

PROJECT DOCUMENT: BAAN UNRAK CHILDRENS HOME NEXT STEP

EDUCATION: For nearly two decades, Baan Unrak Children's Home, in Sangklaburi, Thailand, about 23 kilometers from the border with Myanmar (formerly known as Burma) has sheltered and cared for orphaned, abandoned or displaced Burmese children who had to flee their homes due to civil war and poverty. Baan Unrak was founded by Donata Dolci, who devotes her life to Baan Unrak, and was named Thai Volunteer of the Year in 2003 for her work. Baan Unrak provides a safe, clean and loving home, as well as healthy food, basic education and awareness of how all living things are connected in the world. Now, about 150 children are living safely at Baan Unrak are many are growing up and getting ready to enter secondary school, vocational school or university and prepare for adult independent lives. They have overcome tremendous odds to reach this milestone. Through the "Next Step Education Project" Baan Unrak seeks support to allow a cohort of 20 children to continue their education, at an average cost of approximately 100,000 Baht (USD3300 approx) per child, per year, including school fees, uniforms and room and board, or a total of approximately \$95,000—an astonishingly efficient cost. The children involved seek to study at high school to prepare for university, or various vocations, including nursing, and have to travel outside Sanglaburi for the most part to go to school. Since so many of Baan Unrak children are stateless persons, lacking identity papers and citizenship documents, the most important pathway to stability in the future is a solid educational background and skills, especially bi-lingual skills in English. As the political situation evolves, stateless children such as those at Baan Unrak will face constant uncertainty, and the more skills they have, the more likely they will be able to face adult challenges and gradually, perhaps, establish themselves as citizens with legal status, either in Thailand, Burma or other countries. The project also seeks to provide special education to two younger children—one of whom has had cleft palate surgery and now requires special education and speech therapy so he can catch up to his peer group, and another who is exceptionally intellectually gifted, and who would thrive in an educational setting with diverse educational offerings. Overall, Baan Unrak is a family of beautiful joyful children, despite the trauma and displacement they have suffered. Each child helps the other; the older children help the younger; and as each child thrives, he or she diffuses those skills, confidence and hope to the others. While the civil wars in Myanmar have somewhat abated, economic deprivation persists, and children continue to enter Baan Unrak from nearby poor communities. Education is the cornerstone to security for children such as those who live at Baan Unrak, helping them take their rightful place in society. For this reason, Baan Unrak seeks Global Giving support for the "Baan Unrak Children Next Step Educational Project." (August 2015)