

Baan Unrak

“A Home of Joy!”



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Monthly Newsletters are also available on our Facebook Page!

A message from the founder.....

Dear friends and sympathizers,

Thank you so much for your faithfulness. Your contributions to our community have always been so vital. It's because of you that we are still here today. We can return to you only our utmost love and appreciation.

In this auspicious time of year, during the upcoming festivities and on the brink of the coming new year, I and all of our community here at Baan Unrak want to send our most heartfelt love and best wishes to you all.

In having opened your hearts to us, we have found out that we are not alone, but that we belong to each other, that we are family.

Merry Christmas from Baan Unrak

Christmas is a time for caring, sharing and understanding the importance of family. This Christmas season has seen a group of ISV volunteers decorate our new dining hall and recreation centre, meditation room, and library, with colourful tinsel, Christmas trees, lights, and ornaments. The bright decorations lift the children's spirits, and encourage them to become involved in the festivities.

"I feel excited and happy about Christmas time, and I look forward to spending time with my Baan Unrak family and friends, and singing songs." – Prema

The volunteers also cut tree and star shapes for the students to colour in and decorate around the centre. This proved a fun experience for the children, bringing young and old together to share in the Christmas spirit. The children decorated a large tree at the front of the complex, stringing its branches with colourful fairy lights that twinkle throughout the night.



Sustainable Water Supply at Baan Unrak!

One of Baan Unrak's ongoing challenges has been the development a sustainable system to supply clean water. After years of suffering, we are happy to announce that we now finally have running water in our home. The kitchen receives very good, pure water from the newly drilled well. It is so pure that we can even drink it! The pumping system is activated by solar energy so we do not have any extra costs. The rest of our home receives water pumped from the lake during the dry season, and from our rainwater tank during the rainy season. We are so grateful for our well and all of our new water systems.

The final stage of the project will be a potable rainwater collection and filtration system that has been proven successful in Africa. We hope that Baan Unrak will serve as a model for similar water systems across Thailand as a whole.



Finally, we would like to give special thanks all those that have been involved in our endeavors to gain pure, clean water. So, to our sponsors, the workers of Baan Unrak, and to all the volunteers who assisted us...



Thank you!



Family - Seed for Love

Baan Unrak Childrens Home has been developing for 23 years now, in which it has successfully become a home of safety and love. It's all in the name, Baan Unrak, meaning 'House of joy', which successfully portrays a joyous family atmosphere for all the children present at the home.

Although many children come to Baan Unrak without siblings, or are abandoned by parents, there are many remarkable stories that emerge from this fantastic facility. Sometimes these stories involve the reuniting of a broken family, as is the case with Radio and Gee.

Six years ago, Gee came to Baan Unrak in search of aid for her and her sick baby. Like many mothers, she wanted to leave her baby in the care of Baan Unrak in order to find a job and work to help her debt ridden family. Instead Baan Unrak gave her a job, so she did not need to abandon her child. Slowly the baby recovered, yet Gee stayed on to work at Baan Unrak caring for the children. After time, we learned the tragic story of Gee's life. Her how the family had been split up in order to work to pay off large debts. She had a husband and four more children. Soon it became a mission for Baan Unrak to help Gee bring her family together again, and they believed they could do it.

First, her other children came to the home, after having stayed with different relatives in Burma. Last year at Christmas, one of the only times of year when we have a little extra available funds; we decided to use those funds to go towards helping Gee's family. This meant she didn't have to pay extra due to the 10% interest. In time she will pay Baan Unrak back.

Finally, her husband, Radio, joined them at Baan Unrak. Radio was employed, and he soon became a valued member of our community with his good farming skills and intelligence.



Family - Seed for Love

Baan Unrak has greatly benefited from the hard work and dedication of Radio and Gee. Not only does Radio tend to the buffalo and goats; he also plays a key part in producing a sustainable and organic vegetable garden for Baan Unrak. This agricultural system will promote sustainable living within the home. The home also benefits from the production of organic fruits and vegetables, grown without the pesticides or fertilizers. Sometime organic gardening is complicated because of natural circumstances such as droughts and floods. Radio's intelligence and problem solving skills, means that in time Baan Unrak's farming practices will soon have enough produce to be completely self-sufficient.



This December, perched on the banks of the reservoir, will be the first Christmas Gee, Radio, and their the family will be spend together under the same roof. The idea of spending evenings together as a family excites Gee very much. The children can now receive an education, while Radio and Gee receive a solid income and enjoy their agricultural responsibilities in the home. Their hard work in the past few years means they can finish repaying their debt to Baan Unrak by Christmas time.

Here at Baan Unrak we strive to create a sense of community and to keep families together whenever possible, and it is always heartwarming to be a part of success stories such as this.

Yoga Trip to Kuala Lumpur

The recent yoga trip to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, was a fun and exciting adventure for ten of the Baan Unrak children. Our talented yoga group at Baan Unrak practices yoga each week, and participates in a yoga performance every Wednesday. At first, volunteers used to teach and help with the show, but now the older children mostly teach the younger children yoga techniques. Yoga is seen as a good way to improve oneself. The children had to redesign the show for Kuala Lumpur in a hurry, to be able to fit in new members to the yoga group.



"I was so happy they took so good care of us." - Non Dream

"We stay near the twin towers. We could see them from our windows." - Mon Me

"We were treated as VIP." - Trida

"I enjoyed the yoga, shopping and swimming." - Prema

"I like swimming park. I felt very happy there." - Ahon

"We got so much that you could never imagine." - Kushuma

Didi, who travelled with the group, described the trip as magic:

"The show was electrifying and the people just applauded and appreciated our children."

Loy Kratong Festival : the Purification of the Soul

On the 29th of November, we held an event for the children in order for them to celebrate the Buddhist *Loy Kratong*, or “Floating Crown” festival. This festival celebrates the purification of the heart and cleansing of the soul. The Loy Kratong Festival is held every year, but this year was said to be one of the best for Baan Unrak. There was a strong sense of unification amongst the children as everyone came together and praised the cleansing of the soul.



One of the handmade beautiful crowns

On this special occasion we held a *Kratong* Competition for the children. The competition required the children to make beautiful *Kratongs* (crowns), made from various sources such as bananas, leaves, and flowers, with candles and incense.

The evening was filled with joy and entertainment; complete with performances by a pair of travelling artists and an intriguing fire twirler.

We had seven sky lanterns; the number seven representing a mystical number. The whole event was mystical, not only with the lanterns but with the lighting of candles.

“The children walked down the path, resembling a group of fairies fluttering softly from lantern to lantern. As they reached the lake, they offered their lit crowns, decorated with flowers and incense, to the mother water. Then, group by group, they gently released their lanterns into the sky. The excitement of the fairies had reached its peak; nothing can describe the exhilaration of seeing our seven lanterns fly up in the sky.” -Didi

The most beautiful aspect of this event was the lit handmade lanterns beside the path guiding us down towards the lake. This ceremony symbolizes the lotus offerings to water, letting go of negative thoughts by allowing love to prevail. This event represents our main aspect of love, as it brings us together, and provides a positive atmosphere for the children.



Youth Camp 2013



This years youth camp allowed for everyone to “be united together and help each other,” - Mimi, teenager at Baan Unrak



From the 24-28th October, the teenagers of Baan Unrak had their annual youth camp. Held for the past five years, the camp aims to build team spirit and unity, as well as serve as an opportunity to learn about human nature and its place in our society. On the first day, we learnt about, and discussed, the idea of acting on instincts over emotion. Using the example of the monkey, the growth of conflicts and wars in society and their basis in instinctual action was highlighted through activities and games. By the third day, activities had developed to encourage the fighting of our inner monkeys, in order to grow our inner love and beauty. This is to develop the actions and beliefs of the beautiful humans we celebrate at Baan Unrak!



For the first time, the leaders of the camp were assisted by a group of older children from the home. This allowed them to develop their leadership skills and serve as good role models to the younger children in attendance. Another community group was invited to partake in presentations and activities in order to aid the growth of confidence, as well as to make new bonds and to get to know new people.

Younger children benefited greatly from the guidance of older children, saying, “My leader was so good; they took good care of everybody.” (Prema.) As well as this, the camp provided a perfect opportunity for river side games such as tug of war, meditation sessions and mask making.

The camp acted as a beautiful and adventurous opportunity for the teens of Baan Unrak to develop as a team and become united.

Up and Coming Young Leaders

Increasingly, our younger children are seeking to take on leadership responsibilities here at Baan Unrak, and a chance to help out in order to earn some pocket money! Ahong, 11, has taken on the role of ‘managing’ a growing roster of younger children, who are keen to take on small but much needed jobs around our home. These include picking up rubbish, taking care of the cats, selling sweets, and helping in the library.



“So many children want to do the work, Didi needs someone to organize. It’s a fun job, I like taking care”

This is a great way for our children to earn some pocket money, and develop leadership skills for the future.

Creating Strong Minds

An Insight into Baan Unrak's Nursery



“Education opens your eyes and creates strong thinkers”
Melek, Headteacher

Education is a fundamental human right and the door to a child's future. At Baan Unrak, education is a top priority and this journey begins in the Nursery. The Nursery consists of the head teacher, Melek, two assistants, and Caterina, who teaches the children English. The Nursery was established 23 years ago and forms the strong building blocks for all of the children's further endeavours.

Melek, who is also a current dedicated care mother at Baan Unrak, is originally from Myanmar. Like many little girls around the world, she dreamt of becoming a teacher and often played 'teachers' with her toys. Melek has been teaching for an astounding 31 years, 15 of which have been here at Baan Unrak's Nursery. Prior to this achievement, Melek worked at the Baan Unrak school kindergarten for 3 years as an assistant. She is a strong believer and advocate for education; particularly early childhood education.

Currently there are 18 children, aged from two to six years old, enrolled in the Baan Unrak Nursery. This year we are celebrating our four new arrivals to the Nursery. The new arrivals include an uncle and a niece, and two sisters! How wonderful!



Melek and her two assistants

Uncle Em...



...and his niece Rung:



"I am happy because there are many toys and games in the nursery" - Em



And 2 sisters Rochana (R) and Latika (L)



These sisters came to Baan Unrak in the middle of 2013. They are currently attending the Nursery in order to learn how to read and write, to prepare them for primary school next year.

This is what they had to say about the Nursery:

"I have many friends and I don't need to worry because I feel safe-here" - Rochana

"I am very happy to live here, because I also have many friends"
Latika

New Dining and Recreation Centre Opened!

We loved to eat in our old dining hall but, it was so small, we could never sit together. Although we appreciated our old dining hall and kitchen, every year after the heavy monsoon season it needed repairs. Two years ago we realized we would need to upgrade our facilities to accommodate the monsoonal weather. This year exceptionally heavy rains destroyed our kitchen roof. We are happy to announce, that thanks to the support of our generous donors and volunteers, in August we completed the major project of building the new dining and recreation center.

We love sitting together for meals in a safe, dry, and covered area. Everyone loves the new kitchen! We have also enjoyed using the hall to practice and perform yoga shows to people in the community. Our children had the following to say about their new hall:

"This is our dream dining hall" -Prema
"We like to sit together" -Dokbua Small
"It's nice to be together to eat" - Somsae

Celebrating Karen Cultural Heritage

In August, Didi drove all the way to Burma with some of the nursery children and Melek, to take part in the annual Karen Culture Celebration Day. The celebration involved people from many villages coming together and tying thread around each other's wrists to symbolize the connection between a person and their spirit and living free from fear. The day also involved singing, dancing, delicious food and story-telling by the Karen elders.

The ceremony was open to everyone. All of the nursery children attended with Melek; even those who are not Karen. Melek enjoyed seeing the boys and girls from the villages come together for the wrist-tying; explaining there was a strong sense of community and culture present in the celebrations. The children from the Baan Unrak nursery had fun joining in with the singing and dancing, and listening to stories read by older Karen adults.

The hope is that the ceremony will contribute to the continuation of the Karen Culture both in Thailand and overseas. For our Karen children here at Baan Unrak, we hope they will continue to feel connected to their cultural heritage.



"There was a strong sense of community and culture present in the celebrations, with children from different villages coming together in unity."



Celebrating Mothers' Day

On August 21st Thailand celebrates the Queen's birthday, and families all over the country celebrate Mothers' Day. Here at Baan Unrak, our children took this day as an opportunity to give thanks to Didi Devamala, 'mother' of all here at Baan Unrak.

"Our mothers do everything for us, they give us happiness and love. So on Mothers' Day we want to do good things for our mothers"
- Jumary

The children organized a beautiful surprise ceremony; filling the room with songs and the sweet smell of flowers which they presented to one by one to express their gratitude and love.

This was an emotional and touching day, bringing everyone together to reflect on the love and care provided by all of our care mothers at Baan Unrak.



Thank you for the television....

Baan Unrak Stars Recording in Bangkok

In October, six of our children travelled to Bangkok for five days to record a music album of six new and original mantra music for meditation. This group of talented musicians consisted of Lochoy, who composed all the songs, along with singers Kamala, Thang Mo, Ice, Taji, Momo Aye and Malii. This is the second record created by the Baan Unrak children. The first CD was recorded nine years ago. This trip was a fantastic opportunity to showcase the talents of our current generation of children with the world.



The songs were practiced and the students knew these tunes well before travelling to Bangkok to record them. It was an important activity in the sense of developing the musical talents of the students who created the CD, and created a great sense of achievement amongst the group.

'This was our first time in Bangkok recording as a group, and although we were nervous using unfamiliar equipment, we were very proud of ourselves to have finished the CD.' Lochoy



This trip was during the school holidays, a number of our other children were came along to accompany the music group and to share in the holiday fun. These children had five full days of exciting activities, including visiting two sponsors and the shopping centre.

The children were lucky enough to be treated with a swim in the pool and delicious treats such as pizza and ice cream during their visits to the sponsor's house.

The album was successfully recorded over the five days, and will be available to buy online in the near future.

Activity Update - Horse Riding as Therapy

This year, a volunteer who came to work here, has generously provided the children of Baan Unrak with the opportunity to participate in a horse riding program. The program ran over the course of five weekends, and six of the teenagers participated. We gained access to lessons about 10km outside of Sangklaburi, and shared four beautiful horses between our participants. Horse riding is a therapeutic experience for the teens, and helps to relieve stress and soothe the tension many of our teens have experienced in their life. It also helps to develop a positive connection and respect for with animals, as well as to teach responsibility. During the sessions the teens learnt about horses as well as how to ride them.

Tualek, a teenager from the home, felt happy when doing the horse riding lessons... "I like horses because they are cute and beautiful and fun. They are good to learn and I would do it again."

We have realized the great benefit this horse riding program has provided our teens here at the home. These programs will help our teens to develop new skills, as well as add strength in their lives.

We are hopeful that we will receive more sponsors to allow us to continue these programs in future. Even if we do not receive outside help, we will strive to continue the programs through other means to benefit and help all of those at Baan Unrak!



Visit Us on Open Days!

Make an appointment to visit us on our weekly Open Day for an opportunity to see Baan Unrak, meet some of the children and find out more about our work here in Sangklaburi. The Open Day times are:

Wednesdays 5:00pm – 7:00pm

To make an appointment, please phone us on this number: +66 (0)83-1054223 or email us at emails@baanunrak.org

Hope to see you soon!

BAAN UNRAK CHILDREN'S HOME

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E-mail:
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We're on the web
www.baanunrak.org

How Can I Send Help?

Paypal Account-
baanunrak_village@yahoo.com

Send Money Directly Account
Name: Baanunrak Childrens
Home

Bank name: Siam Commercial
Bank Sangkhlaburi

Account no: 679-214-7928
SWIFT code: SICOTHBK

To receive a receipt and inform
us about which project you chose
to sponsor, please contact us by
email info@baanunrak.org

Give Love. Give a Life.

Baan Unrak "Home of Joy", is a Children's Home and community development project in Sangkhlaburi, Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand. The Baan Unrak Children's Home was founded in 1991 by its current Director, Didi Devamala, in order to provide for one young girl in need of shelter, food, love and safety. One child quickly became two; two quickly became three, and so on. Today, Baan Unrak has grown to accommodate and care for more than 130 children that are orphaned (often from parents suffering from illnesses related to HIV and AIDS), sick and poverty stricken, many of them are Burmese refugees fleeing persecution. Most of the children at Baan Unrak are border children lacking legal papers claiming their national identity.

\$5 a Month to Give a Life

Regular gifts are the only way that Baan Unrak can continue with its work. Having your committed support can be life changing; this is why...

A lot of our success does not happen overnight. With your committed support we can provide long term education and see lasting improvements. Governments are unpredictable and may pass new laws or alter regulations that directly affect our children without any warning, meaning we have to be prepared for any eventuality.

No one can predict when the next child will arrive at our doorstep, looking for help, sometimes needing life saving medical treatment. We must be prepared.

At Baan Unrak we have the experience and commitment to be able to improve children's lives and reignite hope daily, but only with your help.

With our commitment, and your regular gift, together we can be confident of Baan Unrak's future. For more information on how to support us in the most effective way, please visit our website.

Give Love. Give a Life.
www.baanunrak.org

Recently a group of university students volunteered at Baan Unrak for two weeks, and have since committed to the cause of donating \$5 a month to support the children and the home that they all fell in love with....

"It's not that much, its just one coffee a month! Why wouldn't you?" - Anna

"I would do it in a heartbeat and not even think twice!" -

