

Volunteering with the Karen Youth Development Center

By Anna Jüschke and Katja Meincke, September 2007

We started our journey to Maesot aware of the bad conditions for the people there. It didn't take us much time to get in touch with Child's Dream and soon we were convinced of this organization. With the background of studying Southeast Asian Area Studies in Berlin and our interest for Burma and Thailand it was quite interesting to learn more about the situation along the border.

After arriving in the bordertown Maesot we started working in different projects.

Besides supporting various migrant school-projects, we took part in a project of the Karen Youth Development Center (KYDC). It was a kind of a youth leadership and management training course for young people of the ethnic minority Karen from Burma. The only thing we knew before was that we were supposed to teach political science and human rights to young Karens in our age. When we came to the school for the very first time, we were surprised about the high standard of knowledge and the kindness of our students and the whole team there. Nevertheless it was sometimes challenging to make them understand more abstract issues. Issues we are used to deal with, because attending university is quite normal for us. Because of this seldom possibility every student in the project worked hard to learn as much as possible. Given these circumstances it was a very satisfying experience for us.

The project can be seen as an alternative to a regular university for young Karen people along the border and inside Burma. Every year twentyfive students, who are active members of their communities, have good English skills and the willingness to return to their community after completing the training course, get the chance to learn more about community management and development, leadership and organizational management, proposal development and project management, basic medical and health care and to improve their language and computer skills.

We think that providing young people in the border area with political knowledge is a good approach to contribute to the solution of the ongoing conflicts of the region. Education-centers like this are indispensable institutions, which should be supported by more NGOs. Because basic education up to level ten in normal migrant-schools is often not enough to gain access to economy and society in Thailand, supporting education-centers helps to improve the chances of migrants and refugees from Burma.

We would like to thank Child's Dream for providing us with access to this interesting and helpful project.