

2023

ANNUAL REPORT



Supporting Vulnerable Children and their Families

10 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

In January we celebrated our 10 year anniversary. As we set out on this journey in 2013 with a small basic office and one staff member in a faraway border town, little could we imagine the journey we were about to begin and where we would be now. One Sky started with the aim of helping more children in Sangkhlaburi to be able to go to school, but our interest soon expanded to include children's rights to be safe and to live with their family.



Quite early on we realized that to give all children fair opportunity would require system change and that this system change needed to be based on the international children's rights framework known as the Convention on the Rights of the Child or the CRC for short. Realizing this was one thing, but imagining how we as a tiny organisation based in an isolated border town could play a role seemed grandiose back then.

Thailand was one of the first countries to sign the CRC in 1989 but progress in building the legislation needed and implementing it has been very slow. In fact, poorer countries, like neighbouring Cambodia, have received millions of dollars in foreign aid and have progressed more quickly in many key areas of the CRC compared to so-called middle-income countries like Thailand that have been largely left to their own devices and have struggled to prioritize this work.

disadvantaged children in especially the large numbers of migrant and ethnic minority children, this can mean a huge gap between the concept of their rights laid out in the CRC and the reality of their life situations. For example, a very large unregulated industry of private children's homes has grown in Thailand while there remains minimal help for families, this directly contradicts the CRC which states that residential care for children should be a very last option when all other options have been exhausted. Without the oversight and direction from government the private sector in Thailand prefers to provide residential care for children and not to provide support to families, according to the CRC this investment is being made at the wrong place. Adding to the complexity of this issue is the finding that 89% of private children's homes are Christian in contrast to the percentage of the Thai population who are Christian which is about one percent.

So, this was the arena we unwittingly stepped into soon after starting One Sky. Joining the national network of NGO's called the CRCCT (Convention on

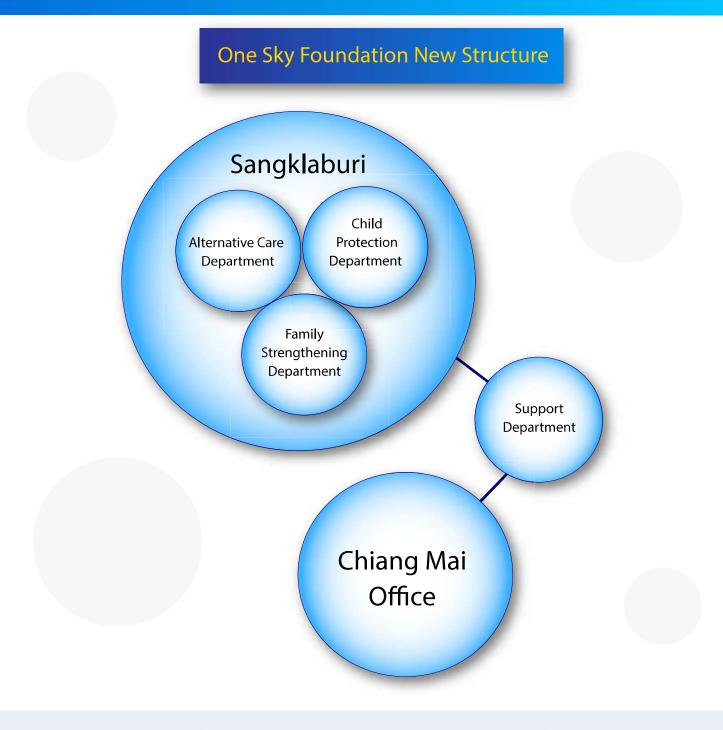
the Rights of the Child Coalition Thailand) in 2015 helped us to find like minded organisations and individuals. Under the CRCCT we joined a thematic working group that has since become known as ACT (Alternative Care Thailand) and this is where we have found our closest allies as we work together to amplify our united voice for reform and regulation of the child protection and care systems for children in Thailand.

We have helped and continue to help a lot of children in Sangkhlaburi to go to school, live safely and live with their family. But as we will share in this report, we have also made exciting progress in the system changes we so crave. We have set up the only district level child protection committee in Thailand, we have made the first ever provincial surveys of Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai provinces, documenting 371 private children's homes, we have built a national reputation as one of the leading agencies in developing family support services in Thailand and we have established the only rurally based foster care program in Thailand.

As we enter 2024, we sit poised to embark on a major project in northern Thailand alongside the government that could result in the total reform of the private children's home sector nationally. Ten years ago, we couldn't have imagined that this is where we would be now.

Some may know the story of how One Sky almost died after the first year when our only funding partner decided not to continue. Now, ten years later, we face a similarly precarious situation as we try to expand to become a medium sized organisation able to take on the opportunity that lies before us in northern Thailand and to maintain and continue to develop the excellent work of the team in Sangkhlaburi. We are seeking funding, and looking for partners who share our excitement about where we could be in the next ten years!

Andy December 2023





Child Protection Department

"A strong community is like a shield that protects children and families. When a community is strong, there is no need to rely on outside agencies or organizations."

Kitti, Head of the Child Protection Department.

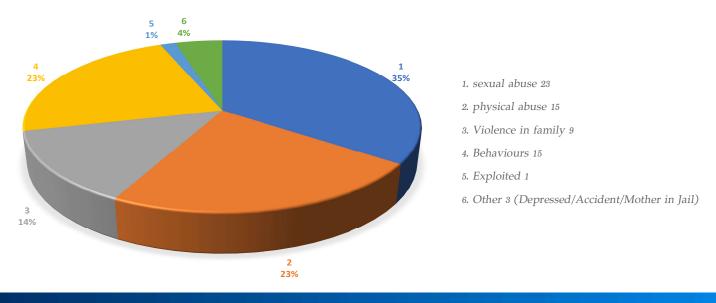
One Sky now spearheads a formal Child Protection system in Sangkhlaburi district, the first of its kind in Thailand and what we hope will be a model to protect children and support victims throughout the country.



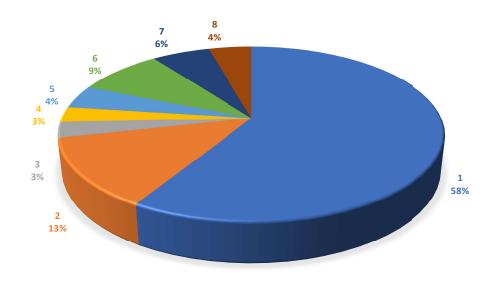
One Sky has invested 10 years in building a district child protection committee in Sangkhlaburi. Thailand's 2003 child protection ACT stipulates that each of Thailand's 76 provinces must have a child protection committee chaired by the governor. These committees report to the National Child Protection Committee. The law also allows for a district level committee whereby the district head (Nai Amphur) is authorised by the governor to chair a child protection committee in his or her district. Thailand has 928 districts and to the best of our knowledge, Sangkhlaburi is the only district to have an official child protection committee.

The Sangkhlaburi committee includes police, hospital staff, school directors, red cross staff, village leaders and local government staff. The full committee meets several times per year while a working group or multidisciplinary team works on each child protection case reporting to the committee. One Sky provides a competent official (licenced to investigate child abuse and to remove children to safety) and a licensed social worker. Both staff alongside a nurse from Sangkhlaburi hospital are licensed child interviewers. One Sky acts as the committee secretary and represents the group at the provincial child protection committee meetings.

By the end of November, the One Sky Child Protection team had worked with 66 referrals. Of these cases, 15 were brought to the multidisciplinary team who met 46 times.



32 cases led to a conviction. We have seen more cases and more convictions than ever before. We see this as evidence that the system is working well. It I not that there are more cases, it is that perpetrators are much more likely to be caught (and punished). As the system gets stronger, we expect to see more cases before we finally see a reduction. Particularly for sexual abuse of children, the higher the chances of being caught and punished, the less likely many offenders are to act on their impulses.



How Many:

- 1. Stayed with family 41
- 2. Kinship 9
- 3. Living without a caregiver 2
- 4. Temple 2
- 5. Iuvenile 3
- 6. Dormitory 6
- 7. Went into foster care 4
- 8. Went into a children's home 3

Case Study

After their mother died of cancer and their father was struggling to cope, three girls moved into a local children's home aged 11,12 and 13. The older two girls were not happy in the children's home and returned to live with their father.

One day the older girl came to school late and complained of stomachache. She told the nurse at the school that her father had raped her. The nurse called the school director. The director immediately called us. The first person to talk to the girl in any detail was our trained social worker, this is huge progress compared to a few years ago when many people would be involved, and all would be asking questions. We arranged a meeting of the child protection working group and made an appointment at the hospital the same day for a medical examination.

While a warrant was arranged to arrest the father, the team worked together to bring the younger sister to safety. Both girls stayed at the One Sky center for the first few nights. The girl's father was known to us as he had previously stabbed the father in another family we were working with, hospitalizing him and earning a stint in jail. While we waited for the arrest warrant, we heard from community members that the father was searching for his daughters and the working group decided the government crisis shelter in the city was a safer option for everyone.

The father is now in jail. The girls are together in a government boarding school while we work with their extended family to find a longer-term solution for them. These cases are stressful, but now that we all work together and follow a proper system, we can really bring children to safety quickly and we have a much better chance of catching abusers than before.

Youth Offenders Rehabilitation

Kitti has also established a partnership with the court and the provincial juvenile detention centre. Drugs are a big problem for youth in Sangkhlaburi, especially meth amphetamine. Children or youth are often caught up in the use and transportation of meth. Kanchanaburi province has 98 subdistricts. It is not uncommon for 25% of the boys in the provincial juvenile detention centre to come from Nonglu subdistrict in Sangkhlaburi district. Previously they were dropped off, often at empty homes, on completion of their time in detention. They would quickly re engage in the drug scene. One Sky now provides follow up support for them when they return to Sangkhlaburi at the end of their sentence. This partnership includes the court and police and is proving effective in giving them opportunities to make positive choices and to avoid reoffending and the longer sentences resulting from this. By the end of November we had worked with 2 girls and 7 boys who were released from Juvenile detention. Only one boy ended up back in Detention.



Road Map for System Change

In 2022 we made a formal complaint to the Thai Human Rights Committee about the failure of the Kanchanaburi provincial social services department to act on any of the information we had sent them regrading 18 unregistered private children's homes operating in Sangkhlaburi district over the previous eight years. Our complaint was upheld, and this put a series of events into motion that led to the development of the Sangkhlaburi Road Map. It has been a slow process, but in October this year a large team of government officials combined with the district child protection committee finally visited all 18 children's homes to document the children living there. Only three of the homes were graded green meaning their practice was safe. The rest were graded red and yellow meaning they could be closed or given support to change. The scene is now set for a so-called Gatekeeping system such that no children's homes can take in further children without assessment and approval from the child protection committee. Such a system is at the heart of the United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, signed by Thailand upon its release in 2009. However, if this pilot goes ahead in Sangkhlaburi it will be the first attempt at gatekeeping anywhere in Thailand.



Kitti — licensed competent official and child interviewer.

Aom — licensed social worker and child interviewer.

Thailand has around 3,000 licensed social workers, one for every 24,000 people.



Family Strengthening Department

"I see my team growing and developing. I am pleased to see them taking a holistic approach to each child based on a full assessment. Now they work skillfully with everyone connected to each child like teachers, parents, relatives, local government staff and others to build a safe and nurturing environment around each of them. We still provide welfare and financial support, but that alone is not enough to see every child reaching their potential. I am proud of my team and grateful for their hard work and dedication"

Aye, Head of the Family Strengthening Department.

Providing holistic support services to vulnerable children and their families requires a broad range of skills and activities. Aye's team reached well over 1,000 children in 2023, some of those children receiving intensive and ongoing support and others needing more straight forward practical support such as financial support to attend school.

Casework and welfare support can be seen as reactive work when a child or family is referred to One Sky because they need help. Increasingly, Aye's team is also building ways to work proactively in the community to strengthen families and to reduce the need for casework support and welfare.





Case Work

Case work is built around a detailed assessment of a child (or children) and their family. Often, an immediate response is needed such as food welfare or support to reach medical care or access education. When immediate concerns are attended, the longer-term planning can begin to ensure that the living environment around each child is strong and able to support each child to flourish. Of course, this takes time and some of the families we support have been with us since the very beginning of One Sky.

At the beginning of 2023 the team were supporting 166 cases involving 443 children and 294 adults. During 2023, 227 new referrals were received involving 426 children and 315 adults.

Among 227 new referrals:

- Opened for full Casework 117
- Brief intervention provided 61
- Referred to other Organization 2
- Internal referral for education spp ort 19
- Internal referral to Alternative Care
 Department 23
- Still finding more information currently 9

154 cases were closed in 2023



Welfare

We have provided welfare support to over 200 families in 2023, benefiting over 400 children and 280 adults. Welfare is often for a fixed period while we support families to get back on their feet or find new work. However, it can be long term, especially for single parent families who cannot provide for their children despite hard work. Most migrant families are unable to access any government welfare support.

	Families	Children	Adults
Monthly Food support	108	322	217
House repair 11 and house rent 16	27	70	55
Milk for children with low BMI	38	43	
Support with urgent health costs	43	31	14

This involves dedicating a whole day to one family and taking them away from the everyday stress and pressure they experience. Typically, it involves a family picnic by the river, time to relax, play and eat together. During the day, time is set aside to bring everyone together to talk through specific issues that are causing conflict and difficulty within the family. Sometimes everyone writes out new house rules and then they put them on the wall when they get home. In 2023 nine families with 25 children took part in family strengthening days and 6 families with 12 children joined in group-based family strengthening trips.

Family Strengthening days





Income generation

This year we have reached 22 families with skills and confidence building and opportunities to increase their income. These are mostly single parent families facing huge challenges in providing for their children because of extreme poverty and at high risk of placing them into a local private children's home. None of the 59 children in these families was put in a children's home in 2023.



Early Childhood development

We have observed for many years that much fewer boys than girls complete their high school education in Sangkhlaburi. Typically, 75% of the students in grades 10, 11 and 12 are girls. In January we worked with a survey team to conduct 87 interviews with boys, teachers and parents to get to the bottom of this issue. We knew from UNICEF's national data that slightly more girls than boys complete high school in Thailand, but the gap is much greater in migrant border areas like Sangkhlaburi.

We imagined that the outcome of the survey might be providing some additional teaching or support for boys but in the end the conclusion was that the issues start much earlier in life. Boys living in families that don't speak Thai language at home are more adversely affected than girls in the same situation. Children who don't speak any Thai are often rejected by government nursery schools because teachers say they cannot follow the basic instructions they give. This delays their educational starting point for several more years during which they still don't develop their Thai language.

In response to these findings, we launched a pilot project called early childhood development aimed at supporting disadvantaged children aged zero to three years old to be able to enter the Thai education system at the same time and same level as all other children. In addition, the project will track the development of each child in the program for the first five years of their lives, using the standard Thai childhood development assessment tool that the team has recently been trained in by a national expert.

The project is focused on nine migrant communities and provides a weekly play and Thai language session for children alongside parenting workshops for adults. The program runs for 12 weeks in each location. 250 children and 231 parents have joined the sessions during the pilot period. We have learned a lot in this period and we are now in the process of securing longer term funding.

The cost of living has grown in Thailand in



recent years, and we have increased the amount of support accordingly to cover transport and lunch costs. This, and the increased demand for help has seen this project budget stretched to its absolute limit. We can no longer reach all the children and need to prioritize those with the greatest challenges. If you would like to support this essential program, please contact us oneskythailand@gmail.com

Peer Support Groups

The Mum power group met 8 times in 2023. 25 mothers attended this peer support group to share their and to support, challenges get ideas, encouragement from each other. These are always lively gatherings with multiple languages and ethnicities represented. One of the key activities is always the preparation and sharing of a hearty meal. The mothers we work with face considerable challenges in their lives due to poverty, domestic violence and discrimination. These sessions create a safe space to connect, grow confidence and share stories of resilience. They are highly valued by the women who attend them.

Education Support

Scholarships

When the school year ended in March 197 children were receiving monthly financial support to stay in education. Among these children, 21 graduated from high school in March, a fantastic achievement.

There are 176 children remaining in the program after the end of the 2022 school year in March. In addition, more than 200 new students are seeking assistance for the 2023 school year, which begins in May. After a detailed evaluation during February–April 2023, there were a total of 94 students were selected, making a total of 270 students receiving scholarship support from the program for the 2023 school year. 228 students are receiving monthly support this year and 42 were provided with one–time support (uniforms and insurance).



Buddy learning

This year we recruited six grade 12 students from among our high school scholarship group and arranged training for them with an organisation called Teach for Thailand. We then connected them with primary school children in their village who had been identified by their teachers as struggling with Thai language. The buddies met with their groups two times a week for 16 weeks for one and half hours each time. The sessions were fun and friendly and focused on improving Thai language skills. Each buddy taught three younger children. We paid 150 baht to the buddies (\$4.25) for each session so that they could support their families or save up for university. The feedback from the buddies and their young students has been positive. The primary teachers who referred their struggling students have reported huge improvements in their student's ability to speak and understand Thai language. We are excited to run this program again in 2024.

Higher Education

One Sky partners with the Daruna scholarship fund that offers support to disadvantaged students so that they can study at university. Students must make an application, have good grades, and show commitment to returning to their community in the future to use their knowledge for the benefit of others. One Sky staff promote the program and support students with their applications. A senior One Sky staff sits on the selection committee alongside Daruna and others from the fund. In 2023, 31 students were supported in this program and were studying teaching, nursing and language teaching.



Special needs education

Inclusive education is not yet available in Thailand. Although the concept has been described by the ministry of education there is still a long way to go in changing the attitudes of teachers, children and society as a whole. In the meantime, government schools in Thailand are generally not at all ready to meet the needs of and provide nurturing opportunities to children with special needs. The only option for children from Sangkhlaburi is to stay at special government residential schools 3 and a half hours away in Kanchanaburi city. It is hard to describe these institutions as being in the best interest of the children, however, they represent the least bad option currently available. In 2023 we supported 13 children to attend special needs schools in Kanchanaburi. The main element of the support is transporting the children to the schools and home again. They are required to go home for school breaks and also many of the public holidays so this is quite a big commitment considering the distance involved and the number of staff needed to supervise the children and ensure their safety.





Careers Guidance

Children in Sangkhlaburi often have limited horizons. Many have basic identity cards and are not able to travel outside of the district, they have never been to the city. When talking to children and their families about the value of education it is important to expand their insight into the world beyond Sangkhlaburi. One Sky developed a careers guidance booklet to help with this and in 2023 the team spent time talking with 200 children and their families either by phone or face to face to help them consider the future options if they can stay in school.

Case Study 1

A father was struggling to care for his two sons aged 9 and 11 after his wife left him. He had poor mental health and high stress; he sometime beat the boys and threw one of them into the water from the raft house they live on. We called together the local government staff, teachers, nurse, and village leader and talked through the situation and options. It was agreed that the boys should be removed from the father for their own safety, the necessary paperwork was authorized but we approached the situation in an inclusive way involving the father, mother, and other relatives. It was agreed that the boys would live with their aunty, (mother's sister) not too far from their father's house. It took a few weeks for the situation to stabilize as the father would visit without warning and the grandmother would try to bring the boys back to their father. But the situation is now calm, and the boys are happy and doing well in school. Their mother sends money to her sister to help care for the boys. The father is taking his meds regularly and has less stress than before without the responsibility to care for the two boys full time. We provide some financial support to the Aunty who has three children of her own, but the main role for us in cases like this is to facilitate everyone involved to work towards the best

situation for the children. It takes time and patience, but I am happy to see my team working with families and communities like this.

Case Study 2

This is a chaotic family that I have known for many years. After a second divorce the father was left looking after three children aged 9, 11 and 14. The youngest child has been receiving treatment for a kidney problem for many years and we have supported the family so that they could take him to the big hospital in the city each time. After the divorce the father was really struggling at first and we arranged some family strengthening sessions with him and the children to help them talk together and make agreements together. Slowly things got better. Now the father managed the meds for his son and the Dr's said that his condition was improving a lot, they started to reduce his medication. At this time the eldest sister told that previously their mother had not given any medication to her brother because when he was sick she had been able to ask us and other people for money to help him.



Alternative Care Department

"Giving yourself the opportunity to take on new challenges.

Sometimes it scares, gets discouraged, or tired, and we can be proud.

But remember, if you fail, you learn. If you succeed, don't forget to appreciate it and move on. Family is the most important thing for children. Whether it succeeds or fails, they always want to have you by their side. I encourage children to grow up as a family."

Oh, head of the Alternative Care Department.

Oh and her team had to be extremely patient as they tried to develop their new project during the covid years. Finally in 2023 this project has taken off, far exceeding expectations (and budget!).



Oh and her team provide monthly financial support, opportunities for peer to peer support between kinship carers and fun activity days for these very disadvantaged children. In addition they have worked with several kinship families on developing small businesses and then gradually reducing financial support as these businesses grow. They have even had some success this year bringing children out of children's homes and back into kinship care with a package of support, great work! In 2023 the team supported a total of 65 children in kinship care.

Kinship care

Over 3 million children in Thailand live in kinship care, most often with their grandparents. 37% of them are in the poorest quintile of the population. Government support reaches only 5400 children and is not available to migrant families. Migrant kinship carers rely on money from parents who have gone to work in the city, this is often illegal, unstable, and very low paid work and the money doesn't always come back to the kinship carers. In our research we found household income averaged at \$20 per person per month in migrant kinship care families. Children who were previously in kinship care are hugely overrepresented in the local children's homes, the lure of three good meals each day can be enough to break up these family units.





Foster Care

Thailand and the UK have similar numbers of children. The UK has a support system for 320,000 children living at home with their parents, Thailand doesn't have this. The UK has around 10,000 children living in specialist residential care settings, our research has found not less than 120,000 children living in largely unregulated residential care settings in Thailand. The UK has 70,000 children in foster care, Thailand has 182 children in foster care.

By no means is the UK perfect, but we share this just to see an example of a country that has moved much further towards the vision of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The biggest emphasis is on support for families and when alternative care (separation from parents) is necessary, family based alternative care is deemed a much better option for children in most cases. One Sky's foster care program is small, but it is the only rurally based program in the country and is authourised by the only official district level child protection committee in the country. As a model it is therefore very important in our quest to increase the availability of foster care placements throughout Thailand as a better option for children who would otherwise go into children's homes.

In 2023 the team ran information sessions in eight communities and two churches leading to the recruitment and training of 11 foster families. As a result, 31 children were provided with foster care during the year. Most of these children came through One Sky's child protection team having been removed from dangerous situations by the child protection committee. The majority of placements were short term while family problems were resolved or longer-term kinship care options were explored.

This project has been a huge success in 2023, but the number of children and the expenses went way over the planned budget, drawing deeply on the limited reserves One Sky holds. We face cutting back this program in 2024 if we cannot find additional funds. Please do contact us if you would like to support this work oneskythailand@gmail.com





Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai provinces in northern Thailand have a combined population of around 3 million people. We are not aware of anywhere else in the world that has such a high density of private children's homes, we have now visited, interviewed, and documented 371 children's homes in the two provinces. Collectively they represent a \$40 million a year industry that is at odds with Convention on the Rights of the Child and now with Thailand's own national action plan for alternative care. Only 89 of the homes have been registered with the government and are therefore legally permitted to operate, but even these facilities are only given a brief annual inspection.

Our experiences over the last 10 years have led us to become a key agency in understanding this situation and working to change it. Prevention is essential, building up support services for children and families reduces the demand for private children's homes. Working with government partners to build a local child protection mechanism in line with the 2003 child protection act removes any need for unregulated private children's homes to be involved in separating children from their families. Building family based alternative care resources such as foster care so that when it really is necessary to separate a child there are better options than large scale residential centers. We are now bringing these achievements in Sangkhlaburi to a much bigger stage, and we hope to have a major impact on the way





Among Thailand's 76 provinces, 20 provinces have no private children's homes. Most of the rest have three or less. The ten provinces that do have significant numbers are either major tourist hubs (access to volunteers and money) or provinces bordering Myanmar. Chiang Mai (175 homes) and Chiang Rai (196 homes) are in a league of their own.

There are several factors that have led to this situation. Northern Thailand is home to several ethnic minority groups often referred to collectively as Hill Tribes. These groups have been discriminated against for a long time and have faced challenges with land rights and citizenship rights. Historically most were Animist, but Christian missionaries started coming to the area 50 to 60 years ago and as a result many of the Hill Tribe groups are now fervent Christians. Responding to the poverty, isolation and difficulties accessing education the trend among Christian groups became the building of children's homes. 89% of the current homes are Christian based.

90% of the children in these children's homes have at least one living parent. Families are being broken apart on this epic scale because of poverty and difficulty accessing education. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is clear that children have a right to live with their family and that poverty and education should never be reasons used for separation. It is our aim in the coming years to redirect the \$40 million per year currently being used to provide children's homes towards family and community support. Of course, it is challenging to bring support services to remote villages and much easier to take the children out and bring them to urban based facilities. But as we have learned over the last 10 years, working for children's rights is never about convenience!

An Update from Wat, One Sky Director

In the past two years We are starting to see changes in some children's homes that after gaining more knowledge and understanding Has changed work Some organizations change at the structure and purpose level of the organization, or some organizations change at the activity level. That began to have criteria to consider the need to accept more appropriate children, including increasing activities and budgets to help more families.

We have observed this happening. And it inspires us to see possible directions and trends. It makes us see that knowledge and understanding can help change the situation.



If you would like to know more about our work in Northern Thailand or if you would like to support this work, please contact us oneskythailand@gmail.com

Also, this year we worked on a major research project with our close partner Dr Gift from Mahidol University. Before our research the number of children living in residential care in Thailand was recorded as 27,000 on the UNICEF database because this was the number given to them by the government. Our detailed research was able to evidence that the real number of children is not less than 120,000. This evidence is a powerful way to encourage the government to prioritise the reform of the care system. If you would like to read the full report then please contact us oneskythailand@gmail.com

Support Department

"Just like children, they need good attention and support from their families in order to grow up with quality. Organizations are the same, stable and strong growth requires a good foundation and support. That is the job of the support department."

Yui, head of Support Department.



Yui and her great team keep One Sky running. They take care of finance and accounts, administration, HR and fundraising and communications. It is a challenging role with constant deadlines. In 2023 we have been working on changes and improvements to our accounting system and our HR process so that One Sky is ready to grow into a bigger organisation in the coming years.

Financial Report

In 2023 One Sky spent a little over £300,000 (a little under \$400,000). We are very grateful for the money we receive and work hard to make every penny count. We have stretched ourselves financially, physically, and emotionally this year to now be in a position to make significant and sustainable change to improve the lives of the most disadvantaged children in Thailand. We are grateful to our supporters who make our work possible, and we look forward to continuing our existing partnerships and building new ones too in 2024. Together we can make a big difference in the next few years!

Please contact us if you would like to know more about any parts of our work or if you would like to support us. oneskythailand@gmail.com

Partners supporting One Sky's work in 2023























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