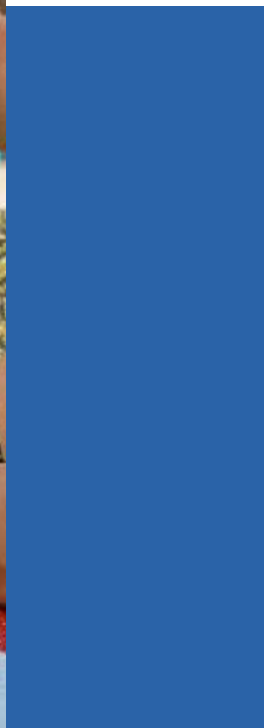


ANNUAL REPORT

2022





10 Years Anniversary

Firstly, an apology for the lack of an annual report last year. I'm painfully aware that several of our amazing supporters rely on these reports as the only means of knowing what we did and how we used their money. It has been a very full two years and I can only hope that this report will go some way to explaining just how busy we have been and why we failed to send out a report last year.

I often worry that it might appear to outside observers that NGO's working for children spend a lot of their time and energy arguing with each other about who is doing it "right". In many countries the legal system protecting our rights is strong and if we are lucky, stays mostly in the background of our lives. In countries like Thailand where national legislation struggles to keep up with the international treaties for human rights and the implementation and enforcement of the existing legislation is very weak, a vacuum is created in which individuals and organisations get to make up their own rules.

On a brighter note, January 2023 marks 10 years since One Sky started. We are proud to have made it this far and to have been able to make a difference for so many children. It wouldn't be possible without the generosity and encouragement of our families, friends, and partners, and we are very grateful for those who have been alongside us on our journey.

One Sky is a child rights led organisation, fully committed to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its goal of always upholding "the best interest of the child". We seek out like minded partners and we work together to support the Thai government to focus on the systemic changes needed to fully implement the CRC. Among the



thousands of NGO's in Thailand there is a full spectrum. Some seek to exploit children or to engage children in ideologies or religions that set out a different version of the children's best interest to that detailed in the CRC. There are good people too, who have often not been trained or have no awareness of the rights of the children in their care. Caught up in this chaos are vulnerable children and their families looking for help. In the absence of any standards or regulation, what happens to these children is a lottery. In this report I hope to share how One Sky is starting to use our experience to inform and encourage the growing movement for reform of the care system in Thailand.

In the last six months Wat and I have felt more of our attention pulled towards the well being of the One Sky team. Economic factors are having a profound effect on the lives of so many around the world and the One Sky team is no exception. We are managing our budget more tightly than ever and seeking creative ways that we can support our colleagues and their families as much as possible. In these challenging times it is more important than ever that the One Sky team feels secure, and that their own mental and physical health is supported so that they do not become consumed by challenges they face up to each day in the communities they serve.

While we have come a long way, we still have much to learn. As we set out on our second decade we aim to keep growing and maturing as an organisation. Individually and collectively, we want to continue improving so that we can be more effective in our goal of supporting the most vulnerable children and their families. It is our privilege to do this work and we know that many of our supporters have made sacrifices to keep us going.

Thank you.
Andy



How many children supported in 2022? _____



- One Sky provided family support services to **279 families** in 2022.
- We received **250 referrals**, **23 of these referrals** were urgent, requiring immediate action.
- **126 cases** were opened as full family support cases, others were provided with brief intervention or referred to the education support team as appropriate.
- **717 children** have been supported through family support services in 2022.
- Food welfare was provided for **94 families** including **311 children**.
- **119 underweight children** received regular milk in 2022, either formula or UHT depending on their age.
- Cash support has included **8 families** having their rent paid, **8 families** supported with health insurance, cash support to **14 families** and house repairs for **16 families**. These are usually single parent families where despite best efforts, the living conditions are detrimental to or unsafe for children.
- **13 families** have been engaged with our income generation projects (8 broom making and 5 sponges).
- **21 children and 7 adults** stayed at the One Sky crisis center for a total of 64 nights.



The COVID-19 pandemic has affected One Sky's operations over the past two years, especially organizing group activities for children and families, which we were unable to do under the measures that the government set up to prevent the spread of COVID. In 2022, after the end of lockdown in July, activities for children and families began again. We have added new activities in response to the social situation and the problems we are now encountering in the area.

Activities for teenage girls we call **"Girl group"** to empower them to have self-confidence, have good life skills, be able to solve their problems appropriately and manage their own emotions.

Educational Guidance is a new activity that we have organized in schools in Sangkhlaburi for students who are studying in grade 9 and 12 to open their educational experience, allowing them to see new options and be able to choose to continue their studies in the subjects that they are really interested in.

Working with teenagers to be aware of the dangers of online abuse, is an educational activity so that they can assess their risks and deal with online sexual harassment on their own, as well as know ways to seek help when they are victims. In 2022, One Sky's Child Protection team organized activities in 4 secondary schools in the Sangkhlaburi area, resulting in more than 400 children benefiting from this activity.

Positive parenting, our activities promote positive and non-violent parenting in childcare, reinforced by providing parents with knowledge about child rights and child abuse to make parents aware of proper childcare. This activity is conducted by our Child Protection team which has been implemented in 2 communities in the past year.



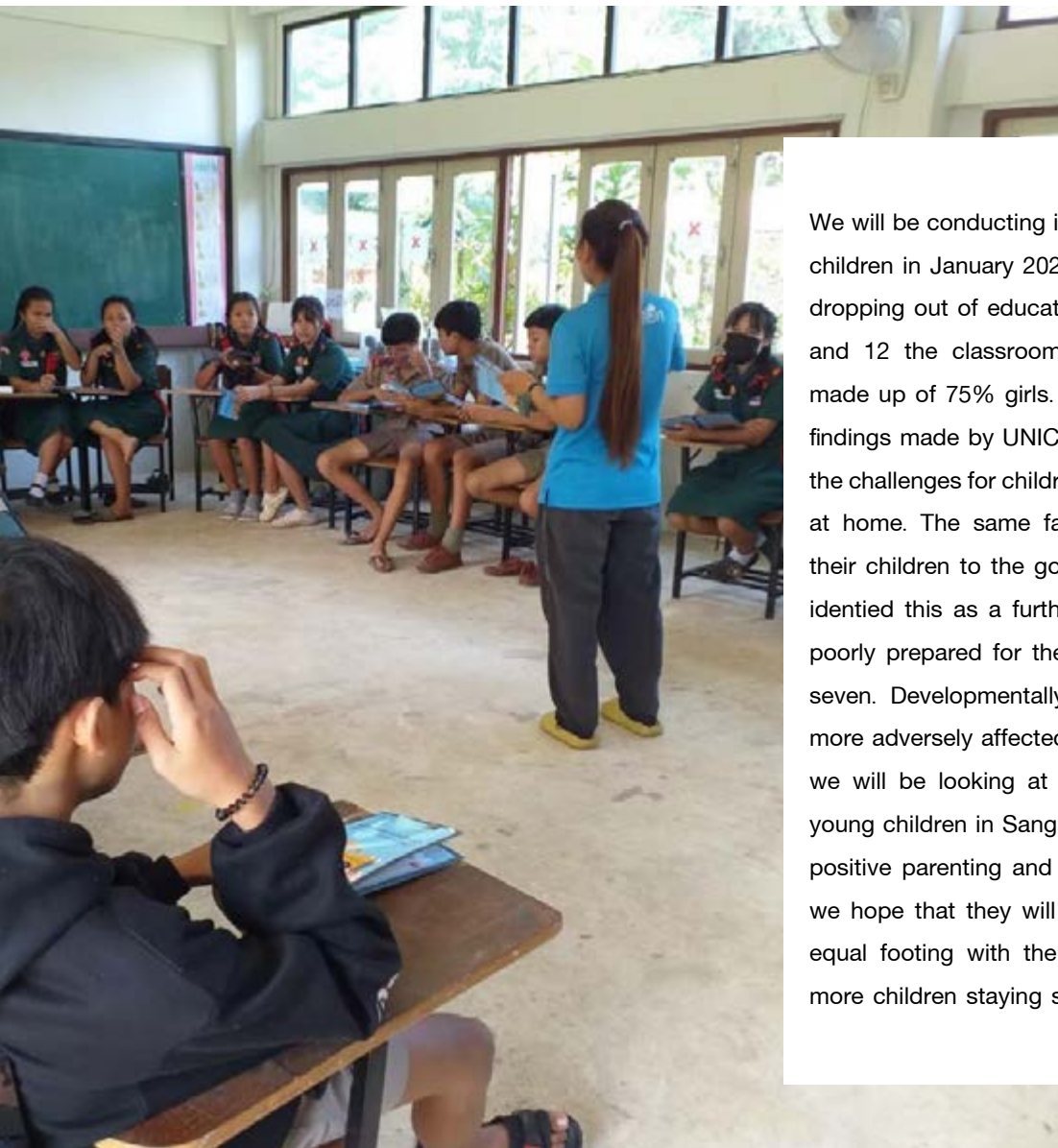
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Education

When schools closed in 2021 risks for many children increased. Despite this we initially saw a drop in child protection referrals because teachers had previously been one of the major sources of referrals. We responded by running covid awareness and child protection workshops in all local communities and soon we saw an increase in referrals coming directly from communities.



It was a huge relief for everyone when schools reopened late in 2021. We have needed to support more children in the aftermath of covid and in 2022 we identified 351 children in need of support. 57 received support with uniforms and other one-time costs but did not need monthly support for travel and lunch costs. These are mostly primary school children who can walk to school and receive a free lunch. Despite our offer of support, 29 children did not start the school year, instead they went to work to support their families (most of these children had completed grade 9). 23 children have dropped out during the year and 242 children continue to receive monthly support and to attend school. When needed these children are also supported with uniforms and one-time costs such as school trip fees.



We will be conducting interviews with parents, teachers and children in January 2023 to explore why so many boys are dropping out of education in Sangkhlaburi. In grades 10,11 and 12 the classrooms in Sangkhlaburi are consistently made up of 75% girls. We will be building on some of the findings made by UNICEF in a national survey that identified the challenges for children when Thai language is not spoken at home. The same families are also less likely to bring their children to the government kindergarten and UNICEF identified this as a further factor resulting in children being poorly prepared for the start of formal school aged six or seven. Developmentally the data suggests that boys are more adversely affected than girls by these factors. In 2023 we will be looking at ways we can support parents and young children in Sangkhlaburi with learning Thai language, positive parenting and access to kindergarten. In this way we hope that they will begin their formal education on an equal footing with their peers and that this will result in more children staying successfully in education for longer.



Welfare Support



We would like you to meet Rung. Among his responsibilities is the coordination of One Sky’s monthly food support:

One Sky provides food welfare support for an average of 50 families per month, some short term and some long term. In 2022 we supported 94 families with food welfare which included 311 children. They will receive rice, eggs and oil by considering the needs of each family and the number of family members especially the members who are children. Every time I meet them, I will ask about their well-being, their work and education of their children and report back any concerns to the rest of the team.

Although food assistance will not help families in the long term but it alleviated the hardships of the family for a while to give them a time to find work and solve family problems. Especially with children that should not be in a difficult situation that will affect their health and development.

Most of the families assisted by the project are migrant families working as general labourers. Some families are unemployed because they cannot move elsewhere to find work. Some time when they don’t have a job, they can’t earn money by any other way because they don’t have skills. Some families have jobs but their income is not enough to cover their expenses especially single-parent families with only one working person and a large number of children to care for. But all families supported by the project must be well-cared for their children and place an emphasis on their children’s education, which is an important precondition for the project to support them.

COVID

This interview was conducted for our 2021 report that was never completed. Although we are all keen to move on now, we thought it might still be of interest to share a little bit of what the covid situation was like in Sangkhlaburi. There was a lot of fear around when covid first arrived. One Sky staff stepped into the breach with only a basic Chinese vaccination and whatever masks and plastic covers they could find. Kung was the lead coordinator for the covid volunteer project we ran to support the local government efforts and to make sure children were not left without care:

The epidemic situation of the coronavirus caused the community to panic. Their inability to live a normal life led to anxiety and stress. When family members are infected and have to isolate for treatment, the children are left unattended, and community did not dare to help the children for fear of infection. The government does not have a plan for the problem with children because for the government the situation is new to them as well. I was worried that children are left alone when their parents are infected.

One Sky team and our volunteers worked with the government at screening points to obtain information about infected people. This is to let us know the needs of infected people who want the project to help their families. That the infected person must be treated immediately when found to be infected, this made them unable to manage their families. In many families we found that only children are left to look after themselves because their parents are infected.

The program therefore takes care of children by visiting and providing survival bags containing essential dry food, milk, snacks and toys for the children because when someone is infected in the family, the rest of the members are at high risk, making it impossible to go out and live a normal life.

We also ran activities to reduce stress for infected children in waiting centers because children had to be hospitalized for up to 14 days, children's inability to play as usual causes stress. Separation from the family made the child nervous. When the project volunteers do activities with these children, the children feel more relaxed.

Educating communities on how to protect themselves and their families from infection, as well as providing information that helped them understand the situation are activities that we did with the communities. Not just knowledge of COVID, we also shared about children's rights so that they know and be aware of their rights that children should receive.





Developing and Supporting Family Based Care, an update by Yui and Oh.

In 2022, there was a total of 59 children supported by the project, 50 under the care of kinship families and 9 children who were taken care of by foster families.

Foster family expansion is fully possible this year after the COVID-19 pandemic eases. Public relations for foster family applications received responses from 10 families who were interested. Also resulting from the public relations is when there was a problem with the children, community leaders who knew of the program decided to inform One Sky Foundation to look for family-based care, before bringing the children to a local children's home.



In addition to helping children and supporting kinship and foster families, we also support income generation activities for 7 families so they can take better care of their children and also empower them with the training on positive communication and online threats so that they can take proper care of the children. As for the children, we do the empowering activities to build the inner strength and to make them feel less alone and dependent even if they are not with their own families.





1 of our foster families who took care of 2 children since September 2022 shared her stories and how she and her family felt when joined the project.

What inspired you to join the project?

I want to see children grow up with quality. Without this program, children separated from their families and homeless would have to be taken care of in the shelters (children's homes). I think children who grow up in families have clear goals and learn life skills from their parents, unlike children who grow up in shelters who live by the rules that are set to follow.

What was your family thinking when you thought about joining the project?

I have consulted with my husband and son. They have the same mindset as me and are willing to take care of children. We think that my skills and experience as a teacher will help to take good care of the children.

How did you feel after joining the project?

My family was entrusted with the project to take care of 2 siblings, about 5-7 years old last September 2022. After taking care of them for 4 months, I feel good with them. It's not just me, all my family members get on well with them.

Taking care of a child didn't make me feel any more burdened because One Sky Foundation supports every child's expense and I also receive some stipend. Taking care of a child only affected me as a matter of time, freedom and lifestyle changes but that didn't make me feel like a burden.

During the first month, which is a period of adjustment for their misbehavior. I used to get discouraged and wanted to leave the project, but I thought it was natural to take care of a child if I was patient enough, the difficulty would be less. So, I tried to use reason to adjust their behavior. I'm sure that a good parenting will make it less of a hassle. In addition, having older siblings take care of younger siblings also makes me not too tired to take care of 2 children. Furthermore, the bond between me and them made me decide to continue taking care of them.

My whole family felt the same way. My husband often takes the children to farm activities. I saw the happiness when they were together. Even my son who works in other provinces, he always asks about the children and buys them the toys and snacks every time he comes home.





How do you feel that the child may have to return to their birth family?

I think the bond between my family and the children will bring them back to visit even if one day they have to go back to live with their real parents. I am sure that me and my family will always be in their hearts. Having a good and happy life with their parents is the best thing for them.



How will the children benefit from this project?

Most of the children who need to be separated from their birth families are taken into care in a shelter where we think they may have a better life compared to living with their own family. But for children, being in a shelter feels different. Children in foster family have their own parents and homes like other children. They feel not different that won't make a mess in their hearts.



What would you like to say to families who want to join the project?

By participating in the project, we are helping children who are facing hardships, but this helping be supported by One Sky Foundation, which does not add to the burden on ourselves and our families. We only sacrifice time and energy. Then we will see the quality growth of a children, giving a child a better future. Moreover, they may be our dependence in the future.

The Sangkhlaburi Child Protection Working Group (CPWG)

In 2022 One Sky made two formal complaints. One was against a policeman for his illegal treatment of a heavily pregnant 14 year old girl he arrested for having no papers and placed in an adult holding cell where she caught covid. The second was a detailed complaint covering the failure of the provincial social services to respond to any of the evidence of abuse in illegal children's homes in Sangkhlaburi that we have presented to them over the last eight years. Both complaints were upheld. Three officers came from Bangkok to investigate the case against a local officer and the human rights commission for Thailand has conducted a detailed inquiry into the failings of social services.



The confidence to make these complaints comes from the five years invested in building a district level Child Protection Committee under which a working group makes a formal response to child protection referrals and conducts preventative activities in the community. Thailand's child protection act does not mandate a district level committee but allows for it to be authorized by the governor who is the head of the provincial committee. The Sangkhlaburi district head agreed to chair the committee and to appoint a working group following our recommendations. Although we had been working with police, hospital, school directors and village leaders for some years, the CPWG formalizes the legal response we can make to situations of child protection. The strength of the group now means that we can ensure a consistent response to cases of abuse and can bring to account even the most powerful of abusers. In the early years of One Sky this was not the case and we saw many perpetrators of abuse against children were beyond the reach of the law. This has now changed.



One of the outcomes of the formal complaint against social services was the holding of a Sangkhlaburi summit bringing together social services, the department of children and youth, UNICEF, local government and local NGO's. It was amazing to see and the commitments made on that day have now been developed into the Sangkhlaburi roadmap. This map sets all of us on a course towards reducing the numbers of children in residential care, providing more support for families and providing government approved foster care as a more desirable option to residential care. Local children's homes will need permission to accept children and the well being of those children will be monitored. It is an ambitious plan and challenges are already surfacing as we work to begin its implementation. But none the less, having everyone in the room together and coming out of that with such a plan is something we could not have dreamed of a few years ago.

Other Updates



Although we had the new truck for almost a year the easing of covid restrictions finally allowed representatives from the Japanese Embassy to travel to Sangkhlaburi for the official hand over ceremony. Many of our local partners joined us and members of the Sangkhlaburi cultural center showed their skills in traditional Mon and Karen dance. Thank you again to the Embassy of Japan in Thailand for their support!

Income generation Bee conscious

We are now working in partnership with a socially minded business in Chiang Mai called bee conscious. They have supported us to develop our loofah sponges into a high-quality product that they are now marketing and selling worldwide. They have now placed a standing order with us of 10,000 sponges per year and they are confident this number could increase quickly. Our broom making project is continuing, but it is very hard to pay a fair wage in a such a competitive local industry. However, the loofah sponges are unique and with the support to develop the quality we are now able to pay the legal minimum wage to the single mothers in this project. We are really excited about this project! Here is a link if you would like to check out the Bee-conscious website. <https://beeconscious.me/beeconscious-a-social-enterprise/>



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One Sky Office in Chiang Mai



In March 2022 we opened our Chiang Mai office, 860km from our Sangkhlaburi office. What brought us to this city in Northern Thailand where many hundreds of NGO are already working and what difference did we think we could make?

One Sky is a leading member of a coalition of NGO's working together under the name of Alternative Care Thailand (ACT). Together we aim to encourage and support the Thai government in the reform of the care system for children in Thailand. Thailand readily signed the United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children in 2009, but has struggled to make meaningful progress towards the vision set out within those guidelines. Support services for children and families are severely lacking, large numbers of private children's homes operate with no regulation or oversight by the government and more desirable Alternative Care options such as foster care are only available in very small numbers. In countries that are more advanced in their adoption of the UN Guidelines there is now much greater investment in the prevention work that brings the support needed to each child and their family based on their individual needs. When families get the help they need, the requirement for Alternative Care is reduced. When Alternative Care is necessary, in most cases family-based care is more desirable for children. This includes kinship care and foster care. In those countries that have worked hard to change how they care for children, the use of large-scale residential care has been reduced a last resort or even done away with all together.



Our experiences in Sangkhlaburi over the last 10 years have gained us a reputation, within ACT and beyond, as specialists in the area of private children's homes in Thailand and how this unregulated sector could be brought in line with current national legislation and the UN Guidelines. Families make up the fabric of society, yet we have seen so many times that without the right kind of support when it is needed many families can be left with few positive choices for their children. Private children's homes in Thailand are completely unregulated. For the minority that do register with the government the outdated requirements to do so focus on the physical environment and not at all on the system of care and the decision making processes involved. Even having a basic child safeguarding policy is not a requirement.

We have known for some years now that the high numbers of private children's homes in Chiang Mai and neighbouring Chiang Rai provinces mean that this area of Thailand has one of the very highest densities of such institutions anywhere in the world.

With support from our ACT partners we approached the Por Mor Jor (Social Services) Director in Chiang Mai who readily agreed for us to conduct a provincial survey with her authority. We visited and documented 176 active private children's homes in the province. 133 of them agreed to take part in detailed interviews. 66% of these facilities are not registered with the government. 65 of the private homes were previously unknown to either the government or ACT. 89% of the homes are run by Christian organisations, while 1% of the Thai population is Christian. 62 homes said they have no child safeguarding policy or procedure in place. Feel free to contact us if you would like to know more about this work and the findings.

At the time of writing, we are about to conduct a similar survey of Chiang Rai province. Although these are only two out of Thailand's 76 provinces we expect to have mapped almost half of the countries private children's homes once the Chiang Rai survey is complete.

Since the Chiang Mai survey we have been approached by Save the Children to conduct a scoping review building on the children's home survey and exploring opportunities to change the current situation. We hope to begin this work early in 2023 and to influence a significant investment that will be made by Save the Children in Chiang Mai following the scoping process.

Across 2021 and 2022 we have worked with Dr. Kanthamane Ladaphongphatthana our close partner at Mahidol University to map all residential Alternative Care in Thailand. This was a painstaking challenge that took many months but we are now able to state that not less than 120,000 children are living in various forms of residential care around the country. This work was important as the official number (reported to UNICEF by the Government) is 27,000.





In 2021 Dr. Kanthamaneer was commissioned by UNICEF to lead a small team in drafting a road map for care reform in Thailand. The resulting “National Action Plan of Alternative Care” was adopted by the National Child Protection Committee in December 2022. This is a huge milestone in the quest to

reform the system of care for children, however, we need to ensure that no children are left behind. While the Ministry of Human Development and Social Security (MSDHS) has committed to the Action Plan, according to our tour mapping, this ministry only accounts for around one third of children in residential care in Thailand. Three other ministries need to be engaged in the plan if all children are to be included. None of these ministries is yet aware of the plan and we hope that our work will help to make sure that this really is a national plan and not just a plan for one of the relevant ministries.



Giving voice to care leavers has been another of our goals in the last two years. We are very aware that very few of us in the ACT coalition have personal, lived, experience of the care system in Thailand. We set out to create opportunities for those who have this experience to give feedback on our work and also to give a platform to those who wanted to, to speak directly to government and policy makers. In 2022 we conducted 37 in depth interviews with care leavers who responded to our engagement campaign. A smaller group is now meeting monthly to consider key questions in the reform process. We have learned a lot from this group. For example our previous description of poverty as being the primary root cause in pushing children into residential care is too simplistic. While extreme poverty does mean some parents cannot feed and cloth their children there is a broader issue about poverty of opportunity. Social mobility in Thailand is something we need to consider more. As things stand, children in poor families will almost certainly become poor adults. Some Children’s homes are offering the rare opportunity for social mobility that many parents cannot find elsewhere. Care leavers can readily identify the failings and negative impact of their time in residential care, but very few felt there was any other way in which they could have elevated their social status. With 175 private children’s homes in Chiang Mai province alone, there could be almost 1 billion baht per year coming into the province for children. How can we divert this investment to create opportunities for social mobility that are accessible to disadvantaged families at the village level.

Feel free to contact us if you would like to know more about our work with ACT. alternativecarethailand@gmail.com

