

Warm Smiles and Rubbish Piles

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We really want to tell you about all the projects we are working with in Mae Sot, but we thought it would be best to focus on one project at a time to keep your minds from frying, so today we are going to focus on The Mae Sot Rubbish Dump Community.

It's difficult to give you a true feel of what The Dump is like, and the closest you will get to understanding what The Dump is like is through a video, please take a look at the video below.

"Look at this! Would you live and raise your family here? Regardless, we will be satisfied with what we have." – A member of the community.

Constant poverty coupled with extreme violence between ethnic groups in Burma and the Burmese military are the just a few of the big reasons why the rubbish dump has become home for the Burmese migrants that live there. These conditions are preferable to their life before, which says a lot about what they have left behind.

Over 400 people live on The Dump as of March 2014 and over 200 of those are under the age of 18. They have limited access to running water, healthy food and other basic necessities. These conditions make them highly vulnerable to exploitation, abuse from others and disease, primarily caused by toxic fumes released as the rubbish is disturbed under foot. The main source of income for these people is scavenging through The Dump, collecting recyclables to sell to local merchants for very little money. In a lot of cases this hinders the child's opportunity to go to school as they have to spend most of their time collecting rubbish. Their parents do want their children to go school, but their primary focus is on survival.

There are many organisations that assist the residents of The Dump, including Compasio. Every Monday and Thursday we visit two areas of The Dump, one where the residents live in an abandoned factories, while in the other, residents live in shacks made of bamboo. We spend quality time with the children whilst other Compasio staff visit families assessing needs and building relationships. Compasio plays a practical role in the community, for example providing housing materials, basic food packages for a year and paying school fees for children, to allow them to access an education they would not otherwise have.

Our impressions of The Dump were different to what we originally thought they would be. The children were so full of life, jumping and joyful, seemingly unaware of the conditions they are living in. It's hard to understand how the children have normalised their living conditions and we quickly realised that we had to adjust our views as we found that kids are kids, no matter where they are. So far we have done face painting, colouring in and a highlight for Nicola and Miko was introducing bead jewelry to the children.

Miko was surprised at the difference in adult participation between the industrial community and the shack community. The industrial community was more closed and cautious about letting people in, while the other was very open. The contrast between the two communities is great despite living on the same, small site.

We are really getting to know the community at the Mae Sot Rubbish Dump and are really looking forward to building relationships with the people. We have only been a handful of time, but each time we come back with a new story, having learnt something new about both The Dump and ourselves.



Prayer Points:

For the community who live and work at The Dump as well as the organisations and people that support the community there.

For the Sky Blue School and our up and coming involvement as English teachers there. (Briefly mentioned in the video).

For our group as we start a new morning system of prayer, bible and talk time together. (More about that in the next blog!)

Fun Fact about Thailand: They have fried ice cream over here! Who knew?

The video mentioned can be found at:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgsinmogtqY&feature=player_embedded