

The rubbish dump kids

On the Thai-Burma border, hundreds of Burmese refugee families live in and survive on rubbish.



“If you can think of hell then I can imagine that hell’s probably a little bit better,” says BMS World Mission worker Charmaine Trendell. **“This is a huge area of mounds and mounds of filth and dirt and refuse – and the stench, especially in the summer time with the flies, is just unbelievable.”**



This ‘hell’ is [Mae Sot’s rubbish dump](#): home to several hundred families. Families who, having fled to Thailand to escape their lives in Burma, spend their days sorting through rubbish to make a living, and their nights sleeping in it. “It tells you about what they’ve left,” says Charmaine, “that this life is something preferable.”

For the last two years, Charmaine and her husband Bob have been working with BMS partner [Compasio](#) to show love to the most vulnerable people living in Mae Sot, on the Thai-Burma border. “The first time we went to the dump was in the monsoons and we just could not believe – we had no idea that people were living in these sorts of conditions,” Charmaine says. “When we got out of the Land Rover we couldn’t see where the river was, where the land was, what we were stepping in. People were living in that.”



Anna’s story

Anna and her family live at the rubbish dump. Her husband was killed trying to stop a fight, and she was left destitute and alone with her daughter and new-born son. Compasio was

able to help, providing materials to make a simple bamboo house for the family to live in, giving them basic food packages for a year and visiting them regularly.

“It’s hard to say what would have happened to her if Compasio weren’t there,” says Bob. “She would have had to rely totally on the community, but they are all very poor themselves. This is what we’re about – just coming alongside people and helping in any way we can. Being Christ in action.”



Twice a week, Bob, Charmaine and others from the team visit the people living on Mae Sot’s dump. While the Burmese staff go from shack to shack to identify problems and see how they can help, Bob and others less fluent in Burmese spend quality time with the rubbish dump’s children – playing games with them, colouring in and painting their faces.

“Many of these children are cuddle-starved,” says Charmaine, “because their parents are backbreakingly hard

at work, the daily grind of just trying to find enough to make a living.”



Living in unimaginable poverty, the children and families of the rubbish dump are not self-pitying. “Here are people living in conditions that no human being should be living in,” says Charmaine. “And yet, when they see us there are huge smiles of delight – they’re so grateful that we come to see them and bring them some help.”

Their stories and smiles have won the hearts of Bob, Charmaine and the Compasio team who are doing all they can to help them. But while these families are literally living in rubbish, at risk of disease and exploitation, we know there’s still so much more to do.