



# BAAN UNRAK CHILDREN'S HOME

December 2011

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Another wonderful year is coming to a close! We celebrated our 21st anniversary this past October and we are so thankful that we can continue to work and grow here at Baan Unrak. Some things we are thankful for: a new tractor was purchased to help with farming, the children enjoyed their October holiday with many outdoor activities and language lessons, we have a new Volunteer-Coordinator and our relief work is continuing with a new campaign called the Coffee for Rice Challenge. So many things to be thankful for!

As the holiday season quickly approaches, we have begun hosting a number of volunteer groups and we are getting into the spirit of the season. We have updated our inventory for the Weaving Center and taken some beautiful photographs of new products. Be sure to place your holiday orders as soon as you can. We know it is a busy time for everyone so thank you for taking some time out of your day to read our December 2011 Newsletter.

Lastly, but most importantly, we'd like to extend our love and gratitude to you and your family for your support. We wish you a happy, healthy holiday!

## What's New?



### A NEW TRACTOR!!

Thanks to our wonderful donors we have purchased a new tractor! This tractor will help improve our farming and enable us to make a "dam" by the lake so we can have water for the house all year round!



### A NEW VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR!

Sarah Lassally is originally from England. She has a background in midwifery, mental health and service coordination. She has lived and worked in Asia many times in her life. To be able to volunteer full-time has been a lifelong dream realized.

## Enjoying the Holidays!

The children enjoyed their holiday away from school during the month of October. They kept busy with many different activities including reading in the library, bike riding, swimming, arts & crafts, visiting local temples, working on the farm and around the home, and continuing their language studies. For 1 hour each day the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> graders continued their studies of English and Thai with our volunteers. Everyone had a lot of fun but they are all excited to be back at school!



## Buddhist Holiday!

In the beginning of October there was a big Buddhist holiday called Boun Bavorana Auk Pansa. The holiday celebrates the end of the monk's rainy-season fasting. Here in Sangklaburi, the townspeople dress up in their finest clothing and bring food and offerings to the monks at the temple. The monks zigzag through the crowds, collecting the offerings in their bowls. Periodically they dump their overflowing bowls into huge rice sacks and then continue on. Baan Unrak children performed in front a large crowd and received a huge amount of support from people giving donations and buying weaving centre products. The monks were very impressed with how disciplined the children were during meditation and how they were able to listen quietly while the monks gave lectures. It was remarked that the children were very respectful of the temple.

Photos by two of our volunteers, Paul and Jewel Maree.



## Home School Update

Two years ago we began home-schooling some of our children. We started this program because we wanted to develop a different way for our kids to be educated. Our goal is to reinforce the Neo Humanist philosophy and teach them new ways of thinking. This year, the students are no longer having all their classes at the home. We have begun teaching some classes at Baan Unrak School. We also have a long-term volunteer English teacher, Dan.



Hello, my name is Dan Bollinger (*pictured above*) and I am the home school volunteer English teacher. I have been at Bann Unrak for 3 months now and I am getting to know each of the students individually. I am discovering how special and gifted they all are. They are all anxious to learn English and we are satisfying their desire to learn by concentrating on written and oral communication as well as listening and reading comprehension. Each week we are dissecting and analyzing their favorite English songs and using the internet almost daily as a primary learning source. As the students become more proficient in English, they are more likely to become valuable and productive members of the work force while living meaningful and fulfilling lives.



### WHAT THE STUDENTS HAVE TO SAY

*"I like Home school because I have fun and Good Teacher and many good friends. I can play anything and sometimes the Teacher gives free time to play computer."*

**Pawn**

*"I like home school because I have a good teacher and I can play computer and I have many friends."*

**Non**

## The Home Away From Home

By **BRITTANY TAYLOR**

The weeks I spent at Baan Unrak have changed me forever. As a volunteer with ISV (International Student Volunteers) I had the opportunity to help with agriculture and maintenance at the home, but it was playing and socializing with the kids that gave the work meaning and purpose. Living at the guest house near the home made us feel like part of the family, spending all of our free time hanging out with the kids right up until bed time. One moment that I will never forget and will cherish forever was when both Weechi and Tanangso feel asleep in my arms and lap one evening before bed. My heart broke remembering their stories and how many would consider them orphaned and abandoned. But the thing about Baan Unrak is that the kids don't act or look like orphans, they are loved unconditionally. They have 140 brothers and sisters at the home, countless volunteers who are like mentors and of course the Didis and care mothers who love them like parents. They are a family and allowing myself to get involved in this story made me part of the family too; part of something greater than myself. Baan Unrak showed me the value of love and how it can change people. When they realize that they are loved, eternally and unconditionally, real healing begins. "Baba Nam Kevalam," the home meditation mantra means "Infinite love is all there is". If only all children were raised on this idea of love. If only everyone gave value to love and its power to change and transform people, even from the worst situations in life. Baan Unrak has given these kids hope of a future better than they could have ever imagined. I am blessed to have become part of the Baan Unrak family, and will always consider this place a home away from home.



## Coffee for Rice Challenge

We started a new campaign for our relief work program called the Coffee for Rice Challenge. We are using the campaign to ask friends from all over the world to save the money they would normally spend on coffee for one week & donate it to Baan Unrak's outreach program. Through the Baan Unrak outreach program we provide temporary food assistance, clean drinking water, health care and education, and needs-based items to about 50 families every month. These people have been displaced by the conflicts in Burma and are living in remote jungle areas around Sangklaburi, Thailand. Every month we spend approximately 20,000 baht providing rice, beans and other provisions to families in need. Your coffee money has helped us to buy these supplies and feed families, and will continue to do so. *These relief photos were taken by our volunteer Jewel Maree.*



## WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Currently the home is seeking funding to purchase our own four-wheel drive VEHICLE to more regularly access these remote areas and to extend our reach. If you have any ideas for vehicle fundraising and would like to help, please get in touch. Donations may also be made through our website <http://www.baanunrak.org/> Thank you!



## Sponsor a Child

### WHY?

Sponsoring a Baan Unrak child is perhaps one of the greatest gifts you could ever give. Your sponsorship will have a dramatic impact on the quality of life for a child, one that will potentially change his or her life forever. Sponsoring a child is more than donating money. It is about establishing and cultivating a relationship with your child. Every six months, you'll receive an update on his or her life here at Baan Unrak along with an up-to-date photo of your growing child. Although it is not necessary, the children are always thrilled to receive any pictures or letters sent from their sponsor family! Although providing a full sponsorship is rewarding, we know it can also be a considerable financial commitment. Baan Unrak has recently made partial sponsorships available as well as full sponsorships. Instead of fully supporting a child's needs, you can choose to support his or her education, medical costs, or cost-of-living expenses (food, clothing, etc.). Any donations will help the children greatly. *Sponsor Photos by Jewel Maree.*

### HOW?

**Become a Full Sponsor (US\$ 62 / month)**

**Support includes:**

- Educational costs
- Medical costs
- Living cost

**Become an Educational Sponsor (US \$30 /month)**

**Become a Medical Sponsor (US \$16 /month)**

**Become a Living Cost Sponsor (US \$16 /month)**

**Become a Higher Education Sponsor (US \$207/month)**

Visit <http://www.baanunrak.org> and click the "Help Us" page.

Follow the instructions and sign up for 12-months of sponsorship in whichever capacity you choose in your currency through PayPal.

Questions about sponsorship? Email us at [emails@baanunrak.org](mailto:emails@baanunrak.org)



## So Long Sangkla'...

By LAURA JANE HITCHMAN



Having already meandered across South East Asia, I decided it was time to give my travels some substance. I wanted to get to know the culture and "do some good", so-to-speak! So I embarked on a six month stint as Baan Unrak's Weaving Marketing Coordinator.

It was surprisingly easy to slot into the slow-paced Sangkhlaburi lifestyle. Free time here is occupied by movies, massage and morning market trips; watching the world go by over a long, lingering Burmese breakfast is something that will be missed dearly. This laid-back vibe extends to the home

itself; without rigid instruction, volunteers are encouraged to work proactively and embark on their own projects. I enjoyed the freedom of this and from my new office at the Bakery set to work making plans.

My most memorable Weaving experience was the fashion show. Nothing could have prepared me for the mayhem that was organizing swarms of excitable children - easily my most challenging and rewarding event yet! The concoction included a catwalk show, dance routines and circus performances. Guests could also indulge at the Bakery stall, peruse products at a mini shop and be pampered at a nail stand. Of course, we had tears and tantrums from the tots and traumas from the teens. A combination of stage fright, sound issues and Thai timing meant that things were fashionably late getting going, and our models were far too nervous to remember their order, but overall it was a success! The children had a great time and, after their initial hindering nerves, were eagerly asking "can I model this too?" at anything and everything they could find. We made a hefty sum from cake and clothing sales and we nearly made it the whole way through without the power cutting out! We compiled a short movie of all of the best pictures - this can be found on the Baan Unrak Weaving Facebook page.

Aside from the weaving, I took on a teenage girls group. Assisted by various other volunteers along the way, we held weekly meetings in which we would paint our nails, eat popcorn and talk about boys, the birds and the bees. These meetings could be especially amusing. I will always remember one in particular when all twenty five of the girls invaded our volunteer house... what started in quiet drawing time culminated in cavorting around to Beyonce's Single Ladies and practicing our catwalk strut in preparation for the fashion show!

So six months have sped by and I'm sad to be setting sail. However, I'm taking with me a backpack full of weaving goods, as well as some incredible memories of beautiful Sangkhlaburi and its inhabitants. I'll always remember the awe-inspiring displaced Ethnic tribes from Burma and the charismatic children, never forgetting the constant stream of fascinating characters that enriches the wooden walls of the volunteer house.



## Weaving Center Update

The Baan Unrak Weaving Center produces a beautiful array of clothing, accessories, jewelry and home-décor. As you may know, all of our products are designed and hand-made by our skilled workers using traditional Thai and Burmese patterns. They put their passion and all of their skill into the items.

The weaving employees do not lack initiative when working with very limited resources. The lovely yarn we use is spun using an old bicycle wheel! After the yarn is spun, the employees move the fabric to our hand-operated looms, often times with their baby in a hammock nearby. The thumping sound from the weaving comb helps the babies sleep while their parents work. We provide work for mothers who live with their children here at the Baan Unrak Home.

Changes are afoot in the weaving center in order to improve this facet of our organization. We hope to employ and give hope to more mothers, support more children, and give you a better shopping experience. We have a new volunteer with experience in textiles currently working to achieve these goals. We hope you will see many improvements in the near future including improvements in our Bakery Shop, our weaving center, and our online presence.

We are planning a huge sale in the New Year so please keep checking our facebook and etsy pages for news! We hope you will consider shopping on our etsy page for your **Christmas Gifts** this year and supporting our organization. The employees of the Weaving Center wish you a very happy and healthy Holiday Season!  
*Weaving Center Photos by Jewel Maree.*



# THANK YOU!

It is thanks to all of you, our supporters and generous donors, that we are able to maintain a quality lifestyle and education for our 140 children. It is also thanks to you that we can develop new projects and new activities with the children. All of the children and the whole Baan Unrak team would like to thank you very much! We hope you enjoyed reading this newsletter and wish you a very happy and healthy holiday season full of joy.



Please follow us on facebook and twitter so you can always stay updated on our ongoing activities and projects.



<http://www.facebook.com/baanunrak>



<http://www.twitter.com/baanunrak>

Visit our website: [www.baanunrak.org](http://www.baanunrak.org)  
Also visit the weaving center website: [www.border-weaving.org](http://www.border-weaving.org)  
and etsy shop: [www.etsy.com/shop/baanunrak](http://www.etsy.com/shop/baanunrak)  
where you can see and purchase all of our new products.  
It is a great way to support us!!

If you would like more information,  
do not hesitate to contact us at [emails@baanunrak.org](mailto:emails@baanunrak.org)