



As Children of the Forest Foundation moves forward into 2013, we are taking this moment to thank our many generous sponsors worldwide for your support, and to update you about developments that the past year has held. 2012 was a year of change for us, both within our own project and in the circumstances surrounding our work. We want to let you know how we are approaching the changing political situation in Burma and show you why, despite challenges that may lie ahead, we are confident that the vital services we provide will continue to grow from strength to strength.

A CHANGING CLIMATE

Given decades of repression, 2012 saw a relative whirlwind of reform by the Burmese regime. Key events included the relaxation of press censorship laws and the release of hundreds of political prisoners, most notably the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

A question we have frequently encountered is how these changes affect our work. The quick answer is that we see no reason to expect any immediate (or even foreseeable) let up in the scale of needs in the Sangkhlaburi Thai-Burma border community. There are many reasons to doubt 2012's reforms triggering a flood of migrants back into Burma. Firstly, it seems clear that these are, as termed by President Barrack Obama, just the "flickers of progress". The government's brutal response to November copper mine protests gives a stark reminder of how far the regime has yet to go. Secondly, reports from human rights groups have indicated that there has been little change on the ground for the ethnic groups that we work with. A Karen Women Organisation statement emphasized:

"We have seen more human rights violations, land confiscations, increased Burmese military presence, forced labor, killing and continued fighting in some areas. It is not safe for refugees to return to Burma." ('Even I am a Refugee, Listen to my Voice', June 2012)

For many migrant individuals, Sangkhlaburi has become their home. As long as fear persists and Thailand's economy remains vastly stronger than its Burmese counterpart, there is little incentive to return. And indeed, there is every reason to expect that large numbers of individuals will continue to make the journey across the border into Thailand.

If anything, wider perceptions of reforms have the greatest bearing on our work. As expressed by Daw Aung Sang Suu Kyi, many NGOs working on the border have noted "donor fatigue"; notions of a quick "solution" to Burma's more deeply embedded problems has prompted funding groups to move their focus elsewhere. The Mae Tao clinic, one of the most acclaimed border organizations (a Nobel Peace Prize nominee), this year announced a severe funding shortfall of US \$600,000. Whilst we see no immediate cause for concern for our own project, the rapidly changing financial climate has prompted consideration of our long-term strategy and vision. We have given deep thought to the question of how, should funding shortfalls begin to affect us, we are to ensure COF's survival. And in discussing threats to our future we have been prompted to consider just why it is so important that COF does in fact survive; the vital elements that make our project unique.

2012 DEVELOPMENTS

Of the substantial progress in all 12 of our Strategic Objectives for 2012 (outlined in January), developments crucial to this long-term vision included:

- **Wide development of our farming programme** – vital to making COF more self-sufficient. 2012 saw not only our best rice crop yet, but also the introduction of chili plants, banana trees and oil palms.
- **An increased network of NGOs and CBOs** - an invaluable support in maximizing effectiveness of our operations. We now have at hand specialized advice in areas ranging from Agriculture to Child Protection.
- **Expansion of our on-site Mother & Child Protection Programme** to Outreach support of 23 mothers and their 50 children. A cost-effective way to provide desperately needed support to deeply vulnerable individuals. Starting in 2013, we will offer a twice weekly drop-in morning at our clinic, primarily aimed at young unaccompanied mothers living in the Sangkhlaburi community. Run by our COF medic and a UK registered counselor working as a long-term volunteer at COF, this programme will deepen the support offered by our Outreach Mother & Child Protection Programme.
- **A first draft of a revised Child Protection Policy** – we want to see our deep commitment to Child Protection accurately reflected in our code of conduct. Throughout 2012 all COF staff have been engaged a number of workshops, aimed at creating a truly “bottom up” policy. We are lucky to have a strong and dynamic team, and it seems only natural that our new Child Protection Policy should be created from their wealth of experience.
- **Successful refocus of the mission of our Free School** to providing preparation for migrant children (with little to no education background) to successfully join the Thai state education system. We now run year-round Preparation Classes (containing around 90 children), affirming our commitment to helping some of the most vulnerable children in the community.
- **Significant growth of our Borderlands Youth & Art Programme**, providing training to at-risk teenagers aimed at helping them live safely and avoid exploitation. In its use of art and creative processes, Borderlands uses our staff's passion for creativity to engage, encourage and empower migrant youth.

INSPIRING MOMENTS

These achievements have been part of a year of many other successes at COF. As we move on in circumstances filled with uncertainties, the everyday inspiring moments we encounter are what drives our work on. We would like share this video with you to show just some of these moments that 2012 held: <https://vimeo.com/57442853>

SO, THANK YOU...

Without our supporters, none of what we do would be possible. As ever, the deepest thanks.