

# **2018 Overview of Children of the Forest And Potential Areas for Donor Funding Support for 2019**

## **1. Introduction**

This overview introduces Children of the Forest (COF), a local NGO working with stateless migrant children in Sangkhlaburi, Thailand near the border with Myanmar. It outlines the situation in Sangkhlaburi, the background and work of COF, and priority areas of COF's work urgently in need of donor funding support.

Children of the Forest wraps an interconnected set of support activities around the young stateless migrant children we work with, focused on their personal and social development, education, transport, nutrition, safety, and family needs. This enables them to develop Thai language and basic education skills as well as self-confidence and self-esteem to be able to successfully transition into and succeed in the regular Thai Education system.



## 1.1 Situation and context in Sangkhlaburi

It is often assumed that Thailand, when compared to neighbouring countries like Myanmar or Cambodia, is a wealthy and developed country. However, away from the high rises, shopping malls and wealthy middle class in Bangkok, in isolated rural border areas such as Sangkhlaburi, many extremely poor migrant communities are hidden from view just off the main roads and in the surrounding forests living in often desperate subsistence conditions.

Stateless migrant communities originally from Myanmar have been living for decades in the Sangkhlaburi area of the Thai-Myanmar border after fleeing there to escape cycles of armed conflict and persecution in ethnic areas of Myanmar. Most of the children COF works with were born into these communities in Thailand but remain stateless and lack Thai language skills, Thai ID or access to basic education and other social services in the formal Thai system.

Poverty and instability of migrant children's families are major barriers to those children accessing education. In many cases, migrant children's lack of Thai language skills is preventing their progress or even enrollment in Thai government schools. There are also pressures on children to work to support their families even from a very young age rather than be in school.

Children are also subject to pressures from family breakups, parents' substance abuse and addiction, and dislocation of migrant families in pursuit of work in Thailand. As a result, the children we work with are also at risk from exploitation in dangerous low paid work and from people traffickers who operate in the border zone around Sangkhlaburi.



## 2 About Children of the Forest

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### 2.1 COF's Background and Vision

Children of the Forest (COF) was founded in 2005 by Daniel Hopson who recognised the desperate need for education for the many stateless migrant children living in migrant communities along the Sangkhlaburi area of the Thai-Myanmar border. Started initially as a small elementary school, COF has since grown as its programs have addressed the many education and protection needs of the migrant children it works with.



Today, COF has programs focused on supporting many aspects of the lives of migrant children in Sangkhlaburi, including education, residential protection centres, medical services, social work, support to single mothers with dependent children, farming, youth, arts and sports programs. COF works in an area that covers an approximately 60 km radius from the project centre near Sangkhlaburi township. Sangkhlaburi is approximately 16 kms from the Thai-Myanmar Border. There are around 32 different communities where COF works. COF's Free School currently serves 169 migrant children covering grades 1-3 to equip them with the language, education, self-confidence and social skills for transition into the regular Thai education system.

COF's vision is for equal access to and successful completion of elementary schooling for migrant children in Sangkhlaburi that will enable them to progress on to further schooling, opportunities for higher education and fulfilling futures.

## 2.2 The COF Approach



There is a need for appropriate basic education and Thai language skills provided within a supportive community framework to enable stateless migrant children in Sangkhlaburi to transition into and succeed in the regular Thai education system.

COF recognises that the challenges that face migrant children seeking to move into regular Thai schooling go beyond just language differences and lack of education opportunities. These children require a wider support network. COF provides that social safety net encompassing Thai language development, basic education, protection services and residential care (where necessary), awareness raising about risks from work exploitation and trafficking, developing children's self confidence and self esteem, and engagement with the children's families and wider communities.

## 2.3 COF Programs Overview

Over the last 12 years COF has expanded its programs to incorporate:

- COF Free Grade school (169 Children attending)
- residential child protection centres (104 children resident currently)
- kindergarten (34 children attending)
- youth education and education preparation programs (49 children and youth attending)
- health program and medical centre
- mother and child protection program (35 mothers and 60 children)
- farm and farming education program (COF school children learn about environmentally sustainable practices on this farm)
- creative and arts programs
- sports program (COF teams compete in and organise local tournaments, COF fields an equal number of futsal and football teams for both boys and girls)

#### **2.4 COF Staff**

- Project director
- Project manager
- 8 qualified and experienced local teachers with both Thai and ethnic language skills
- 8 trained child care staff
- Art teacher (US qualified)
- Local community and social work outreach worker
- Counselor (UK qualified)
- Two former COF students are graduating in social work and one is returning to work at COF

#### **2.5 COF Board**

- COF Board of Trustees (8 members) including Thai Prof of human rights, education specialist, medical specialist, and protection expert
- COF School and home operate under a strict Child Protection Policy based on UN standards
- COF has a supervisory Child Protection Committee elected annually

#### **2.6 COF Registration**

- COF registration (since 2009) as Thai Foundation KAN 87/2552,
- UK Charity registration 1109763,
- USA Charity registration (501c3) 36-4758269
- COF School Registered since 2008 as a Thai government satellite school

#### **2.7 Financial Transparency and Accountability**

- COF's accounts are audited each month by Accord International Law Office Co. Ltd. 61/27 Soi Rama9 Soi7yek4, Rama9 Road, HuayKhwang, Bangkok 10310, 66-(0)2-2488488/ Mobile: 66-(0)8-19377108/ e-mail [accord9@account-legal.com](mailto:accord9@account-legal.com)
- COF's fully qualified accountant formerly worked with World Vision Thailand

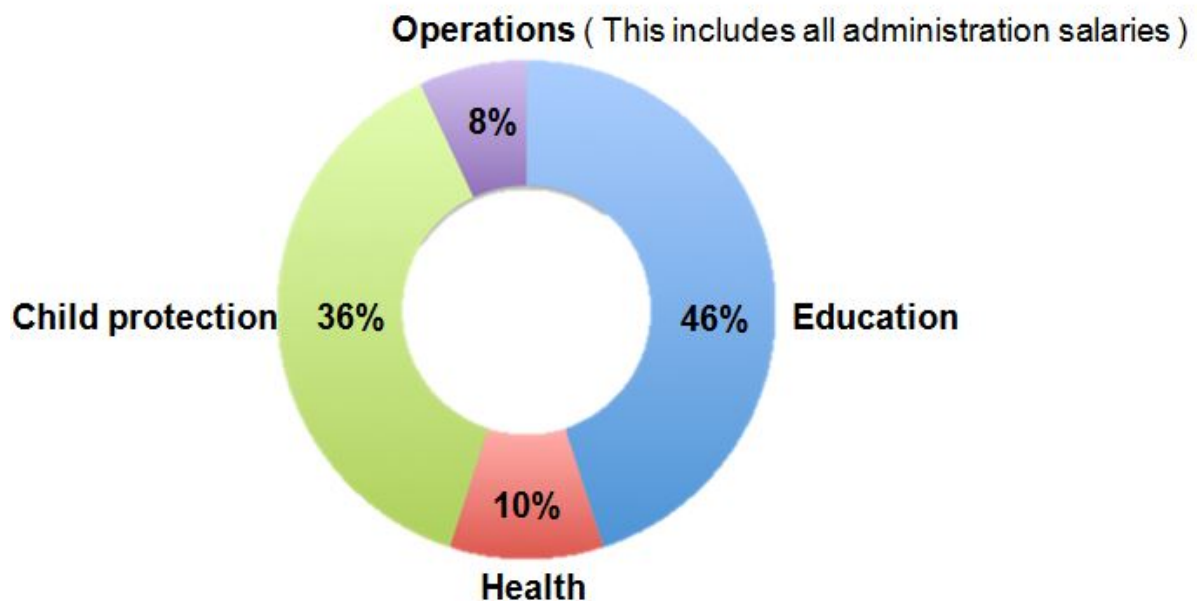
#### **2.8 COF Achievements, national and international profile**

- 2006, Bangkok Post front page feature article on COF's role in education for migrant Karen and Mon children
- 2010-11, COF awarded two \$US 15,000 grants from the UN Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery
- March 2012, COF awarded £8000 grant after invitation to and successful presentation at the London Funding Network
- Oct 2014, 7 children from COF speak at meeting on Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) at Rayong, Thailand)
- Nov 2014, 2 children from COF speak at the CRC final national meeting, Bangkok, Thailand
- Nov 2014, Video about COF's education and protection work on Thai TV Channel 3 News
- Jan 2015, Bangkok post feature article and video documentary on COF's education and child protection work
- July 2015, COF speaks at UN conference on child rights in New York, introduced by founder of Amnesty International
- Nov 2015, COF speaks to CORAM conference on child rights chaired by Harvard Law School
- 2017 COF identified by Thai Department of Social Welfare as best practice model of child protection in Sangkhlaburi
- 2018 COF invited to present on education for stateless children at The Conference on Democracy in San Francisco USA

## 2.9 Sustainability of COF into the future

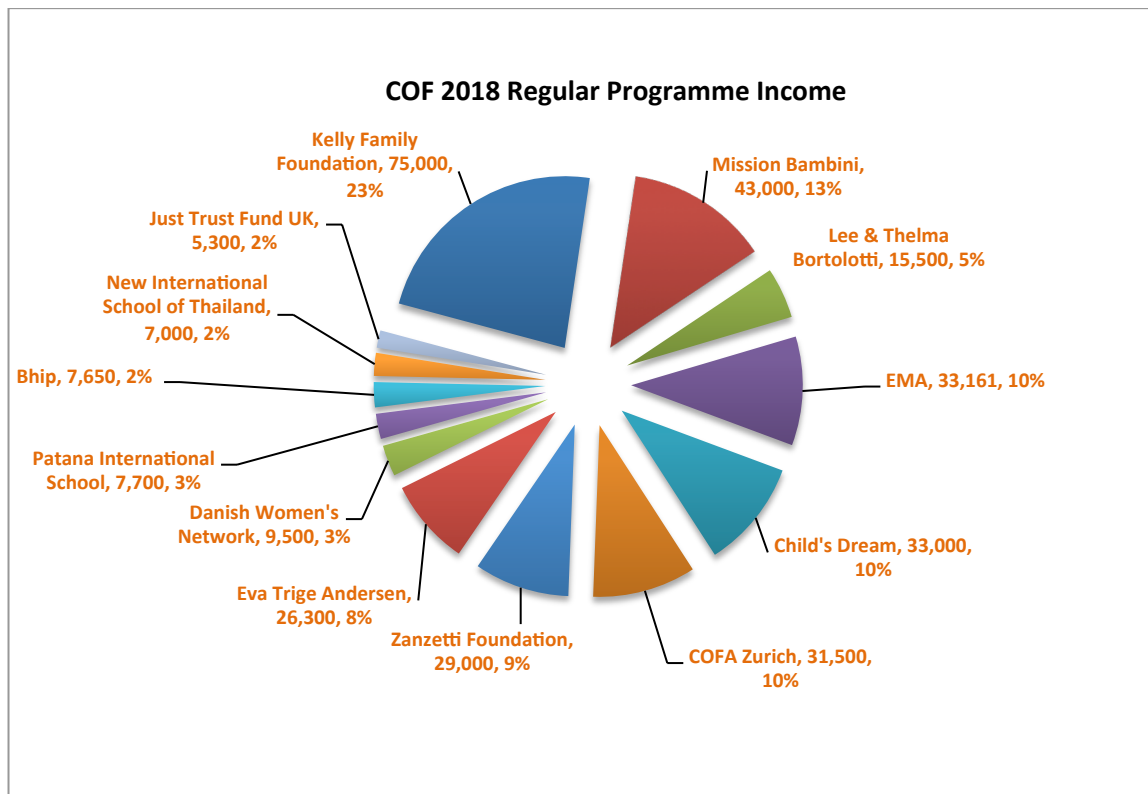
COF is a long-standing project of 13 years that has strong connections to the migrant communities it works with. This means COF is embedded in the local Sangkhlaburi community and there to stay. COF has developed a farming project that now supplies some of the food for feeding children onsite at the school and protection centre. The farm also raises some revenue for COF's expenses. COF is always looking for ways to make its work more sustainable and is always seeking new funding partners to work together with on its projects. One important contribution to the sustainability of the work we do has been the return of several former COF students upon completing higher education degrees to work with us and help their communities.

## 2.10 COF expenses by sector 2015-2018



## 2.11 Current funding challenges for COF

Over the last few years, COF has been facing cuts to donor funding for essential parts of its education and protection work. This has been partly due to the internal decisions and changes in priorities of some major donors. It has also been part of a wider trend of international donors moving support from local organisations working with migrants and refugees on the Thai-Myanmar border to inside Myanmar in response to political developments there over the last five years. However, the situation and needs of migrant children in the Thai-Myanmar border areas remain largely the same, but now with less support.



In 2018 we received a total of **\$US 323,611** in contributions from our donors to the regular running costs of our main programs (a **reduction of \$US 36,389** from our operating budget for the previous 4 years).

## 2.12 Current situation and looking ahead to 2019

It is always difficult to project completely accurate figures for income for the year ahead. Many of our main sponsors financial situations are uncertain which means, understandably, they are unable to make long term guarantees.

Our estimated income for **2019** is approximately **280,000 USD**. We expect that cuts in our core services in 2018 will reduce our 2019 operating budget to approximately 329,000 USD. This 50,000 USD shortfall can be separated into 3 key funding proposals.

- (1) Kindergarten & Elementary Outreach Education (21,132 USD)
- (2) COF Migrant Youth High School Program (13,520 USD)
- (3) Child Protection Residential Centre care ( 17,800 USD)

The need for education and protection for migrant children in this area still remains and we are more than ready and eager to work with any donors that are willing to support migrant children's education and protection in the Sangkhlaburi area.

Some areas of our work most in need of donor support are outlined below. If you or your organisation or business is interested in supporting any of these, COF is happy to provide a full proposal and budget and all further information you require.

### 3. Areas of COF's work in need of donor support

#### 3.1 Kindergarten & Elementary Outreach Education Program

COF is currently looking for support to assist 80 children to attend Thai government schools. Without this assistance these children would soon fall out of the education system and the monitoring and security this provides. Child labour trafficking, drug gangs and early pregnancy is the usual fate of those children outside the system. In order to avoid this, once children are enrolled in school, follow up must be consistent and thorough.

COF therefore needs a dedicated social worker and outreach worker. The outreach worker will visit children both at home and school regularly and assess the progress of individual cases. At risk children will be highlighted for the trained social worker to address. The outreach worker will work with migrant communities around Sangkhlaburi to identify other out-of-school children. The outreach worker and social worker will also organize community meetings to stress protection for migrant children and the importance of education.

#### Funding needed

#### Budget breakdown:

Item	Cost and quantity	Total per year (Baht)
Social worker	15,000/month x 12	180,000
Outreach worker	10,000/ month x 12	120,000
Uniforms (Gov schools)	1750/yr x 80 students	140,000
Driver	10,000/month x 10 months	100,000
School bus costs	150/month/student x 10 x 80	120,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>660,000 (\$US 21,132)</b>

#### 3.2 Children of the Forest Migrant Youth High School Support Program

#### The situation

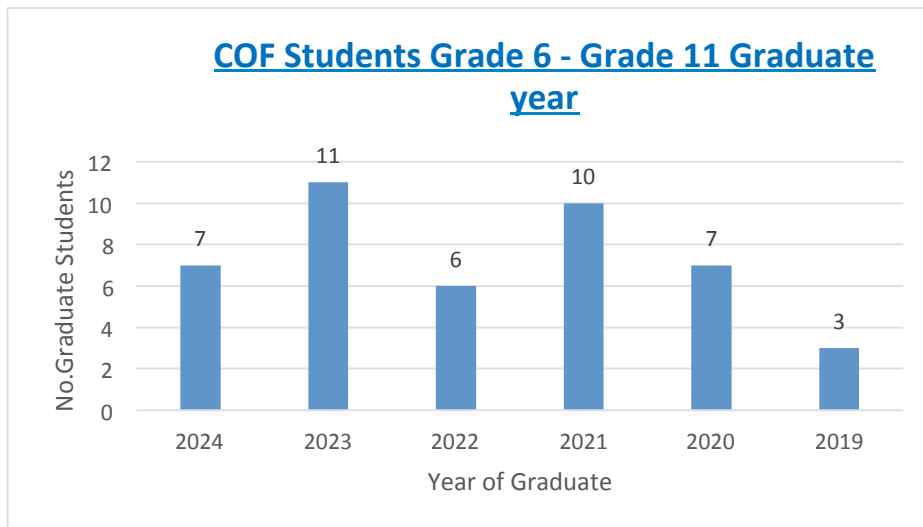
This program will assist 42 older migrant children who will be starting high school or who are already at high school. Your support to these students will be the difference that enables them to progress and graduate successfully from High School and an opportunity to go on to higher education. Graduation from high school will open up many opportunities for these teens that have come from stateless migrant backgrounds often without parental support.



## Funding needed

### High School Sponsorship Support: Budget Breakdown

Item	Cost and quantity	Total (Baht)
Transport	2100 x 42	88,200
Insurance	200 x 42	8,400
Parent club	300 x 42	12,600
Admin	100 x 42	4,200
Lunches	6000 x 42	252,000
Field trips	500 x 42	21,000
Stationery	500 x 42	21,000
Uniforms	350 x 42	14,700
<b>Total</b>		<b>422,100 (\$US 13,520)</b>



Projected graduations by year (2019-2024) for COF supported children starting, or currently progressing through, high school Grades 6-11

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### 3.3 The COF Children's Protection Centre

#### Situation

The COF Children's Protection Centre is divided into five separate houses by age and gender. Each house is overseen by a live-in house mother. The children that are resident at the COF protection

centre are supported by COF to attend schools in Sangkhlaburi. Currently there are 104 children resident across the five houses within the protection centre.

The children's protection centre is vital to COF's work. The children living there really have nowhere else to go when they come to us. Other organisations in Sangkhlaburi working with migrant children often refer at-risk children in crisis situations to COF for residential care. This is an essential need in Sangkhlaburi where many migrant children are abandoned, abused or orphaned. The border zone between Thailand and Myanmar contains many risks to these children's safety and well being, such as forced or exploitative labour and human trafficking. More generally they face a lack of access to education, health care services and opportunities to move beyond the poverty of the border zone.

#### **COF Child Protection Centre: Full Budget Breakdown (one year)**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Cost and quantity</b>	<b>Total per year (Baht)</b>
Food	82,000/month x 12	984,000
Kitchen supplies	2,500/month x 12	30,000
Clothing	4375/yr/std x 80 students	35,000
Rice	25 bags @ 900 = 22,500 (mth) x12	270,000
Personal bathroom items	(soap, toothbrush etc) 15,000 (mth) x12	180,000
Education Fees	68,000 (mth) x 12	816,800
Activities/food @ wk end	28,000 (mth) x 12	86,400
5 CPC house mothers)	34,700 (mth) x 12	416,400
Cooks ( x 4) for CPC home	19,800 (mth) x 12	237,600
1 Driver	10,195 (mth) x 12	122,340
Pre university cadetship	14,500 (mth) x 12	174,000
Water and Sanitation (WASH)	10,000 (mth) x 12	120,000
Transportation	30,000 (mth) x 12	360,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,832,540 (\$US 120,157)</b>

#### **Funding Needed**

**\*Funding cuts mean we have a 17,800 USD shortfall in funding required for the Child Protection Centre in 2019.**

If you are interested in contributing funding to any of COF's programs we are happy to provide a full proposal and provide all further information. Please feel free to contact us about any questions you have about anything you have read in this overview.

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### **Children of the Forest in the Media**

Bangkok Post article and video on COF's education and child protection work (January, 2015)

<http://www.bangkokpost.com/archive/hope-grows-in-the-forest/456547>

<http://www.bangkokpost.com/vdo/thailand/456579/free-education-for-stateless-children>

*Forget Me Not – Stories of Child Trafficking from The Thai/Burma Border*, Book 1 of art by children from COF about child trafficking published by COF in conjunction with the Publication Unit of the English Department of Illinois State University (2015)

*Stateless– Stories of Child Trafficking from The Thai/Burma Border*, Book 2 of art by children from COF about child trafficking published by COF in conjunction with the Publication Unit of the English Department of Illinois State University (2015)

COF was consulted and quoted in an article in 'The Diplomat' newspaper about the situation of stateless migrant children in Thailand (May 2016)

<http://thediplomat.com/2016/05/eliminating-statelessness-in-southeast-asia/>

Thailand's Invisible Children (Documentary about migrant children in Sangkhlaburi and the work of Children of the Forest (2015)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liahubV0FwY>

Audio from COF interview with Radio NZ National (Jul 2011)

<http://www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/ninetonoon/audio/2492603/children-of-the-forest>