



Kids International
Development Society

NEWSLETTER

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Hi Everyone,

We are starting to get ready to leave Mae Sot and head back to Cambodia to finish our work there. Our time on the border has gone quickly, we have been busy assisting Agape and other schools and projects. Your generosity has helped support many refugee children here and will continue to do so after we leave, as we have put in place ongoing funding for food and education. We also want to acknowledge the people here (both local and in this case from Canada) who put it all on the line and hold nothing back in fighting for basic human rights, education and full bellies. They assist us greatly in helping your contributions and KIDS be as effective as possible. Below is a story about one such person and a little boy.

The recent increases in attacks on the children and their families on the Burma side of the border has caused many more people to flee into Thailand at the point of a Burmese regime gun, scattering into forests and fields, cold, hungry and scared. Most only to be rounded up and herded back across the border to Burma, this time staring down the barrel of a Thai gun. Many of the children here have a grimness about them that undoubtedly comes from having seen too much, having eaten too little and having lived and slept rough for far too long. It is not hard to tell which children have newly arrived from across the border from those who have been here and have been sheltered and cared for; you can see it by their willingness to smile. There are many losses in this work, children who return to the street or drop out of school and there are many more victories that outweigh them; children who graduate from primary or high school or university, those who are given the chance to sing and dance like all children should have the right to do. Sometimes the biggest victory boils down to a smile which makes it all worth while. We have a friend here from Canada, Jennifer Jones, she is compassionate and dedicated humanitarian...long story short she came here for six months to teach english and six years later she is still here and runs a small NGO, which she founded, called Room to Grow (www.roomtogrowfoundation.org). Weekly Jennifer goes to Agape puts on bouncy music, cranks up the volume and leads the children in dance, the effect is priceless.

We asked Jennifer if we could share a blog she wrote . Below, in her own words, is a story of a hard won victory, the power of music, love and of a recovered smile.



"Last year, I met a little boy at Agape who, for the purposes of this blog, we will call Kyaw Kyaw (not his real name). Its hard not to notice Kyaw Kyaw. He is a beautiful little boy with big eyes and a cute face. Lots of people who visit take his photograph. And in every photo he has his big eyes open wide and a blank face. I see a lot of blank faces among young children who have lost their parents. It's like some part of them has shut down or shut off. They eat, they sleep, they walk through the playground, but it is as if it is all happening in slow motion, through a fog, and none of it registers on their face.

Kyaw Kyaw was just over two years old when I first met him. I couldn't help but pick him up and cuddle him. Every time I visited, I would hold him in my arms for a while and kiss his cheek before leaving.

Sometimes I held him as we walked around the school, surveying the fish ponds or looking at the site for the new well. Kyaw Kyaw started falling asleep in my arms. It was like he could finally let go there, or maybe that he finally felt safe. I often left him napping in the dormitory.

Kyaw Kyaw and his older sister both live in the boarding house at Agape. Their mother is dead. Their single father brought both children to the school to enroll them. At the time, Kyaw Kyaw was (and still is) too young for school, so the headmaster asked the father to keep the child at home. "Children this young require a lot of attention," the headmaster explained to the father, "so it's really better for him to stay with you."

The father nodded and took Kyaw Kyaw home. At the end of the school day, he picked up his daughter. The next day he brought her back to school, and picked her up again. A week went by in this manner. But the following week, the father brought both children back again. "I really need help," he said. "I can't work and take care of my son. Please, will you take him into the nursery for the day." The headmaster, a man of incredible compassion, relented and took Kyaw Kyaw into the nursery program. And all week the father dropped the children off in the morning and picked them up after school in the evening.

Until one day he didn't. He dropped off his children in the morning and he didn't come back for them. He hasn't been back and Kyaw Kyaw's face has been blank ever since.

I wanted to make that face move. I started wearing sparkly jewellery when I visited the school. I wanted to entice the little boy, to get him engaged, to see him playing with something. Sometimes he would pick up my necklace in his hand and turn the beads over, slowly, one by one, but nothing registered on his face.

It was more than six months since I first met him when Kyaw Kyaw started to change. I noticed it during a dance session. The music was playing and he was in my arms and we were whirling around. I found out the way to turn his frown upside down was to turn little Kyaw Kyaw upside down. Whirling around upside down I saw his crazy little grin for the first time ever, his half rotted teeth a little creepy to look at but the expression on his face simply sublime.

The next week, I was sitting in the kitchen speaking with the headmasters wife when he saw me. And just like that, he smiled.

Last week, I had the music on and all the students were running around, being crazy, moving to the music and dancing their faces off. I was taking a break, sitting on a bench, when I noticed Kyaw Kyaw in the corner. He was playing with another little boy his age. Then he stood up and started dancing.

He was dancing in that way that 3-year-olds do, which has nothing much to do with the music playing outside, and everything to do with the rhythms inside. Their knees jerk and they flail their arms around.

As soon as I grabbed my camera, he stopped and went back to playing. So I put the camera away and just sat watching him. I watched him play with the other children. I watched him laugh. I watching him smile mischievously and joyously. I watched him dance all by himself in the corner, totally oblivious to the world. It's the dancing that made me cry. Watching him dance, I was reminded that it is never too late, that nothing is ever too horrible, that we can't come back from it if we try hard enough and have enough love around.

At the end of the CD, when Jive Bunny and the Mastermixes was playing, and the last school bus was getting ready to leave and take children home, Kyaw Kyaw stops playing in the corner. He runs outside for a little victory dance. He eludes his sister who is always

looking after him, puts on his shoes and shakes his fists in the air with a wild little jiggle. You can't see his smile from this little video, but I think you can see a little boy who is wild and alive and fully present once more in this world, and what a beautiful, beautiful thing that is." (check out the video on the [videos page](#) of our website).



Here is Kyaw Kyaw hanging on to Adrienne's shirt tail as we danced at Agape.

Your contributions towards Agape has made space and a place for this little boy's smile.

With Appreciation,
Rick and Adrienne