

April - June 2002

## Bringing Change With Project LIFE

By David Skeat

For many years Youth With A Mission ran refugee camps on the Thai - Burmese border which were caring for hundreds of thousands of Khmer people who were fleeing the vicious Pol Pot regime who were in power in Cambodia at the time. When the peace process began these camps were closed and the people returned to Cambodia.



Many of the workers in the camps returned home but some remained in Thailand and continued to work amongst the poor in that nation. Amongst these were a group of YWAMers who relocated to Bangkok and began working in the slums there. The Thai government recognized the work that YWAM had done in the camps and seeing that they were now focusing

helping the poor in Bangkok they gave them a charitable foundation as recognition of their hard work. This foundation is called Project LIFE (Life In a Family Environment) and it is now one of the main stays that YWAM Thailand uses to broaden its work amongst the poor and needy.

*One of the many young girls who are being helped by Project LIFE*

There are many stories that can be told of the work that is done through Project LIFE; but I would like to tell you about some of the involvement I have personally had with them over the years.

When I first met the team at Project LIFE they were just starting off with a work in the Bangkok slums that provided micro enterprise development, and child sponsorship to children of poor families living the slums in which they were working. I was impressed by the dedication of their staff and by the way they had relocated themselves to live in the slums in which they were trying to make a difference.

One day I was talking to one of the workers who told me that many of the female children in the slums in Bangkok were sold into the sex trade (some as young as five years old) so that the family could afford to educate their sons. Project LIFE was trying to set up a child sponsorship program to try and pay the educational expenses of children who were at risk in the slums in which they were working. This discussion motivated me to do something to try and change this situation and as a result ARMS opened its child sponsorship program that helps to sponsor children in the slums where Project LIFE were working. Over the years we have seen many children go all the way through this scheme and many of them are now at university or working in regular jobs because they were able to get an education through the vehicle of a child sponsorship. Today ARMS over 100 children receiving educational sponsorships on its books (in five nations) Project Life on the other hand has many hundreds of children it now sponsors. What started as an idea to meet a need has now become a large ministry that is seeing incredible results. I have made a point of visiting children on our sponsorship program when I go to Thailand and tracking their progress. I can tell you from my own experience and observation that the team at Project LIFE are doing a sensational job and through them hundreds of families are receiving support and assistance in many other ways through the determined kindness of this work.

Project LIFE has grown over the years and has many Thai workers involved in its programs. Many of these workers are volunteers who have joined the Project LIFE team because of what Project LIFE has done in their slum.

Not long ago one of the slum workers a Canadian lady named Linda was traveling from one slum to another to interview perspective families that were asking to be involved in the child sponsorship program. As she neared

*(continued....)*



# A CHANCE FOR CHANGE

The strong and ongoing relationship between ARMS and Partners (an NGO that is working amongst the Karen refugees in Burma and Thailand) has been well documented, and through our networking together we have been able to accomplish a lot of good amongst the needy children and refugees in the camps along the Thai – Burmese border.

The growth of Partners ministry has been exponential. When we first started working together Partners was helping about 100 children in one refugee camp. Today they are caring for over 5,000 children in six camps, and are running both nutritional and educational programs. They are involved in emergency aid, community development and Primary Health Care and are also working amongst the internally displaced peoples in Burma. As someone who has watched this ministry grow I can honestly say that I am amazed and delighted at all Steve Gumaer and his team are doing.



Partners have launched an international appeal to help their work. The appeal is called *A Chance For Change*. Through this appeal Partners are hoping to further finance the ever increasing numbers of children they care for each year. ARMS fully supports and endorses the work of Partners and we are therefore distributing with our April Newsletter a brochure outlining the *Chance For Change* program. When you think about it caring for the children in the refugee camp costs so little. **(The \$40 mentioned in brochure are American dollars – the Australian equivalent is \$80.)**

If you would like to respond to the *Chance For Change Appeal* then please send your donation to ARMS – we will pass it on to the Partners team. Please make your cheque out to ARMS but clearly mark it *Chance For Change*.

A video CD has been produced as part of this appeal, copies of which are available from the ARMS National Office. Small quantities of Videotapes are also available at a cost of \$5.00 each.

## Project LIFE (Continued)

her destination, Linda was knocked off her motorcycle and lay unconscious in the middle of the busy freeway outside of the slum to which she was going. Bangkok freeways are unfriendly at the best of times and on this freeway no one was stopping to assist her, and there was a real danger that Linda could be hit again and killed. Some people in the slum who had witnessed the accident ran onto the freeway and began to stop traffic – they lovingly picked Linda up and carried her to safety after which they called an ambulance. Linda spent time in intensive care and after a few days was discharged and sent home to the slum in which she lived to finish her recuperation – she was weak and needed constant care. The people in Linda's slum lovingly cared for her providing her with meals and doing her washing for her. The women of the slum regularly took turns in visiting with her and making sure she was alright.

Like so many Project LIFE workers Linda had won the hearts of the people she was trying to serve. She had sewn kindness and concern into the lives of these people and now through this serious accident an opportunity had arisen for the people whom Linda had served to care for her.

A slum can be a very depressing place to visit, and a much more depressing place to live. They are often filled with drugs, alcoholism, gambling and every other vice known to man. The people at Project LIFE through their dedication, and commitment to the poor in Bangkok are changing the very nature of the slums in which they live, and shining their light there for all to see. It really is amazing!

Whenever I am in Bangkok I always visit with the team at Project LIFE they are in my view lovely people who are right on the cutting edge of mercy ministries.



Two boys from the Project LIFE sponsorship scheme.



## Hekan Housing Update

Recently I heard a sermon on how God uses small things in a mighty way. I cannot think of a better example of that principle than the Hekan Housing Project.

As regular readers will remember, last year ARMS entered into a joint venture with Mobile Mission Maintenance to develop a new housing concept called Hekan with which we can provide strong, stable cyclone proof housing for homeless families in East Timor.

As we have worked on the prototype we have become more aware that Hekan has more potential than just helping the people of East Timor but could provide a means through which emergency housing could be provided in any disaster and that variations of Hekan can provide instant medical clinics, schools, administration offices, in fact any kind of structure that is needed to address a disaster situation. Because of its modular design Hekan can adjust to any size and therefore can address most needs. We envisage that one day we will have containers that hold the components needed to construct several Hekan houses ready to go.



There have been several delays in the design phase of this project as technical problems have been worked out, however, the prototype is currently being constructed at the MMM centre in Melbourne, and we plan to construct our first Hekan house in East Timor later this year. Other Hekan challenges are also before us; the cost of developing the prototype has increased owing to our need to build extra wall, door and window frames with which we can test all variations of the design. ARMS is currently seeking funding to make up this funding shortfall. We hope to have raised \$5,000 towards the Hekan Project by the end of May. Please pray for us, as this is a significant hurdle for us.

*ARMS also has a second housing project on the go. Over the past few months we have been talking to an engineer who works for BHP Billiton, who has been researching the whole idea of constructing cyclone proof houses from bamboo. Things are at a stage where we hope to actually test a design in East Timor within the next 6-12 months. We will keep you informed about this as the project progresses.*

## RESCUENET AT 911

*RescueNet International Director Brett Harwood spent three days working on the disaster site at the World Trade Center following the terrorist attacks on September 11 last year. The following is an excerpt from an article in Catalyst Magazine.*

I was assigned to work with an urban search and rescue team from Southern California; we worked on WTC Tower 1, the first tower that fell. Ironically our search site was on the corner of Church Street and Liberty Ave. Our goal was to find a way into the basement, or four levels of parking garages, or the mall. We were unable to make very good progress as we were surrounded by what seemed to be thousands of other rescuers, firemen, policemen, federal agents of all descriptions and military personnel.

As soon as I arrived on the site it began to rain and continued to do so for 14 hours. This made the work not only miserable but dangerous. I was full of hope as I began but that soon faded as we recovered body after body but no survivors. Early in the morning I was complaining to myself as my feet were getting blistered in my wet boots. Then a gentleman who owned a shoe store up town drove to the

site and began to hand out dry socks and new hiking boots this was so encouraging and a blessing to my feet.

We were asked to stand down as large equipment and machinery was needed to move the steel and larger pieces of debris and I was re-assigned to a make shift morgue one block away. I had never been to Manhattan before and was surprised when I looked up at the building next to us and saw the American Stock Exchange. The building next to it was an up scale high school and we used the lobby for a morgue, clinic and rest area for exhausted rescuers. This was the first time that I had the chance to really talk to other rescuers and what amazed me was how open they were towards the Lord. I offered to pray with a number of the rescuers as they seemed exhausted and depressed; many of these men had friends and fellow workers who had died when the second tower collapsed.

... there were also some tense moments. A 30 storey building across the road from our rescue site was extremely unstable and was being monitored by a group of engineers who would sound an alarm every time they thought it might collapse. The first time this alarm went off I was inside the morgue and could not hear it over the noise of large generators directly outside our building. At one time I looked up and saw hundreds of rescuers running up the street in sheer panic. It certainly motivated me and panic seemed like a good idea at the time, I ran outside not even knowing why and joined the crowd. Several blocks later I asked why we were all running. Someone pointed to an enormous building and said it was going to fall. That's when I realised the futility of trying to get away if it really did fall. Nevertheless I continued to run. Fortunately the building is still standing.



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## Counselling Ministry In Canberra

Families are important and ARMS is concerned at the numbers of families within Australia who are experiencing difficulties, and who need help.

For the past eight years YWAM in Canberra have been operating a Family Counselling Clinic in Scullin. The clinic is very busy and offers help with Conflict Resolution, Communication Skills, Parenting Courses, Grief Therapy, Addiction Therapy, Abuse Issues, and Pre Marital Counselling. Through this clinic trained counsellors are providing a service to the community that is helping to bring healing and wholeness to many families within the Canberra area.

This ministry has signalled its desire to now operate under the auspices of ARMS. Which we are very encouraged about, as we want to expand the work that we are doing within Australia. Please pray for Anne and team at the clinic. We will be bringing you updates in future issues of *Focus On Mercy*.

### RescueNet Training Dates 2002

Following the highly successful RescueNet Training Course in December last year a second such course is now being arranged.

As with the last course this course will be held at the YWAM base in Adelaide S.A. The projected dates for the course are August 2-16. Further details can be obtained from Lisa Voltz on 08 8981 2424 or by emailing her at [rescuenet@arms.org.au](mailto:rescuenet@arms.org.au) or from the RescueNet web site [www.rescuenet.com.au](http://www.rescuenet.com.au)

### New Staff At National Office

It is with great pleasure that we announce the arrival of Neville and Gillian Humphreys onto the ARMS National Office Staff. Neville will be running building teams into East Timor (and beyond) and will also be involved in RescueNet.

Neville and Gillian are a valuable addition to our talented team!

### Focus On Mercy

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A Ministry Of Youth With A Mission Australia

## Response Form

I would like to become a supporter of ARMS and will regularly pray for its ministry and /or give a monthly gift of \$ ..... per month. I enclose a gift of \$ ..... towards:

National Office Support

A Chance For Change

Australian Mercy Fund

Project LIFE

Canberra Coueselling Clinic

Hekan Housing

Name.....

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Please debit my credit card (circle one) Visa Mastercard Bankcard

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