

ANGELA ORTLOFF



Greetings from

northern Thailand! After graduating from Valpo I packed my bags and headed for the hills –the hills of the Mekong region where I am currently working with an NGO called Development and Education Program for Daughters and Communities.

The goal of DEPDC is to protect children who are at the greatest risk of being trafficked into prostitution or some other form of labor exploitation by removing the children from situations of poverty or crisis and provide them with housing and education. DEPDC also operates a non-formal school, a vocational training program, and an agricultural program. I am working specifically with the Child Protection & Rights office, which rescues children from abusive situations and assists children and women getting out of prostitution. Much of my duties involve international correspondence for DEPDC & CPR, helping to facilitate relations with international donors and others interested in our work. This experience has taught me so much about the work of NGOs, the social issues of the people in the Mekong region (including Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam, & Yunnan province China), as well as local solutions that are changing lives one at a time. Yet, it is also my life that is being touched and even changed by the children who live and or study here at DEPDC. Approximately 200 children are enrolled in DEPDC programs. They continue to be my motivation for the long days of hard work. My evenings are filled with helping the children with their homework, teaching guitar lessons, playing sports, or just chatting. Yes, my skills in Thai are improving each day as the children as so good to patiently teach me. Some of my most meaningful moments are spent sharing a song, a smile, a bowl of rice, a hug, or wiping a tear. The children amaze me with their efforts. They really know that they have been given a chance and want to make the most of it. Many return to DEPDC after they graduate from the program in order to volunteer as a teacher because they want to give something back. One of the most interesting parts of my job is going to visit village families whom we are assisting. This gives me the opportunity to capture a picture of real Thai rural life. Imagine entering a one room hut, sitting on the floor, and listening to a mother explain that her daughter has gone to Bangkok to work but she hasn't heard from her in six months. Or

imagine visiting a mother in prison who comes to you on her knees in tears as she asks you to take her three-year-old little girl to live with relatives in Myanmar so she won't have to grow up in prison while her mother serves a 17 year sentence for drug dealing. Simply heartbreaking to face such realities. Many families that I've visited are immigrants since this area is right on the border with Myanmar (also called Burma). For a great variety of reasons people of all ages are coming to Thailand hoping for a better life but finding it difficult to achieve their dreams because they lack Thai citizenship. Even the hill tribe people who live in Thailand lack Thai citizenship. This situation leaves people vulnerable to labor exploitation. Well I could go on for quite some time about the web of issues here. If you want to hear more or are interested in this type of work, please feel free to contact me with any questions. Angela Ortloff Butter ThaiFly@hotmail.com www.depdc.org www.journey2thai.com About the content The content of these pages do not constitute, nor are they intended to convey, any official VU content. The content, view, opinions and positions expressed on these pages are strictly and exclusively those of the author.

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