



Give Children A Choice

builds and fills preschools with children in Asia.

Special Thanks For Your Generous Support

As with any non-profit organization, we depend on your generous and gracious support. 100% of every dollar you donate is directed to the children you help. None goes to overhead. Every dollar we receive goes a long way. School lunches for 30 children costs \$8 for one month. 50 books for the preschool children cost \$65. An entire one-room preschool costs \$13,000. Know that your donation, small and large go a long way.

We send thank you notes to everyone who shares their email address or mailing address.

Special thanks to long-time supporters Craig DeRoy and Landon Taylor of First American Corporation. First American helped us get started with our first preschool in 2003. Landon joined us in Laos during our early exploratory



Craig DeRoy (left) and Landon Taylor (right) of First American Corporation pictured with Give Children A Choice Founder, Dori Shimoda.



Timeless Image staff Miki Fukui, Nancy Fontana, Barbara Shimoda and Russell Lee (left to right) pictured with Dori (center).

years. Landon is featured in Barbara's spotlight article.

Barbara Shimoda has been key in our fundraising efforts. She won't let one of her clients leave her office without telling them the good works of Give Children A Choice. Her Timeless Image Enterprises Inc. clients helped fund the Pak Nga preschool.

Thank you Denise and Patrick Michael McCarthy, who funded the Pak Ou preschool. They traveled with us in February 2006, saw the preschool they built and met the preschool children and their parents.



Patrick Michael and Denise McCarthy pictured with Dori.

Bringing New York Hospitality to Luang Prabang, Laos

Ms. Eileen Solomon of Mt. Sinai Hospital, New York City and Ms. Sharon Bronte a New York City attorney joined us this past August to be part of our pilot health fairs. They helped us lug the boxes with books, learning tools, school supplies and medical supplies for the preschools from New York to Bangkok to Luang Prabang.



Sharon Bronte, Eileen Solomon and Barbara Shimoda (left to right) after arrival in Bangkok.



Helping with medical and school supplies for the children of Luang Prabang Province.

New York Hospitality *continued*

They stayed up late into the nights helping us prepare for the health fairs. They got up early to drive over four hours to Nongbia, where we held the first health fair. They helped us through our very first health fair which was hectic, yet successful. They experienced the local delicacies. They slept on hard beds under mosquito nets at night. They were real troopers and we thank them for bringing their genuine New York hospitality and care to help the Nongbia village children.

Some children received special attention at the local hospital with Eileen's support. Her unselfish acts of compassion will never be forgotten by the mother who could not afford a few dollars to get medical treatment for her daughter and son's sickness.

Before embarking on her trip to Laos, Eileen worked with Jeff Pitonza and President and COO Todd Miller of Transcare in Brooklyn, New York, who donated rubber gloves, stethoscopes, and adult and children's blood pressure cuffs. Thank you Transcare for your generosity. Thank you Eileen for finding Transcare for us. Dr. Amone Sirivong, head of the Luang Prabang Provincial Health Dept., was elated to receive the supplies.



(Above) Barbara Shimoda and Eileen Solomon leaving the hospital with a child that received treatment.



(Left) Alichith Phengsavanh, Barbara Shimoda, Dr. Amon Sirivong, Eileen Solomon, Sharon Bronte and Thongchanh Vilayvong presenting medical supplies to the Luang Prabang Health Department.

Helping the "Handicapped Village" Grandchildren

Nongbia is known locally as the "Handicapped Village". The elders now in their 60s, were brought together by the Lao government over 30 years ago to form this village. They had one thing in common. They were innocent victims of the Vietnam War, what they call the "American War". Many are lucky survivors from the war's bombing raids. Many are lucky survivors from unexploded ordinance (UXOs) accidents. Many are lucky to have prosthetics that have helped them lead more productive lives.

Nongbia village may be the poorest village we've visited. Some homes are incredibly simple and small – a single room as small as 10 by 10 on stilts with no running water, no electricity, no facilities. They cook outside. Yet, families are strong. Children help their grandparents; grandparents care for the children.



The entrance to Nongbia Village.

The Nongbia villagers never worked so closely with foreigners as they have with Give Children A Choice. Certainly, they were generally a bit curious, apprehensive and quiet during our visits. We agreed that we would build a preschool. We celebrated the agreement together.



Dori Shimoda speaking with Nongbia's naibane (village leader) during our February 2006 trip.

Through the generosity of Sasha Alyson, a retired American businessman, Lyle and Agnes Schaller and film maker Roberto Minervini, the Nongbia preschool was completed six months later. A beautiful two-room preschool stood next to their simple community meeting building with the towering karsts behind them. The school was supplied with

Helping the “Handicapped Village” continued

desks, blackboards, toy blocks, playground equipment, water supply, bathrooms, electricity, lights and ceiling fans. The villagers played an active part in the preschool construction by providing labor, rocks and gravel. They were incredibly proud and appreciative.



We celebrated the preschool opening with the village leaders and village children in August 2006. The village leaders were again proud and appreciative. They said that “We have little to offer in return but our thanks and

blessings.” Little do they know that their traditional and celebratory baci, sharing their thanks and blessings were emotionally, priceless gifts for us.”



Give Children A Choice celebrating with a traditional baci with Nongbia village leaders.

We strongly believe that healthy children make better learners. We piloted our first pilot health fair at Nongbia.

Read more about our August 2006 health fairs in this newsletter.

We felt that helping Nongbia’s children was a way giving back and helping those grandparents who endured the challenges caused during the Vietnam War. We departed feeling that we made a permanent difference.



The children of Nongbia in front of their new preschool.

From the Nearby Mountain Tops to Long Or Village

Give Children A Choice had an opportunity to build a preschool in Long Or village, located 25 minutes south of Luang Prabang. The preschool would help the recently arrived Hmong family children, who speak Hmong only, be better prepared for primary school taught only in the national language Paso Lao.

Long Or village was founded in 1825 by 22 Nuans, an ethnic group indigenous to north eastern Thailand. The Nuans left Thailand 180 years ago to escape the many conflicts with China, Burma, and to settle in the bucolic setting of Long Or. This agricultural community has thrived since their beginnings, yet the average household income is \$250. a year.

Three years ago, 28 Hmong families were relocated from the nearby mountain tops, where they grew opium. Their relocation to Long Or village was part of a Lao government program to eliminate all opium fields by 2010.



A young Hmong girl in Long Or.



A typical Hmong home.

We visited the Nuan (aka Lao Loum) and Hmong homes and their families, both culturally different, e.g., different New Year’s, different home architectures, different styles of eating meals – yet both are family-oriented and hard working. They live together. They govern together. They share cultural traditions together. They strongly believe that education is key to their children’s future.

The village has a simple and small thatched-roof preschool for their 35 preschool children. Long Or needed a one-room preschool.

The Long Or preschool will be completed by February 2007.



Helping A Village Help Themselves

We arrived at Kokngiew village with the Luang Prabang Provincial Education Department. At the base of a hill, we adjusted the pickup truck's wheels to four-wheel drive and drove up a steep slippery hill to the elementary school.



Children were laughing, as they scurried from classrooms for a 15 minute recess. They ran to a small wooden building. It took two children to carry mats from the building to a grassy area with books under their arms. They spread the mats out and read the books. The children were framed by the panoramic chartreuse green rice fields below. Fifteen minutes later, the children

quickly returned the mats and books to the wooden building then returned



to class.

We peered in the building and we were pleasantly surprised to see hundreds of reading books on shelves. This was unusual in a country where books are treasured and sparingly used.

Kokngiew's village leaders explained how the village's founders in the early 1900s moved a number of families closer to Luang Prabang because of the economic benefits of being closer to the royal capital of northern Laos.

Each year, village leaders agree on two or three village-wide priorities.

Generally, one priority focuses on children's education. Four years ago, the village people constructed this library and since then have added new books each year. This current school year's priority was to begin a preschool program for 5 year olds. Three and four year olds would be admitted later, when spaced allowed.

The village leaders shared that their emphasis on their children's education pays off. Their children are among the best performers in the nearby middle and high school. We thought it would be a terrific idea to help them accelerate their preschool program, which they welcomed.

We wanted to help accelerate their preschool program by providing facilities for the 3, 4 and 5 year olds. We signed a memorandum of understanding with the Luang Prabang Education Dept on December 10 to build a two-room preschool in Kokngiew. Construction started in the third week of December. Preschool construction will complete in late February.

Memorable Day of Fun in the Sun

We landed late in Phnom Penh, Cambodia two days before our long journey back home to the USA. Before leaving Southeast Asia we had to visit our sponsored children. We wanted to make sure that they were well taken care of and to give them all the gifts from their individual sponsors who have made their dream of attending school a reality.



Two of the girls in our program who no longer spend their days in the dump.

Working in the dump for 8 to 14 hours a day is becoming a distant memory for some of them. Over 2 ½ years ago, four girls set foot in the dump for the last time. They work hard in school to avoid going back.



The girls in their new bathing suits ready to go for a swim.

We spent a day with eleven sponsored children this past September. Shy at first, they became enthusiastic, playful, and affectionate as the day went on. We rented tuk tuks

and gave them a tour through Phnom Penh. We took them to the central market to buy school uniforms for the new school year. We bought them their first bathing suits.



The children in their new play clothes.

We brought them to our hotel pool for an afternoon swim party. All the children splashed about and played in the pool like fish. We gave them new play clothes, many provided by you.

Memorable Day of Fun in the Sun *continued*

Our departure was tearful. Yet, even though they returned to their challenging lives at home after a fun filled day, they have more hope than ever before. They are so thankful that they have a sponsor who cares.

On that note, we want to thank each and every one of our sponsors, heartily and dearly for helping us take their sponsored child away from the toll in the Phnom Penh dump to attend school full-time.

You have given them a gift of what was an unattainable dream. You have given the gift of education and hope.

Support Dreams and Imaginations

Our mission has always been to give children a better future by bringing the necessary basic things that we all take for granted here in the United States, like education and now healthcare. In the short few years that Give Children a Choice has been in action, we have worked in collaboration with the government to achieve this in over 10 poor villages by building preschools. The lives of these children born into poverty and despair are no longer a setback against them getting a good head start to a better future. Since the inception of GCAC in 2002, we have been able to give these children the opportunity to not only learn, we have also helped them to use their imagination and dream of what they to be when they grow up.

you grow up?" Most of the kids said "teacher or nurse". When it got to the little boy (who coincidentally looked like what Dori might have looked like when he was a child), he said, "I want to ride on a plane and travel all over the world just like Dori." Immediately, there was silence in the classroom. So silent you could have heard a pin drop and then laughter about everywhere. I think it was at that point that everyone including staff, kids and the Give Children A Choice team "Got it". We had opened the door to one child's imagination. Because of us, he was able to dream and hope and wish for the opportunities that would have been denied him and all his friends if there were no school there.

world. With your donations, this is a reality for them. We use 100% of your donations to build preschools and serve the children. They are used for the building of schools, teachers' training seminars, school supplies, libraries, school lunch programs, and health fair activities such as inoculations, hiring doctors and nurses to examine the children and medicine and hygiene seminars. Your donations and continued support is very important to us. Without your help we cannot do what we do. This is the reason we are committed to using your dollars wisely and judiciously.

Again, we'd like to thank all our supporters who have taken time out of their busy schedule to hear about what we do and take the necessary actions to help us in our endeavors to improve the lives of these children and more importantly to support their dreams and imaginations!



A group of preschool boys at our preschool in Pak Khan village.

I will never forget the clever response from one little boy from one of the latest preschools we built in Pak Khan village. After an introduction by Dori Shimoda, our founder, who talked about his own life and the struggles that he had in making Give Children A Choice happen. Afterwards there was a round of questions for the children. One question was "What do you want to be when

Please help support dreams and imaginations. They are important in all aspects of life. We are not just a charity for poor and sick children, we are a facilitator of new opportunities and a brighter future for children. We give them dignity and the tools to survive in their challenging

The preschool children with their teachers at the Pak Khan Preschool.



Piloting Immunization, Health and Hygiene Education For Give Children A Choice Preschools

Give Children a Choice has always strived to help children in impoverished villages in Southeast Asia. Since its inception in 2002, we have built ten preschools to help children get a head start during their formative years of learning. Believing that healthy children make better students, Give Children a Choice piloted two health fairs this past August.

Barbara Shimoda joined us on her first trip to Luang Prabang in October 2003. She was moved by what we saw. She was moved by our preschools. She was moved by the enthusiastic preschool children. As a registered nurse, she was particularly moved by the pervasiveness of sick children attending preschool or unable to attend preschool.

Determined to help the children do better in school, she wanted healthier children. She wanted to introduce health and hygiene in preschool. She wanted to ensure all preschool children are inoculated against not only the common childhood diseases such as measles, mumps and rubella, but also common tropical diseases such as malaria, yellow fever and others.



Dr. Amon Sirivong and Barbara Shimoda at the Health Department in Luang Prabang.

In February 2006 she befriended and shared her vision with Dr. Amon Sirivong who heads up the Luang Prabang Provincial Health Department. Dr. Sirivong supported Bar-

bara's ideas. She noted that the Lao government goal where 85% of the children would be inoculated by the 2000. Unfortunately, as of 2005, 55% of children were inoculated.

They agreed to pilot two health fairs in August 2006. Two villages were chosen – Nongbia and Aine Savanh villages. Dr. Sirivong would provide the doctors and nurses. She secured support from UNICEF to provide inoculations and safety boxes. Give Children A Choice provided per diem expenses through the generous support from Robert Graulich and the Retired Peace Corps of Connecticut. Barbara found health and hygiene brochures in Lao from UNESCO and UNICEF.

Her intention was to test out a program to promote immunizations in Luang Prabang Province and raise awareness of the importance of being healthy.



The woman and children wait to see a doctor for their medical checkups and inoculations at the Nongbia Health Fair.

We held the first health fair at Nongbia village. This village has an interesting history to it. It is over 30 years old. All disabled people from the "American War" (Vietnam War) were relocated to form this village. Some were war veterans and some are victims of land mines. We heard about these terrible situations, but it really hit home when we met so many people whose life was permanently altered as a result of this atrocity.

As a result, the village people are



Mothers have medical records prepared for their children before receiving care at the Health Fair.

very poor with the older generations of maimed people having very limited capabilities to make a living. They are a very proud group of people whose lives are not an easy one, but they are very cohesive and intact in their camaraderie, community and service.

After a four-hour drive to Nongbia, we arrived about 1 ½ hours late to the village after our van broke down three-quarter's of our way there. We were greeted by Dr. Amon Sirivong, the Director of The Provincial Health Department, her staff and the residents of Nongbia. It was hot, humid, and the dirt just seemed to stick to you everywhere, but everyone came out to participate.



A mother providing her child milk while waiting to see the doctor.

Piloting Immunization, Health and Hygiene Education For Give Children A Choice Preschools... continued

Physical exams for the women and children were provided by Dr. Humphan of the Health Department's Mother and Child Division. He was the only doctor on duty. His manners were quick, diligent and very caring to all of his patients. It was very easy to see that he and his staff were overwhelmed with all the patients who wanted his services.

Immunizations were also provided for the children and women. Give Children A Choice provided workshops which included watching a film about keeping the planet clean, proper hand washing, and dental hygiene. Toothbrushes and toothpaste were handed out. We showed the children in Lao how to brush their teeth correctly.



Young mothers have their babies inoculated against common childhood diseases.



Eileen Solomon teaching proper toothbrushing techniques to the children.



Barbara Shimoda and Alichith Phengsavanh teach the children about the importance of proper hand washing.

The next day, as the fair concluded, we gave each family one kilogram of rice as a thank you gesture for attending. T-shirts, donated clothes, toys and school supplies were provided to the children. We also presented the teachers with much



Dr. Humphan of the Luang Prabang Health Department performs a medical check up on a child needing care.

needed teaching tools and school supplies.

100% of the children were inoculated in both the villages of Aine Savanh and Nongbia.

Overall, our Nongbia healthfair was a success despite having some coordination logistics challenges. 100% of all children were inoculated.

Our plans are to incorporate health and hygiene into our preschool program. Two more health fairs will be piloted in February with the hope of incorporated inoculations, health and hygiene into the preschool program.



Representatives of Give Children A Choice, the Luang Prabang Health and Education Departments opening The Luang Prabang Festival of Health at the new Nongbia Preschool.

The Need for Growth

Suane Luang has a growing population with many children. They have held preschool in a tiny room at the end of the primary school for several years. Preschool attendance has been limited due to the lack of an adequate facility. They came to us and requested our assistance to grow their program.



Meeting with village and school officials in Suane Luang in February 2006.

On our first of several visits to Suane Luang's makeshift preschool we noticed that the group of twenty or so children were sitting in three small groups. As we spoke to the teacher, we learned that the children were grouped together based on the ethnic language they spoke. At the same time, they were introduced to the national language Paso Lao.

Primary school is taught in the national language of Paso Lao, pre-

school is many of the children's first exposure to Paso Lao. Preschool is giving them the chance to better prepare for entrance into primary school.



The children of the Suane Luang Preschool gathered together for a picture during our February 2006 visit.

Suane Luang only had room enough for about one third of the children who wanted to attend preschool.

We secured funding and signed a Memorandum of Understanding in



The new preschool at Suane Luang.



Mr. Eung Lorsavanh and Thongchanh Vilayvong sign the MOU to build the Suane Luang Preschool.

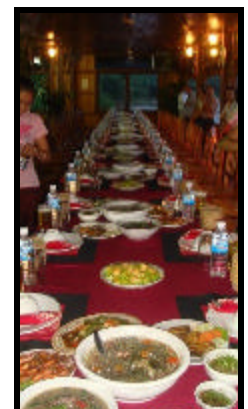
mid-October, they broke ground on the preschool a week later. The preschool opened to the children the second week of January. Attendance the first day was more than double that of the old classroom. The children love their new preschool and now have a facility that will allow them to grow and better prepare for primary school.



Opening day at their new preschool facility, the children love it!

Celebrating With the Luang Prabang Education Department

We traditionally celebrate our collaborative efforts with the Luang Prabang Education Department with a handover ceremony, where we formally hand the preschools to the Lao government, followed by dinner on the Mekong River.





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Spotlight on Landon Taylor- A Visionary, Entrepreneur and Renaissance Man

By Barbara Lee Shimoda

When I first met Dori, he told me about Landon who was both his colleague and great personal friend. He told me how supportive Landon was with Give Children a Choice. He was the driving force behind persuading his company, the First American Corporation to donate money for a preschool during the early days of Give Children a Choice when no one knew about us. Since then, First American has contributed funds for four preschools and the list continues.

When I finally met Landon and his lovely wife Tawnia, it was like we had known each other forever. He is a success in business, a devoted husband, a community leader, and loving father of two sons, Landon Jr., who is 15, loves to read and hang out with friends, and enjoys persuading his acting career; and Matthew who is 12 and loves playing baseball, football, and video games.

Last September, we asked Landon to become a board member of Give Children A Choice. He accepted with the graciousness that was only becoming of a man with great class.

I have been wanting to spotlight Landon for quite sometime now, but because of his busy schedule, I was finally able to sit down and interview him. Dori and I met Landon at the famous Del Fusco Steak House near Rockefeller Center in midtown Manhattan. It was a cold crisp evening with the sights and sounds of Christmas and the Holiday season in the air. As I shook his hand and got a big hug from him, I felt that he was a man of great warmth and caring.

Landon was born and grew up in San Francisco. His beginnings were quite humble, but he knew the value of education at a very young age. Through great odds and perseverance, he graduated from Grambling State and Pepperdine University. At an incredibly young age of 36, Landon is Corporate Vice President of First American Corporation and President of First American Home Ownership Foundation.

Some of his great personal pursuits are his great passion for concentrating on family, fitness, finance and faith in his life. He has built a wonderful life with regard to his personal and professional life. Christian by faith, His wife Tawnia and he make a great team as both are involved members of their community and Church.

Whenever he is not traveling, he can be seen spending quality time with his family at church or at one of his sons' many activities. He also has visions of one day building a special place where everyone from all over the world can come together to learn from another about the joys of living well both spiritually, physically and financially.

I asked him how he got involved with Give Children A Choice. With a great big smile from ear to ear, he describes his three day journey in Laos. "When Dori first described his backpacking previous trip to Laos, I was amazed at how with little or no money, he was able to create a way for the people of Laos to get drinking water and electricity. He spoke to me later about his latest vi-

sion, which "was to build a preschool".

During his many visits to Aine Savannah village, he encountered children unable to go to school, just carrying their younger siblings on their backs. "A preschool would give the younger children an opportunity to go to school and learn while the older children would get to go to school. My first thought was "How can I help Dori make this a reality? and that's how I got involved."

Landon along with his friends Dain Ehring, Rob Carpenter and John and Heather Reznar made the leap and found themselves deep in the heart of the jungle in Aine Savannah, Laos during the Spring of 2002. It was there that First American paid for half of the school. The other half was an accumulation of multiple donations from people who really believed in Dori's vision. I asked him what he likes best about Laos and he replied with a resound smile, "Lao Lao!!" Yes, that exquisite rice wine, the elixir of good times to come! He stated that when he first drank it during a baci ceremony, he was surprised at how much he liked it since he was pretty much a teetotaler. Upon his return, he was determined and committed to help Give Children a choice and the rest is history.

Landon Taylor and Craig DeRoy, President of First American committed to assist Give Children A Choice through 2008. Thank you for your continued support.