

**Visit to Baan Gerda
by
Plan International**

Report by: Ravipa Vannakit, Regional HIV/AIDS Adviser, Plan Asia Regional Office

1. Introduction

Approximately 450,000 children (0-14 years) in East Asia and the Pacific have lost one or both parents to AIDS. Additionally, of the estimated 50,000 children living with HIV in Asia, many of whom are also orphans due to AIDS, merely 1 percent have access to pediatric antiretroviral treatment despite over a tenth of these children having an immediate need for such treatment¹.

In Thailand, a range of between 5,400 to 38,000 children are estimated to be living with HIV and almost 30 percent of orphans, are orphans due to AIDS.² The policy environment and civil society engagement in Thailand have allowed for greater access to antiretroviral treatment. Much can be learned from the Thai experience in responding to HIV.

Providing accurate and adequate support and care to children living with HIV is vital, in order to ensure that the rights of the children are protected, so that they are able to live to their full potential. Many children with HIV may have been abandoned by their community due to misconceptions about the way that HIV is transmitted. Although it is widely recognized that the ideal place for the child is in the home community, many communities lack the knowledge, understanding and skills to provide the required support and care. In this context, specialised interventions are required.

Baan Gerda is a children's rights foundation established to provide homes, treatment, care and support for children orphaned by AIDS. It has a unique family environment with a foster parenting system to look after the children and their daily needs. It claims to be the only organization in Thailand that provides family-style homes for orphans, as well as comprehensive HIV care.

2. Purpose of the visit

The visit was scheduled as a preparatory activity for the development of Plan Asia Regional HIV Strategy. The purpose was:

- To provide a forum for lessons and experience sharing on care and support for children with HIV; and
- To encourage the generation of ideas and plans for developing the Regional HIV Strategy which will involve provision of care and support for children living with HIV.

3. Participants

The visit included representation from Plan Asia Country Offices, Plan National Organisations and Plan Asia Regional Office. See Annex 1 for the list of participants.

¹ UNAIDS Document Sheet 7: "Children Orphaned and Affected by AIDS" UNICEF: *Scaling up the response for Children East Asia and Pacific Regional Consultation on Children and HIV/AIDS*, 22-24 Mar 06, Hanoi, Viet Nam (2006) p.3

² *Support and Care for Children Affected by HIV and AIDS* (2006) p.3

1 1st Plan Asia HIV Task Team Meeting, 19-23 November 2007, Bangkok, Thailand

4. The visit

A team of 15 participants visited Bann Gerda, Lopburi Province on Monday 19 November 2007. We met with the founder of Bann Gerda, Karl Morsbach, who took us around the area of Bann Gerda and provided a brief orientation on the set up of Bann Gerda and the issues faced as the epidemic evolved in Thailand.

In the afternoon, a presentation was given by Ginge Tulloch on the ideology and philosophy of Bann Gerda. This included the right of the children to health and creating a warm and loving atmosphere for the children in the institution. She highlighted a number of medical issues involved in responding to the needs of the children living with HIV, including early diagnosis, adherence to treatment, regular follow up and specialist services. She mentioned that stigmatization was not less of a problem both in school and in the community.

This was followed by a presentation from Dr Jintanat Ananworanich on '*treatment of children with HIV infection*'. She indicated the need to provide general care, immunization, treat and prevent infections. Among the actions required are the following:

- Correct malnutrition
- Provide cotrimoxazole to prevent PCP and other bacterial infections
- Provide antiretroviral therapy to children with moderate or severe HIV diseases or those with CD4 in the severe immune deficiency range
- Help children adhere to ARV to prevent ARV failure
- Help children and teenagers develop life skills in order to cope and live with HIV

5. Feedback from Plan staff

In the flowing days, Plan staff provided feedback through written submissions which were collated by William Savage, the workshop facilitator. These are summarized below:

General observations and personal reactions	<p>It is inspiring to see how one person's concern for a child has now bloomed into a village of 75 healthy and well-loved children.</p> <p>It's important to know that such a child-friendly village is possible for children living with HIV. The next dream would be having such circumstances in the children's real families and communities.</p> <p>Baan Gerda demonstrates what commitment and social responsibility really mean. They have got their mindset right because they have allowed for evolution.</p> <p>Very child-friendly environment; clean, green and pleasant, living in families.</p> <p>Protecting children living with HIV and helping their rehabilitation in families and communities.</p> <p>Very impressed to see love and medical support help improve health conditions among children.</p> <p>Collaboration with the King's project of Baan Gerda for education of children living with HIV.</p> <p>Reminds us that love for children is most important and children need a family.</p> <p>It is refreshing to hear "I don't know" from project implementers, quite comfortable with the risks and surprises of everyday implementation and without any pretence that they can control everything.</p> <p>It encouraged me to see how we prepare or think about a comprehensive program for orphans.</p>
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Specific findings	<p>Baan Gerda is a rights-based model with a multisectoral approach, contributing to the realization of the rights of children with love, care and treatment, child development and learning.</p> <p>These kinds of projects with non-infected and infected children help in reducing stigma and discrimination with infected children and adults.</p> <p>Baan Gerda is a “circle of hope” for children.</p>
Recommendations for future action	<p>Children’s perspective on their own life will add value to their future.</p> <p>We need to start to think about individual children living with HIV, parents and community, and the linkages among those levels.</p> <p>It is a learning center for communities and organizations working on HIV. We must learn the lessons from Baan Gerda and apply them in our own programme areas.</p>

6. Conclusion

As can be seen from the positive feedback from the participants, this was seen as a very useful exercise. It provoked thinking and discussion around issues connected with child rights and HIV. These will be reflected in the draft Plan Asia Regional HIV Strategy.

