

## **Not Victims, but Survivors**

An observation of Prof. Dr. Wanpen Tirachinda, who met the children of the School for Life in Chiang Mai, and also during a trip to the Asian University for Science and Technology near Jomthien during March 2006:

**Dear Prof. Zimmer,**

**As a School for Life volunteer, I have repeatedly heard people from all walks of life who come into contact with our students made the following comments:**

**“They are the happiest orphans I have ever met.  
They are so confident and capable.  
They are very creative.  
They are well behaving, sensible and responsible.  
They are giving and caring.  
They are so normal.  
They know they are loved.”**

**These comments make me wonder what causes School for Life students to be differed from other students in general and other orphans in particular. Recently, I have been asked to coordinate the students’ annual educational trip to the Eastern Seaboard. This opportunity provided answer to my inquiry and I would like to share them with you who contribute directly to the well being of these students.**

**At the reception dinner when you and Khun Joy came to finalize what needed to be done prior to the students arrival, I had invited Khun Halle, a Dutch lady who is well known for her charity work with the poor and under-privileged children in Pattaya area. Khun Halle and I have an on-going disagreement regarding how to work with under-privileged children. Therefore I want her to meet our students hoping that this experience will validate my point of view. As she observed how the children considerately took care of the guests and put on mini dances and songs to entertain the adults all on their own, tears were in her eyes. They touched her in a way my words of wisdom couldn’t do it. She has approached Khun Joy to provide training for teachers and staff of several orphanages in Pattaya and plans a trip, along with other charity workers in Pattaya to visit School for Life in June to see it for herself, so to speak.**

**Khun Halle believes that these poor, under-privileged children are victims of circumstance and we need to raise standard of their living so their basic needs of food and shelter will be met. Giving any things beyond that would spoil them and degenerate their will to help themselves. I believe that we need to give beyond basic**

**needs. These children are not only victims but also survivors. We need to help them move beyond being a survivor to become a contributing citizen by removing a label of under-privilege and replace it with normality—love, trust, self-confidence, creativity, beauty and morality. Children who never have more than basic needs do not understand the concept of “having enough.” The journey from under-privilege to normalcy is like a pendulum swinging from one end to the other until it finds a balance. At this point it is too soon to argue that the children have been spoiled. Dr. Y.C. James Yen, President of International Institute of Rural Reconstruction succinctly said, “[Development is] not to conform but to transform, not relief but release.” This is a breeding ground to develop “a culture of innovative entrepreneurship” (Zimmer et al.).**

**Best Regards,**

**Wanpen Tirachinda**

Since May 2006 Professor Tirachinda is the new Director of the School for Life in Chiang Mai. She is born in Thailand and lectured for many years at universities in the USA. Until 2003 she worked in the Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Postsecondary Education at the University of Northern Iowa. She received her doctoral degree at the George Washington University, Washington DC, USA.