

IT'S ROUGH AROUND THE EDGES - AN INTRODUCTION TO CHILDREN ON THE EDGE

Children should be found safely at the centre of a family. They should be enveloped with layers of protection from their governments and wider international authorities. Tragically many children around the world have been stripped of these forms of care and protection.

Children on the Edge is a Chichester based charity that exists to give these children a safe environment where they are protected and their rights to education, nourishment and play are upheld.

The charity has 15 different projects across 10 different countries working with children who have lost their parents in conflicts, children whose governments persecute them until they flee their homes, and children overlooked by the radar of international justice. Even the roving eyes of the media don't settle on the children they work with; they are no longer at the centre, but pushed to the edges.

The Children on the Edge office is nestled at the top of the old Victoria pub in St Pancras, here you'll find a small organisation that makes a massive impact. The charity's projects are innovative, effective and tangibly improve the lives of the most marginalised children.

In **Bangladesh** the Learning Centres give 300 working children a chance to rest, learn, play and receive a meal each day. This costs only 27p a day for each child.

In **Thailand** the charity supports a Children's Crisis Centre which shelters 75 children without parental care who have fled ethnic cleansing in Burma.

In **Haiti** the innovative sports programme creates opportunities to engage with and educate 400 children living in the slums of Port au Prince, each of whom leave each day with a vital food parcel.

In **Burma** there is support for four refugee camp nursery schools. These provide early years learning and nourishment for 349 children under the ages of five in grave risk of chronic malnutrition.

Here's a closer look at some of their work:

IN FROM THE COLD: A CHILD FRIENDLY SPACE IN MOLDOVA

Photos from the summer play scheme supported by Children on the Edge in Moldova this year were colourful images of skipping, running, rosy-faced children playing and performing outdoors in the sunshine. As the winter cold sets in, the photographs from their Child and Community Centre now show a different world where the children are huddled together in their woolly hats, cradling hot drinks and devouring hot mash!

The story of this Child Friendly Space is the story of a community transformed. This small rural town struggles with low employment and high levels of poverty. It's a place where many children see their parents disappear abroad to find work and are left in the care of

an elderly relative or, worse still, they are left to fend for themselves. For those parents who remain, alcohol abuse is common and many children face a home life where they are neglected and abused.

The Child and Community Centre established here by Children on the Edge has through the provision of daily hot meals, computer classes, homework help, sports and support, encouraged the community to give back to their children the essential ingredients of childhood. The results so far have been stunning, with a dramatic drop in the numbers of children having police records or dropping out of school, and a corresponding rise in school attendance.

As the work of Children on the Edge continues in Moldova, the encouraging stories roll in, but so do the fresh challenges. There is still a lot more to be done.

Gradually the winter cold is creeping in, making the scarcity of food even more apparent. Not only do the hot meals provided at the Centre become more vital than ever but, for those child headed households fending for themselves, circumstances are increasingly harsh. In response the Centre has started a course in food preparation, equipping those without parental care with skills to make the most of the little they have.

A disturbing number of children arrive at the Centre with signs of being badly beaten. There is not much in the way of child protection in Moldova, and a call to the police results in very little being done. Children on the Edge is currently developing incentive based parenting programmes to prevent this kind of situation arising and giving support to children whose parents struggle with alcohol addiction.

Recently throughout Moldova a swathe of institutions for children with special needs have been closed down, resulting in many children being placed back in the community. Within Iargara, many of these children end up at the Child and Community Centre where staff work hard to help them break the limiting patterns of institutionalisation and work towards independence.

10 year old Valeria came to the centre after the institution she lived in closed down. When she arrived she couldn't do anything for herself, even the smallest of tasks. She was violent and wouldn't speak to anyone. Both Valeria's parents have learning difficulties and her Grandmother cares for them all.

After a few months at the centre Valeria now speaks and responds to the staff and her friends, she has not only learnt the simple tasks of caring for herself, but she has learnt to pay bills and help her Grandmother around the house.

Stories like Valeria's highlight how crucial it is for children to have a safe place to just be themselves, to be supported and given the chance to enjoy and explore the things that are essential for their development. This 'Child Friendly Space' supported by Children on the Edge in Moldova provides just these things for those children that are most at risk. Support for the work here at this time is invaluable.

FLOOD WATERS RISING IN THAILAND

Yee Win's day began like many others at the Children's Crisis Centre in Mae Sot, Thailand. Rising at 6.30 in the morning, she wiped the sleep from her eyes and glanced out the small wooden window next to her bunk bed. "I couldn't believe it" she said "Our garden was gone. There was only water. Everywhere I looked there was water."

Over the past three months, Thailand has endured its heaviest rainfall in a century. With 75% of the country facing unprecedented levels of flooding, the situation has reached crisis levels. The government reports that the floods have claimed 281 lives this year, many of the victims have been children. Rising waters have inundated homes, shops and schools, directly affecting over 19 million people.

Children on the Edge supports the Children's Crisis Centre in Mae Sot which gives shelter and support to refugee children without parental care, and the centre has borne the brunt of floods directly. Stores of dry food like rice and beans have been contaminated straining already tight budgets. Piles of books and stationary have been ruined as well.

With most of the major roadways under water, usual supply lines are cut causing the price of basic foodstuffs to rise dramatically in rural areas. Vulnerable groups, such as refugee children, are the first to feel the effects of the crisis.

With your help, Children on the Edge would like to assist those affected by flooding in Thailand. Please help us intervene in this crisis by making a donation today. Text HELP FLOOD to 70080 to give £3. £3 can buy three textbooks, or replenish 3 days worth of food for a child at the crisis centre.

BUILDING HOPE IN BURMA

Children on the Edge is currently building a primary school for 84 children in Chin State, Burma who have no access to education.

The Chin people in the tiny village of Tilum in Burma have been the target of persecution and oppression for many years. Despite what appears in the press to be positive moves

for democracy by Aung San Suu Kyi, ethnic groups throughout Burma are currently enduring some of the worst levels of human rights abuse.

The Chin Human Rights Organisation describe how the Chin people in Burma have had to endure “decades long violation of the rights of women and children, forced labour, political suppression, racial discrimination religious persecutions committed by the Burmese military regime”.

Tilum is situated just 3 miles from the neighbouring village of Tibual where one of the main Burma Army Battalions is posted. These soldiers force tax, labour and food from the Tilum villagers and consequently many people have left the village.

The remaining 19 households are those who lack the money or capacity to leave the village or those who are too afraid to settle in other communities. There is no transportation out of the village so the children remaining in Tilum have no chance of an education.

Children on the Edge is paying for the building of the school which will have four teachers and give an education to 84 children. Materials have arrived and building works have started, so by Christmas they will be celebrating the opening of a brand new school.

PLANTING FOR THE FUTURE IN BANGLADESH

Borochoira is a fishing community in Bangladesh and is the home of one of three Learning Centres set up for working children by Children on the Edge. Poverty levels are so high in this area that many children have to work alongside their families in order to survive, leaving no opportunity for their own education.

The Learning Centres provide these children with a few hours each day to have a break from their work, attend classes, freshen up, and play with their friends. This is a chance for them to just be children.

Facing annual flooding and soil erosion, residents of this hill-top community also struggle with food provision. Consequently Children on the Edge has funded the planting of 2,500 saplings along the eroding slopes which skirt Borochoira.

The trees include varieties of mango, lychee, jackfruit, mahogany, teak and eucalyptus, planted in an evenly-spaced grid around the community. The hope is that these trees will

provide both an economic and environmental benefit to the community in the years to come.

For further information or to donate to Children on the Edge simply visit their website at www.childrenontheedge.org, or to contact the office e-mail office@childrenontheedge.org or telephone 01243 538 530. For a hassle free £3 donation to the work of the charity, please text HELP to 70080.