

BUTTERFLY CHILDREN

MARCH 2020

BRYAN WATT & LEILA SROUR



The Butterfly Children's Development Center offered visions, hopes, and dreams for the children's future. They perfected their surgical skills at the center, then confidently demonstrated heart surgery to a team of visiting doctors and received accolades from one of the country's top surgeons.



Now the children are growing up, and two of them are continuing their education in health sciences at medical schools in Laos and China.

Although we left seven years ago and the center closed, we return every year to keep their dreams alive. This year, we continue our support by offering scholarships to seven young women with good grades and from poor families.



After we left Laos, the children finished primary school and began studying at secondary school. Some of them continued in school as far as they were able then dropped out. Now they sell snacks by the roadside, work alongside their fieldworker parents, or help sell things in Chinese owned shops. A few are married and have children, and sadly, some are already divorced. But fortunately, most of the students are doing well.



We bring hard-working students sets of school textbooks so they have study materials. Students whom we are most concerned about send us a picture of their class grade sheet every month. Many of their parents, most of whom have never been to school, don't understand academic performance or its

significance. They cannot encourage their children, recognize their potential, or communicate any hope or belief in their future. We encourage everyone to do their best, study a little harder, spend more time studying, ask more questions in class, and review their textbooks before lectures. Education gives them the best chance to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

We have already provided scholarships to three students who finished secondary school last year. One of them has always been a business person. As a child, she sold snacks to her neighbors at village festivals. Now she is studying business at a college in Vietnam. The second student is a pharmacy major at the medical school in Vientiane. The third student is studying Chinese in China for one year in preparation for medical school. We will continue to support these students until they complete their education.

This year we identified seven additional students for scholarships. They are completing their final year of secondary school and will graduate in June. We promised one of them a scholarship several years ago. Her parents prefer her to leave school and work to support the family, creating drama at the beginning of every school year. Her life has always been a struggle, so we provide encouragement by supporting her school expenses. She tells us that without our financial support, she would have been forced to drop out of school.

Immediately after we offered to help another scholarship student, she called her parents to ask for their permission. They told her it was her decision. Then, for the first time ever, looking upwards with a smile

on her face, she thought about the possibility of continuing her studies.

Another student told us she would like to be a teacher. Her mother died when she was a young child, so she received permission to study from her father. However, her older brother says he will forbid her from leaving to continue her studies. She told us that if she doesn't study now, she will regret it for the rest of her life.

One of the students informed us that people from her ethnic group never study beyond secondary school. We hope this student will be the first. She is considering law, medicine, or information technology.

One of the students comes from a family of five sisters living together in a tiny one-room house. Her father is a truck driver. She would like to study medicine, business, or agriculture.

Over the years, we have encouraged children's dreams, and now we see that without further help, these dreams, hopes, and goals would remain unfulfilled. Continuing their education will help bring them nearer to the achievements they have dreamed about. These students already stand out from their peers by completing secondary school despite family issues and obligations, peer pressure, and uncertainties. Scholarships will provide opportunities otherwise impossible. Perhaps some of these students would find a way to continue their education without our support. However, for young women with younger brothers, there is a common belief in the villages that education is more important for boys, who are more likely to receive family support.



This year, we visited with several scholarship students who have graduated and begun their careers. One of

them is employed by the government and currently studying for a master's degree in China supported by the Lao government. Another one has a respected position in the provincial forestry department. One is employed in an insurance office, and another reporting and announcing for a radio station. One student in their last year of university is working as a receptionist in an upscale international hotel. A scholarship student who formerly volunteered at the children's center is now teaching Lao language at a secondary school where they are one of the most favored teachers. We were not able to see one of our first scholarship student, who is a doctor in the local hospital, because he was attending a continuing medical education course in Thailand.

We are very proud of these students' successes and watch them advancing and contributing to their communities. They validate our belief in the value of education and encourage us to support additional students. The Butterfly Children's Development Center's tagline continues to be, "Where dreams have wings." We have contributed to their dreams, and now we must help them fly.



www.butterflychildren.org