

## The Best Friend

The Best Friend was founded in Burma in 1999 by two concerned monks with the purpose of encouraging people to become more educated, aware and active in the struggle for peace and freedom. The main belief is that education can open up people's ears and eyes and is THE way to eradicate poverty.

At one point, The Best Friend operated fifteen libraries inside Burma. The libraries provided access to uncensored information and literature. Apart from that, they were meeting places where people could discuss freely.

The Burmese military regime has been closely monitoring and controlling the activities of politically active people, especially since the 2007 Saffron Revolution. Many of the members and volunteers of The Best Friend were forced to leave Burma to avoid persecution. Several people, also monks, were arrested and are currently imprisoned. Simply for the crime of providing information and discussing about politics and freedom.

Today, only three of the fifteen libraries are still in operation. King Zero and Ashin Sopaka, the founders of The Best Friend, moved to the Thai border town Mae Sot and opened the first Best Friend Library in Thailand in 2008.

Apart from Thailand, The Best Friend now has active groups in Switzerland, The Netherlands, Canada and Germany. It is actively raising awareness about the situation in Burma and supporting refugees living in Thailand.



## Health Care Program (mobile)



Since January 2010 The Best Friend is operating a mobile Health Care Program in the district around Mae Sot.

The patients receive free treatment and free medicine. If necessary they will be transported to the Mae Tao clinic for further treatment. For most Burmese migrants it is impossible to come to a doctor or a clinic.

The program is coordinated with the help of a midwife who lives and works in the area. She knows and talks to the people, finds out in which places a doctor is needed.

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Ashin Issariya aka King Zero  
and Ashin Sopaka, founders  
of The Best Friend



# The Best Friend Projects

## Free Libraries/Learning Center

The Best Friend operates free libraries in Burma and Thailand. The libraries offer free internet access and literature, books, research reports, news magazines, films and other materials for English speakers as well as books in Burmese and Burmese-minority languages.

The Libraries are hotspots for Burmese migrants, refugees and interested people from all over the world who come here to learn more about the situation of Burmese migrants and Burma.

The Best Friend has been involved in transforming the living conditions of the migrant families at the rubbish dump since 2007. We provide basic services such as food, medicine and drinking water to the families at the dumpsite.

The library in Mae Sot also offers daily free English, Thai and computer classes as well as free internet access. It is located in the centre of Mae Sot with its busy market.

Apart from that The Best Friend also runs and supports schools. One of these schools is the 42KM learning center

in the Mae Sot area, that was founded by The Best Friend 42KM is a primary learning center and currently teaches around 400 children. These children are refugees from Burma, most are in Thailand illegally.



## Work on the Rubbish Dump

Along the Thai-Burma border the rubbish dump of Mae Sot has become a refuge for migrant families from Burma. Approximately 300 people live in houses, constructed from bamboo and plastic trash.

Our Relocation Project for the people from the dump has evolved into a agriculture project. With the help of two Italian organizations we rented land for families to live on. The people are growing their own food here and can make a living by selling vegetables on the market.

In addition we have established a "clean water fund" and with these donations purchased a water purification system to provide clean drinking water for the people on the dump of Mae Sot.

## Peace Campaign

The Best Friend's Peace Campaign commenced in 2006 with a 29-day peace march from Cologne to Berlin led by Ashin Sopaka.

Since then, similar walks have been led from New York to Washington, D.C. and from Bangkok to Mae Sot.

From The Best Friend's base in Mae Sot, the campaign also involves the distribution of 'peace dove' clocks, flags, and t-shirts to schools and businesses and the spreading of peace stickers - with the campaign's main message of 'Peace in Burma now!' in both English and Burmese – throughout the community and around the world.

Western volunteers have been able to stealthily post the stickers inside several towns in Burma, reminding Burmese people with hope and optimism that the struggle for peaceful change in Burma continues.



From left to right:

1. Books at the library in Mae Sot
2. Computer class at the library learning center
3. Children eating at the 42KM learning center

4. The agriculture project
5. Photo for the 'Clean water fund'
6. Ashin Koyida with 'Peace in Burma Now' sticker

If you need assistance in getting information about migrant workers and refugee camps in Thailand please contact us: info@thebestfriend.org

