

Helping Burmese children

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Published: Saturday, Aug. 9, 2003

BRISBANE, Australia — Members of the Church from the east coast of Australia recently responded with overwhelming support after hearing of the plight of 95 Burmese children (now numbering 200) stranded near the Thailand border. The children were orphaned as a result of civil unrest that has destroyed villages and families. After walking many miles in tattered clothes and without food, the children managed to survive the elements of the mountains and the perilous journey and trek their way to the neighboring border of Thailand.

Janelle Nicholson, a member of the Church in Lismore, New South Wales, first learned of the children's plight as she met with a Norene Colley of Rotary International who recounted the experiences of the children, many of whom are less than 10 years old. David and Asa Stevenson of Brisbane, together with Rotary Lismore and Noreen Colley, began an ambitious project to first build the vital shelter needed to house the children.

Sister Nicholson then worked with her Stake Relief Society president, Kaye Hettig, to help orchestrate the other much needed supplies such as clothing and toiletries.

"The response swept through like a fever among our people and they have really caught the vision. Trailer loads have arrived from as far away as Hervey Bay and Lismore. We invited everyone to please donate; to provide toiletries, basic hygiene essentials and clothing for the little ones, and we have well exceeded our goals. One lady drew out all of her personal savings and a widow pressed a \$50 note into my hand. In total, there were 303 blankets, eight boxes of sheets, 54 boxes of quality clothing, 13 boxes of toys, five boxes of shoes — many of them new — boxes of books and activity sets and cash donations of about \$3,500," said President Hettig. "This project will be an ongoing commitment from us. We don't want to just donate a couple of boxes and forget about these little ones."

A group of teenage girls from Mudgeeraba Ward in the Gold Coast took the plight to heart and fashioned T-shirts from their wardrobes into dresses that were packaged along with fresh hair ties and combs for the young girls in the camp. "I hope they can somehow feel our love for them through those dresses," said Bianca Eagle, 15, of Bonogin.