

Myanmar

Phil and Lisa Crosby - Our first year

Firstly a big thanks to the Timeos Trust, who through their bursary, enabled us to move to Myanmar and settle with our young daughter, to do the work we are called to do.

As a brief introduction, we are Phil and Lisa Crosby (and our daughter Elsie). We moved to Myanmar in February 2016. Our story for moving here is a long one and if you have a few hours and a pot of coffee, we're happy to tell it. :-)

We have been here for 14 months now and we could talk about many many things, but we wanted to post a few highlights (which have become the norm around here).



We have been working with a team in recycling areas (to you and I, a place where families live and work, collecting and sorting the city's waste - mostly by hand) and we have been involved in pioneering and getting community centres up and running here in a few areas of the city. To those of you in the West, the idea of a Community centre is not a new one. A place where anyone can come to a safe environment, where people learn new things and most of all, where people support and love one another. If you're in a Church, this is a concept that you'll recognise even more. The concept doesn't really exist here. At the centre of it all is our belief in a people who can rise up out of their circumstance. To have hope beyond the poverty and the difficulties that they face every day. If you've tried the \$1 a day challenge (living off \$1 a day) take that and cut it by a 1/3. Survival instinct is high. Most often there is no capacity to care for your neighbour, when you and your family are merely trying to survive.

The community centres provide children's programmes, providing basic education, creativity through art, singing and dancing and offers space for the children to discover hope for their future. The centres also provide a safe place to play (we have a very sturdy playground and a good area of shade from the beating 40 degree sunshine). Teen girls learn about self-esteem and self-worth on top of the offerings of the children's programme. We offer vocational training for women who have no opportunity to work, either through lack of jobs or through lack of education. We encourage small businesses and an understanding of finance and the women's groups are an enormous amount of



fun, where we share, support, build trust and community. We are looking to empower the local communities, to give them ownership of their own space, to work with, instead of against culture and to bring a concept of a loving, caring and nurturing environment to many who have been left devoid of such. We could give more detail, but instead we want to share a few highlights of the fruit that we've seen.

One of the children (aged 11) in our programme was absent for 2 weeks. Our local staff went to her home to enquire, and found that the child had been exchanged for money to pay off a debt. The family circumstance was dire and the mother in desperation. Our team went to the restaurant where she was working 14 hrs a day and paid back the debt of \$25 to return her to her home.

One mother, living nearby one of our community centres, just as we opened it, had twins and had neither the money to pay the debt to the "midwife" nor the milk to feed her babies. Living in a small bamboo hut with five children is tough enough, without all the other problems. No clean drinking water, no money to buy the formula milk prescribed. Supporting this family with clean water, formula milk and rice to eat and visiting regularly has built a relationship with this family. The woman is now a good voice and a friend in this community. Only yesterday we were taken to another shack where a girl of 18 had small twin babies and was struggling. She wanted them to receive the help that she had,



that had grown her twin boys to hefty happy babies. With the offer to come to the community centre to join with the women's group. the practical help of clean water and formula (she was feeding her babies powdered milk you put in tea) and rice for the family, the mother we helped in that first instance, stepped up was teaching her how to mix the milk safely and when to give it and encouraging the young mother to come along for support amongst the women of the community. Seeing this seemingly hopelessness situation grow into a hopeful situation, was just amazing. The community rising up to help one another. Paying it forward if you will.



At Christmas time, the team threw a Christmas party in three places. At each place, over 200 people came. All having a role to play, from the tiniest children to the oldest granny and grandpa! All eating together, sharing, laughing.

Children in the recycle areas are now beginning to pass exams. As a result of our teams continuing to educate and love these children. They are now passing Grade 8 - point at which the children usually drop out and begin to lose hope of a future education and go into work.

We have many many stories, too many. Many stories of Grace and the miraculous that we aren't able to share here. Perhaps the most amazing thing is the change that we see in ourselves. How differently we live our lives, the eyes we have been given to look through a different lens, the patience we are constantly trying to live in, amongst circumstances that go against all we believe, the constant growth. Whatever your length of service in another place, we encourage you to follow the call. You will be changed, like us. You may have struggles and troubles, but your dependency from yourself will move along the axis to a dependency on Him.

Thank you Timios for your belief in all of us who have stepped out.

Phil, Lisa and Elsie.