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# Strumming to pay Thai girl's debts

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A GUITAR teacher hopes to clear a Thai family's £1,000 debt after his sponsored child incurred huge medical bills following major heart surgery.

Simon Ashworth, of Cirencester, and his wife Kathrin have sponsored 15-year-old Phanida for the past ten years and visit her every year.

Her mother died of AIDS when she was a baby and her father abandoned her, meaning she now lives with her grandparents.

But last year the impoverished family suffered devastating news when Phanida was diagnosed with a hole in her heart and was forced to undergo heart surgery.

Although she made a full recovery, the family's income of less than £1 a day meant they were unable to pay for travelling expenses to the hospital in Chiang Mai while Phanida was recovering.

They have been left with a £1,000 debt to settle, a sum which Mr Ashworth says would be impossible for them



**Simon and Kathrin Ashworth with their sponsored child Phanida**

to pay themselves.

Mr Ashworth, who visited Phanida in March this year, said: "Phanida is a very friendly girl and although her family is one of the poorest in their village, she always has a smile on her face. When we visit she gives us little trinkets she has made herself.

"Thankfully the surgery went well and she is recovering from the traumatic experience.

"She was even proud to show us the six-inch scar on her chest."

Mr Ashworth set up a fund to pay off the debt and money from guitar lessons goes straight into the fund.

He said although £1,000 isn't a lot in the UK, it is a huge amount to families in Thailand where the average wage is just 80p a day.

"I would like to thank all my students and their families for their support which will allow us to help Phanida and her family get back to a normal life in Thailand," he added.