



SEX IN THE CITY?

Or ... Changing lives for the hill tribe children of Northern Thailand

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Background

Two years ago, key stakeholders in hill tribe communities (the indigenous people of Northern Thailand), established the Borderless Friendship Foundation (BFF). In 2010, Borderless Friendship Western Australia (BFWA Inc) was incorporated to support this valuable work. These not-for-profit community organisations are changing the lives of hill tribe people by providing access to education for their children. Other basic needs, such as sound nutrition, safe drinking water and mosquito proof sleeping, are slowly being addressed by BFF as they work with hill tribe families, local schools and universities as well as BFWA and other international organisations, such as Rotary and Engineers Without Borders.

Key issues for hill tribe children

- Up to 2,500 hill tribe children, aged 5-14, are cared for in very basic accommodation provided by BFF.
- Thousands of hill tribe children are unable to access health care or education.
- Education is the key. Without education many children will enter the sex trade.
- UNICEF and CATW¹ estimates that 75,000 young people are involved in the sex trade in Thailand. Many of these children come from impoverished hill tribe communities.

(¹CATW- Coalition Against the Trafficking of Women, 2010)

Focus groups with key stakeholders in Thailand

Young Lahu people said...

- Limited knowledge of sexuality.
- No-one to talk with about sexuality.
- Unaware of sex trafficking.
- Girls expected to remain virgins until marriage.
- If pregnant – forced to marry and leave school.

Lahu hill tribe parents said ...

- Some resistance to children (over 12) staying at school.
- Ignore/unaware of risks of trafficking.
- Poverty driving decisions about their children.
- Fathers working away and bringing back HIV.
- Same sex relationships – “not here – in the city”.

Teachers said ...

- Even though “they know it is important, talking about sex is still taboo”.
- No existing sexuality curriculum.
- Teachers not familiar with student-centred strategies.
- Poorest schools in Thailand.
- Few teachers and many students.
- Hill tribe children have proven their intelligence and deserve opportunities.
- Girls leaving school early (12-14 yrs) – poverty & pregnancy.
- Principals and teachers very keen.



Lahu girls



Lahu parents



Teachers

Working in remote areas of Northern Thailand

HIGHLIGHTS

- ✓ Stakeholders – very enthusiastic.
- ✓ No red tape – easy to engage with schools.
- ✓ Positive & immediate impact for children.

CHALLENGES

- Language barrier (Thai and hill tribe languages).
- Unable to support all hill tribe children.
- Travel costs.



Where to from here?

- Seeking funds/grants to develop culturally appropriate curriculum and peer training in sexuality education.
- Working with hill tribe young people to produce booklets about puberty and relationships.
- Facilitating workshops with teachers on student centred strategies for sexuality education.
- Continuing to work with BFF to enhance the lives of hill tribe communities.

Key references guiding this work

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