

## January 2014 Referral to One Sky

One Sky was contacted by a local Children's home after a very sick woman asked them to take her 11 year old daughter. They had crossed from Burma and the woman had been told by Doctors that she would die soon. The team traced them to a house outside Sangkhlaburi where they were staying with the woman's sister.

The team found themselves in a rapidly deteriorating situation. People at the house had been drinking all day. The sister's husband became violent and punched the sick woman and then his wife in the head, knocking her out cold and stamping on her chest before we were able to warn him off. The team did well to get everyone in the truck and we were soon on our way to the hospital.

There are times when the local Thai hospital offers great service, but this case was one of those beyond their capacity and interest. They patched up the obvious wounds and then confirmed that the best they could offer a Burmese woman with no papers was to come back for the next monthly HIV clinic scheduled in 3 weeks. It was clear to everyone that she would be dead well before then.

The drunk sister was given a couple of hours to cool down in the cold weather (yes – it really has been cold here) and then spent the night on the One Sky office floor, she was gone early in the morning when staff came to see her. The sick woman and her daughter were taken to the BHI staff house where they were cared for through the night.

With hindsight we should have anticipated her TB infection. One of the BHI staff is back on his feet after 5 months recovering from TB induced meningitis, we are so lucky that he didn't suffer any permanent brain damage after being unable to walk or talk at the lowest point of his illness. But yet again BHI staff were taking huge risks with their own health to try and help someone with nowhere else to go.

The next morning she was accepted as a patient by the Christian hospital 20km away. She and her daughter were put in the TB isolation room. She needed an urgent blood transfusion and luckily for her the hospital had one unit matching her group. (Usually patients are required to find their own blood for transfusion from family and friends – with no screening of blood the advice is to go for the youngest and healthiest volunteer you can find, ideally they are not yet sexually active).

As a 25 year old sex worker with an 11 year old daughter it is clear that she has had a difficult life so far. Her daughter is showing clear signs of trauma and possible abuse. It is families like this that One Sky and BHI aim to help. Dealing with complex health and social issues with no social services, no health provision and no police support is a huge challenge. Your support for these projects enables them to try to fill the gap in services and to try to create choices for families that can lead them to a better situation.

Even at the Christian Hospital there is no food or personal care for patients. This remains the responsibility of family and friends. One Sky and BHI staff visited this family in their time off throughout the weekend, making sure they had food, clothes and support. The cost of her treatment is being shared between the 2 projects and the hospital.

It is possible to treat TB and take drugs to suppress HIV at the same time, but this is a very expensive option. The treatment available here is to deal with the TB first. If the patient survives then options for survival with HIV will be explored. At that stage treatment costs around £30 per month and relies on a very

disciplined approach by patients to take their drugs at the same time every day, failure to do so leads to the virus becoming resistant and after that only very expensive cocktails of drugs will keep the patient alive, no one has the budget to provide this here and patients die.

BHI currently covers the cost of treatment for 13 women and children each month. To join them our new patient will need to show that she is willing to change her lifestyle. No more sex work (infecting customers and through them their wives and unborn children), no amphetamine, no drinking and working with the team to find a new source of income and stability and schooling for her daughter. If she doesn't work with the team towards these goals then she will not be accepted onto the list for treatment costs and she will die.

The next 2 months as she is treated for TB at the hospital will determine the future for her and her daughter. One Sky and BHI staff will do everything they can to ensure the best possible outcome for both the patient and her daughter.

We will keep you updated with this family and what happens to this 11 year old girl. She is one of many children living complex and unsafe lives that One Sky and BHI are working together to help. If you recently supported us or bought a One Sky T shirt – please wear it with pride and think about this girl, you are part of the solution.

Andy  
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