



2019 ANNUAL REPORT

PREPARED BY

Andy Lillicrap



Supporting Vulnerable Children and their Families.

AFTER SEVEN YEARS

As co-founders, Wat and I often talk about One Sky as a vehicle. A vehicle that enables us to do things we couldn't do otherwise. Every year we get a little bit wiser and a little bit more skillful in developing and applying our vehicle to bring about positive change in the lives of vulnerable and at-risk children.

After seven years we can see a maturity growing in One Sky. A strong financial system and a professional case management process are two examples. But what makes me most proud is the personal growth in our team, both individually and collectively.

One Sky was born as an agent of change, to work in the best interest of children and to create an environment within which all children can exercise their human rights to live safely under the care of their own families, have an education and access medical care when needed.

Starting a new organisation in an environment where none of these things are possible for many children meant starting with a group of employees who took a salary each month to follow our directions. Seven years later those employees have become the owners of One Sky, they live it and breathe it every day and they are the agents of change that are turning this environment into one where all children have opportunities to flourish.

I can't think of anyone who has made the long journey to Sangkhlaburi and spent time with One Sky who hasn't expressed deep feelings of admiration for the team and what they are achieving in this complex community.

Thailand still relies heavily on a one-dimensional approach to helping families with problems. Thousands of children are still finding themselves living in unregulated private children's homes because the help they and their families need is not available to them. There is now a small group of talented and committed people in Sangkhlaburi who have a proven track record in helping families fix their problems so that they can continue caring for their own children. Our task in the coming years will be to help our team see just how special they are and to support them in sharing what they have learned with other NGO's and government partners throughout Thailand.

As always, thank you to everyone who has given us their support and encouragement. Without you we could not have supported the hundreds of children whose lives have been made better by the team's work. I hope you will also feel that you have made a valuable investment in a vehicle of change that is now playing a growing role in the systemic changes that Thailand needs so that all children have a chance to fulfill their potential.

*Andy
January 2020*





In 2019 One Sky worked with over 700 children and their families.

In order to provide holistic support based on individual needs, we offer varying resources and supports. This includes; food support, financial assistance, advocacy, counselling, grants for housing repairs, education costs, skills building, family strengthening and more. Basically, we do whatever is needed to keep children safe, healthy, in education and whenever possible living in the care of their own families.

In this report we will share more deeply about some of these aspects of our work.

Please do contact us if you have any questions,
would like to know more or would like to become one of our supporters.
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INTERVIEW WITH AYE BY KADILYN

Patients in the Thai hospital system rely on family and friends to care for them while they are undergoing treatment. Food and basic care must be provided by the family of the patient. This can be a huge task for parents of children with chronic conditions. Migrant parents on low incomes are often forced to borrow money at high rates of interest while they stop working to care for children in hospital. A large chunk of One Sky's welfare budget in 2019 was spent to keep some of these children alive. In this interview with Kadilyn, One Sky's social work technical adviser, our family support team leader, Aye, shares some of her experiences over the last year.

AYE, YOU WORK A LOT OF MEDICAL CASES THAT COME TO OUR FAMILY SUPPORT TEAM. WHY IS THIS SOMETHING YOU'RE PASSIONATE ABOUT?

Every child's life is important. Really! They are the future adults who make decisions about our world! I want children with health problems to have good treatment, and I want the parents to prioritize their children's health and their own health too. If they're healthy, they can go to school and participate fully in their families and communities. I want every child to have the chance to develop to the best they can!

WE'VE HAD A LOT OF REALLY INTENSE MEDICAL CASES THIS YEAR. WOULD YOU TELL ME ABOUT THEM BRIEFLY?

We're working with a young girl who was born with no anus and a boy who had been tortured and needed his leg amputated. This year there have been numerous children with holes in their hearts and other heart issues. We helped access treatment for a mom of four with breast cancer and a dad with stomach cancer. We work with children, teenagers, and adults who need various medicines for mental health and behavioral issues. We've sought treatment for children with autism and ADHD. Some of our cases had seizures this year and some live with epilepsy. We've helped financially with blood transfusions and development assessments. Additionally, we've had almost a dozen cases of children who are completely or partially blind.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE SPECIFIC BARRIERS THAT KEEP OUR CASES FROM ACCESSING CARE?

One of the most basic reasons is that parents know that they don't have money to pay. They love their child and know they're sick, but also know they can't possibly pay a hospital bill. As day laborers, spending the day at the hospital means they aren't able to work to provide for their other children and elderly grandparents.

Some people don't know their rights; they don't realize that the hospital is required to treat them or that their child has rights to Thailand's universal healthcare. Many families don't know about the opportunity to buy health insurance or simply don't have money to pay for health insurance.

Often times, a family doesn't have the language to navigate a hospital. We assist many families who don't speak Thai and some who do speak Thai but can't read and write.

Sometimes a family just doesn't understand the processes of the hospital. They don't understand why their child would need to see a specialist instead of just a regular doctor. In the end, their child gets lost in a pile of referral papers to bigger hospitals with more specialists and never receives treatment. In some cases, we need to advocate at the hospital that a patient needs additional care or a new assessment. When necessary we help parents to understand the benefits of modern medicine, as opposed to only using traditional medicine.

"As day laborers, spending the day at the hospital means they aren't able to work to provide for their other children and elderly grandparents".

AYE, YOU'VE BEEN TO A LOT OF DIFFERENT HOSPITALS THIS YEAR FOR SPECIALIST CASES, WHERE ALL HAVE YOU BEEN ?

We do have to travel a lot to treat more serious cases. We've been all over the country this year and also to Myanmar! This year I have been to two clinics at Three Pagodas Pass, and hospitals in Huey Malay, Sangkhlaburi, Thong Pha Phum, Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, and Bangkok. I also went to hospitals in Moulamein and Yangon in Myanmar. Other staff have been to more hospitals in Bangkok, Nakhon Pathom, Siriraj, and Chiang Mai.

YOU'RE REALLY GOOD AT PRIORITIZING. A LOT OF THESE MEDICAL CASES MAKE THE TOP OF YOUR PRIORITIES EVERY MONTH. WHY IS THAT?

We see many cases who would die without assistance. For example, when we met the young girl with no anus she was one year and four months old, but she only weighed five kilos. She couldn't sit up straight or breathe normally. She was very skinny but her stomach was large and very hard, as if it had rocks in it. When we saw her for the first time, we didn't know yet if this child could have a future. We were unsure if she had a month or even a week. Now, she has had a successful surgery and is gaining weight and learning to play! Another case from this year was a young girl with cancer. She had tumors on her leg and neck that were growing bigger and bigger. She was very skinny and her body was yellow. She has just finished chemotherapy and will be able to enroll in school this next year!

SPENDING SO MUCH TIME WITH OUR CASES ALLOWS US TO PROVIDE MORE THAN JUST MEDICAL SUPPORT. WOULD YOU TELL US ABOUT AN INSTANCE THAT YOU FELT YOUR TIME WITH THE CASE HAD AN IMPACT OUTSIDE OF JUST MEDICAL CARE?

The time we spend going to the hospital with children and their parents is an opportunity for so many things. It's very empowering for parents! They go from knowing nothing about the hospital system or the city to being able to go alone without One Sky's help. It has changed how some parents relate to their child. For example, one father didn't know what to do with his daughter's poor behavior. He was very harsh with her and often turned to violence to try to make her change. However, after he was able to understand that her behavior was caused by her IQ, brain development, and traumatic experiences, he has changed how he relates to her. He is much calmer and uses different logic to reason with her. I'm also thinking of a young girl with special needs. When we go to the hospital with her we're able to give her one on one attention. She's so much more independent now and even says many more words.



EDUCATION

This March (2020), 205 students will graduate from Sangkhlaburi high school, the highest number ever and an increase from 181 last year. The high school as a whole grew past 1500 students in 2019 and is now classified as a medium sized school meaning a larger budget will be provided by the government, currently there are not enough classrooms and teaching often takes place outside.

This year One Sky has provided 144 students with monthly scholarships covering transport and lunch costs. Some of these students and over 50 other students also received help to buy their school uniforms. The high school director fully recognizes One Sky's role in growing the school numbers and is very appreciative.

There is still a long way to go however as many children are still not able to remain in education or are forced to live in unregulated private children's homes in order to be able to go to school. We continue to search for funding to increase the number of students we can support.

If you would like to see a short film we made in 2019 about the lives of two of our scholarship students then please use this link (viewing time 5 mins 45 secs)
<http://bit.ly/oneskystudent1>

ENDING PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT IN SCHOOLS

This year we funded a major event for over 80 schools. In partnership with the education department we hosted 160 teachers and brought speakers from the special police team in Bangkok and senior officers from the department of education in Thailand.

The morning session was about the use of physical punishment in school. Despite being banned by the department of education for several years, physical punishment is still a daily occurrence in most Thai schools and it can be severe.

In the afternoon we focused on child protection and how to support children who have been abused at home and where to get help. We have had several significant referrals since the event.

The ending of physical punishment will be a long haul, but we have planted the seeds of change and will keep going. There will be a follow up event in 2020



A NEW DORMITORY AT THE HIGH SCHOOL

Sangkhlaburi is a remote rural area with only one high school. For children from isolated jungle villages it is impossible to travel between school and home every day. To continue their education, these children must choose between living in unregulated private children's homes or the school dormitory.

Unfortunately, the dormitory, like other parts of the school, is in a very poor state. With 104 students living there, it is also over crowded.

We can only hope that the government will eventually improve this facility, however in the meantime we have committed to supporting the school with a new building for 32 of the students. The building is progressing well, but so far, we have only raised half of the \$18,000 for the project.

Earlier in 2019 we successfully applied for some money for basic classroom improvements and equipment, all gratefully received by the school. There is so much potential within the school to develop the resources so that the students have the best possible chance for a quality education and we are keen to play a role in making this happen.

Some of those we have approached have rightly questioned whether building up the school resources should be paid for by the government.

I think the school has so many needs, for new classrooms, enough covered space for all students to eat lunch and for any kind of sporting facilities that we can only hope government funding for education in rural areas will increase.

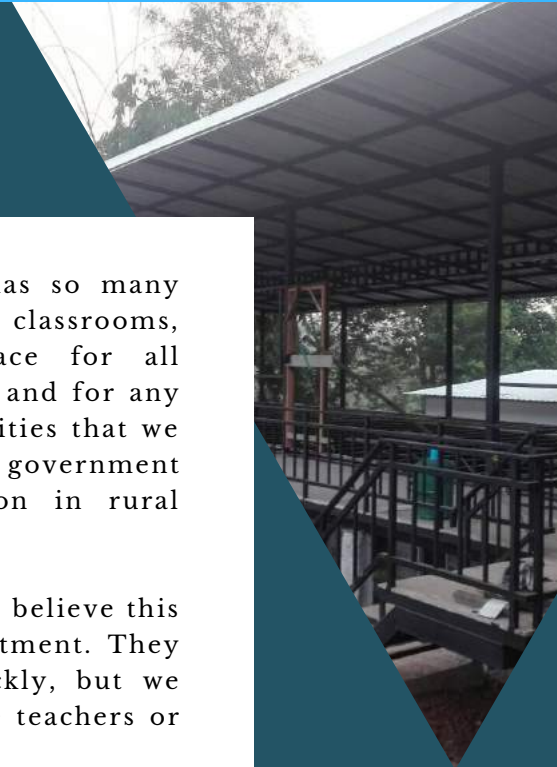
In the meantime, I do believe this is a sustainable investment. They need a building quickly, but we don't have to pay the teachers or the running costs.

From the beginning of One Sky we chose not to invest in NGO schools that rely totally on donor funds, instead we fought for the right of all children living in Thailand to attend Thai government school.

With that right now firmly established in Sangkhlaburi and with our scholarship project generating a steady increase in student numbers, it seems only fair that we seek ways to support those government schools to develop the resources they need.

By continuing to strengthen our relationship with the high school we aim to gain a say in the management of some aspects of the school.

We have just interviewed all of the children in the dormitory as part our UNICEF backed research project (see below) and if any of the children are living there because of family poverty rather than the geographical distance of their home from the school then we will be able to offer them a scholarship so that they can return to living at home.





HIGHER EDUCATION

We found two organisations offering university scholarships this year and supported grade 12 students to apply to the New Life Center in Chiang Mai and the Brackett Foundation.

In partnership with the high school we took 25 students to Chiang Mai for interviews and 11 of them were awarded university scholarships by the New Life Center. Of these students, five were current recipients of a One Sky scholarship (for high school).

These are life changing opportunities for higher education and we hope to find more support to enable more students from disadvantaged backgrounds to reach their full academic potential.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER

This year One Sky was able to recruit two native speaking English as a Foreign language teachers to join the English Department in the high school. The positive impact on the school and the community has been huge. This is a remote border town with a large migrant population. Native speaking English teachers is the realm of the super expensive international schools in Bangkok. Some local parents even see the opportunity to learn English from foreign volunteers as one of the reasons to give their children to a children's home.

With this project we wanted to give all children this opportunity by investing in the school system that is available to everyone. We spent our reserve money to make this project happen and it has been difficult to find funds for a second year meaning that we will likely reduce the project to one teacher in 2020 despite the school committing to covering some of the costs. Here, Jason and Sarah share their experiences, if you feel inspired by their words and have any thoughts on how we can keep this project going then please do contact us.

SARAH GRIFFITH

My experience volunteering with One Sky Foundation has been nothing short of life-changing. My time here will impact the work I do in the future, the message I spread about alternative care, and the way I interact with disenfranchised, vulnerable people.

As an English educator, I have spent years developing my teaching skills in the United States. I taught English in adult education programs, K-12 settings, and colleges. When I started this year-long journey with One Sky, I wanted to increase my intercultural skills and understand international school contexts. My goal was to develop personally and professionally so I can better relate to my future English students.

I am more than halfway through my time in Sangkhlaburi, and I can say, undoubtedly, I am a better global citizen and educator. I have learned about Thai culture and language acquisition in a way I would not have been able to without this opportunity. Working within Udomsiththisuksa school, I have observed international teaching styles and engaged with the administration of the school system. During my time, I have been able to work in collaboration with Thai English teachers who come from a range of backgrounds. We have shared our teaching methods and classroom management ideologies. I have gained greater insight by observing how Thai culture is intertwined with language. I'm extremely appreciative for this unique opportunity.

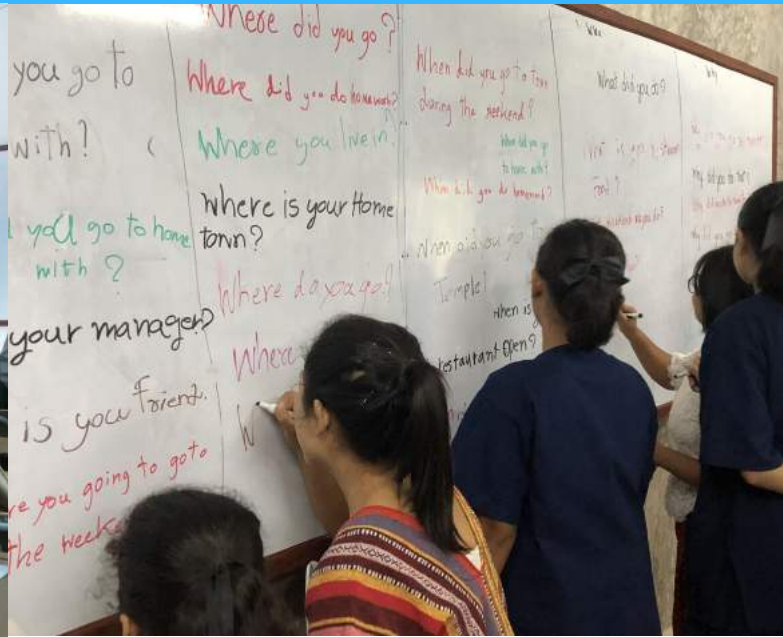


The best moments have been with the students, watching them transform into confident, independent learners. Even though they are beginners of English, they have begun to master valuable conversation skills in English.

During my first month, no student spoke to me outside of class. Now, I can barely take five steps through campus without having numerous students run up and greet me.

It's heart-warming to connect with students, and I will truly miss these moments. The experiences I've had with the One Sky staff, the school administration, and the students have positively influenced my outlook on alternative care and how an NGO can ethically serve within its community. The opportunity to integrate within the school system and expand the conversations about social services, family support, and education equality has been challenging but equally rewarding.

I sincerely hope this becomes a sustainable program as it benefits both the volunteer and the community at large.



JASON KNOOP

Sangkhlaburi holds many firsts for me. Stepping off the plane in Bangkok marked the first step into my first experience living in a country not my own. Seven hours and two mini buses later I traded the traffic and tall buildings of Bangkok for the rubber forests, banana trees, and waterfalls of mountainous Sangkhlaburi.

In this beautiful region I get to partner with amazing local staff in my first time teaching English. The staff are always kind as they answer my many questions and work hard to help me understand the ins and outs of working at a Thai school.

These firsts for me accompany firsts for One Sky and Udomsithsuksa Secondary School. One Sky's relationship with the school continues to open doors that may otherwise be closed. This new relationship includes:

- Partnering with teachers and the principal to end corporal punishment in the classroom
- Interviewing all students living in the school dormitory in a UNICEF backed survey
- Using native English teachers to increase local enrollment, which has, in turn, increased school funding and staff allowances
- Empowering low and middle income students, living at home with their families, to have the opportunity to learn English with expatriate teachers

I am thankful to both One Sky Foundation and Udomsithsuksa Secondary School for allowing me to partner in these many firsts. I hope these firsts will continue, that students' opportunities will increase, and that best practice in education and child protection will continue to be the focus and goal of our partnership.

CHILD PROTECTION WORK

in Sangkhlaburi

Thailand's 2003 Child Protection Act describes a committee at provincial and district levels that takes responsibility for child protection including prevention of abuse and responses when it does occur. There are very few district level committees in place across Thailand's 878 districts.

For several years we have been working to support the formation and training of the Sangkhlaburi committee. The group including hospital staff, police and teachers, has been working well together for a few years now and we are very close to obtaining the official authorization of the group.

This has been a long term and at times slow moving project, but we cannot underestimate the importance of finally putting in place the formal child protection mechanism that the law describes. Without this, child victims will always be left trying to negotiate their way through the system, instead of the system being ready to work for them.



THE WORLD STARTS WITH ME

One Sky's eight-week program for kindergarten children covering self-awareness, naming the private body parts and who and how to ask for help remains very popular. Teachers often comment that they did not know how to approach these subjects by themselves and many schools are very keen to welcome us back each year. In 2019 we ran the sessions at 11 schools, meeting 13 classes and 460 children.

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FAMILY SUPPORT AND CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER (FSCAC)

We provided emergency accommodation for 22 children at the FSCAC in 2019. This included sexual abuse, violence, severe neglect, medical emergencies and run-away children. In all but one case we were able to keep children with their families by working through problems and removing offenders through successful prosecution.

We worked for many months with a family where both parents have learning disabilities. They had lost their home and were sleeping rough around the town, their nine-year-old daughter was at high risk. We rented two houses for them but they were unable to manage and were evicted from both, repairs to these houses further dented our budget.

After more violence the mother and daughter moved into the FSCAC for a week and we were hopeful that we might be able to find them a new home together. But after a week the mother walked out and went back to her husband leaving their daughter behind.

We were finally left with no choice other than a formal removal of the daughter from her parents. Despite the violence and continual drinking there is genuine love for this girl from her parents and we all felt very sad. After the removal the parents lived on the office door step for several weeks and the whole team faced daily tears and shouting as the father' drinking further escalated.



The situation has calmed. The parents call in to see us most days and there is trust between us. We will continue to work with them, their daughter and the staff now caring for her to consider what level of contact with her parents will be most appropriate for her.

More happily, at the FSCAC this year have been the increasingly popular Mum power and teen girls' groups. Mum power brings together up to 20, mostly single, mums of all local ethnicities. Together they share their experiences and learn from and support each other. There have been some amazing discussions among the group and together they have shared openly about their lives and the challenges they face. The end of the year was marked with a day trip for a picnic by the river. So wonderful to see this group of women crying tears of joy as they played silly games and forgot about the challenges of their daily lives for just a moment.

KADILYN, SOCIAL WORK TECHNICAL ADVISER

I have been at One Sky Foundation since May, and I am still astounded by the work of One Sky's staff. They serve an incredible number of families on the most limited budget I have ever seen. Their efforts foster change in the lives of hundreds of families and young people.

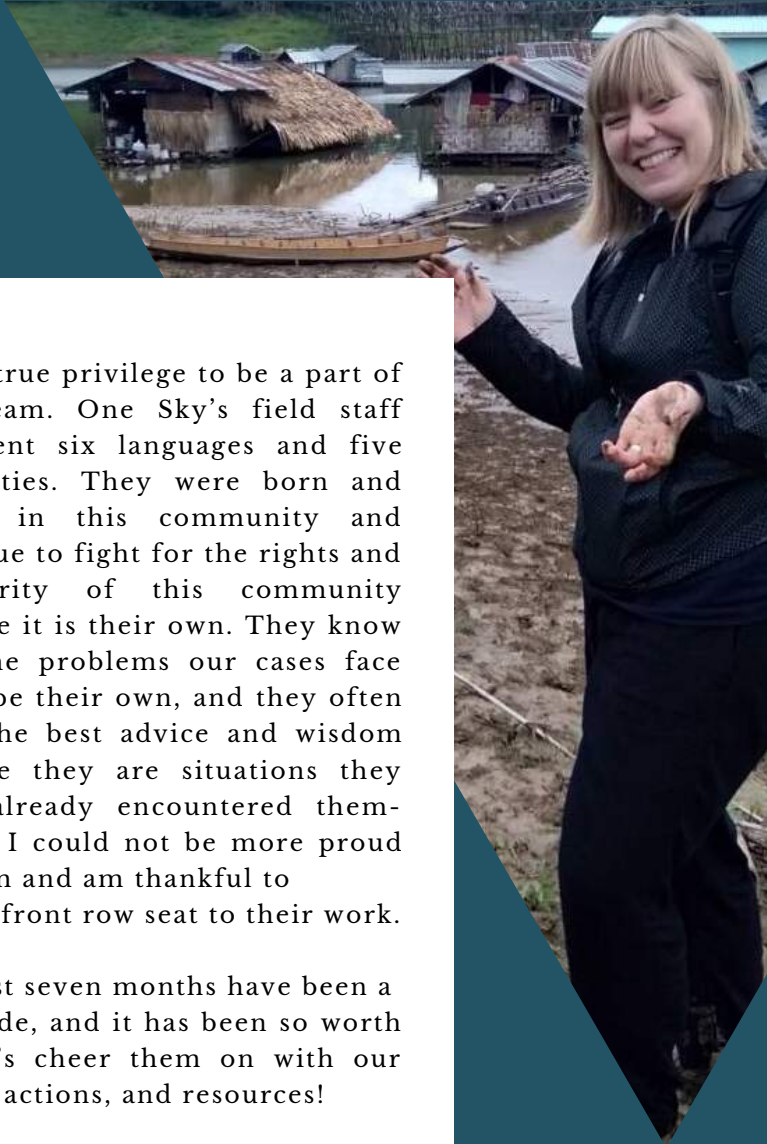
My job entails overseeing our 160 cases and ensuring best practice. That means I witness our team show up every day and continually seek creative solutions to problems born of lack of resources, citizenship, and safety. They do home assessments, offer scholarships, step in with emergency food welfare, translate at hospitals and clinics, create safe spaces for women and girls to just be, stand alongside young children as they prosecute their abusers, and advocate to government agencies on local and national levels. They take on the chaos of our clients' lives, organize it into manageable steps, and then walk alongside clients as they pursue a better world for them and their children.

It is a true privilege to be a part of this team. One Sky's field staff represent six languages and five ethnicities. They were born and raised in this community and continue to fight for the rights and prosperity of this community because it is their own. They know that the problems our cases face could be their own, and they often have the best advice and wisdom because they are situations they have already encountered themselves. I could not be more proud of them and am thankful to have a front row seat to their work.

The last seven months have been a wild ride, and it has been so worth it. Let's cheer them on with our words, actions, and resources!

Kadilyn Knief
Social Work Technical Advisor

"I am still astounded by the work of One Sky's staff. They serve an incredible number of families on the most limited budget I have ever seen."



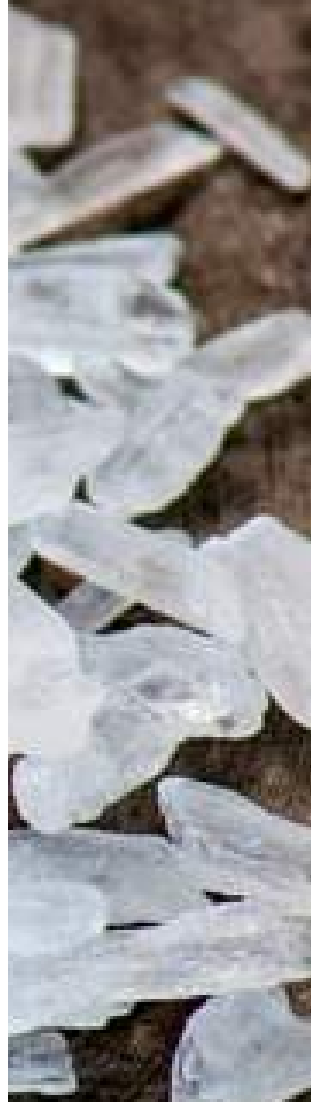
BOYS, DRUGS AND JAIL

The BBC recently ran an article exploring why girls are twice as likely as boys to obtain an A or B grade in GCSE French in the UK. Here in Sangkhlaburi many children and their parents speak languages other than Thai at home. It seems that here too, boys find it more difficult to obtain a second language. The Sangkhlaburi high school population is 75% girls with many boys having dropped out already. This is a tough environment for boys from migrant families who are often expected to take on the responsibilities of men from an early age.

Drugs are readily available and cheap, with crystal meth becoming established as the go to drug for many boys. During a visit to the provincial juvenile detention center last year we learned that of the 41 children incarcerated there, 11 were from Sangkhlaburi. This included 10 boys and the only girl at the center. We were astonished that in a province of nearly a million people, 25% of the children in detention came from our small town. All of the children were there for drug offences.

Since that visit we have been working together with the juvenile justice officers and One Sky has already provided support for 6 boys and one girl following their release. Two brothers who were unable to stop their drug use agreed to go to a detox and rehab project that we found in Chiang Mai, 13 hours away. It is costing us \$250 a month to keep them there, but the change in them has been astounding. We are committed to finding the money for the full four-year program.

Without intervention there is little doubt that the 12-year boy would be dead by now and his older brother back in jail for a third time. A year into their rehabilitation it is clear that both of these boys have so much to offer society.



DID YOU KNOW THAT ONE SKY HAS ITS OWN MASTER GROWER?

*Written By: Dr. Ash Kies
Psychologist Consultant to One Skyr*

Since June 2019, One Sky has been busy inspiring the community with a new initiative: home-based food production (HBFP). This involves teaching skills and providing resources to families to help them grow food or raise animals near their homes. This project is all thanks to long-time One Sky staff member and master grower, Franky, with whom I sat down to understand a little more about the innovative HBFP project.

HOW DID HBFP START?

Franky explained that the idea for HBFP came after he met with a family to assess their needs. He asked the family, “What is the most important thing for your family?” and they replied simply, “Food.” This was a very common answer among families.

Having studied agriculture in college, Franky realized he could help in an impactful and sustainable way, by empowering families to grow their own food. Now, 22 families participate in Franky’s HBFP initiative.

HOW DID HBFP WORK?

Franky first meets with a family to assess their needs. If interested in HBFP, Franky collaborates with the family to figure out what HBFP options would be best for them, including rice, sesame, roselle, papaya, pigs, chickens, and many vegetables and herbs like cucumber, long beans, pumpkin, chili, and cilantro.

In the early stages of helping a family with their HBFP plan, Franky helps to educate and inspire families by taking them to see the Patanaruk Foundation garden or to other family’s gardens.

Next, the family prepares the land and creates a place for the HBFP project. When Franky sees that adequate preparations have been made, he purchases supplies and then helps the family to carry out their specific HBFP plan.

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WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO THE FAMILY?

According to Franky, when families have their own reliable food source near to their home, the benefits are numerous. Many families live in rural areas, far away from food sources. With HBFP not only do the families save money on buying food but on travel as well. This money can be used for other needs such as school uniforms, house repairs, or healthcare.

Also, when families have food security, this helps them to feel accomplished, proud, and independent. This has a ripple effect. Franky says, “If families can support themselves, they will have fewer problems.”

In addition, HBFP is a way of bringing the whole family together—from children to grandparents—to bond in an empowering activity that teaches valuable life and work skills.

WHY IS HBFP IMPORTANT FOR THE COMMUNITY?

Franky explained that many families do not have the knowledge, skills, or resources to do HBFP at first, but that doesn't mean they can't do it. They simply learn from and rely on their neighbors and community for these things, which creates community harmony and togetherness. It is important for me and for One Sky that we help people become as independent as possible and able to help others so that one day they don't need our help. Further, HBFP strives to use local seeds to increase community pride and economy.

Also, HBFP is a healthier option for the community and generations to come because Franky's methods are GMO-free and chemical-free.



WHAT HAVE BEEN THE BIGGEST SUCCESSES SO FAR?

Franky proudly shared, “One family started with 5 chickens, and in 6 months they had 20 chickens. Now they have enough food, and if they have extra, they can sell some for profit.”



WHAT HAVE BEEN THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES SO FAR?

As with any new project, challenges occur. Franky stated that sometimes plants don't survive or livestock become sick, which can be stressful for him and the family. However, he has a determined and solution-focused attitude. For example, he has recently been collaborating with the Thai government for vaccinating and improving the development of livestock.

WHAT DO YOU MOST WANT PEOPLE TO KNOW ABOUT HBFP?

Franky cheerfully told me, “If everyone starts with a small thing, like a garden or a tree, in the future everywhere will be green. Then, we will have many trees and plants. We will have good air and a good life. This is my dream.”

CARE REFORM IN THAILAND

Over the last seven years One Sky has grown and matured. We have learned more about children's rights and the mechanisms to enable those rights from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, country level policy and implementation at the local level. We have a detailed understanding of the extent of the gap between the agreed international vision of child rights set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the reality on the ground in rural Thailand. We are also increasingly aware of the challenges facing those of us who wish to close that gap.

We have come a long way and some might say we punch above our weight for a small foundation based in a remote corner of Thailand. There remains a mountain to climb, but we feel positive that change is possible. Slowly the key ingredients needed for care reform in Thailand are coming together. We are a small wheel in a vast and complex machine, but sometimes big wheels don't turn without small cogs getting them started and connecting them. In this section we will share about the progress we have made and the exciting developments coming in 2020.

CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD COALITION THAILAND (CRCCT)

Only by joining together with others can we strengthen our voice and hope to be a catalyst for change. Membership of the CRC coalition has been essential for One Sky's advocacy work. The coalition was started with funding from the Swedish Development Agency (SIDA) and now faces an uncertain future as that funding has come to an end. However, of the six thematic groups working under the coalition banner, the Alternative Care Working Group has formed a strong bond and we are committed to continue working together for care reform in Thailand. No single person or organisation can achieve the changes we hope for by themselves, yet together we present a formidably skilled and knowledgeable team recognized by and working in partnership with the Thai government.



**Alternative Care
Thailand**



UNICEF BACKED RESEARCH

In 2014 we gained a \$2,000 grant from the Thai government to conduct research and we managed to interview 605 children living in private children's homes in Sangkhlaburi. The research provided confirmation that 90% of the children had at least one living parent and that poverty was the main reason they lived in a children's home. In 2018 we were approached by UNICEF Thailand and asked if we would like to repeat the research with strong methodology and the backing of UNICEF and the Department for Children and Youth. Of course, we said yes!

In 2019 the research project has finally started. We are very lucky to have such a strong team including our CRC coalition partner, Dr Gift from Mahidol University.

Our methodology has been supervised by a professor at Mahidol and we have been certified by the ethical research committee. Interviews with around 1,000 children are currently underway with a great research team made of up of local high school teachers who have received specialist training.

In 2015 it was easy to dismiss us as a young and small NGO who had done some research on a shoe string and had high expectations about changing the system of care for children in Thailand.

With this new research, things feel very different. We are very optimistic that the findings of the research will start a new conversation about how the necessity principle of the United Nations 2009 Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children can be implemented in Thailand.

In a nutshell, this is about how decisions are made for the separation of children from their biological parents. Currently hundreds of unregistered private children's homes in Thailand are involved in such separations with no government oversight or minimum standards. Our hope is to gain government backing for a "gate keeping" pilot project whereby in Sangkhlaburi an official child protection group is appointed and becomes the decision maker for all child separation. This would mean no children's home can take in a new child without permission from this gate keeping committee. This will be the first time this has been tried in Thailand and will play a vital role in the care reform process we hope to influence at the national level.

FOSTER CARE IN SANGKHLABURI

With training and support from two of our partner organisations from the CRC coalition we will begin a foster care project in 2020. We believe that when it is necessary to separate children from their biological parents then a family based alternative care option such as kinship care or foster care is always more desirable than a large-scale children's home or institution. This ranking of desirability is sometimes called the continuum of care, with children's homes and other institutional type care being the very last option when all other options have been exhausted.



What happens to children whose parents can't care for them?

NEW INFORMATION WEBSITE

www.alternativecarethailand.org

Unlike most of its neighbours, Thailand has never been colonized. Thailand has an extensive and proud government infrastructure. While this is a strength, it has also meant that the influence of the United Nations and major international NGO's has been less than in some other countries. Awareness and understanding of the Convention on the Rights of the Child remains generally low despite Thailand's ratification in 1989. We are yet to see any significant response to the 2009 Guidelines for the Alternative Care of children, with many government staff involved in Alternative Care still unaware of the guidelines or lacking understanding of its core principles.

In response to this in 2019 we launched a new website, Alternative Care Thailand where we have gathered and presented all of the key documents, research and examples of good practice that are relevant to Thailand. The site is available in both Thai and English languages. We wanted to be sure that for any Thai person who does not read English, all the information they could need to understand about best practice in Alternative Care would be readily available to them.



2020 ONE SKY CHIANG MAI OFFICE



It is highly likely that Chiang Mai province has a higher number of private children's homes per capita than any other similar sized population in the world. Yet there is no war, no HIV epidemic and Thailand's economy has made huge steps in the last twenty years, so why does a population of about one million need hundreds of children's homes? It has become increasingly clear that in order to increase our influence in the care reform process for Thailand we need to take what we have learned in Sangkhlaburi to the heart of the problem. In 2020 we will open a One Sky office in Chiang Mai. We will not be providing direct support to children and families in Chiang Mai, rather we will be surveying and documenting the extent of the private children's home industry so that we can better inform the care reform process that will eventually bring about regulations that are in line with the UN Guidelines.

Another exciting project for 2020 is the plan to join with the UK embassy to co-host a high-level conference with all the major embassies in Bangkok alongside senior Thai government officials. We hope to agree on a media campaign to raise awareness of the dangers of so called "orphanage tourism". Volunteering in overseas orphanages has become very popular and is now a multi-million-dollar industry. Many volunteers do not know that most of the children have parents or that they could be living at home with just a little help. It is now internationally recognized that volunteers and the money they bring are often fueling the unnecessary separation of children from their parents. Even with the best of intention many volunteers are doing more harm than good.

Thailand is a great country to visit and also has hundreds of private children's homes soliciting for volunteers. In 2020 we hope to ensure that all of these volunteers are making an informed decision about the best way they can use their money and time to help children.



FINANCE

In 2019 One Sky spent a total of \$205,000 (around £160,000) and we supported over 700 children. We scraped into 2020 with just a few thousand dollars in the bank, the lowest balance since we started and a cautionary warning not to over stretch ourselves in our hunger to help children and to push for care reform.

We have seen a jump in our welfare budget and the number of scholarships continues to increase. We have become more skillful in targeted support for single parent families and kinship care families made possible by additional money. We are now consistently spending between \$5,000 to \$6000 per month on welfare costs, pushing this element of the total One Sky budget from around 25% to past 30%. Salaries remain at 50% of the total budget, with the remainder covering running costs such as rent and fuel.

Based on the average amount spent on each child per month we know that the 18 children's homes in Sangkhlaburi are collectively spending four times as much as One Sky each year to take care of 650 children. We sometimes dream of being able to control all of this money. For sure we would need a small specialist children's home for a few years to come until foster care becomes established on a big enough scale. But imagine what we could achieve in the community with five times as many staff, five times as many scholarships, five family support centers and so on. This is the so-called transition in funding that international campaigners like JK Rowling are hoping for. We can only hope that this change will come soon.

As always, we are very grateful to the generous support and encouragement, we receive from so many people, without you none of our work would be possible.