Artisan Highlight

From a life of timidity to one of joy and confidence.

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Program Overview

2018

- Village church-based community outreach (10%)
- Advocacy and promotion (13%)
- Church leader support program (8%)
- Independent artisan support (13%)
- Outreach through vocational skills training and income generation project (46%)
- Special outreach and visitation program (10%)

Additional Features:
- Outreach and visitation program
- Independent artisan support
- Advocacy and promotion
- Church leader support program
- Special outreach and visitation program
- Village church-based community outreach
- Outreach through vocational skills training and income generation project
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Dear Thai Village Friends,

At Thai Village we marvel at all the people who come to our doorstep looking for work. The women and men who walk into our training center represent a cross section of humanity that the world does not always esteem: their income levels are not impressive; their social statuses are not the aim of the majority; their homes are not the kind you find in magazines or social media posts. But we marvel at each one of them because they are incredible – with individual histories and unique gifts that make them come alive.

One thing that we see time and again is that work is so important. It’s important for the single mom struggling to make ends meet. It’s important for the man who is facing mental health issues. It’s important for the young woman who was trafficked as a teenager and still trying to get her life back on track. It’s important for the almost-retired-60-something who still has energy, experience, and life to share. It’s not just the income that work provides, but the community.

We strongly believe that work is a way that gifts can be discovered and used to provide for one’s own family and needs; but the longer we have been doing this work, we have come to believe that each person’s gifts are not fully recognized until they are unveiled in community. It’s actually the process of working together that helps discover and celebrate an individual’s place in community that would remain unrevealed by working alone.

After years of doing this work, we can safely say that work is not easy. The heartbreak we see each week is enough to make us quit. But (after years of doing this work) we can also say that this was a very good year. We were introduced to some incredible, eccentric, diverse human beings throughout the year, each of whom joined our community in some way. We worked together to design, train, and produce crafts. We prayed together, ate together, cried and laughed together.

It wasn’t a good year because everything ran smoothly. In fact, we had plenty of speed bumps (which we won’t get into here). It wasn’t a good year because everyone was doing fine. The truth is things are not always fine and that life’s struggles are raw and real in this line of work, as in every line. But... It was a good year because we had a “front row seat” to the things that God was and is doing through Thai Village. We saw fruit. Fruit from God. Fruit of God.

We are excited to share this year’s annual report with you. These stories are a testimony of God’s power to grow fruit in the time and way He sees fit, and the privilege He gives us to get to see it.

Thank you,

Liz Meister and Katie Lehman
2018 sales and display venues

- Amazing Grace, Panama City, FL
- St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Columbus, OH
- International Fair Trade Women's Conference, Cincinnati, OH
- Pathways to Christ Retreat, Oshkosh, WI
- Today's Christian Women's Retreat, Portico, MI
- Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church, Nicollet, MN
- Reformation Lutheran Church, Wildomar, CA
- Living Hope Lutheran Church, Wildomar, CA
- King of Prussia, PA
- Twin City Bible Baptist, Marion, WI
- Rolling Hill, MI
- Lake Town, OH
- Bethel Lutheran Church, Menasha, WI
- LWMS National Convention, Green Bay, WI
- WEIS International Youth Rally, Bowling Green, OH
- Eternal Rock Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, CO
- Hilltop Lutheran, Green, WI
- Indianapolis Open House, Houston, TX
- Open Matthew, Houston, TX
- Abiding Word Lutheran Church, Houston, TX
- Christ the Lord Lutheran Church, Houston, TX
- Printers Point Lutheran Church, Houston, TX
- Open House, Appleton, WI
- Faith Lutheran Church, Appleton, WI
- Cross Lutheran Church, Howard, WI
- Mount Calvary, Waukesha, WI
- Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Wildomar, CA
- Cross Lutheran Church, Madison, WI
- ELIC of Bangkok, Bangkok, Thailand
- Chiang Mai Café, Chiang Mai, Thailand
- The Barn Christmas Home Show, Amersham, UK
- Dulwich Open House, London, UK
- Worthing, UK
- Open House, Worthing, UK
- Ethical Gifts, Worthing, UK
- AZ
- Empower, Melbourne, Australia
- Artisan's Village, Albuquerque, NM
- Impact Exchange, Palham, The Netherlands
- Festival of Hope, Gig, Mai, Thailand
- ISO51 Farmer's Market, City Life Garden Fair, Chiang Mai, Thailand
- ISDSI Christmas Fair, Chiang Mai, Thailand
- Thai Team, Chiang Mai, Thailand
- International School John the Baptist, Findon, UK
- The Barn Christmas Home Show, Ames, IA
- Dunwich Open House, New Life Church, Worthing, UK
- Home Group, Shopping Fair, Oxford, UK
- Garana, Phoenix, Thailand
- With Love, Redley, CA
- Red Tas, AL
- International Blessings, Hollister, MO
- The Johnson City, TN
- For Dignity, Blackburn, Australia
- Wood, Kent, UK
- The Open Suitcase, Rapid City, SD
- Yobel Market, Colorado Springs, CO
- Women Color of Heat, Atlanta, GA
- Discover Website, Harbor, WA
- Pankesum Trading Company, Chiang Mai, Thailand
- Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, WI
- Middletown, OH
- Heritage Craft and Trade, Bangkok, Thailand
- Juniper Tree, Thailand
- Good Morning Chiang Mai, Thailand
- Echo Thai Team, Mjung's, Randolph, WI

A ll of you make this work possible with your supportive purchases, donations, and prayers! By hosting a display or purchasing products, you have equipped people in our community with ongoing dignified work, and helped us to provide an accepting environment for our artisans. By donating, you have allowed Thai Village to grow our programs and our impact in ways that we couldn't do without you. By praying, you have joined voices with us, helping us to seek God's guidance and direction. These proceeds and gifts have gone to support Bible education and self-sustainability initiatives throughout the year and Christian outreach in partnership with Thai churches across Northern Thailand. Thank you!
Thanksgiving celebration at Promise Church

Meet Nat

Day to day, it does not usually feel like we are making an impact in the lives of others. One step forward, two or more steps back is more often what we feel. But when we look back over time, we are amazed at the impact that being in a community over time has brought about. We give glory and thanks to God for working in the hearts and minds of those in our midst, and for giving us the gift of getting to watch his work.

This year, a new artisan named Nat came into our group after a traumatic year of losing her husband to suicide. Alone, feeling shame from her community, not able to find a way out and without a job, she asked her friend, a Thai Village staff member, if she could help her find work in Chiang Mai. Her friend introduced her to Thai Village for training as a seamstress. Although she did not have a strong background in sewing, Nat was a quick and highly motivated learner. After a month trial, Thai Village hired her to be a full-time seamstress.

Not only was Nat a quick learner in sewing, she was spiritually hungry to learn about God’s Word and the hope that she saw in this new community. She began attending weekly Bible studies at Thai Village, worship on Sundays, and evening Bible study classes with the local pastor. In September, she was baptized at Promise Lutheran Church. Her transformation from a life of timidity to one of joy, confidence, and eagerness to grow has amazed everyone around her.

When we asked Nat how her life has changed since she met Jesus this year, she said, “I think God has done a miracle in my life. Before, my community made me feel terrible for what had happened to me and my family. I was overwhelmed in the darkness and I thought I could get myself out, but I couldn’t. I felt so guilty but I could do nothing to change it. Since I met God, everything has changed. Yes, outer things have changed like I have a good work environment and a new community, but I’m changed on the inside. I know that God loves me and He forgives me, and all of my past. I feel free, even if my old community doesn’t understand me. I want everyone to know, we all need someone to rely on in times of trouble – God is the One we can rely on.”

Nat and her two children now live in Chiang Mai
We eat together, laugh together, and encourage each other with the hope of the Gospel.

In all of our activities and evaluation, we have heard a recurring theme, loud and clear: community time together is important. This year, we increased our efforts to spend time with artisans, focusing on home visits, community events, and community meals.

While people bond over songs, food, and games, these events also increase opportunities to talk and share with each other. As a community, we eat together, laugh together, and encourage each other with the hope of the Gospel. And as a team, we are more able to see the real life situations that people are in, hear about problems, give encouragement, express interest in each other’s lives, and strengthen relationships with artisans.

One leader reported that after a party at his location, the students who previously had not come to

“Why Do We Have Parties?”

“We eat together, laugh together, and encourage each other with the hope of the Gospel.”
Church have started coming to church on Sundays. They live in a nearby dorm, and now make up the core group of students that attend and even help with the worship services.

At another party, the trainee who had moved on to another job and seemingly out of our community returned for the event, and at the end announced she wanted to learn more about Christianity. Since then, she has become a believer and was baptized in September. She celebrated this past Christmas for the first time knowing that it wasn’t just about fun games and presents, but about Immanuel coming to the world for her.

We are humbled by the breadth and depth of what God has done in the lives of people in our community through something as joyful as parties!

The Making of the Paper Nativity

Often our first point of contact with people in our community is through their desire for extra income to support themselves and their families. Many times, they stay through the training process and become regular artisans receiving income generation projects. Sometimes, they stay for a short time or work only during their time of need. Regardless, we have come to appreciate the process through which artisans are connected to work through our Thai Village community. And what a process it is!

Every year, our design team uses their creativity to come up with product designs that are marketable and also something our trainees can make. This year, one new product in particular was designed intentionally for people who cannot sew, so that they could also have steady work.

This mulberry paper nativity set uses simple materials of local mulberry paper and glue, yet, is labor-intensive, as each ornament requires hand cutting, gluing and painting.

When we stop and consider all of the steps that go into making a new product, many community members can play a role: designing, sourcing materials, preparing, training, managing, and quality controlling. This product alone provided skills training, income generation, and an uplifting community for students, moms, teenagers, and those who needed it during a particular time of their life.
Many volunteers, staff, and artisans worked together to help trace hundreds of animal and people shapes. These shapes make up the base of the figurines.

During term break, a group of teenagers from the community needed work so we gave them the task of cutting out the hundreds of cardboard shapes.

As the cardboard figurines took shape, the colorful and textured mulberry paper was then glued onto the stiff cardboard and then cut out during Friday community craft day.

Many artisans helped to cut and glue the small pieces of mulberry paper to the different figurines. Some came from as far as 5 hours away to pick up work.

The final stage of the ornament figurine making included the gluing of the smallest pieces of paper and then painting on top of them. Only a few delicate artisan hands did the finishing paint touches.

The manger-styled storage folders involved cutting thicker pieces of paper, gluing, and then creating sections for the small figurines to fit in.
Sometimes craft work is not for everyone, even those who have trained with Thai Village. One woman named Faa had previously been a part of Thai Village vocational trainings, but in the end she did not enjoy sewing and found another job that was a better fit for her. She was somewhat disappointed in herself but she remained a part of our community and was especially excited to join in the community artisan parties, even though she wasn’t an artisan.

In February, Thai Village and Promise Church hosted a Valentine’s Day outreach party in an artisan’s neighborhood which Faa attended. The event included dinner, games, and sharing of the Gospel message. Immediately after the event Faa came up to Thai Village staff and said, “I think I’m interested in becoming a Christian.” We invited her to learn more and to come to church, and she began regularly attending Sunday worship services. She began Bible information classes and in September, Faa was baptized along with her son.

What once looked like an unsuccessful vocational training turned out to produce more fruit than we ever imagined!
As a fair trade artisan organization, most of our energies are spent in vocational training and income generation projects at Thai Village; put simply, in helping people to produce crafts. However, this is not all that we do. Throughout 2018 we spent 33% of our program support in working with local ministries in Bible training and Christian outreach efforts. We are proud to come alongside these local leaders.

Outreach

In 2018, we helped fund nine outreach events in partnership with local church leaders, including food, games, travel, and activities. In addition, we support two local leaders with stipends to supplement their ministries.

Bible Training

We partner with Aroma Lanna Ministries and local churches to provide additional Bible training for those who are interested in higher and ongoing biblical education. In 2018, two individuals started formal higher education degrees partially funded by Thai Village.

Bible Study

Thai Village hosts weekly Bible studies during Friday community craft day. This provides a regular opportunity to partner with the local church and invite new community members to join in study and activities together.

Stewardship

We provide financial planning and stewardship seminars for our regular artisans. In 2018, we added more full time artisans to our matched savings program that allowed multiple families to buy their first vehicles and homes this year.
2018 by the numbers

- 29 Vocational Trainings
- 32 New Products
- 27 Trainees (12 new this year)
- 4 Bible Trainings
- 9 Outreach Events
- 17 Home Visits
What do you do when someone asks you for money? As a rule at Thai Village, we try to avoid giving handouts. Our goal is to train people to develop a skill, to build them up, so that they can have more opportunities as they move into their future. We provide training paired with income generation projects so that they have a way to get back on their feet. Yet, it’s hard to say no to someone when they ask you for money.

We first met Mary* a few years ago at a time when she was very eager to receive supplementary income generation projects from Thai Village, as she was pregnant with her first child and didn’t have a job.

After she gave birth to her son, she received ongoing training and income generation projects from Thai Village before she got a stable full-time job elsewhere. We didn’t hear from her for some time until this year, when she came into TVI distraught and asking for money. It was clear that she had come into some troubles but we weren’t sure what was really going on in her life.

We called a managers meeting with five local managers and discussed among ourselves what they thought was the best way to help Mary. A variety of ideas were exchanged. Some wanted to give her money, some wanted more information, some wanted to find her a job elsewhere where she could immediately earn income.

The conversation was not easy and the way forward was not clear. After prayer, we decided to schedule a visit with Mary. We wanted to learn more about her circumstances, to see her living situation, and to try and understand what was going on and how we could help her. While the way forward seemed unclear at first, God led us to learn more and help her find a solution that did not involve a handout.
We learned that Mary was recently forced to leave her old job, and that she had tried to find a job but no one would accept her. Her husband had just been put in jail. That week she had gotten into a fight with her mom, who took her son back to her home village. She was suddenly unable to pay for rent and she couldn’t take care of her son. In addition, Mary was pregnant and preparing to have another child and wasn’t sure if she’d be able to have work to take care of her growing family.

As we listened, we talked with Mary about the issues she had with her mother and with her landlord. As we learned more, we were able to cater a Thai Village training project just for her, with a special payment plan so that she could begin to pay her rent again. We prayed with her for her circumstances and for her future.

The next day, Mary started coming into Thai Village every day, learning how to use a sewing machine, and learning how to make a specific product. While she learned to sew, she was paid by the day for her work and began paying off her debts. After she had mastered the designs, Mary was able to buy her own sewing machine, work from home, and come in once a week to be paid for her work. By the end of the year, Mary was one of the highest earning Thai Village artisans that was paid by the piece, due to her hardworking persistence and determination to do her part to provide for her family.

*Name has been changed for privacy purposes*
This year we added volunteers, new full-time staff, and more artisans. The programs for vocational training and outreach activities have been growing steadily as well. Because of all this growth, we are finding that we are more and more cramped for space.

Our current building handles drop-by visitors, shoppers, vocational trainings, Sunday worship services, special events, weekly Bible classes, teams visiting from other countries, Friday worship, administrative paperwork, raw materials storage, sewing machines, product storage, community meals, and more. Often a few of these things are going on simultaneously. Needless to say, we are outgrowing our space! It is our desire to continue to grow as an organization and serve more people, if it’s God’s will. This will require a bigger space and we are praying now about the possibility of buying land and building.

We are envisioning that this space could include a new training center, an activities and community area with a playground, exercise equipment, and a community garden. Ideally, there would also be enough space to build a new church building to continue our partnership with Promise Lutheran Church. This would all be done in a spacious area on the south side of Chiang Mai. We have started researching what needs to be done legally and financially in order for this vision to become a reality. While we do not know the exact details yet, we would like to invite you to join us in prayer for this vision.

Pray for:

1. Wisdom and discernment as we navigate complex cultural and legal dynamics as we grow
2. God to guide us to the right space in His time for the work He wants to accomplish, for His glory
3. Increased faith and trust in God for each staff member through the process
4. God to guide us to find funding and support for the vision
Thai Village Inc (TVI) is a registered 501(c)3 nonprofit that exists to provide vocational training and income generating work for the low income population in Northern Thailand. We produce a large variety of unique handmade jewelry, personal accessories, stationery, and home decor. Products are available for sale in Thailand and the USA. We seek to develop long-term Christian relationships with artisans, while also connecting them to Christians and the opportunity to hear the Gospel through partnership with the WELS Lutheran church in Thailand.