

The Ayui Foundation is a non-denominational, non-government organisation that provides a home environment, educational opportunities and future pathways for disadvantaged hill tribe young people.



Ayui

September 2007

From the Director

The past two months saw many things happen at Baan Ayui. The boys dorm was built within a week, and they were glad to move into their traditional Akha style abode. In the end it proved too difficult to coordinate a date for all the boys' fathers to come down from their villages to build it, so we hired a group of Akha men and woman from a nearby village.



FOUNDATION



Our New Boy's Dorm

Our boys, like most Akha men, are great with wood, and built a doghouse for Anyi (our puppy) out of bamboo and wood. On their own initiative, they also built a shoe rack and corner shelves for their dorm from leftover wood. Three of our boys went back to their villages for a weekend to join in the traditional Akha Swing Ceremony, held every August in villages. They returned bearing traditional rice-cakes and vegetables from home.



We had seven visitors to the hostel, from Australia, New Zealand and the US, and every one who came made some kind of contribution towards Baan Ayui and enjoyed interacting with our young people. Plus, we went on our first field trip, which was both educational and just plain FUN!!



Group Discussion Topics

Every Sunday, before our weekly house meeting, the Director facilitates a Group Discussion. This is an open forum with our young people on a particular topic relevant to their lives, to educate, gauge their level of knowledge and explore ideas together. The topic over the last two months was ‘My Identity and My Culture.’

This started off with everyone sharing stories from their lives before they came to live at Baan Ayui. I learned some new things about everyone, for example, one girl’s father was a drug dealer and he was shot and killed by police in front of her when she was 12; only two out of our group of eleven once studied the written Akha language; two of our kids walked through the jungle under cover of darkness with relatives, when they were little, to escape the Burmese soldiers who would constantly raid their village to take livestock and money (their parents followed later); and one girl’s mother (now re-married in Burma) took her term school fees and gambled them away so she couldn’t go to school that year.

For another session, the Board’s vice-president, Chatree Rungsriskhit, an impressive young Akha man, gave a talk about his background. Chatree also attended the Sahasart Suksa School (where our kids are studying) and grew up in hostels. He is a good role model, as he is a proud Akha man who took his education seriously. He is also a certified guide and has just completed a law degree – both of which he achieved while working in community development.



We then started talking about the Akha culture, which was the reason behind our field trip to the Hilltribe Museum. We watched a documentary on all the main hilltribes in Thailand, (most of our kids don’t know much about the other hilltribes) and learnt that many of the groups share similar problems.

For the final discussion, we went through a list of all the problems faced by the Akha today, and factors that are causing the traditional culture to slowly disappear. These included: limited land rights for farming, lack of citizenship, missionaries, TV, the trade-off between learning traditional knowledge passed down by their elders and the necessity of entering the Thai education system, lack of Thai language skills, being ‘looked down on’ by Thais (leading to low self-confidence and lack of pride in their culture) and the drug trade. For an excellent overview of these problems, read the ‘Problem Web’ written by my friend Jonathon Morris at www.hilltribe.org website.

During all the discussions, I tried to remind our young people

that theirs was once a proud people who produced everything they consumed themselves from the forest.

They were completely self-sufficient.

That their parents’ generation was so different from theirs,

and that they should try & remember all the traditional ways their parents taught them because

a person’s culture – their roots - is what gives a person their identity

so they should try to hold onto it for as long as possible.

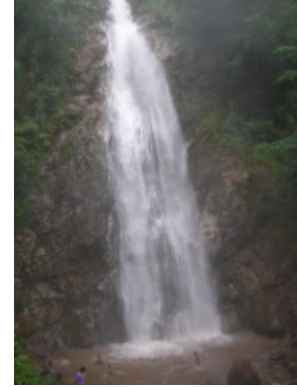
Our Field Trip

August 11-13 was a long weekend for Mother's Day (the Queen of Thailand's birthday) so, to tie in with the Discussion Group topic, we started off our field trip at the Hilltribe Museum. We watched the very informative documentary on the six main Thai hilltribes, then looked around at the various objects on display. The kids were asked some questions (partly to test their knowledge): What is this? What is it used for? Does your village still use them? I'm proud to report that they had an answer for everything, including the silversmith's bellows, the bamboo bird-traps, the opium pod scrapers, and the wooden bicycle (yes, a bike made from wood).



Then we piled back into our rented pick-up truck taxi and drove out to the majestic Khun Korn Waterfall – the highest waterfall in Chiang Rai at 72 metres. We laid out a mat by the river, had a picnic lunch, and enjoyed being in the forest. Then we trekked through the National Park up to the actual waterfall, with the boys pointing out edible plants along the way.

*You should have heard
their whoops of delight
and awe when the kids
reached the waterfall.*



After a good swim, the kids asked to visit Wat Rong Khun temple, the white temple and ongoing art project of one of Thailand's national artists, which was on the way home. We admired the beautiful murals painted on the temple walls and it was the first time the kids had ever entered a temple.



A big thank you to Nancy Sandilands and Coro Daniel from New Zealand, who dropped in to meet with the kids and learn about the work of the Foundation.

After learning of our planned field trip, they donated B1,500 which covered our expenses for the entire day including cost of transportation, our wonderful outdoor picnic lunch and dinner. It was a day we won't forget anytime soon.

Citizenship and other Hilltribe Issues

- ✓ Buyer went back to her village District Office to get her photo taken for her Thai citizenship card that she will go back to pick up in the first week of September.
- ✓ On August 18, a National Referendum was held in Thailand, so our housemother Noi had to go back and vote in her village. She was very excited to be involved in the democratic process and use her right to vote as a Thai citizen, especially since she had learnt all about the new Constitution in her Non-formal Education School class.
- ✓ Aju's father was arrested after a random urine test (yes, these are still carried out by police) showed traces of opium. His mother came to tell Aju, and said that his father had stomach pains the previous night and had swallowed a tiny ball of opium to ease the pain, as opium (morphine) is traditionally used for its medicinal purposes. He had to borrow B20,000 for bail and is now in debt for doing something that the Akha have been doing since the beginning of time.

Future Plans

We plan to start growing straw mushrooms at the hostel. Three of our young people have cultivated mushrooms before so they will be in charge of this activity and will teach the others. A cultivation shed will have to be built which will be the main cost. The objectives for growing mushrooms are: to teach an income-generating skill, to eat homegrown mushrooms, and to sell the mushrooms at the local market to raise some income (which is why we chose the most expensive mushrooms).

Mother's Day

During another Discussion Group session on Mother's Day, I asked everyone to reflect on the kind of lives their mothers had, and the changes they've seen. Most of their Mum's had a Grade 3 level education, if any. Their mother's generation woke every morning at dawn to pound rice and light the cooking fire. They spun their own cotton and sewed their own clothes. They also worked alongside their fathers in the fields. We thought of things they use that their mothers didn't have: soap (used a foaming herb), toothbrush (used fingers rubbed with salt or charcoal), sanitary pads (used pieces of cloth), mobile phone (walked to another village for news), clocks (used the sun), lighters (used flint stones or blew on ashes), vehicles (walked the mountains), bathrooms (went in the forest), electricity (candles), pots and pans (used bamboo, wood or leaves), and TV (sang and danced for entertainment). We talked about how their mother's generation was vastly different from theirs, and the need to be empathic towards, instead of embarrassed by, their mothers, and that they now have both opportunities and risks that their mothers didn't have.



Health Issues

- We received a donation from a dentist in Australia and it was decided it would be fitting to use those funds to get dental check-ups. The donation covered all the dental work that was needed: 5 extractions and 7 fillings.

Yohan, our 6-year old, had two of his baby teeth fall out. According to Akha culture, he says, he has to throw his baby teeth onto the roof of the house



while saying: "Since that was a small tooth, I wish that the new tooth be as big and strong as a hoe."

- Suchart and Acheu have had separate ear problems. Acheu's ear started bleeding, and he says he has had the problem on and off for the last four years but it was never treated. The surprised doctor says it is now too late to fix his slight hearing loss problem. He also had an infection in the other ear that has cleared up. Suchart has a tiny hole in his ear drum that is still being treated.

Our Wonderful Visitors....

- Ajarn Jintana Sandilands, a Thai lecturer at the Asian Studies Faculty of the Australian National University (ANU) and former professor of the Ayui Foundation's Director, visited Chiang Rai briefly and had time to drop in and meet our young people. She brought some second-hand clothes, two board games, and most importantly, about fifteen Thai books for the kids to read. She spent time listening to everyone read and correcting pronunciation. The kids practically devoured the books and have read some of them twice now.



- Dennis DiCesare, an American Chiang Rai resident now working in Shanghai, came to see the hostel and gave the teenagers an impromptu English lesson. His enthusiasm in meeting the kids and shaking their hands one-by-one made them feel very adult and, more importantly, respected. The kids sang 'Country Road' for him, and before flying back to Shanghai, Dennis donated alphabet jigsaws, writing paper, a world map, writing practice books, rulers and a CD with 'Country Road' so the kids could hear the original version.
- Aju's mother came by to visit him three times. We have an Open Door Policy for parents, which means that they are welcome to drop in unannounced at any time to see their son or daughter, see their living environment, tell them family news, and best of all, bring them traditional Akha goodies such as fried bamboo worms and fruits and vegetables from their fields.

- Candice Fitzsimons, a young Australian volunteer teacher, and her two friends visiting from Australia dropped in to meet our young people. Pintip Suthayakhom and Souk Saphilom, whose parents are Thai, were born and raised in Australia. It was interesting for the kids to meet bilingual Thais who do not always think of themselves as Thai, and who grew up in a different culture than their parents – just like them. The three visitors joined in our English class and took some brochures to spread the word about the Foundation back in Canberra, Australia.

Thank you. . .

We would not have been able to have accomplished this much without the support and generosity of the following people:

- ✓ **Dr Narin Chellappah**, an Australian dentist, donated the funds for badly-needed dental work. It was the children's first visit to the dentist.
- ✓ **Victoria McColm**, founder of Global Citizen Solutions, organized a Full Moon Party ('Party with a Purpose') on July 28th, in Washington D.C., to raise money for the Ayui Foundation. Over 500 people partied from 9pm to 3am, and raised \$1,000.
- ✓ **The North Hobart Rotary Club in Tasmania**, Australia, for their financial donation that assisted with running costs.
- ✓ **Robyn Cooper**, of Australia, for her private donation.
- ✓ Visitors **Dennis DiCesare, Ajarn Jintana Sandilands, Nancy Sandilands and Coro Daniel** for their donations that contributed to education costs.

A	Y
U	I

If you would like to
contribute to The Ayui Foundation
organisation and know that your gift is
making a difference please contact
Sumalee Milne at
ayui.foundation@gmail.com
Thank you for thinking of us.