annual report
2019
Dear Friends,

One of the main truths we have come to value at Thai Village is that creativity belongs to God. He is our Creator, and any creativity in us comes from him. He has planted his creativity in his world, in his creation, and in his created ones. We naturally get to see a glimpse of who God is everyday through our pursuit of creativity in the realm of handmade crafts. But this year we have seen it in more ways than just beautiful design work. God has allowed creativity to flow throughout our entire process: creativity in employment; creativity in outreach; creativity in development; creativity in sales.

Nonetheless, the pursuit of relentless creativity on earth is a challenge as well as a team effort. Many hours are spent brainstorming and praying about how to creatively employ and utilize as many of the skills from the community as possible in every project, so that the maximum number of people can be served. It can be extra challenging to provide training and work for people who are struggling. Yet this year has reminded us that the process itself is part of the beauty for which we strive.

When creative ideas work out for the good of even one person, we celebrate! For example, one month we had an extra amount of temporary work but no one to do it. Then over the weekend, one of our managers met a couple who desperately needed work so she brought them to Thai Village. They worked for a few weeks, profusely grateful to Thai Village for the income that helped them out of a dire situation. And then… that couple came to believe in God. Wow! We rejoice because we know that God is in the details and working so creatively toward his glory! And we are delighted that we get to play a part in being creative alongside him. (See page 5-7 for more of this story.)

Of course, this is not a new concept. Just as God enabled artistic gifts in his people to fulfill his purposes in building the temple in the book of Exodus, we see that he continues to provide creative gifts for his purposes today.

"And he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs.”
– Exodus 35: 31-32

“’We are continuing God’s work of forming, filling, and subduing. Whenever we bring order out of chaos, whenever we draw out creative potential, whenever we elaborate and “unfold” creation beyond where it was when we found it, we are following God’s pattern of creative cultural development.’”
– Tim Keller, Every Good Endeavor

Thank You,

Liz Meister
Thailand Director

Katie Lehman
Operations Manager

As we step back and reflect on the year, we celebrate the gifts that God has infused into humanity, that he has breathed into his world and given us the task to steward for the common good. We delight in the way he gifts us with resourcefulness and ingenuity not only to know him more, but also to see how we can bless our community through those artistic expressions. We invite you to join us in celebrating some of the ways creativity has delighted us this year.
A generous grant received from the Antioch Foundation allowed us to build up local staff in four areas: Small business training, Bible education, Peer counseling and mental health training, and English language.

**Matched Savings Program**
This year 17 people participated in the stewardship seminar and program with 5 new artisans opening matched savings accounts for the year.

**Expanded Markets**
Volunteer Cheryl Stinchcomb went on a UK crafts tour for two weeks, with 19 displays in 12 locations.

**Sabbatical**
Thailand Director, Liz Meister, left for a 6 month sabbatical, providing opportunity for great creativity, increased responsibility, and growth in the whole team.

**Promotion**
Pring, our longest TVI worker, was promoted to Production Manager as we moved into a new phase of growth.

**New Volunteers**
Christina, Melanie, Annie, Charlie, and Lisa joined the TVI team helping with English teaching, display set-up, social media, and product design.

**Celebration**
Jessie Langr completed one year of full-time service in Thailand, injecting TVI with bursts of creative insight in product design, local showroom makeover, photography, and graphic design.
As we continue to commit to providing income for the artisans in our community, we trust that product orders will come in to provide enough work for them. This delicate balance is often beyond our control, and yet we see time and again that God is the greater director, orchestrating the timing of these orders, people’s need of income, and the work we have available. We see God’s hand at work in the special orders he brings our way through wholesale orders and customized orders from individuals. Some of our favorite stories are the ways God blesses our team through the unexpected orders from customers like these.

During one of our weekly local manager meetings where we pray and plan for the week ahead, we discussed how we had an extra amount of temporary work to prepare for a large sewing order. We talked as a team about who we might have to fill this order, but could not think of anyone at the time. On Friday we prayed for the right people to help us fill this order. By Monday, our sewing manager had come back to the team saying she met a couple over the weekend who were in need of work. She had heard they were new in town, so she stopped by to give them clothes for their small children. Their extended family circumstances put them in a desperate situation in need of immediate income. As it turned out, they were also trained seamstresses. She invited them to come check out the temporary work opportunity at Thai Village. After the first day, the couple left profusely saying, “We are so happy! Thank you SO MUCH for this work!”

Not only did God provide the work through the customer’s order, He provided the people to fill the order who had a specific need for income at that point in their lives. But as the month continued, we were amazed to see what else God had orchestrated.

As the couple continued to help with the order, they joined the weekly Bible study and fellowship meals at Thai Village. They listened as other staff sang and shared, and they began to ask questions about Christianity. Local staff shared their faith and their own journeys with them in their own ways. “We’ve never experienced a family like this before,” the wife said. Beyond the need for income, it was clear that the couple was responding to a deep need for community as well. Throughout that time, we learned that an elderly member of their family was sick, so our home visit team went to have lunch with and pray for the family.

For our many customers who partner with us in bringing blessing through providing work to individuals, families, and entire communities, thank you!
To our amazement, by the end of the trial work period, both the husband and wife had decided to go to church with some of the Thai Village staff who had become their friends. Within a matter of time, both were baptized and now profess faith in Christ.

Would you have believed that this was the purpose of a sewing order? We are humbled by the ways God chooses to use this work as a creative platform for blessing others and for His greater purposes of introducing people to their loving Savior.

We see again and again people drawn into Thai Village by a physical need for income, hooked by an emotional need for a supportive and accepting community, and transformed by the power of God’s work on their deep spiritual need for the Gospel.

2019 by the numbers

- 44 Vocational Trainings
- 40 New Products
- 31 Trainees (11 new this year)
- 7 Professional Development Seminars
- 8 Outreach Events
- 21 Home Visits
- 4 Educational Scholarships
2019 sales and displays

Donors: 51
USA Displays: 71
UK Displays: 19
Thailand Displays: 8
Wholesale Vendors/Shops: 23

Thank you!

2019 sales and displays
behind the scenes

The livelihood behind the new products

Most of what we as Thai Village share with the world is the beautiful handiwork of our artisans - but as you can imagine, behind that handiwork is a labor of massive creativity, teamwork and love, countless hours of research, design, trial, error, more trial, more error, feedback, material sourcing, re-sourcing when those materials run out, design tweaking, training, labor, quality control, packaging, and finally presenting the finished products to you.

Of course every product has a “behind the scenes” process that brings it to life, and without which it would not exist. What we find even more beautiful behind our scenes is that this process creates new jobs and livelihood: each new product brings new income and ongoing work to people in our community.

Here’s a glimpse of the livelihoods we were able to support through the creation of the new products we brought you this year!
We are honored to serve alongside visiting teams throughout the year. This year, a team from Australia helped us host a Rainy Season Carnival for our artisans and community. The event was held at an indoor sports venue, and the program included soccer games, craft activities, face painting and carnival style games and challenges. The visiting team led the games while Thai Village staff invited artisans and people from their neighborhoods. They arrived at the event by the truck-full! Thai pastors led the group in a time of worship and sharing, and we said goodbye just in time for the evening rain to start. Almost 200 people gathered for the fun!

During the first week of April (Thai summer), Thai Village hosted our first ever Summer Vacation Bible School Camp in partnership with Promise Lutheran Church. TVI staff alternated as camp helpers in the mornings throughout the week and continued to run business as usual upstairs with artisans in our workshop facility at the same time.

Last year our Valentine’s Day party was held in the front yard of one of our artisans. We were so encouraged by the results that we wanted to do it again! This year we held the Valentine’s outreach in the community of another artisan, Bee*. In Thai culture, generations of family often live together, so her whole family was involved in hosting. Bee was a vital part of the planning committee for the party. Her parents welcomed us to their neighborhood, and Bee’s sons even joined in by helping invite their neighbors to attend. We were overjoyed at the opportunity to share a message of God’s love with this community.

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*name has been changed for privacy purposes
How has Thai Village benefitted Promise Lutheran Church?

We thank God for Thai Village which has been working alongside Promise Lutheran Church in Chiang Mai and serving the Lord together with us since we established this church. TVI has provided a place for the church to meet to worship God and has remained faithful in offering consistent funding to support the mission.

What is one way the church and Thai Village have worked together?

I’ve seen strong partnership, especially in Christian outreach and evangelism. Thai Village has been involved in every outreach event, including sharing the Gospel with local communities on Valentine’s Day, Christmas outreach parties, and special events and festivals. Through this collaboration, we’ve been able to proclaim the Gospel message to a large number of people.

Have you seen any impact on church membership through these outreach events?

Yes, we have had some great results. I’ll give an example of an artisan who became a believer and then a member of Promise Lutheran Church. Previously, this person had gone through a TVI training. The church and TVI worked together to organize a Valentine’s Day outreach in her community, and she became interested in knowing God. TVI staff invited her to come to a Sunday service at church. As we visited her in her home, prayed for her, and studied the scriptures together, her faith grew. She was baptized with her son and then she was confirmed and became a member of the church. To this day, she is still faithful in her pursuit of God and she continues to witness to her family and friends. God is using her life as she serves him and reaches out to others with the Gospel.

Any final thoughts?

I’d like to highlight the text of 1 Corinthians 15:58: “Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” TVI is a project that will continue to benefit the people in the community and the church. May God bless TVI as you carry out His mission of blessing others. Amen.

Pastor Wang Saewang, Promise Lutheran Church
Cast All Your Anxiety on Him

Home visits have become a part of the culture of Thai Village. Our simple strategy has been to spend time with our artisans in their homes, bring a meal to them, inquire about their lives, and ask how we can pray for them. We have seen exciting and unprecedented spiritual results with our artisan visitation program in partnership with Promise Lutheran Church. Often these visits turn into a mini-counseling session, where artisans speak from their hearts about mental health issues or problems in their lives.

This year, our local management team asked for help in learning how to better respond to the dramatic and heart-breaking news that artisans frequently share. We recognized that equipping our key managers with foundational counseling skills such as listening, reflecting, asking good questions, and identifying and dealing with trauma increases their effectiveness not only in building artisan relationships but also in reaching out to new contacts.

However, this is a challenge. Historically there has been strong cultural stigma surrounding mental health or personal issues in Thailand. People are much more likely to talk to peers than to seek outside help. Thankfully, local counseling centers in Chiang Mai have increasingly been offering programming and training for Thai people to equip them with people helping skills. This year, scholarships allowed us to send five Thai Village staff to a training seminar to certify Thai lay people in basic Christian counseling. Staff benefited from the open dialogue and skill-building scenarios in culturally appropriate contexts.

Debriefing the takeaways from the counseling training helped us to highlight and reiterate the core values that make up our organization and our team. We seek to create an atmosphere of acceptance and dignity for all who come through our doors. As we continue to welcome people who desire training and income generation, it is no coincidence that many who are in need of help are often those who also struggle with mental health issues. We see ever more clearly the need for community as well as purposeful and meaningful work for all. Training, income generation, home visits, outreach events, meals, community craft day, and Bible study all provide opportunities for creative solutions to complex social, emotional, and mental health challenges in our midst.

please pray for:

1. openness and courage to talk about mental health issues
2. encouragement for those who struggle
3. wisdom for doctors to find the right balance of medications
4. creative ways to support those in need
Chiang Mai is located in the center of a complex cultural and socioeconomic melting pot. People from many ethnic minority groups have moved to the city from rural villages in order to seek employment opportunities. Historically, these groups have had less access to traditional education due to factors such as lack of funding to pay for school, high drop-out rates due to a need to begin earning money, or having no school available in their rural villages. UNESCO’s 2017/8 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report highlights many systemic challenges including the fact that 50% of students in Thailand are studying in a language that is not spoken at home and that those who are from poor families are very likely to not complete basic secondary school.

Many Thai Village artisans and staff fall into the category of this UNESCO statistic, coming from very humble backgrounds. Some are from ethnic minority groups and are not comfortable reading and writing Thai, some have trouble with simple math calculations, and many of them lack confidence because of a formal education deficiency. While some have attempted to pursue their own educational goals, it is a major challenge for these main bread-winners to prioritize education because it is financially difficult to make ends meet.
At Thai Village we value the diversity in the body of Christ, seeing individuals as created in God’s image and each one uniquely gifted in different ways to reflect His glory in the world. We celebrate the variety of vocations and callings He has given to our staff. Not each one is called to be a pastor, neither is each one given exceptional artistic ability, business acumen or language capacity; yet, we believe that each one of these strengths is vital to the outreach work that God has prepared for our diverse community.

Thanks to a generous grant, we were able to designate funding to increase capacity for outreach through education and professional development for the national staff of Thai Village in 2019.

We identified different areas of education that would also benefit the greater circles of their families and communities where Thai Village is reaching out with the Gospel. Throughout the year, we saw great improvement in the confidence and competence of each of these staff as they grew in their respective areas of gifting.

Take a look at some of the results of this development!

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:10

We are thrilled by the growth we have seen in our local staff this year and the ways they have overcome great challenges to pursue formal and informal education and development. This investment has already begun to pay off in the daily TVI operations and systems, but we believe will reap exponentially more fruit in the long run in the lives of the individuals and their families. As we look to the future, our hope is strong in the Lord, the One who created each of us with his unique creative hand, and the plans He has to unfold his purposes in our midst with the gifts He has orchestrated.

Pursuing under-graduate Bible degree
Pursing Master’s in Ministry degree
Our product designer pursued further training in speciality art forms
Our longest full-time worker (and mother of a toddler) began pursuing a Bachelor’s degree in her spare time
Our visitation program administrator attended regular mental health seminars
Our jewelry manager also trained as showroom manager in new Point of Sale technology and English language

Pring
Jade
Wang
Taeng
Nuat
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, the USA, and the UK. 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.

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