

The Ayui Foundation is a non-religious, non-government organisation that provides a home, educational opportunities and future pathways for disadvantaged Akha hilltribe teenagers.

# Ayui Foundation

## NEWSLETTER



Sumalee Milne, OAM  
Director

October 2022

Chiang Rai, Thailand

### FROM THE DIRECTOR



We are nearing the end of the monsoon season, and the end of Term 1 is finally here. Due to the lifting of all Covid 19 restrictions, it is great to hear from volunteers once more, and the annual Akha Swing Festival was held again after a 3-year hiatus. One Saturday in August, for the first time ever, the Girls Home was flooded - with the water level above 30cm/1 foot - and the whole area was underwater. It was a shock because, the previous year, local authorities dug up our road to install larger drainage pipes. Our area flooded because the rain fell for a record 10 hours straight, starting at 7pm. At 5am, I was woken by a frantic call from the Housemother saying that the place was flooded, and she sent the following, shocking photos. I told her to save what they can, and for her and the girls to pack a bag with essentials and go stay at the Boys Home for the day. Until the water receded, the girls spent the weekend there only returning to sleep.



Once the water receded, we did a big clean-up and made sandbags to put around the front door, just in case. Our bookshelves, TV table and computer desks - all made from plywood - had water damage and we replaced the

most urgent items. Our very old fridge also stopped working and had to be replaced. Also, some wooden door jambs rotted in the dirty water and had to be replaced.

# CONGRATULATIONS



**Ahmer 2012**

Even though we have a University Sponsorship Program, it is only for students who live outside the Foundation. So we are proud to announce the university graduation of our first student who lived at Ayui. Ahmer Chermeu has been sponsored by Amanda Hudson since she moved into the foundation in 2012. Her mother had remarried and her step-father was occasionally drunk and physically abusive to her mother so she was placed in our care for safe-keeping. While at Ayui, Ahmer graduated from Grade 9 and went on to do Accounting at Vocational College. Neither Ahmer nor her mother have Thai citizenship and then, that year, the government announced that those who have lived in Thailand for a certain number of years and have a university degree are eligible for citizenship so Ahmer asked if we could sponsor her through university. *[They hold 'legal alien' status, like most hilltribe people without Thai citizenship.]*

At this time, her whole family was kicked out of their village due to her step-father causing too many problems at home and disturbing the peace. Even after her mother found a small room to rent in town, he found them and would lurk around their place. Luckily, there was a policeman who lived next door so he eventually left. If I recall correctly, he also spent time in jail for drug use. I had no idea just how bad the situation was until her high school graduation, when Ahmer wrote about her time at Ayui and said moving in here "was like being lifted out of Hell." By coincidence, she did her internship at the accounting firm that does our annual audit, so I had the nice surprise of catching up with her there. Thanks to her sponsor, Ahmer now has a Bachelor of Accounting from Chiang Rai Rajabhat University, and started her first accounting job last week, and we are so proud of her. Sadly, due to her village Headman finding excuses not to sign documents to proceed with her citizenship application, it is still just out of her grasp. *[This local corruption of Headmen demanding small to large payments for their signature is a common obstacle for the Akha. Some borrow money to pay, only to be turned down again, with no recourse for justice and now in debt.]*



**High school grad 2014**



**Ahmer 2022**

# INTERVIEWS WITH AKHA ELDERS

Two years ago, to support cultural preservation and pride in Akha culture, the older students were given the assignment to interview an Akha elder in their village. We discussed the interviews during a Discussion Group but, for this year's assignment, I also decided to translate and put them in the newsletter as part of a series. This will give an insight to readers on the generational gap – and how hard their lives were, especially those who migrated from Burma – and how their traditional culture is slowly being eroded. Most students interviewed their own grandparents, so it was also a bonding exercise where they got to learn about their family history, which is important for their self-identity.

The interview questions were:

1. Tell me about your life, from when you were little, up till now.
2. What Akha customs are no longer practiced, and why?
3. How is life different now, compared to before?
4. What do Akha youth have now, that you didn't have when you were young?
5. What do you want to say to the new generation of Akha youth?

## **Muser Yaesorku, 65, Female, lives in Mai Pattana village (Interviewed by Jerana)**



I lived in Burma for over 20 years. When I was little, life was very hard. I had no shoes to wear, I had to go bare-foot. Even my clothes, I had to make myself. Then I migrated into Thailand...it took ages to find a secure place to live. I've lived in Thailand now for 33 years.

I haven't followed any traditional customs since I migrated and became Christian.

Now, things are more developed. Before, we had to cut wood to build houses but now we use bricks.

We now have fridges, washing machines, Notebooks, motorbikes and TVs. I want the new generation to study hard so they can get a good job instead of having to work in the fields, like I did.

# THANK YOU



To our French volunteer, Jacky (35) for spending time with the boys, playing sport and teaching English for 2 weeks. Interestingly, in France, his job is similar to our housefather as he works for an organization that supports migrant teens, living with them and teaching them how to cook, clean and assimilate to their new life.

To our 2 new sponsors:  
Lauren Dowell in Australia, for sponsoring Kittika, and Khun Chompoonut Suwasin in Bangkok for sponsoring Somdet.



To Ayui graduate Yohan and staff of The Gentleman barber shop where he works, for giving the boys another free haircut as well as donating rechargeable hair clippers.



To Nel Ta and Dan Simpson in Hong Kong and Alec and Jane Peebles in Chiang Rai for donating their unwanted clothes, shoes and things when they left Thailand.



To our friend and former volunteer Grace McCaughey, in Australia, for sending a donation as soon as she heard about the flood. As we had already replaced the important items, we used it to replace and fix things needed at the Boys Home - a new computer desk, plastic tablecloth, and mosquito screen.

*If you would like to VISIT, FUNDRAISE, VOLUNTEER or DONATE please email us at [ayui.foundation@gmail.com](mailto:ayui.foundation@gmail.com) [www.ayuifoundation.org](http://www.ayuifoundation.org)*



For donations in Thailand

ธนาคารไทยพาณิชย์  
SIAM COMMERCIAL BANK

Acc no: 5072669424  
Acc name: Ayui Foundation



Visit [www.ayuifoundation.org](http://www.ayuifoundation.org) for online tax-deductible donations in Australia.

\*\*\*\* WE NO LONGER USE PAYPAL \*\*\*\*