

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

July 2023

Chiang Rai, Thailand

FROM THE DIRECTOR



Welcome to the first edition for the 2023 school year! This year we started with just 27 students, so we still have to room to accept 3 more during the year. During the long summer break, in April, we got a lot of badly-needed renovation work done, thanks to a bequeathment from the late Richard Hield in Australia. We were able to build a new, permanent house for the housefather (replacing his bamboo house), re-cement many areas at the Girls Home and, finally, build a wall between us and the neighbors to replace the shrubs we had planted to block the view, that they always complained about. We also received funds from the Higgins family in Australia to renovate the boys bathroom block.

For this school year, we accepted 7 new students. Thank you to their sponsors for supporting them.



L to R: Nalinnipha, Sawinee, Korawit, Nawarin, Wuthikorn, Suthichok, Adisak

I also want to introduce our new housemother, Athicha Rattanawichaikun. She previously worked at the Mirror Foundation for 10 years, as their volunteer coordinator. Due to Covid, their volunteer project closed, so we will be implementing a similar volunteer project and we have updated our website with the details. Like many other NGOs - and due to financial necessity - volunteers will now pay a weekly fee, which covers cost of coordination, transport, accommodation and meals at the foundation and they can teach English to hilltribe children during the day. It will be an unforgettable experience, living with the Ayui family.



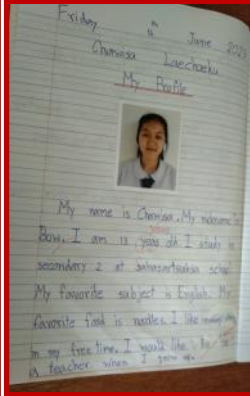
On 22 April, I attended the wedding of a former student, May. Her father left her mother and crossed the border into Chiang Rai with May and her brother, and placed them both at Ayui in 2007, when we first opened. She was 10 years old when she finally started Grade 1, due to her parents not being able to afford to put her in school when they were in Burma, and her mother's gambling addiction. May went on to skip a few grades, and graduated from high school and vocational college, with honors. Then she followed her boyfriend and went to work in Japan for 3 years. During that time, she sent money back to finally build her family their first house. When she

returned from Japan, I went to their housewarming. The best part about attending May's wedding was that I got to catch up with 10 other former students, some of whom I hadn't seen for years. I was touched that May asked me to sit next to her father, in place of her mother, during the wedding ceremony.



Everyone but the groom is a former student of the Ayui Foundation

OUR ACTIVITIES



This school year, the children are taking English classes after school with a retired English teacher, Ajarn Jintana. She divided the students into 3 groups, according to their English skills, and each group learns twice a week. Thank you to long-term supporter, Kok Hiang Tan in Singapore, for sponsoring this activity.

We were visited by Chiang Rai residents Glenn and Esther Stein, who kindly invited the children to go swimming at their house once a month, including snacks, drinks and a BBQ lunch served up by Glenn. The kids always look forward to going to the pool, especially in the hot weather. Thank you to the Steins for their generosity and opening their home to us.



In the first week of July, the children attended a traditional musical instruments workshop at the Akha Culture Center in Chiang Rai. They learned about various wind and string instruments, such as bamboo flutes and blowing buffalo horns. An Akha elder demonstrated the lost skill of blowing notes from a leaf, which none of the children were able to do. As the Akha culture is slowly in decline, the number of Akha people who are able to produce and play these instruments is also slowly declining.



INTERVIEW WITH AN AKHA ELDER

This is the fourth part of our series of interviews done by the students during term break. 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 want to say to the new generation of Akha youth?



**Buser Morlaeku, 81, lives in Padaeng Laung Village
(Interviewed by Sunantra)**

1. Before, there was no education, no schools, so we had to work in the fields since we were children. When we got too old for that, our job was to raise the grandchildren.
2. From our old belief system of ancestor worship, many Akha have converted to Buddhism or Christianity.
3. From the past until the present, there have been so many changes. Before, the women wore the traditional skirt but now they wear pants when they work.
4. We now have mobile phones, TVs, fridges and cars. Before, we hardly had anything of convenience but, now, we have a lot of things we can use to make life easier.
5. Study hard - as much as you can – so life will not be hard when you are older. Don't just think about getting boyfriends!



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