

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

April 2025
Chiang Rai, Thailand

FROM THE DIRECTOR

This edition marks the end of another school year, and the children have gone home to their villages for the long summer break. I attended graduation, saw the flood prevention projects completed and, sadly, we said goodbye to our German volunteers. A few weeks ago, we also felt the tremors from the earthquake in Burma around 2pm in the afternoon. There was no major damage sustained in Chiang Rai as, unlike in Bangkok, we do not have many tall buildings.

Congratulations

This year, we had 4 students graduate from Grade 9. Put will be looking for work now and Boss plans to leave and go to Technical College while working part-time. Oi and Chawisa plan to continue at their high school till Grade 12, staying on at the Ayui Foundation.



Boss, Oi's mother, Oi and Chawisa



Congratulations

Our volunteer, Maite, attended the Vocational College graduation of Yanisa (Tourism) and Nut (Food and Hospitality). Both Yanisa and Nut have lived at Ayui for 5 years. Over those years, they have both grown and matured into responsible young women, who were good role models for the younger girls. Yanisa, who was raised by her aunt's family after her parents abandoned her, will now look for a job to give back and help support her aunt. Nut has chosen to stay on at Ayui and continue to study for her 2-year Higher Vocational College certificate, and her sponsors are happy to continue her sponsorship.



Yanisa, Maite and Nut

I was so honored to attend the university graduation of Anurak, who lived at the Ayui hostel for his final 3 years of high school. Then he moved to live on campus and was sponsored for 4 years by long-time supporter, Hal Radin, to get a degree in Physical Therapy at Mae Fah Luang University here. Since he completed his degree, he has already secured a job working as a trainer at a fitness center in a hotel in Bangkok – where he can also utilize his English skills - and has a bright future ahead of him.



With Anurak and his proud parents

CHILDREN'S DAY

Once again, our long-time supporter from Singapore, Kok Hiang Tan, sponsored the Children's Day activities at the Foundation in January, and gave out gifts to each child. Our volunteers were in charge of games this year, and everyone had a lot of fun before eating their fill of KFC.



OUR VOLUNTEERS

Due to the unreasonable amount and scope of documents required from the Foundation to extend volunteer visas, sadly, our volunteers will not be staying for 12 months, as planned. Mikka and Maite stopped volunteering by the end of this school year, even though they could have stayed till August. But they both had an unforgettable time with the Ayui children, learned about Akha culture, and were very helpful during the flood. We asked Maite to write about her time with us, and this is what she wrote:

Seven months volunteering at Ayui Foundation by Maite

When I arrived in Chiang Rai in September '24 I was rather intimidated by everyone and everything. Life in Thailand really is different than life in Germany. But I was greeted very welcomingly and was optimistic and looking forward to my time at Ayui Foundation. In my first week we went to an Akha Swing festival in the mountains. It was the first time I got to see the gorgeous landscapes around Chiang Rai as well as a cultural festival that - in this form - I've never seen before. The traditional clothes, the dances, the food it was all very fascinating to me. In my second week the flood happened and even though that was not the start I had wished for myself it was an experience I'll never forget. Eventually everything went back to normal again and after the children came back from their holidays at the end of October, I was ready to make a fresh start. Despite various challenges, as being the only one not speaking Thai and at the same time the only one being able to really speak English, I've taken the girls to my heart very quickly. In their own way they always included me and made sure I was waking up in the morning, and ready to join them for dinner.



In the evenings, I started giving them English lessons, depending on the girls motivation that day :) Living with them, I realized what a unique way of growing up they experience. Of course, living in a dorm together with several other kids your age isn't always easy. It comes with challenges. But one thing the children at Ayui Foundation will never be, is alone. The girls as well as the boys have very sibling-like relationships with each other and to me it often seemed they are one big group of brothers and sisters. I always loved seeing them playing and laughing together. My favorite experience volunteering at Ayui Foundation

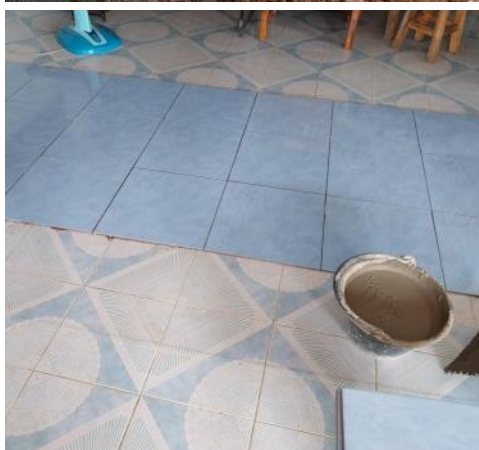
were the little trips or special occasions, like going to the Akha Swing festival, celebrating Loy Krathong, having dinner together at a restaurant, celebrating Children's Day or going to the Boy's Home to fish. The children were always so excited and happy about it.

Now that my time here has come to an end, I'm incredibly sad to say goodbye to the children. I care about them a lot and I only wish the best for them. I'm thankful for the whole experience and all the lessons it has taught me but I am the most thankful for meeting the girls and watching them get more and more comfortable with me.

FLOOD PREVENTION PROJECTS



As planned, we completed 2 flood prevention projects at the end of the school year after the children had gone home for the holiday. Due to floodwaters coming through the bottom of the neighbor's wall during the flood last year and the water taking so long to go down because our land is lower than houses next to us, we added a cement row along the bottom of the side wall to prevent future leakage, made a drain and installed 2 water storage tanks underground to help drain water. We also cemented some areas that were just dirt, to reduce the accumulation of mud during future floods. This project was funded by a donation from child sponsor, Serena Hield, in Australia.



FLOOD PREVENTION PROJECTS



Our second project was to prevent floodwater seeping up from the tiled floors in both buildings, as occurred during the flood. We were shocked to learn that there was no cement under the tiles, just soil. So, we cemented and re-tiled the floors to seal them, to ensure it will not happen again. This project was funded by the amazing efforts of the Year 1 forms at Harrow International School Bangkok, thanks to Mr. Jordan Hunt. We used the remaining funds to replace several roof tiles that blew off roofs during a recent strong storm.



THANK YOU

On behalf of our high school, vocational college and university graduates, we would like to thank their sponsors. Your support over the years has changed the lives of these students.

Thank you to our friend, Kok Hiang, for another fun Children's Day! You brought smiles to everyone's faces.

Thank you to Sophie Tayton and daughter Evie for coming to visit Nut, whom the family has sponsored since she moved into the Foundation. The family have visited twice before but their last visit was about 6 years ago so Nut got very emotional seeing them again.

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