

# Reflections from Bangkok

## Please pray for:

- My former community of **Permsup**. There is only a small cluster of houses left as the rest have already been evicted and demolished. Several families are in the process of **organizing, saving, and moving together**. Pray that they would be successful and for our leader Kaew who is helping with their efforts.
- Our efforts to share the Gospel in Phothong, particularly to **Lek and his family** who have shown interest.
- The **community organizing in Phothong**, that God would use this to develop responsible, creative leaders.

By Sara Stephens

November, 2008

## Community organizing— moving from fatalism to hope

“There’s no play area for the kids now that they’ve built the gas station. They’re playing in the swamp and getting infections from the water. They’re addicted to the internet cafes. They’re so many of them and not enough adults to watch them— it feels overwhelming!”



One of the community leaders with some of the local kids

These are common complaints I heard as I met one-on-one with many of the mothers in Phothong.

“But I don’t know if anyone else feels this way— it might just be me,” was something else I often heard.

Part of the power of community organizing comes from getting people together to tell their stories that they didn’t know they had in common. We’ve done this twice now, gathering these concerned mothers in

our house and asking them to share their stories. At times the room has been abuzz with emotion and ideas for what would help their kids.

“Why don’t you put on a kids program for us, and we’ll help you?” was an initial request. Phothong has a long history of outside organizations coming in and trying to fix its problems, encouraging dependency.

“I didn’t call this meeting because I want to do something for you,” I replied. “I called it because I keep hearing you all individually saying you want to do something. So what are you all going to do?”

By the end of this first meeting there were nods and sounds of approval about the community creating and owning their own solutions. After a second meeting, where more of the community was represented, the group proposed four key issues and I helped to teach on how to choose one to move forward on— is it specific? Deeply felt? Broadly based? Winnable? Can we act on it now?

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## One of our own receives the Lydia Award

Kamsai Waranat, a bulk seamstress in the Samaki Pattana slum, has been using loans through our Peace Micro-Enterprise Development (PMED) program to expand her business and to hire and train unemployed women in her slum. She has helped many migrants to Bangkok, including a Cambodian refugee, to gain a foothold in the city.

A few months ago we submitted Kamsai and her business to the Lydia Award contest, run by PEER Servants. PEER Servants partners with micro-enterprise development programs around the world and has been invaluable in training and guiding us in our work. They also give these awards to entrepreneurs whose businesses have contributed toward transformation of their families and communities. Kamsai was one of three entrepreneurs who were awarded the \$2,000 prize! She

hopes to use this grant to further grow her business and help more of the poor around her.

Pray for Kamsai as she has also been showing receptivity to the Gospel lately!

Pray also for PMED as we scale down our focus to the Samaki slum, and consider transitioning into a community-owned savings group model.



Kamsai at her sewing machine

November, 2008

## Character and discipleship our focus with our church leaders

During our retreat with our Thai church leaders in August, it became clear that they had a common desire to grow in their own discipleship and to help those under their care to become more like Jesus. They identified this as contributing to their economic struggles, their lack of energy to do evangelism, and other issues.

Since then it's become even more obvious to us that our leaders are dealing with some pretty intense struggles, include domestic abuse and addiction. So rather than focusing on ministry and outreach training, we're helping our leaders grow in their walk with Jesus.

I led our leaders through Nehemiah 5 recently, talking some about anger, healthy confrontation, and why it is important to keep each other accountable. Kevin has given teachings on how to handle conflict well within marriage and what a healthy family looks like.

He is also counseling one couple regularly.

We've already seen God bring fruit and positive change. Two couples seem to be allowing him into their marriage more and the issues they wrestle with, and one husband who has been absent for quite a while has committed to returning to church.

On November 17th my teammate Michelle and I will be leading a teaching on anger during our monthly leaders training. What is the purpose of anger? How can it be channeled to glorify God rather than abuse those we love?

I am also hoping to begin a discipleship and prayer relationship with one of our leaders, Pahn, who has seemed eager to open up about her life and walk with God, and who has expressed interest in joining us in our work in Phothong. Please pray that God would bless both of us in this relationship.



Church leaders at the retreat

### Please pray for:

- The **marriages and families** of our church leaders.
- Our church **Christmas outreaches**.

### Coming up:

- Nov. 17 leaders training
- Team retreat to Koh Samui Dec. 3-6
- Church Christmas evangelistic events

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Three of the concerns felt important but too complex for the group to pursue as a first focus: lack of a safe play area, addiction to internet gaming cafes, and high drop-out rates among the older children. But the fourth issue—lack of constructive things for the kids to do in the slum—seemed like an issue they could move forward on now. They nominated five key women as their action planning committee to do research and work out the details of the next step.

In early November we met with these women. They were full of ideas, from teaching the kids about staying away from drugs, good manners, and traditional Thai art forms, to planting trees and painting a mural on the newly constructed wall between the slum and the gas station.

The group decided to do some research first: how many kids are in Phothong? What are their ages? How many are still in school? They will also try to visit other slum communities with these same concerns to see how they have addressed them. And they will start to brainstorm about the logistics of putting together a weekly program for the kids.

What has been the most exciting to me in this process is watching these women begin to view themselves as capable of bringing about positive change in the slum. While at first they were asking what we foreigners would do for them, they are now asking how they as leaders can mobilize the community and tap into outside resources themselves. They are moving from passivity into their God-given identity as actors and change-agents in their world.

### New SP website!

My sending organization, Servant Partners, has recently launched their new website. Check out what's happening on our other field sites around the world, meet our leaders, read other missionary blogs!

[www.servantpartners.org](http://www.servantpartners.org)

**Finances:** My personal financial needs are met, but additional donations to my ministry expenses can always be put to good use. If you'd like to give, contact me or refer to the info on giving on my website (see below).

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