

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



Director
Sumalee Milne

F rom the director

October 2013
Chiang Rai



The students have just gone home to their villages for their term holidays, as we say goodbye to the monsoon season (and dengue fever) and look forward to welcoming the cold season when Term 2 starts at the end of October. We also had to say farewell to our wonderful volunteers, British teachers Jennie

Payne (30), who volunteered for 3 weeks, and Anna Hutchings (28), who joined her for one week. We took them to Sida's village, Baan Nong Pak Naam, where we enjoyed an Akha lunch, then went to cool off at Huay Mae Sai waterfall.

★ **"When we have culture, we have life."** ★
- Old Akha saying



Midway through the term, we accepted a new student, Meelae Aresong (13) who heard about us from a classmate who lives at Baan Ayui. Meelae's mother died when she was a toddler and her father was addicted to opium, so when the family migrated to Thailand from Burma, her and her older sister were raised by her aunt. Meelae's sister missed the chance to attend school and is illiterate in Thai but Meelae does well in school and is on the volleyball team. She considers herself very lucky to be educational support at Baan Ayui, as her sister was struggling to put her through school on a small wage from working at a noodle shop.

Akha Swing Festival and Cultural Performances ★ ★ ★



On September 1st, the children all went to nearby Baan Apa village, where Buyer is from, for the annual Swing Festival. This is when the men build a huge swing comprised of a base of four tall tree trunks, tied together at the top, where a thick rope hangs down to swing from. The Swing Festival is held after the crops have been planted, to celebrate the end of planting season and signal their rest period, while they wait for their crops to grow over the rainy season. Family members return home to their villages and partake of a big family feast. The men of the village get to show off their strength and bravery by trying to out-do each other in how high they can swing. Traditionally, the cultural significance for the young women of the village was that, if they have reached marrying age, they announce this by wearing the front waist flap on their traditional dress for the first time. Before the start of the festival, offerings are made to ancestors but in Christian villages, that part is skipped.



The children had a go on the swing at Baan Apa and had lunch. Then a week later, we went to join the Swing Festival held at the Akha Association, where the girls performed Akha dances after having a go on the big swing and the traditional Akha ferris wheel that's completely made out of wood. The girls were proud to win B500 for the best performance.



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On September 9th, the Ayui children performed three Akha dances at Phuwadol Resort, Chiang Rai, representing the Akha, at a showcase of local cultures for the final evening of a seminar held for Rajabhat University lecturers from around the country. It was the first time the boys had been involved in a dance performance, with Yohan on the drum and Apichart using the cymbals.

Our Volunteers



My week volunteering at the Ayui foundation was such a fantastic experience and a real eye opener. Having worked as a teacher in an inner city secondary school in London for the past 3.5 years, I had recently begun to question why I entered a profession working with young people. I was constantly drained by my students' inability to take their education seriously, lack of respect for people and rules, and their desire to want to grow up far too quickly. My time at the Ayui foundation reignited my passion for working with young people and reminded me why I became a teacher. I was amazed by the young peoples' impeccable behaviour and astonished by their humble and caring nature. I was also overwhelmed by their sense of belonging as they came together as a family to work with and

support one another, both academically and in their free time. I was made to feel so welcome by everyone involved in the foundation and was encouraged by the children's outlook on life as well as the value they place on their education. They each have an amazing sense of pride about their culture and traditions and their determination to succeed is extremely apparent. This really touched me and made it so difficult leaving, even after my brief period of volunteering.



The young people truly inspired me and for the first time in many years, I genuinely looked forward to going to work (volunteering) each day. This was such an endearing experience and one that will stay with me forever. I hope that, despite only spending a week there, I can continue to make an impact on the life of the young people I worked with. I learnt a great deal about the Akha tribe and gained first hand experience of the importance of customs and traditions. My volunteering placement taught me more than I could have ever anticipated and I will forever be grateful. I thank each and every one of you for giving me one of the best experiences of my life. You will always have a place in my heart.



Anna Hutchings



Having spent three weeks volunteering at the Ayui Foundation, I'm so enthused and excited that I keep telling everyone I meet! Although I'd been in touch with Sue via email, I arrived in Chiang Rai a little apprehensive about how I would fit into the Bann Ayui family. Within minutes of arriving at the house and meeting the children, as well as Wit and Tam, any anxieties I had disappeared - the environment at Baan Ayui is warm, welcoming and secure.

Over the weeks of getting to know the kids, I've learnt so much about Akha culture, Thai culture and also about myself! The children are so generous with their time, kindness and energy that you can't help but get caught up in their fun. I was so taken aback by their eagerness to get involved in any activity I put in front of them - it was certainly different to what I'd experienced at home when teaching 11-16 year olds!

We had lots of fun playing games, sports and doing art activities. I was able to teach the kids some English and help them to practice and improve their pronunciation. It was also really good to tutor Nee and Busor in English and get to know them and build a trusting friendship where they felt they could ask for help and not be fearful of making mistakes.

I was lucky enough to be invited to go to Sida's village where I met her Mum and other members of her family. I was treated to a traditional Akha meal and shown what it's like to live in a traditional Akha way. Seeing firsthand how the Akha live meant that I understood more deeply the problems that they face. It made me further realize how important the work of charities such as the Ayui Foundation are.





I have so many happy memories from my placement that I know I will treasure for a very long time. Leaving Baan Ayui was as hard as leaving my home and family - I know that I'll be back, and in the meantime, I continue to spread the word about the great work that the Ayui Foundation does, and the merits of volunteering. I know for a fact that the experiences, memories and friendships I gained there mean more than anything you can buy on a tour, or read in a book. Thank you to Sue and the children at Baan Ayui, who really touched my heart.

Jennie Payne

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ **THANK YOU** ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

- ★ We'd like to thank Janet, Clive, Lauren and Sophie Peter from Ormond Primary School, Melbourne, Australia, for donating a box of A4 printing paper via Lorraine Bell and daughter who visited us in July.
- ★ Thanks to Margaret Hulme, who also visited in July, for her donation to cover one monthly shopping trip, and for another donation when she returned to Australia.
- ★ Thanks to Singaporean Paul Teo for his donation to buy a new, larger water pump for the girl's house and renovate the girls' bathroom, which will be carried out in the term holidays.
- ★ We were also visited by Khun Bhichit and Khun Pantipa Suwanakijboriharn, from Bangkok, and appreciate their donation.
- ★ We welcome Australians Greg and Alison Rimes as new sponsors and thank them for supporting Meelae Aresong in her quest for a high school education.
- ★ We also thank the Director's Grade 2 student, Papangkorn Jongpaisan and his family for donating clothes and school uniforms for our annual clothes drive.
- ★ Our older students, who need to use computers for assignments, really want to thank Russell Stevenson in the USA for setting up a project to get us a brand new computer and computer table to replace our very old laptop. The funds came from several donors, and we'd like to give special thanks to Mark Faerber and the Wells family, both of whom made particularly large donations.
- ★ Thanks to Susanna Bonnet, in Switzerland, for thinking of the children and asking friends to donate to Ayui in lieu of her birthday gifts this year.
- ★ Lastly, a big thank you goes to Anna and Jennie for sharing their vacation time with the children and being such great volunteers.



If you would like to visit or support us please contact:
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Thank you for thinking of us.

Without regular funding, we rely solely on small grants and donations and, therefore, try to keep expenses as low as possible. If anyone is able to support the hostel for a month at a time, our monthly average expenditure is B60,000. All donations and fundraisers are welcome.

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