



## **UBON RATCHATHANI 5 YEAR REPORT**

### **PRATTHANADEE FOUNDATION**

On 24 August 2016, the Pratthanadee Foundation celebrated the fifth anniversary of the opening of its second branch in Ubon Ratchathani (Ubon), Thailand. This report marks the occasion by providing an assessment of the situation in Ubon and an overview of the Foundation's work to empower women and girls in the region.



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*“Poverty in Thailand is primarily a rural phenomenon. As of 2013, over 80 percent of the country's 7.3 million poor live in rural areas. Moreover, an additional 6.7 million were living within 20 percent above the national poverty line and remained vulnerable to falling back into poverty.”*

*- World Bank (2016)*

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## THE STORY OF UBON

Thailand's rapid economic development has been predominately centered in the capital, Bangkok, and the disparity in income between the city and the rest of the country is vast.

One of the nation's primary contrasts is between the area in Northeast, widely called the 'Isaan' region - the area that accounts for around one-third of the total area of the country and contains also one-third of the entire population - and the rest of the country. The Isaan region is where the large province of Ubon Ratchathani is located.

## UBON MILESTONES

**2011:** Opened branch on 24 August.

**2012:** Launched women's law and rights training.

**2013:** Weena (Nang), a former student of Pratthanadee, begins to manage the branch.

**2014:** Launched career planning workshops in schools.

**2015:** Reached a grand total of 10,000 women and girls.

**2016:** Launched the new concept of a mobile learning booth.

## Life in Isaan

Most Isaan people are farmers, dependent primarily on rain-fed agriculture. However, the land of the Isaan region is generally dry, has far less foliage and poor crop yields, and either has too much rain resulting in flooding or too little rain resulting in drought. This geographic disadvantage is the main obstacle to the well-being of the people in the region.

The Isaan region is one of the poorest areas of the country, but the people are well known for their friendliness and openness. They have maintained, to a large degree, their own culture, which is Laotian.

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*It is no wonder then, that the conclusion drawn by most Isaan women is "I am a second-class citizen."*

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The elderly are highly respected. A common solution often proposed to the poverty they face in the villages is to send their

children to the city in order to make money to send home. While the poverty is challenging enough, the male-oriented culture has created an even more unfortunate fate for the women. It is a well-known fact that, most of the time, it is the young female who rescues her family, while many men tend to be freer to live their lives.

There is always at least one person in every family, who knows intuitively from an early age that she will become responsible for improving the whole family's life, while the rest of the family lives from her earnings. Though men work hard if there is work to be found, they may also choose not to work. So while they hold a higher social status, in reality, women are the backbone of society and it is to them that the family turns when they are in trouble.

Struggling with poverty, many Isaan women leave their children and parents in hope of a better life in major cities like Bangkok, or overseas. However, their limited qualifications, low education and lack of professional skills cluster them into factory work, menial labor, street hawking and, for the most desperate, the sex industry.

The attempt of Isaan women to save their families from poverty has borne a new dimension of loss, aside from a lack of money; that is, the gradual deterioration of the values they hold at the heart of their beliefs and their culture: honor, morality and pride. It is no wonder then, that the conclusion drawn by most Isaan women is: "I am a second-class citizen."

## MY ISAAN MOTHER

"When I was young, which was quite a while back, one of the insults I learned from my Catholic School's playground was 'barn nork'. The direct translation may seem harmless, as it means 'from the countryside', but as Thailand has always been and still is running in a feudal system, one where the majority of wealth and power stays in the centre, while the rest spreads out around it, the further you are from the centre, the less you have of everything - from power, education and money to shopping malls (one may find this as a relief).

"My mother was never ashamed of her origin. She always taught us how we should always remember where we came from and be proud of it. She came from Ubon Ratchathani... >>>



## Building a Brighter Future

The work of easing financial desperation, reshaping the overall social structure, and giving hope to future generations of Thai women has been increasingly addressed by substantial programs from the government as well as the private sector.

However, there is still much work that needs to be done. What is needed to yield sustainable healing is for Isaan women to arm themselves with sufficient education and professional skills, so that they can build a brighter future for themselves and their family. The Prathanadee Foundation is at the heart of making this future a reality.

## OUR WORK IN UBON TODAY

Having helped women in Bangkok, often from the Isaan region, since 2000, the Ubon office was set up in 2011 to provide a unique, replicable, and preventative approach to the issues the team saw many of these women facing – a lack of job opportunities, financial desperation, willingness to accept low quality work, risk of exploitation and violence, and low self-worth and self-esteem.

By reaching young girls before they move to Bangkok, the mission of the Ubon office is to help prepare and support these girls for the future, by giving them the skills, knowledge and awareness they need to protect themselves and to make an economic success of their move to the city.

Since establishment in the province, we have worked closely with local schools and communities to determine the best way to meet the needs in the area. We are continually adapting and improving our programs to best serve our mission. Today, our core activities include two key training sessions in schools, colleges and communities across the province. These are run either as three hour workshops or, where that isn't possible, through a mobile learning booth stationed in the area.

### 'Claim Your Rights' Training for Women & Girls

In Thailand, nearly half of all women experience violence at the hands of their partner – but, fewer than 2 in 10 report it. Those that do, only do so when it reaches the stage that they need urgent medical attention.

Sexual harassment in public places is widely acknowledged to be an issue and the dangers of posting personal photos and meeting people online are well reported, especially for teenage girls.

"...a town up in the Northeast of Thailand. She is an Isaan girl through and through. She is tough, resilient, hardworking and has a mean cooking chops. She told us about how hard it was when she decided to come to Bangkok as an 18-year-old girl, who didn't know anyone other than her uncle and her aunt.

"Once I heard about the Prathanadee Foundation and what they do, I imagined what would have happened if my mother had gone through the training the Foundation provides. This Foundation could have given my mother an opportunity to become who she wanted to become, helping her achieve something that might be near impossible for her to do all alone.

"The Foundation shows how educating a woman can educate a family, just like my mother, who always told us to become the best that we can be."

**Rungroj, Volunteer**

Unfortunately, in a recent focus group conducted by our team at a school in Ubon, none of the students reported having any prior training in their rights or how the law relates to their lives.

This workshop equips women and girls with the potentially life-saving skills they need to protect themselves. It covers:

- **Awareness of and Prevention of Danger:** Aiming to raise awareness of a range of risks (including relationships, harassment, financial dependency, pregnancy and online grooming), tactics for avoiding the dangers and ways to deal with any incidents.
- **Basic Self-Defense:** Training in basic moves, such as wrist grabs, lapel grabs, and protection on the ground.
- **Women's Law and Rights:** Covers areas of the law relevant to women, such as reporting domestic violence or assault to the police, and provides the resources they need if they are unsure.

### **'Preparing for Success' Training for Girls**

When girls leave village schools, whether they finish high school completely or leave at primary level, they are unlikely to have received any advice on what to do next. Often, the only guidance they receive will be from colleges and employers who actively choose to visit the school and recruit them - providing a limited one-sided perspective.

These girls will often feel a great responsibility to earn money on behalf of their entire family - and they will be faced with big decisions about their life path and the balance between ensuring their own wellbeing and earning enough money. Often their family and friends will not be equipped to advise them and they will struggle to find an objective viewpoint.

This workshop introduces teenage girls to the basic concepts of career planning. It helps them to understand their options for training, employment and education beyond high school. It aims to provide a holistic overview of the options, paths and challenges before them - whether they choose to move to Bangkok and find work, or to remain in Ubon.

### **Community Engagement**

It is crucial for us to build good relationships in the community. We play an active role in local events, and constantly strive to work closely with schools, communities and provincial government across the region to ensure that our programs are meeting their needs.

## **IMPACT**

We run pre and post-training tests and collect evaluation surveys from the girls who take this workshop, to measure our success in training.

Of students taking part in training this year:

99% highly agreed that they gained knowledge and improved their understanding of the potential dangers in their life.

96% highly agreed that they now understand more about their rights and the law, and that they know how to use this information if they are the victim of violence or criminal behavior.

94% highly agreed that they can now apply this knowledge to their daily life.

84% highly agreed that they are now able to share this information with friends and family.

## OUR UBON JOURNEY



**Weena (Nang) is a former student of the Foundation. Today, she leads the operation in Ubon Ratchathani.**

Hello! My name is Weena. Originally, I'm from Krasang in the Buri Ram province.

I worked in the Pratthanadee office in Bangkok for 10 years, before moving to Ubon. I was fed up with life in the capital and wanted to live upcountry permanently. I missed my home with the rice farm, fresh air, and friendly people. At first, I thought living in Ubon Ratchathani would be the same as my home in Buri Ram, so that I didn't have to adapt much. I came for a short trip in Ubon Ratchathani once and I thought it was a peaceful place with friendly people. I liked it and thought it would be great to live there.

However, when I actually moved, I had to adapt myself quite a lot. First of all, I could not speak the local Isaan dialect and barely understood the language. In my hometown, we speak Khmer. So, at the very beginning, I felt lonely and discouraged. I didn't know anyone and I could not communicate with local people. The cost of living is surprisingly expensive here, almost the same as Bangkok. I started to plan to move somewhere else again.

In time, I reconsidered. I started to think about the reasons I was here and why I wanted to move in the first place. My original thoughts brought me back on track. I tried harder to adapt. The first barrier was the language. I tried to talk and listen to sellers in the market. I started asking how to say something I did not know in the local dialect. When the local people saw me ask questions about dialect, they would be curious to know where I came from. Knowing that I'm not a local, next time I shopped, the shop owner would try to explain to me something that I might not know. As well as daily conversation, people also taught me about culture so that I could fit in. With the sympathy of the locals, I had fewer problems and I began to understand them. I started to know more and more people.

Today, I'm so glad to work for Pratthanadee in Ubon Ratchathani, to give advice and hear the problems of women in our area, and to be part of improving their quality of life. I strongly believe that everybody has the potential to do good things. The important thing is how to find it and develop it. I wasn't born in a rich family. Mine was poor, but

## FROM OUR STUDENTS

"I want you to run this training again."

"So happy to see you. Please come back."

"Want to have it again, but all day not just a half day."

"Would like to know more about how to look after myself and want to join an activity like this again."

"Just want to say thank you for giving us a lot of good information. Thank you very much."

"This is so useful and I am able to use it in daily life. You should come every year for other girls."

"I want you to do this activity every year because now I know better and understand how to protect myself."

"So much fun and learn so many things from the trainer. Trainers are so nice and happy."

caring. Everybody cared for and loved me. That is why I want to give love to other people as repayment for what I have received in my life.

I'd like to express my gratitude to the Pratthanadee Foundation for giving me the opportunity to work here. It is like my family. My special thanks go to Sarochinee, who always gave useful advice and encouragement. She is like a friend and sister to me. Without her, I wouldn't be who I am today. And for that, I'm thankful.



**Sarochinee (Beer) is the Managing Director of Pratthanadee. She was responsible for the set-up of the branch in Ubon Ratchathani in 2011.**

I can't believe that our Ubon Ratchathani office is celebrating its 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Time flies so fast.

When we were first thinking about opening a second office upcountry we spent such a long time surveying the area and visiting different NGOs in the provinces of Northeast Thailand, before we made our decision. Our involvement and activities have grown up a lot in 5 years. In the beginning we visited so many schools and communities to introduce our programs and activities. They were surprised and suspicious because we offered all projects for free and we had only 3 staff at the time, which made us different to other foundations. We had to try so hard to show the community that we exist and to prove the quality of our work.

Now, our programs in Ubon are serving the community and solving problems at the same time. Our Claim your Rights workshop increases awareness of the issues of violence against women, which is a big problem in the villages, and provides information, support and contacts for when someone has a problem.

The Preparing for Success workshop is also helping girls understand and access further education and employment. We work with so many women and girls, and we've learned that the problems are always there wherever you go. One of the main reasons is that these girls lack education and awareness, so they easily fall into bad situations. Our work is filling that gap.

We can do much more, but unfortunately we can only run workshops when we have the funding. Our work is making a real impact, and the schools and communities now recognize us because of the quality of our programs. I hope to see more donations support the Ubon Ratchathani office so that we can continue our good work there.

## THE FUTURE

Our vision for the future is to establish a network of branches across the poorest provinces in Thailand, rolling out our training for women and girls across the country.

These satellite branches will equip rural girls with the information they need to build a successful future, and will direct them to the services available at the central Bangkok branch if and when they decide to move to the city.

We aim to provide best-in-sector free training programs that help women and girls escape the cycle of poverty, raise their aspirations, build their confidence and give them the skills they need to improve their lives.

Our overarching goal is to become the 'go-to' provider of services and support for women who want to build a better future for themselves and their families.





## HELP US BUILD A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR ISAAN GIRLS

If you have been inspired by our work in Ubon, please help us reach more girls across the province, and further afield, by making a donation today.

We receive no public funding and rely on your interest and support to keep this project alive.

We hope you will join us in honoring our 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Ubon by choosing one of the gift options below:

- **Give \$26 USD** to help us reach five local girls with training.
- **Give \$260 USD** to sponsor a full workshop for 50 girls.
- **Just \$10 USD a month** will make a huge difference to our ability to make future commitments for the benefit of our students. Join our regular donor team with a recurring donation.

**Please visit [www.pratthanadee.org/donatenow](http://www.pratthanadee.org/donatenow) to make a donation. Thank you.**

## THANK YOU

The Board and staff at Pratthanadee would like to express their deepest gratitude to all supporters, partners and volunteers who have made the success of the second branch in Ubon Ratchathani possible.

Our success is your success and we hope you will join us in celebrating this exciting milestone.

We look forward to continuing to work with you for many more years to come.

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