



## THEORY OF CHANGE NARRATIVE

### PROBLEM

Southeast Asia has the second-largest prevalence of modern slavery in the world.<sup>1</sup> The United Nations Department of Defense and Crime ranks Thailand among the highest countries experiencing trafficking<sup>2</sup>. Human trafficking, oftentimes referred to as “modern slavery,” is the act of using physical or psychological coercion to force individuals to engage in labor services, commercial sex acts, domestic servitude, or forced marriage.<sup>3</sup>

Thailand’s trafficking industry generates 12 billion(USD) dollars annually, well surpassing Thailand’s illegal drug trade, and making it the biggest cash earner in the country.<sup>4</sup>

Thailand’s geographic location exacerbates the problem; its multiple shared borders and numerous unsecured land routes make it easy for traffickers to move people in and out of the country. Additionally, the country’s well-established migration roots, often utilized by individuals coming to Thailand seeking better opportunities, are a hotbed for predators seeking to take advantage of voluntary migrants.<sup>5</sup>

### VISION + MISSION

We want to see a more equitable and just world free of exploitation and risk. At Creative Life Foundation (CLF), we work with global partners and local leaders to bring shared vision, passion, and values into the communities and cultures we work. We connect vulnerable and marginalized children and parents in urban and rural Thailand to critical resources that create a path to freedom and prevents human trafficking.

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<sup>1</sup> Walk Free Foundation. “The Global Slavery Index 2018.”

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR. 2019. Results of the High-Level Segment on Statelessness; 2019.

<sup>3</sup> “U.S. Department of Justice.” Accessed December 30, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> “International Labour Organization.” Accessed December 29, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Hogan, GiGi. “The Borgen Project.” *10 Facts about Human Trafficking in Thailand* (blog).

## OVERVIEW

How do we believe our actions will produce change?

CLF takes a preventative approach to human trafficking. We believe by providing access to education, a path to citizenship, and holistic care, we will break cycles of poverty and exploitation. Research has shown, and our experiences confirm, that lack of educational opportunities, persistent economic hardships, illiteracy, and statelessness significantly increase an individual's likelihood of experiencing human trafficking and exploitation.<sup>6</sup>

However, CLF recognizes that just meeting an individual's needs is never enough, which is why building relationships is an essential cornerstone of our mission. We do not simply enroll children in school; we provide essential mentoring services to ensure sustainable academic success. We do not just deliver food and personal care products to those struggling; we make meaningful connections. Our focus on relationship building exists not only to reduce isolation—which has been shown to increase exploitation, as traffickers often employ coercive isolation to reduce a victim's social support, but because in our experience, sometimes just being fully present with someone who is struggling, is the missing element that equips people along their journey.

## BACKGROUND

### **Our Theory of Change is rooted in the understanding that local problems demand local solutions.**

This premise is at the very heart of all program initiatives, and guides our strategic actions as an organization. This pathway of change exists to identify the necessary actions and responses that will accomplish our organization's mission. CLF's Theory of Change promotes a participatory approach to change and development through 12 years of engagement with local community members, stakeholders, and partners. The majority of our staff calls Thailand home. Their knowledge of human trafficking in Thailand is dynamic; their understanding of the problem intensive, and for some, deeply personal. This ensures CLF staff is well-positioned to develop and implement preventative initiatives that create meaningful, sustainable change.

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<sup>6</sup>Goodey, J. (2004). Sex Trafficking in Women from Central and East European Countries: Promoting a 'Victim-Centred' and 'Women-Centred' Approach to Criminal Justice Intervention. *Feminist Review*, 76. Post Communism: Women's Lives in Transition, 26-45.

## IMPACT

We are connecting vulnerable and marginalized children and parents in urban and rural Thailand to critical resources that create a path to freedom and prevent human trafficking.

## INPUTS

### **ACCESS TO EDUCATION**

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) found, after completing Thailand's "largest-ever survey of the wellbeing of women and children," that 900,000 school-age children 11 or younger, and 37% of children over 11 were not in school.<sup>7</sup> Almost 1 million children in Thailand do not have birth registration documents, and 10% of Thai children live below the national poverty level.<sup>8</sup> Although Thailand offers free education through 12th grade, there are many associative costs that keep attending school out of reach for many families. Others might attend school, yet drop out after the 9th grade (the end of compulsory education in Thailand) to apply for low-paying jobs in order to support their families. This decision severely limits future employment opportunities, and promotes generational cycles of poverty.

CLF believes that access to education is one of the strongest preventative measures against human trafficking. Without access to education, finding stable, sustaining employment can be uncertain. To meet the needs of themselves and their families, many try to find work wherever and however they can, which heightens their vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation. Our approach to providing a path to education is tailored towards the needs of our students. Every student in our scholarship program benefits from a mentor that monitors their academic progress and social/emotional wellbeing.

CLF is currently committed to supporting 65 students annually. Our students come to us from a variety of backgrounds: migrant families struggling to enroll their children in school, others living in Bangkok who struggle financially, and those who are experiencing statelessness among hill tribes in

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<sup>7</sup> UNHCR. 2019. Results of the High-Level Segment on Statelessness.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

Northern Thailand. Each child accrues a unique set of obstacles and hardships which threaten their right to an education and their freedom; this is why CLF's holistic, individualized approach is critical to students' success. We understand that every student's journey is unique, and we are committed to providing personalized care to all participants..

Significant increases in inter- generational graduation rates strongly indicate our methods are effective.

**While only 6% of our participants' parents graduated high school, today, 85% of their children have gone on to complete their secondary education (a staggering 1316% increase).** Currently, we are on target to increase participants' graduation rates over the next 2-3 years. And, with CLF's continued support, many of our students are able to pursue their dreams of higher education by enrolling in university.

There are a multitude of reasons why a child is not attending, or at risk of dropping out of school, and we have come to learn that a one size fits all approach does not work for our students. We start with relationship building. We engage with each student, learn what their specific needs are, and then we deliver what is necessary for them to remain in school. For some, this could be financial support for books, uniforms, and school fees. For some of our other participants, providing access to education might involve advocating for a girl's right to attend school and preventing child marriage; for others, it might be tuition for international schools or providing supplemental income to their families to make up for lost wages received if their students were working rather than attending school.

In the northern Hill Tribe communities of Thailand, families live in geographic isolation with few available government or social services in reach. Economic opportunities are limited and sustenance farming is how most make a living. These opportunity deficits are often compounded by statelessness, poverty, and the pressure of child marriage. Here, many girls are encouraged to abandon their education, marry, and become mothers while still children themselves. Without intervention, these cycles will continue, ensuring future generations of Hill Tribe children will grow up in circumstances that increase their vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation.

Our advocacy and programming break generational cycles of poverty, prevents child marriage, and strengthens communities. By expanding educational opportunities, CLF is ensuring the next generation of Thailand's

children are empowered, supported, and encouraged to achieve their dreams and pursue their goals.

## **REFUGEE ASSISTANCE**

Refugees living in Thailand can feel isolated and alone, especially new families just arriving. That's why we work with the refugee community to help identify and support under-resourced families with weekly check-ins, food and personal care items, providing supplemental income to economically disadvantaged families, and through the distribution of educational materials.

Holistic care is at the heart of our refugee assistance program. These individuals desperately travel to Thailand to flee persecution or escape extreme poverty. They choose Thailand for the general ease of obtaining a visa and find themselves forced to overstay.<sup>9</sup>

The Thai government has never adopted a legal framework that accepts refugees for local settlement.<sup>10</sup> The Thai Immigration Act of 1979 makes no exception for refugees when it says anyone who enters Thailand without authorization “shall be punished by an imprisonment not exceeding two years and a fine not exceeding 20,000 Baht [about US\$600].”<sup>11</sup> With no system in place to protect their rights as migrants, the ability to get a stable job is almost impossible.

Without the ability to work, living day-to-day is an incredible challenge. Many migrants, refugees, and ethnic minorities in Thailand have few suitable employment opportunities and rely on brokers to navigate them through checkpoints and borders. Compounding the issue is the absence of any government-sanctioned protection for refugees, which effectively reduces them to illegal aliens, and increases their overall susceptibility to intimidation, exploitation, and detention by Thai authorities and corrupt brokers.<sup>12</sup> While many of these brokers are providing a service to marginalized groups who would otherwise not find work without them, the absence of legal protection

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<sup>9</sup> Spires, Robert. *Human Trafficking and Education: A Qualitative Case Study of Two NGO Programs in Thailand*. May 2012, pp. 1–326.

<sup>10</sup> Chantavanich, Supang. “Thailand’s Challenges in Implementing Anti-Trafficking Legislation: The Case of the Rohingya.” *Journal of Human Trafficking*, vol. 6, no. 2, 29 Feb. 2020, pp. 1–10.

<sup>11</sup> Seltzer, Alexandra. “Human Trafficking: The Case of Burmese Refugees in Thailand.” *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice* 37, no. 4 (November 2013): 279–93.

<sup>12</sup> Vigneswaran, Darshan. “Migrant Protection Regimes: Beyond Advocacy and towards Exit in Thailand.” *Review of International Studies* 46, no. 5 (December 2020): 652–71.

for these groups often leaves abundant opportunities for predatory brokers to coerce and exploit people desperate for work.<sup>13</sup>

While detained, they often lack adequate food, personal care items, and most pressing, human connection. While our program strives to meet the physical needs of detained refugees by delivering critical personal items, we recognize human connection is equally important. Traffickers often attempt to isolate potential victims from social connections in order to manipulate and coerce them into predatory situations.<sup>14</sup> Severed from friends, family, and community, these individuals prove easier to exploit.

Refugees detained or otherwise, likely experience high rates of social isolation, creating a situation ripe for abuse and exploitation. Cut off from family, and community, these individuals usually have few social connections in the country, demonstrate less awareness of fraudulent employers, and are ill-informed of nefarious working conditions; which therefore increase their vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation.<sup>15</sup>

By maintaining regular social contact through counseling, mentoring, and being fully present with refugees, CLF staff is straightening the social ties of vulnerable refugees through meaningful connections. Maintaining constant contact also allows CLF staff to help refugees who are unfamiliar with Thailand's employment risks identify predatory working conditions.

Studies in Thailand demonstrate a powerful link between social capital and human capital.<sup>16</sup> While many Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) develop human capital, through educational opportunities and job training, research has shown that this alone does not significantly reduce a child's risk of exploitation.<sup>17</sup> When an organization works to strengthen a child's connections to the community (social capital), it serves as an additional safety net for at-risk youth.<sup>18</sup>

**CLF strives for a future where every child has the freedom to attend school; but for some, their refugee status hinders their ability to enroll.**

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<sup>13</sup> *ibid*

<sup>14</sup> Hagan, Elizabeth, et al. "Functional Isolation: Understanding Isolation in Trafficking Survivors." *Sexual Abuse*, vol. 33, no. 2, SAGE Publications, 2021, pp.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*

<sup>16</sup> Spires, Robert. *Human Trafficking and Education: A Qualitative Case Study of Two NGO Programs in Thailand*. May 2012, pp. 1–326.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*

It can often take time for these families to resettle into more permanent living situations, and during this time, children are at risk of encountering learning deficits and knowledge loss. Refugee children who fall drastically behind are likely to struggle when they do return to a school environment, placing them at heightened risk for abandoning their education altogether and increasing the likelihood of exploitation.

To ensure refugee students have the opportunity to access education, develop critical learning skills, and meet learning benchmarks; CLF has provided 52 children and youth with individualized education packages and will continue providing supplemental educational materials as needed. We believe these thoughtfully curated materials will be instrumental in ensuring refugee children unable to access traditional education options have the tools and resources to ensure continuity in learning and are better positioned to pursue a traditional education when available.

### **A PATH TO CITIZENSHIP**

Despite the Thai government's efforts to follow guidelines set by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which recommend non-discriminatory practices between citizens and non-citizens; a great number of Thailand's ethnic minorities, including Thailand's Hill Tribe communities, are negatively impacted by their lack of legal recognition.<sup>19</sup>

CLF is well-positioned to help. Many people among Hill Tribe communities lack Thai citizenship, even though most have lived in Thailand since birth. Considered stateless, these individuals face exclusion at every point in their lives. Their status results in limited access to education, healthcare, and no right to a pension in their older years. Those without citizenship also have limited mobility; an issue which is compounded by their location on the Myanmar/Thai border, an area that is often heavily patrolled by law enforcement for drug trafficking.<sup>20</sup>

Their restricted mobility leaves them dependent on brokers to negotiate their way across provincial and national borders for employment opportunities, which further compounds the problem and increases exposure to abuse and exploitation. The UNHCR has recently recognized the lack of citizenship as a major contributor to human trafficking and strongly recommends that all nations enact a robust effort to eliminate statelessness. With few prospects of a better future, stateless persons can be forced to look for better work

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<sup>19</sup> Hoornick, Michiel. "The Statelessness-Trafficking Nexus. A Case Study in Thailand." *International Institute for Asian Studies*, no. 87 (2020): 1-2.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*

elsewhere and, as labor migrants, can be easily deceived by brokers.<sup>21</sup>In response, Thailand passed the Nationality Act in 2008 to make it possible for eligible stateless individuals to apply for Thai citizenship. However, for many stateless individuals, there are significant barriers to this process.

In keeping with this recommendation, CLF has begun identifying families within the villages where we work who lack citizenship, and will begin assisting 20 families with the application process in 2022. Geographic isolation, limited Thai literacy, and limited understanding of Thai legal processes make obtaining Thai citizenship a burdensome and often insurmountable obstacle for many members of these communities. For many individuals living in the Hill Tribe communities their statelessness has been inherited; and without intervention, it will be passed down to future generations.<sup>22</sup>

Further complicating this process is the fact that many members of this community do not record births with the Thai government, creating a system of inherited statelessness which hinders their ability to obtain citizenship later on. To obtain citizenship, these individuals are forced to undergo a costly DNA test which could prove a direct genetic relationship to family members who are registered citizens. To ease the burden of obtaining citizenship, CLF staff will work individually with eligible individuals to obtain and complete the necessary paperwork for citizenship. CLF will also provide financial assistance to cover the cost of DNA testing when required.

Additionally, community Liaisons familiar with local dialects will remove language barriers to citizenship by informing individuals of their rights, translating information, and navigating channels crucial to the application process. By increasing individuals' access to citizenship, CLF is not only reducing these individuals' immediate vulnerabilities to trafficking, we are reducing the vulnerability of future generations by working to eliminate inherited statelessness.

## **WOMEN'S LITERACY PROGRAM**

Illiteracy increases an individual's susceptibility to trafficking in various ways; through restricting educational opportunities that can lead to stable employment, and preventing stateless individuals from applying for and obtaining Thai citizenship. Completing necessary paperwork and obtaining

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<sup>21</sup> Chantavanich, Supang. "Thailand's Challenges in Implementing Anti-Trafficking Legislation: The Case of the Rohingya." *Journal of Human Trafficking* 6, no. 2 (March 14, 2020): 234–43.

<sup>22</sup> "UNHCR - The UN Refugee Agency." Accessed December 30, 2021.



necessary documentation requires sufficient Thai language skills that many living in the Hill Tribe communities lack access to.

CLF recognizes the immediate and urgent need to extend citizenship to as many members of this community as possible. Obtaining citizenship is crucial to preventing trafficking and can not be contingent on Thai fluency alone, rendering the Thai Citizenship Program critical. However, CLF aims to increase the sustainability of our citizenship program by ensuring those most vulnerable to trafficking have the necessary skills to stay and remain free from exploitation.

With women and girls accounting for 71% of trafficking victims worldwide, it is clear that eliminating human trafficking will require examining the problem through a gendered lens.<sup>23</sup> The gendered nature of human trafficking and modern slavery is an indication and a driver of innumerable societal issues, which offers a valuable road map to its eventual elimination. With this in mind, we believe that providing Thai literacy instruction to women in these communities will result in far-reaching, and lasting benefits, and achieve market decreases in trafficking and exploitation.

**The link between education, literacy, and trafficking among women and girls has been well documented. When women and girls are excluded from educational opportunities, political processes, and a right to own property, their likelihood of being exploited increases.**<sup>24</sup>

For Thailand's Hill Tribe women, their vulnerability is amplified by the additional obstacle of statelessness. These women not only lack an education, a variable that considerably increases their risk of trafficking and exploitation but their situation is made even more precarious when their lack of Thai citizenship enters the equation. Lack of citizenship is a major risk factor for Hill Tribe women and girls for being trafficked and otherwise exploited. For many Hill Tribe women, illiteracy is the biggest obstacle for overcoming statelessness, as most speak only their local language, which severely restricts their ability to maneuver through the process of applying for and obtaining Thai citizenship.

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<sup>23</sup> Walk Free Foundation. "The Global Slavery Index 2018." 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Goodey, J. (2004). Sex Trafficking in Women from Central and East European Countries: Promoting a 'Victim-Centred' and 'Women-Centred' Approach to Criminal Justice Intervention. *Feminist Review*, 76. Post Communism: Women's Lives in Transition, 26-45.

Our literacy program for Hill Tribe mothers will empower over 50 women with the confidence and support needed to develop this new skill.

For these 50 women, Thai literacy will significantly expand their opportunities for economic security and advancement. Literacy will build their confidence, status, and access to information while affording them the opportunity to better prepare their children for school, engage with their teachers, and supplement their education with at-home support.

## THE FUTURE

Breaking cycles of poverty and exploitation demands considerable energy, creativity, and risk. The above outlines our current understanding of the best practices, interventions, and actions we believe are best suited to the prevention of Human Trafficking in urban and rural Thailand.

By boldly following this pathway of change, we envision a Thailand where all children, youth, and adults are free to live full lives, pursue their dreams, and live without the threat of exploitation.

Our Theory of Change is a living document. As we grow and evolve as an organization, evaluate programming, monitor our impact, and forge new partnerships, our Theory of Change will transform with us as we pursue our mission.

Human trafficking exist to destroy connections; connections to family, home, agency, and freedom. The Creative Life Foundation exists to create connections. Connecting people to critical resources is essential to our mission, but what really drives us is how we connect to people, human to human, in ways that spark change and shape new cycles.

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