

Response to Flood Disaster in Central Thailand, October 2011

THE CONCEPTION:

As news reports started flooding in about the increasing devastation of the provinces north of Bangkok, we at CTM knew we had to do something about it. But what??

There were already a lot of governmental and corporate help – entities with a lot more resources than our small team.

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On Tuesday morning, the 11th of October, we felt that we needed to do something that no one else was doing. We needed to do more than just give clothes, food and material supplies.

We could not only provide these physical needs but we could also harness the talents of our network of friends, and tap into their talents to provide encouragement, love and some joy to the growing number of people who were seeking shelter at the Thammasat University Rangsit

Flood Relief Shelter. The plan was conceived --- We would host an event – a concert plus a kiddy corner – on the upcoming Sunday. The countdown began – we had five days to get this organized. When we first contacted the Shelter, there were about 1,500 people who were displaced and camped there. When we eventually went there for the event on Sunday, this had doubled to 3000 in just five days!

Tuesday afternoon, we called our network of talented singers and musicians to ask if they'd like to help in our effort to host a concert on the grounds of the Shelter. Immediately, we got confirmations from our foreign friends who were also wondering what they could do to help.

We signed up Charlie, an Aussie guitarist singer who also sings in Thai, a Swedish family band – Smooth Barrage -- of teen siblings who play and sing . On Wednesday, Saran, a semi-pro Thai singer agreed to join us and so did the Danish rock band, Sobic . These are three young men who not only compose their own Thai songs but sing in impeccable Thai as well. Canadian Julie and Thai husband teamed up to also perform for the event. By Friday, other friends were jumping in to offer help with the sound system, the stage set up, ballooning and face-painting for the kids.

There were yet others who came by to drop off contributions of clothes, toys, shoes and other supplies . This included one company which delivered 200 bags of cookies for the activity!

Saturday – we got confirmation that our Italian friend was ready to take on the part of BOZO the clown and entertain the kids with a magic show. To make the event more meaningful, we invited a couple of Thai friends to tell stories of overcoming & perseverance in order to encourage these one who have lost their homes, belongings and many, their jobs too.

We also made 400 copies of these stories to distribute at the event.

Thanks to sweet Thai friends, Anna and Dao who dug up the stories and got them translated.

There were calls from others who said they wanted to help but they didn't know how they could contribute – they were not performers, neither artists or

Background of flooding: Essentially this is the run-off from the North of 3 major storm/typhoon events that crossed Vietnam and China and dumped large volumes of rain onto the mountains in Thailand's Northern areas. This run-off can only find its way out to the ocean via the river systems, and unfortunately, all the major river systems run through the very flat areas of central Thailand. The only outlets to the ocean for these river systems are through the major Port (Samut) towns and Bangkok. Obviously, the tidal flows of the Gulf of Thailand have an effect on the speed of this natural drainage system – when the tide is high less water can flow out, and when the tide is low, more water can escape.

The Risk

In a normal year with a normal volume of rain and run-off the river systems can manage the water as it passes through central Thailand, but this year the sheer volume of water (from 3 storms rather than just 1 or 2) has placed enormous pressure on dams and river banks, designed to protect towns, villages, farm land and the cities. When the build-up of water reaches a certain level the banks of these structures collapses due to the weight of the water, or they simply overflow and water starts drain to lower areas. Once this process starts, the power (speed times weight) is usually too great for any immediate human intervention, and thus Ayuthaya and other towns have already been inundated, and some lives lost..

balloonists. “Well,” I said, “Can you give a hug, a listening ear, shoulder to cry on?” That one conversation grew into one of the highlights of our event --- we had a team of people who were on hand to give “FREE HUGS”!

Sunday – we were rarin’ to go, despite having heard that the sides of the university was starting to flood. The few golden beams of sunlight through the trees was enough to encourage us that it would all work out. We were going to perform outdoors, with NO tent cover. It was all by faith!

As we traveled to Rangsit, some ominous grey clouds rolled up in the distance and we drove through some flooded roads. But that was not going to deter us --- “It’s going to be sunny at Thammasat,” I told the team in the van. The sun broke through the clouds and flooded every corner with its light and warmth. Like the sunlight, it seemed like our big team of volunteers were to be rays of joy, love and encouragement beaming into the broken hearts of these people, who have been displaced by the devastation of the deluge in Ayuthaya and Pathumthani.

THE PROGRAM:

Where There's Life, There's Hope! –

Having made it safely to dry ground, in the face of the torrent of the recent ravaging floods in Ayuthaya and Pathumthani, thousands of victims were now facing life in a temporary shelter, despairing & anxious about their future.

With a banner on stage pronouncing that “Where there’s Life, There’s Hope” , we themed this relief program on 16th October 2011 to encourage the hearts of those left high and dry by the floods. The charity event saw thirty talented Thai and foreign volunteers converge at the Thammasat University Rangsit flood relief shelter. Under a beautiful bright blue sky, it was as if, like the sunlight, we hoped to help them step out of their gloom and into the sunshine, even for just awhile – to be entertained, amused and receive some emotional relief. There are currently some 3000 people from the nearby provinces of Ayuthaya and Pathumthani who are taking refuge in the Shelter, and this number is growing as evidenced by the long queues we saw outside the registration office. Many that we spoke with, had been rescued with just the clothes they had on. Noi, a 60-year-old lady who has been in the Shelter for the last four days since her house was inundated with water, told how she found herself, alongside a cobra, trying to escape the rising waters. Thankfully, the cobra had no appetite for her, having already devoured her rabbits!

The event featured a concert with some impressive performances by our 'farangs' -- the Danish band Sobic with their original Thai songs, American Julie accompanied by Paisarn with a meaningful rendition of Peace in the midst of a Storm as well as Aussie Charlie who rocked with his lead guitar, along with the Swedish teens, Jenny, Safir and Percy from Smooth Barrage, who entertained with Thai and popular English top hits. There was also a special performance by KPN’s talent quest winner, Saran, who charmed the audience with a few Thai ballads. Thai volunteer Paisarn was a hit when he got members of the audience to get up, let go and dance to a popular Thai Isaan favourite. As the song went on, our foreign volunteers jumped in as well and we soon had full floor of fun-loving, anxiety-free folk finding their relief in the rhythm. Special thanks to our Thai MC, Tom (a tutor who is also Oishi’s online program host), who partway through teamed up with familiar TV show host, Janlo. They were a show on their own with their wit and humour.

On the side, we had the Kiddy Corner where our team of volunteers – youngest at 10 -- had their hands full in keeping up with the demands for sculpted balloons from the choices of hats, flowers, doggies, swords..etc.. Artist Dao along with CTM’s Sunny, Julia and Jaime, helped with face-painting, though the demand was more for hand

designs as most were too shy to have their faces painted. Our very own BOZO, the clown, courtesy of Italian friend Giorgio, entertained the kids at the children's care center, keeping them on edge with his magic tricks and antics.

One of the highlights came at the end of the concert when we sent out an enthusiastic team of teens to reach out and offer FREE HUGS. We can't deny the power of touch, in encouraging, loving and sympathising. So our free hugs team was warmly received and even approached as they also offered a bag of cookies (kindly donated by Kerry Flour Mills) for every genuine hugger!

At the end of the program, we drove our vehicles to the donation center where we unloaded two full vehicles of clothes, toys, hotel bathrobes, shoes, Dole desserts, Lactasoy drinks, chocolate milk drinks and 800 paper diapers. We also visited the children's care center where volunteers (mainly students from the university) help to keep the kids occupied with arts/crafts and activities. Here we brought board games, kindly donated from the piggy bank savings of two Aussie-Thai kids, Hal and Lulu.

A couple of our enthusiastic friends also jumped into the military trucks to participate and help with onsite distribution of goods to housing areas that have been inundated and residents unable to leave their homes.

A crisis is truly a challenge, yet the beauty of people joining hands and hearts to serve their fellowmen in their hour of distress, is much like the beautiful perfume that comes from crushing of scented flowers. May we live our days, with this heart of service, believing that we can - in our own unique way -- be something special to somebody by adding value to their lives.

We couldn't have done this without the individual contributions of friends like Ake Lackgren who helped with the sound system setup, Havard, Marc and Paul -- our photographers and drivers who helped in so many ways, Orasa and Dao who spiced the concert with heartening stories of perseverance, as well as the many friends who helped to make this event possible. Thank You!

The following are reports compiled from a few volunteers, our Thai friends who went around personally encouraging and talking with people at the shelter.

#1: French Marc and I (Thai Anna) were able to participate in the flood relief effort. After the main program and performances, we went around giving out some encouraging selected stories to the flood victims.

“Sutep and Kannika, are amongst the few thousands who took shelter at Thamasart University, one of the biggest Flood Relief Centers in Bangkok outskirts area. They are from Ayutthaya, one of the worst hit areas. They are young couple in their early thirties. Kannika is eight and a half months pregnant. They have been at the shelter for about one week. The first floor of their simple Thai house was flooded and the water kept rising. When they heard that a few people were electrocuted and lost their lives they decided to take refuge somewhere else. After a few weeks of staying in a small rented room, they had to move to the shelter when the area was flooded as well.

They said they are very thankful for the shelter because Kannika can be close to the medical team who are on duty at the center since she is due to have the baby in a few weeks. They said they don't know how long they'll have to stay there, but at least they have free food, clean water and dry place to sleep. They both work at one of the big electronic factories that just closed down due to the flood. A few of the big industrial towns in the area are submerged

under water, along with thousands of houses and businesses. We spent some time talking and encouraging them.. “



Anna, far left, with the couple Suthep and Kannika.

Here's a report from another volunteer, Orasa::

“Paah was a lady I talked to while we were waiting for the rest of our team to arrive. She came from Patumtani just across the Thummasat Shelter. The houses in her community were mainly one story houses. They're all under waters all the way to their roof tops. They just had to flee as no body could survive in their houses. They had to leave everything they had in the house -- the furniture, their fishery business ,their belongings, etc.

She also told us of a miracle, how God healed her elderly neighbor who had stroke & became partially paralyzed. She couldn't walk properly. She had to drag one of her feett on the floor when she walked. That side of her foot became black dead skin from having to continually be dragged on the floor as she walked. But this lady came to believe in Jesus.. She would walk around with her Bible, claiming the promises of healing. Then one day she was healed & walked perfectly normal. Jesus healed her miraculously because of her belief & her faith in Him. Because of this, when the flood waters came, she was able to make it to safety, and even help others in the village. “

“Kool is a young man I was trying to encourage. He worked in a factory that had almost 1,000 workers all together. It was owned by an Indian gentleman in WangNoi ,Ayuttaya. This company made cotton thread. Ten days ago, they had to close the factory down as it was 3 meters under waters. They don't know how long before they could go back to work as no one could tell how long it'll take before the flood will go down. And life would go back to normal again. They said thankfully the factory owner was kind enough to pay them all in cash before they closed down the factory. They're thankful for some money as they have to camp out at the University campground unemployed. I was able to give him our printed out stories & to encourage him to keep fighting & to look on the bright side. To keep believing & having hope as long as we live. “



way to the Shelter

On our



Pizza deliveries still go on!



Cars parked on the highway, as city residents scramble to find high ground to keep their vehicles out of water



a common sight during this time --- sandbags fortifying different buildings



Rising waters stall the traffic



Many vehicles can be found parked on flyovers, ramps, along highways.



More people are moving their whole household belongings to high ground



Already in action – volunteers help to load supplies to army trucks to bring to residents stuck in inundated areas



Friends helping to set up the backdrop “Where there’s Life, There’s Hope” on stage



Danish Band Sobic perform with passion



Paisarn

gets the crowd going with a popular local country song



a little gift

for each of the dance participants



Julie and

Paisarn with a meaningful "Peace in the Midst of a Storm" duet.



Brian (Bongos) Aussie Charlie (lead), with Swedish teens Jenny (guitar), safir (keyboard), Percy (bass)



CTM manager Debbie with one of the Shelter coordinators



Saran – Thai crooner takes the stage



Story teller Dao with an audience participant



Old lady comes up to the MC for the first hug of the day, after he announced it!

FREE HUGS...and more hugs....





how about just a little more color? Face-painting by Dao



Bozo with our Free Hugs team



The Ballooning corner



Unloading a van-load of supplies



The Shelter's volunteer staff pose for a picture with us and the goods we brought in



Bozo tries to cheer up this handicapped child



Bozo with the children's activity center



Board games donated to the children at the activity center



Our team of friends and volunteers!