

**100 Projects for Peace
Final Report - Summer 2007**

Title: Healing the Souls Through Arts

School: Westminster College, Missouri

Student(s) Information:

Janepicha "Bambi" Cheva-Isarakul, Thailand, UWC Student

Julio Noguera, Venezuela, UWC Student

Brianna Andrade, USA

Brittany Doscher, USA

Courtney Richter, USA

1. **Project Summary:** Describe location, timeframe, participants, other funding involved, scope of work, and goals intended.

Our project took place June 15-August 15, 2007, in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The project leader and former UWC student, Miss Cheva-Isarakul, is a native of Chiang Mai, and therefore chose this location as the site of the Project for Peace. The other participants included another UWC student, Julio Noguera, from Venezuela, and three students from the USA, Brianna Andrade, Brittany Doscher, and Courtney Richter. Aside from private donations, which were given to the foundation with which we worked, there was no other funding involved.

The work of the project focused on assisting a local organization called "Baan Samanjai" or the Healing Family Foundation (HFF). This organization empowers mentally disabled adults, who are referred to as "artists", to produce handcrafts that have market values by teaching them a Japanese style of weaving. Not only does this activity allow them to use their imagination and express their own unique visions, it helps to integrate them into a larger society. The artists form their own social support group as they meet every day of the week at the Foundation. While the artists were mainly weaving and creating new products, they also had free time to do other activities, such as singing and dancing.

Our main project goals included fostering a positive attitude about people with disabilities; promoting a spirit of volunteerism that is lacking in Thailand, especially among young people; assisting HFF in spreading its message to the wider society and expanding its market further into the local community. In order to meet these goals within the limited timeframe, we chose to update and redesign the Foundation's brochure and website to make them more easily accessible, as well as organize a charity concert which would feature the local youth performers. This show not only raised funds for HFF, but also fostered a relationship between the foundation and the rest of the community, specifically the youth of Chiang Mai. Other implications of the goals include giving Westminster College students an opportunity to observe a self-sufficient organization in order to cooperate with a local community and create a project upon their return; allowing an opportunity for the students and people with disabilities to practice English and to learn more about the cultures of the participants from Westminster College.

2. **Project Results:** Self-evaluate the project; your assessment should enumerate what goals were and were not accomplished.

Overall, the majority of our goals were met. By creating a more accessible web-site, a more organized brochure, and funding and promoting a charity concert for the Foundation, we raised awareness for the Foundation, and also helped to expand its market. We feel that we did foster a more positive view about people with disabilities through our promotion and production of the Healing the Souls through Arts Charity Concert and interaction between the community of Chiang Mai and the 'artists' with disabilities.

The limited timeframe and the existing schedules of the involved parties posed some restrictions as well as challenges to the project. We did not manage to write an official report on the change in outlook of the disabled and students after participating in our activity, although through casual conversations we learned that their experience has been very positive. Even though we were not able to form a group of students who would regularly participate in our activities and contribute to the improvement of the Foundation as it was originally planned due to schedule conflicts with local schools, we were able to create some one-time activities that encouraged interactions between cultures and cultivated a more positive view towards those with special needs in the mind of the young. The design competition that we held benefited both the Foundation and the students who participated; it gave the Foundation some new product design ideas, while it let the students express their artistic talents as well as contribute to a good cause. We were also able to spend quite a considerable amount of time with the artists ourselves, giving us a chance to learn more about the Thai culture, as well as share the Venezuelan and American cultures with them. By spending time with the Healing Family Foundation, we now have a greater understanding of how to run an organization successfully.

The concert was very well received, and was graced by the presence of the Consul-General of Japan in Thailand as a Guest of Honor. This project was also recognized by the Japanese Consulate as a medium which promotes intercultural peace and exchange. It was chosen to be one of the selected projects that commemorate the 120 years Anniversary of Thai-Japan Relations. Over fifty youth volunteered as performers and staff for the concert, which is quite extraordinary for a society where volunteerism is not very prevalent, and we therefore accomplished our goal of promoting a spirit of volunteerism. Not only did we succeed in sparking public interest in the Foundation through the use of media including appearance on the national television, press release in local newspapers and interviews at the radio stations, our project also inspired the other groups to start thinking about setting up their own project or a similar organization. The Foundation reported to us that as a result of the concert, they observed an expansion in market as well as a rise in the number of visitors and volunteers. The feedback from the young performers were also very positive. They all reported that they would like to do more charity work and be involved in the future with a similar event. Some of the audience also expressed that the show has inspired them to want to do more humanitarian service. We were able to raise the net proceeds of approximately \$3,200 or over 100,000 baht, all of which was donated to the Healing Family Foundation. By organizing this charity concert, we ourselves have gained a greater knowledge of how to promote activities and integrate with the local community.

3. **Implications: What are the project's implications for peace? What are the future prospects for the project? What have you learned?**

For this project, our idea of peace focused on the understanding of persons with disabilities. We wanted the wider community to see the talent within each person and to respect them for who they are and what they can achieve. A disability should not be seen as a burden to the family or society; rather as a special way of living that requires a deeper level of understanding. We hope that our efforts have allowed the people to recognize the beauty in difference and appreciate the expression of creativity in various forms. In reflection of our experience in Thailand, there is much we have learned about Thai culture and its view of disabilities. We have also gained more experience in intercultural cooperation and exchange by working with the Foundation and our fellow team members. Most importantly, the Foundation's artists have taught us that each disabled person has special talents and abilities within that we were not aware of before this experience. Upon our return, we plan to inform the Fulton community of the Healing Family Foundation's model, with hopes of incorporating this model into local existing groups.

