
House of Love

2006 Annual Report

2006 marks the 12th year that House of Love (HOL) has been sheltering tribal women and their children. During 2006, the House of Love had 36 residents, 32 children and 4 adults (one of the adults comes for shelter only when she is not well, and one of the children attends college and is only home for school breaks). Seventeen of the children are orphans (both parents have died). There was one death of a youth at the House of Love this year. At the end of December 2006, there were 33 residents at the House of Love. Of the 36 residents who lived at the House of Love in 2006, 16 were Akha, 15 were Lahu, 1 were Mien, 1 was Lisu and 3 were Thai Yai.

Six new residents were taken in this year; two were referrals from the Day Care Center, one was referred from the Church of Christ in Thailand AIDS Ministry, one was referred by a Health Project team, and one was a woman who returned with a child. Two of the children are HIV positive, one was being abused by his stepfather, and one of the children had no place to live as her mother died of an AIDS-related illness. The House of Love received many other referrals this year but new admissions had to be limited because of lack of resources (space, finances, and personnel).

Three former residents of the House of Love, who are HIV infected, and one of their children, continue to live outside but have asked for help with access to medical care and medical costs. Parents of two of the children at the House of Love who are also HIV-positive have been followed by the HOL staff. Both of these parents died this year and HOL staff had to assist with funeral arrangements.



Children's Education

Of the 30 children in residence at the end of 2006, seven are HIV-positive. All but one of the children have been able to attend school this year. He was too ill to attend school. He was fifteen years old and had become resistant to his antiretroviral drugs late in 2004. Although he was given new drugs, his CD4 count remained 0 and the doctors felt that his

immune system was too weak to allow him to attend school. His health continued to deteriorate and he died in July. This year we have 3 children in kindergarten, 20 in elementary school, 2 in junior high, 4 in vocational school, and one in university. There is also an eight month old infant at the HOL. The children in kindergarten to junior high attend a private Christian school with the exception of one child who attends the government school for the deaf. The young people attending vocational school are studying mechanics, architecture, business and tourism, and computer. The young man in university is studying electrical engineering. All of the children attending the Christian school are receiving special tutoring in an after school program. As well, several of the children have benefited from Japanese and American volunteers teaching Japanese and English.

Cooperation with Other Organizations

In 2006, the House of Love continued to work with the International Justice Mission to provide scholarships for the children's education and to receive legal help in applying for Thai citizenship. The staff also works with the Social Welfare Department, local government agencies, and an emergency home when working on obtaining proper documentation and citizenship for the children. The House of Love staff works closely with the administrators and teachers at each of the schools that the children attend. The staff has also cooperated with a government agency to register two of the women at the House of Love as migrant workers, giving them a legal status that allows them to stay in the country. HOL has had much help from McCormick Christian Hospital in helping residents become part of a program that allows them to receive antiretroviral drugs free of charge. The children attended a vacation Bible school/camp that was partially funded by the Boville-Murray Vacation Bible School Fund. The House of Love continues a relationship with the churches in Okinawa and with the Kantogakuin Muttura Elementary School and the Kanto-Gakuin University in Japan. The CCT AIDS Ministry has worked closely with the HOL staff in giving information about drugs and access to care for non-residents and they have also referred children to the HOL. The House of Love staff began a new relationship with Deaf Ministry International this year. The staff of that ministry has helped with communication and counseling for the deaf teenager living at the HOL. The teenager attends church, cell group, and camps sponsored by the ministry, and she was baptized this year.

Staff

The House of Love staff consists of one housefather, one housemother, four assistant housemothers, and one registered nurse. The housemother is married to the housefather and this couple manages the home. The housefather provides a male role model for the teenage boys. He has worked for the Health Project and has been responsible for visiting the children who were previously living in villages or hostels. The children have known him for many years. He is Akha and has one year of Bible school training. He is currently studying for a bachelor's degree in community health. His wife is a Sgaw Karen with an associate degree in computers. She has been able to give special tutoring in computers to the children. Of the four assistant housemothers two are Sgaw Karen and have graduated from high school, one is Lahu and one is Akha and they have both graduated from Bible school. The nurse is Sgaw Karen and is responsible for the health care of all the residents.

Activities

Because the House of Love is truly a home, the family of women and children enjoy many fun times together. In 2006 the residents attended a Vacation Bible School camp with children from the slums. The children also attended boy and girl scout camps sponsored by their schools. One of the teenagers attended an Akha youth camp and one attended a camp sponsored by the Deaf Ministry. There were seven birthday parties scheduled during the year and twenty-three special outings. Residents attended AIDS Day activities on two occasions. Many of the children attended special activities and a concert for the disabled at

Chiang Mai Univeristy. The children were involved in special activities at the church for Father's Day and Christmas. The residents also went Christmas caroling and performed at the Christmas celebration at the church for the deaf. The staff attended the graduation ceremonies of two who graduated from junior high and three who graduated from kindergarten. The children took a trip to the sea and to Bangkok during their school break. The children at the House of Love also recorded a music CD this year that they hope to sell to raise money for the new building.

Visitors came to the house 30 times for a total of 209 guests. Some of the children at the House of Love performed at school on graduation day and three times during the Christmas season. Women and children at the House of Love are making cards providing them with a small income. Nearly 43 thousand baht worth of cards were sold last year. All of the children are divided into teams and are assigned chores to do together, such as setting the table or cleaning up after meals.

Meeting spiritual needs is a high priority. This is important as residents try to cope with the amount of illness and death that they see. Worship is held every evening at the House of Love with the children taking the lead in praying, reading Bible verses, and choosing songs. The staff and older children share from the Bible. Staff from the Health Project for Tribal People meets monthly with the House of Love staff for a time of worship and prayer. Christian students from a local international school lead a weekly program that includes a Bible story and prayer. Children from the House of Love attend Sunday School and take part in special activities at church, such as a Sunday School camp.

In 2006 some of the children were able to spend time with family members. The staff has also worked to get copies of documentation for the children (such as birth certificates and house registrations) when they exist, so that the children will have an opportunity to receive Thai identity cards when they turn 15. Most of our children now have some documentation and are in the process of receiving Thai citizenship. Two of the children may never be able to receive citizenship because of their ethnicity. International Justice Mission has a lawyer who has helped with the process obtaining citizenship for the children. Without Thai citizenship their futures are very bleak in Thailand. Progress has been made in this area in 2006.

In 2006 other activities included learning English and Japanese lessons with volunteers, special tutoring for all children, keyboard lessons, and a special party given by a sponsor who came to visit. The Lahu and Akha languages were taught during the school break. A group of teachers and students from Grace International School came to lead activities for the children on Saturday afternoons. They play games, do crafts, bake cookies, sing, read a Bible story, and pray. The children took a Children's Day trip, went swimming, and participated in a sport's day at school.



Future Building

The House of Love was damaged during the floods of 2005 and it also receives more referrals than there is room for. Therefore the staff began plans to build their own facility. This will save rent money and allow for more residents. It will also give room for gardens and a fish pond so that the children can raise some of their own food. Donations from Norway and Hong Kong were given so that a piece of land could be bought. Plans are now being drafted for the buildings and churches in Ohio are helping to raise funds for the buildings.

Citizenship

Three of the children at the House of Love now have all the documentation needed to receive Thai citizenship and should be able to receive it soon. Another seven are in the process, but it is expected to be a very long process. Two children received full citizenship this year, making a total of 18 children with citizenship. Three of the children are not eligible at this time to apply for citizenship in Thailand. This process has taken much time and effort from the HOL and HPTP staff; but it is an important process as more and more of our children are approaching the age of 15 when the Thai government requires that they have some type of identification card in order to stay legally in the country. Two of the women living at the House of Love were able to re-register as migrant workers, giving each legal status that allows her to remain in the country.

Sponsorship Program

The sponsorship program has expanded for the children at the House of Love. Individuals, groups, and churches from Hong Kong, Germany, Singapore, Sweden, England, Norway, and the United States are giving full or partial sponsorship for the children. Sponsors receive pictures, updates, and notes from the children twice a year. This program is very helpful as the House of Love has little consistent funding from other sources at this time.

Staff Development

Staff attended seminars for continuing education and studied English. Seminars included:

- AIDS Competency
- How to use antiretroviral drugs
- How to plan for and carry out an evaluation

- Preventing sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism
- Children rights and how to prevent and deal with the abuse of children
- Capacity building for AIDS workers of the Interfaith Network on AIDS in Thailand
- AIDS and the church sponsored by the Christian Conference of Asia
- How to talk about sex and morality with teens in the context of AIDS
- Prevention of HIV/AIDS among migrant workers in Thailand

Medical Care

Residents of the House of Love were taken to the Outpatient Department of the hospital for treatment 171 times and were admitted to the hospital 6 times for a total of 48 in-patient days. Health problems included ear, eye and skin infections, herpes (shingles), stomach problems, chicken pox, dental cavities, and diarrhea. A father and mother of two of the children at the House of Love, who were HIV-positive and followed by the HOL staff, were treated for tuberculosis and cryptococcal meningitis. Both died this year.

During 2006, two more children who are HIV positive were admitted to the HOL. One of them is taking antiretrovirals and one is in the process of registering with the hospital to begin taking the drugs. One child, who became resistant to his antiretroviral drugs in 2004 became very sick and had many medical problems before dying in July. This was the first death of a child who had grown up in the HOL. He was fifteen years old and is missed by the other children. It was difficult for the other children who are HIV positive as they were forced to think of their own illness and possible death. Experience in other countries has proven that many people will develop a resistance to the antiretroviral drugs within one to two years after beginning them. This is a concern for the staff. Some alternative drugs are now available in Thailand, but they are more expensive. We still have one child who has not started on antiretroviral drugs because her CD4 count remains above 200. She remains healthy, but her CD4 count continues to fall at a slow rate. The program that provides free drugs for our women and children may not continue. We will have to look for funding if the children are to remain on antiretroviral drugs.

Successes

- Children are in a more stable school environment where teachers take individual interest in the children, their skills and abilities. Several of the children are making very good grades. The young man attending university in Bangkok was in the top 3 in his class after the first year. The young people studying in vocational school are maintaining good averages and are hoping to go on to university.
- Children who have come with emotional problems causing them to be depressed, withdrawn, or aggressive are responding well to the love and care they receive at the House of Love. Several of the older children have found appropriate ways to express their needs and have begun to tell more of their histories. All children continue to develop in their ability to get along with others and in their faith.
- Children are taking more responsibility and have done a good job of welcoming new children to the home.
- The child who is deaf and living at the House of Love now attends worship and cell group in a Christian community. She was baptized this year and has invited a friend to worship with her.
- More children are receiving documentation and the possibility of Thai citizenship.

- Children and adults living at the House of Love are healthier. Five of the children are on antiretroviral drugs and have experienced an increase in their CD4 count and therefore an increased ability to fight opportunistic diseases.

Problems

- Citizenship issues remain a problem for many of the residents at the House of Love. This is becoming an issue as children are graduating from compulsory education and are hoping to continue their educations and eventually find a job.
- Limited space and the condition of the House of Love after the floods of 2005 make it difficult to accept new referrals and care properly for the residents at the House of Love. In 2005 the land lord moved the front fence to make room for parking for an indoor badminton club that he built across the street from the HOL. This makes it more dangerous for the children due to increased traffic and leaves less room for the children to play outdoors.
- Access to antiretroviral drugs is limited due to costs and lack of citizenship of some of the HOL residents. Our residents now have access to a drug produced by the Thai government, but the program that provided that drug for under a dollar a month is expected end in near future. Costs will increase at that time. Also, when residents become resistant to the drug produced by the government, there are limited drugs to replace that drug and all of the drugs that are available are costly.
- Some of our children now have parents who live outside of the House of Love. The children were taken from their homes because of abuse, family violence, and drug and alcohol problems. The children want a relationship with their parents and it is sometimes difficult to know how to build that relationship and yet keep the child safe.
- Children continue to struggle with their HIV status or with the fact that they do not have families. Staff must be aware of the times that an individual child needs special attention.
- In 2006 we had to turn referrals away because of lack of resources and space. There is also more concern about accepting those considered illegal aliens by the Thai government. It puts the tribal staff at risk for being arrested. This is also true when residents die.

Future Plans

- The House of Love will continue to meet the needs of ethnic minority women and children who are affected by AIDS or who need temporary or more permanent shelter from abusive situations. The urban work of the Health Project has pointed out the very great need for shelter for women and children coming from troubled families.
- The staff will continue to work towards finding ways of securing documentation or citizenship for the children when possible. This is difficult since legally many of them are not considered citizens of Thailand where they were born nor of Burma where their mothers were born. These children are without rights and without a secure future if they do not have citizenship. The staff is working with the Social Welfare Department and other government organizations in order to secure this documentation.
- The staff also plans to continue to work closely with the Christian hospital and research groups that will continue to provide antiretroviral drugs for the children and to monitor their CD4 counts for signs of resistance.

- The staff also sees the need to expand because of the number of referrals that must be turned away. Land has been bought and funding is being secured in order to build a home to replace the houses that are now being rented.

