



The Youth Volunteer Group : Network of Thai Youth living with HIV

We are youth living with HIV in Thailand. Our experience with stigma and discrimination have often made us feel worthless and resulted in a lack of motivation to live. Gathering together as the 'The Youth Volunteer Group' has provided us opportunities to share, learn and help our friends and communities.

We formed our group in 2004 with 20 members, increasing in membership to 90 by end 2008. While initially, it was a loosely defined and unofficial group, it became more organized and established in 2009. At present, overall membership consists of 200 members in 12 groups across Thailand (Bangkok, Phetburi, Khon Kaen and Chiangrai Province), with members ranging in age from 13-21 years. In collaboration with partner organizations, we work with about 1,000 children and youth living with HIV in Thailand.

Our hopes :



Painted by Keng in 2006, a great friend who passed away when she was 15 years old, 2007. Her hopes becomes our hopes "Change the world from one of AIDS misunderstanding to a world with understanding"

And we would like to see ourselves and our friends attain healthiness, hopes and get inspired to pursue our dreams and to have a family care us.



Most of our activities are concerned with organizing art healing activities for our friends during the visits to the clinic and in the art camps, family camps during school vacations. We help to assure parents of children living with HIV that the children grow up and live a life just like other children. To generate income, we have produced art works and sell them. Some do theatrical performance and exhibitions to campaign on AIDS.

The group has been funded by 'we understand' group, AIDS ACCESS Foundation, Phachomklao Phetburi Hospital, Srinagarind Hospital, Khon Kaen University, SEARCH-Thai Red Cross AIDS Research Centre, ART AIDS Funds, Australian Federation of AIDS Organization and UNICEF Thailand.

The Experiences of Youth Volunteers



Nok(M) was 14-15 years old, 6 years ago when he first joined the art camp. According to him, it was the lowest of the low in his life during the time; he was gravely ill and had to quit school, and had been bed-ridden in hospital and his home. His mother died around that time. But once joining the camp, he said;

"In my first time at the camp, I liked it so much to get to meet friends and have fun with them, and be away from home. After that, I never missed out on any further camps and kept counting days before the camps would be organized. During the camp, I wanted the time to get by slowly, and I did not want to return home."

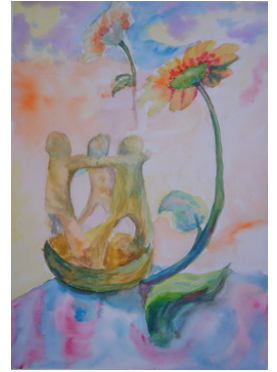
"Now, I stay at the peak of my life. Having ART keeps my health strong and makes it possible for me to resume my education and complete junior high school. Now, I can earn my living. And if I am available, I always like to help organize the camp. We have been through this, and are able to share with our younger friends and give them support, just like how the staff members had done to us. We treat our junior friends alike. I and my friends help our teachers to prepare the theatrical performance with our younger friends."



Paint brightness into the night (2004, 13 yrs old)



**Journey of dream (2008,
17 yrs old)**



Together (2009,18 yrs old)



Bua (F), 19 years, is skilled in drawing and pursuing higher education in arts. At every art camp organized for her younger friends, she volunteers to teach drawing. Asking what keeps her to continue working for Youth Volunteer Group, Bua said

"I was given a chance to learn and wanted to extend such an opportunity to others. Also, it's not that I help them to learn, but vice versa. They give me courage to express myself and help me to practice taking the responsibility for my younger friends."

Bua's father said, Bua has improved herself owing to the help from staff. If there's any request for help from either Bua or father, they are happy to help. When he learns that his daughter can teach the younger friends to draw, help the others, he throws his wholehearted support behind her to work for Youth Volunteer group.

Our challenges:

- Attempts to participate in implementation to mitigate impact from “ARV drug resistance in youth”.
- Campaign for production of ARV tailored to the need of children (smaller dosage, not bitter, smaller pills, no need to cut up, no need to take the drug too often), stigma reduction, child right and gender equality.
- Coordination on Positive Prevention and holistic care among children and youth living with HIV
- Expansion of work to cover other groups of children who are also subject to vulnerable predicament and have to face unequal treatment in society.
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**'A New Day' Painted by Misa(F), 18 yrs old,
a first year student of a university (2010)**