



*Encouraged to live
Empowered to create*

Christmas Newsletter 2024



Dear Friends,

As we gather together on the 18th of December to give thanks for the past year, it will be the 20th time we have done so and will also mark the day, 25 years ago, when I arrived in Nong Khai. Hands of Hope will celebrate its 20th birthday in February.

Every year brings its challenges and successes. For twenty years we have celebrated new life, with children born to the producers or people restored to health after receiving an unpromising prognosis. We have seen people move on to independent living and occupation outside of the project and we have also accompanied friends, during their last days.

Creativity has been at the heart of the project and community, the life blood running through it. We have designed over 700 different items, with our first design – the Lotus Card – still a favourite to this day. We have produced hundreds of thousands of products – each original and each utilizing one medium – 'saa' (mulberry) paper. In February, we will publish all the statistics from over the years, in a celebration of our years together.



Pik

Samorn

Pit

Nuphit

Gay

Got

Sanit

We have missed the daily presence of Sanit, who continues to work at home, caring for her young grandson and comes just once a week to exchange her work. All the others in the group multi-task to complete orders, each with particular skills that they bring to the table – literally!



In late June, the group was shocked and deeply saddened by the sudden death of Gay 2. She had worked in Hands of Hope for seven years and had fully participated in all project activities. She was always smiling, yet faced great pressures outside of the project....personal relationships, on-line scams and debt....and it all became too much for her. We attended her cremation ceremony but needed to do something special together, to process what had happened. A 'retreat' day was held and a half day of art therapy – both of which allowed us to honour and mourn Gay and find peace ourselves. We continue to miss her.

Although we gave up holding annual design workshops a few years ago, new designs continue to emerge and this year Boxed Angels were extremely well received. A collaboration between Got and myself gave birth to 22 different designs – an angel for every occasion – and a new Christmas Angel appeared ready for the annual fair in Bangkok too. A new Nativity Set was also launched and new designs made for customised orders.

Extreme heat was experienced in April this year, from which there was little escape. Hands of Hope joined the Garden of Friendship community for the celebration of the Songkran Water Festival, which offered short relief through



water play and a chance to bless the 'elders'.

We are grateful to Sr Pranee and the Outreach staff for always welcoming us to join their celebrations and for providing assistance on many levels to the producers. Hands of Hope originated from the Outreach Programme, when families were visited in the villages at a time when HIV infections were rising. Since that time, great inroads have been made in Thailand, through the availability of ARV medication.





For four years, we have raised tilapia, learning much from the experience. In 2024, there were five new intakes of fingerlings, 329 kgs of fish were sold fresh and a further 249 kgs were caught for drying. The latter was made a lot easier, when in July, we were gifted a dehydrator. Insects were no longer a problem and we were able to dry fish through the raining season. Our dehydrator has two drying units and so, in the latter half of the year, we began experimenting with fruit, turning bananas and papaya into nutritious snacks. Tending the nets is an ongoing activity and the group comes together to attend to this. Two other problems impacted the project with a huge uprooted tree falling into the pond during a storm and the rapid growth of water hyacinth. This threatened to take over the pond and so we have been manually removing it. We hope to reclaim our pond before closing for the year!



One of our highlights every year, is welcoming visitors and 2024 saw people arriving from Ireland, Italy, Denmark, Australia, Germany, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Holland, Belgium and France, with additional visitors from Bangkok and other parts of Thailand. It is always a joy to interact with those who come through our doors.



A new cat entered our community...another waif brought in during a rain storm. 'Tua Lek' ('little one' – though not so little now), has yet to make friends with Munjai but is attached to the producers and likes to get up 'close and personal' during production. She joins cats Chilli and Kanom and our dog Munjai, who still enters the workroom every day at 4:28 and barks for all his friends to down tools and go home.



The future of Hands of Hope very much depends on orders. We have to face the question of sustainability and are discussing whether we can feasibly continue beyond our 20th birthday. You, our customers, have accompanied us in our journey through the years and we have valued this greatly. Not only has it provided life giving work to the producers, but many of you have become dear friends and your feedback, words of encouragement and visits, have meant so much. So.... PLEASE send us orders for 2025, early in the year if possible, which will be a sign that you want Hands of Hope to keep going!

In closing, we give thanks for the year that has passed. Although we have had our challenges –as indeed everyone has – we are not facing the catastrophic difficulties and loss of life besieging other nations. We pray fervently for peace.



*With blessings for Christmas
and throughout 2025 (2568 Thailand)
With love and gratitude – Antonia and all*

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