

IN THE SHADOW OF THE RED LIGHT

FAA is twelve years old. She is Vietnamese and sells flowers around one of the tourist entertainment areas in Bangkok to earn a living for her family. Faa also goes with foreign tourists who use her for sex or to make pornography. This is a way of life now; if she has no money for a taxi home she just offers her body to the taxi driver for payment. Maybe she already has AIDs. Faa has a book of phone numbers and hotel rooms where she visits her 'clients'. Faa's mother acts as her agent and makes 'bookings' for Faa. Each night Faa has to take home 6000Baht (approximately \$US140), to build a house for her father in Aranyaprathet where he lives. Mam is 10 and she works with Faa as well to support her parents in Cambodia.

Rahab Ministries evangelism team met Faa three months ago when visiting women working in the bar area where Faa usually 'hangs out'. Sometimes they buy her flowers, sometimes they take her for ice cream, and mostly they just talk and want to be her friend.

Building friendships and gaining trust are the first steps in reaching out to sexually exploited children. Meeting them where they are, listening to them, keeping their confidences and demonstrating practical love and real friendship is the first steps to building relationship and trust.

However there seemed to be little that we could do to really help Faa and Mam as we have no authority to take them from the streets and they felt it was their obligation to their parents to earn money for them. Fortunately we had friends who were able to help. Mother is now in jail and Faa and Mam are in a welfare home. Both children are receiving treatment for STDs. We are thankful that they don't have AIDs.

Rahab Ministries is a small Thai Christian organization working with prostitutes in the infamous 'red-light' tourists districts of Patpong Rd, Bangkok and in Pattaya. There are approximately 4,000 prostitutes working in Patpong. In Pattaya there are up to 50,000. 20% of who are children under the age of 18. Young children who are sold into the brothels for use mainly by Thai and Asian men are kept in hidden locations, not accessible to other than the clients.

Rahab Ministries has three objectives:

1. To share the love of Jesus Christ through friendship evangelism and social concern.
2. To provide practical help and emotional support to women and children in prostitution.
3. To provide opportunities for education, vocational training and alternative employment.

These objectives are met by bar visitation and friendship evangelism. Four times weekly Rahab workers visit the bars inviting the girls into Rahab center, a Beauty Salon. Their friends who refer to the salon as ‘the place where they will help you’ bring others in. Here the girls can rest, relax, receive counseling, practical help and informal education. Sponsorship enables girls to leave prostitution and further their education or do vocational training. Counseling and teaching are given on practical matters such as safe sex, nutrition, HIV/AIDs prevention, and other relevant topics. Girls can learn Thai literacy, basic English, hairdressing, sewing and typing. Rahab Greeting Cards provides alternative employment for girls leaving prostitution.

Girls coming into the program live with the housemothers, staff workers who have come out of prostitution and through the program. They work on the greeting cards until school enrollment. This provides some income for them and their families, training in work skills and learning to work together and communicate positively. Constant support and encouragement is given through personal affirmation, counseling and prayer. Fun activities are important too. Girls are encouraged to talk about their experiences with Rahab staff as a means of release and healing. They are discouraged from discussing their experiences among themselves as this can encourage them to dwell on sexual experience and negative behaviors. Efforts are made to integrate the girls into normal teenage life experiences through participation in church and other youth activities.

Spiritual Program

A major focus of the program of Rahab Ministries is worship, prayer and Bible teaching. There is daily worship, bible study and prayer for the staff and everyone on the program. Bar workers can join in if they wish. Biblical counseling, personal bible study and prayer, prayer ministry and laying on of hands are seen as essential processes for the healing of the sexual, psychological and emotional abuse suffered by many of the girls. Sexual abuse and accompanying trauma may result from earlier sexual abuse in the family as well as prostitution. For many girls this precipitates entry into the sex industry.

OO, started work in the bars when she was 14. In her first month she slept with, or was raped by, eleven foreign tourists. She started coming into the salon every day to shower, eat and rest after working all night. Rahab workers befriended her, chatting, doing her hair, gaining her confidence and began to encourage her to look at options to prostitution for her life, such as:

Did she want to return home to her village?

Did she want to go to school?

Did she need to earn money for her family?

Oo needed to support her grandmother and younger brother, she needed a place to live and she wanted to continue her education. Rahab house provided a place to stay where she was nurtured and disciplined in the Christian life. Rahab Greeting Cards provided employment and an income and Rahab Sponsorship program provided for her school fees and living expenses. Each day Oo participated in the worship service at Rahab. She accepted Jesus Christ and his love, forgiveness and healing and began to grow in the Christian life. Workers spent time with her on a regular basis in counseling and personal Bible teaching and helping her to understand her value as a child of God. Prayer counseling helped OO to overcome the rejection that she had felt within her family from early childhood and to deal with the confusion of sexual abuse.

Oo exhibited high attention seeking behaviors as a result of sexual exploitation and the rejection by her family. She was given specific boundaries for behavior in her daily life and rewarded with positive attention for good behavior. Negative behaviors were ignored. As Oo began to feel secure and loved, the attention seeking behaviors lessened. Rahab counselors then began to focus on praying with her through her early experiences for healing and wholeness. Oo enjoyed school and was a good student. School achievement and learning new practical skills also contributed to her increased sense of well-being. Unfortunately increased financial pressure from her family necessitated her leaving school after one year and finding work in a factory.

Ministry to commercially sexually exploited women and children must focus on the following levels.

1. 1. The spiritual
Helping them to experience God in a way that is relevant to their lives.
2. The psychological and emotional
 - a. Providing love and acceptance.
 - b. Building confidence and self-esteem.
 - c. Healing of trauma.
3. The physical
 - a. Practical needs. This may need to include income generation. In Thailand most children are in prostitution to support their families.
 - b. Health needs
 - c. Skills training, education and/or vocational training.
4. The Behavioral
 - a. Structured living.
 - b. Counseling for behavioral change
 - c. 'peer support'
 - d. Therapy

Strengths of Rahab Ministries Program

Emphasis on acceptance, non-judgement, Bible teaching, worship and prayer.

- The staff. Many of the Thai workers are former prostitutes and have come through the program.
- The program is user friendly. A beauty salon is non-threatening, and provides a social center where girls feel free to come at any time, use the facilities or just socialize.
- Hairdressing and other 'beauty' services in the salon are hands on ministry to the girls, helping them to feel accepted, affirmed and cared for. Looking good and feeling beautiful raises self-esteem.

Identifying real needs and addressing them at grass roots level. These may be immediate short-term needs or longer term needs such as planning and preparing for their future.

On the job staff training, most of which takes place at Rahab. This is 'hands on' training, which focuses on working with actual people rather than theoretical principles.

How can a ministry to sexually exploited children be started?

1. Find out where the children are
 2. Build relationships, listen to the children, let them tell their stories
 3. Offer love, acceptance and a non judgmental attitude
 4. Meet their immediate felt needs. Assess their real needs
 5. Provide appropriate facilities/program that are accessible to the children to meet these needs.
 6. Start small, within the funding that you have or can foresee. Start small God will grow it!
 7. Plan times for Bible teaching, counseling and prayer. Present the gospel and pray WITH them.
 8. Adequate and appropriate selection and training process for workers.
 9. Flexibility in the program and constant reevaluation is important
- Use referral agencies for professional services. You can't do it all yourself.
BE PATIENT. This ministry takes time.

Some pitfalls.

1. Starting too big.
2. Not listening to the children
3. Planning the program according to your own perceptions of their needs rather than meeting their felt needs.

Rahab Ministries did not set out to work with children. Rahab Ministries has not had a high success rate with this younger age group whom we have 'rescued' or helped out of a sexually exploitative lifestyle. We had no specific structure or planning for the younger children but began to encounter many in the bars. We are learning too. Our initial target group was 17 years and over and we have had a high success rate with these girls who do not want to be prostitutes but feel that they have no alternatives.

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Some of the difficulties that we face.

There are constant difficulties in setting up and maintaining a program.

- It is hard for the girls to understand that we love them and want to help regardless of the choices that they may make.
- Thai people tend to 'disappear' rather than confront their actions and allow counseling for healing to take place.
- The freedom, excitement and 'easy money' of life in the bar or on the street can be appealing to some adolescents and the pressure to 'take money home' can also be intense.

- Psychological addiction to sex work, leaving one's friends and coercion by friends to stay can also be deterrents to starting a new life as can fear of the unknown and fear of not being able to cope with a new situation.
- Lack of good parental models for the children. There is no father figure as Rahab Ministries is essentially a woman-to-woman ministry.

So what of **Faa**? We have not seen her for a while. We passed on information on her customers to an Organization trying to list and prosecute foreign pedophiles. Maybe the police have taken her to a Social Welfare Department home or maybe she has relocated, selling flowers in an area we do not yet visit.

Patricia Green

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Patricia Green is a New Zealand missionary with World Outreach and has been working with prostitutes in Thailand for fourteen years. Patricia is an ordained minister of the Assemblies of God in NZ and has a Masters degree in Community Psychology. Her background is in Social Work. Patricia's desire was to work with the children in the brothels in Bangkok but they are inaccessible so she began Rahab Ministries in 1989 to work with the women in the 'Red Light' districts.