



Elise and Jon Fletcher

Update from the Edges 1 | March 2025



Location: Thailand



What we do: Immersing ourselves in the life of a vibrant slum community, sharing Jesus' love with people around us



Empowering people pushed to the edges of life to release their God-given potential

Dear friends,

We're so excited to share with you how God has been working through CMS partners who, like us, are helping to empower people pushed to the edges of life to reach their God-given potential. We've heard from our colleague Alison in Ukraine about how her church is making a difference for people facing the pain and trauma of ongoing war. Our friends in Paraguay have shared how a CMS-facilitated indigenous mission project is helping a young man learn academically and spiritually. We hope you are as encouraged as we are by these stories!

Here in Bangkok, Thailand, we have begun the year with some great opportunities to serve families. Our local setting is the wonderful Khlong Toei slum community where our family has lived for 10 years. With the help of Thai case workers and a local church, we run a Keeping Families Together (KFT) programme to support and equip overwhelmed adults to improve the lives of children in their care.

The current cohort of families are smashing their goals in areas such as budgeting, positive parenting and healthy living. The family fun days and training sessions are great, with weekly home visits allowing us to go deeper in applying family strengthening principles. We are super grateful to journey with these families who have so much to teach us about resilience.

Aunty Song was in crisis when a community leader nominated her for the KFT programme. She had recently taken on the care of her niece, Manao, alongside her own children, providing refuge from an abusive home in a different province. There was a clear bond between them and a desire to make the situation work, but nobody had counted on Aunty Song losing her cleaning job and falling behind on rent. With no qualifications and no savings, an extra mouth to feed and school costs for the new term now seemed an impossible burden.

Aunty Song's first thought was to approach a big foundation in the slum community, known for its resources. She had to swallow her pride but she was determined to provide for Manao and shield her from worry.

"She'll be better off with us," said the officer. "She can go to one of our residential schools outside Bangkok and eat three meals a day. Think of the education she'll get and the opportunities... just sign here."

It was so matter of fact. Aunty Song felt shame turning down this offer. It was "help" but not the help she wanted or needed. She knew family ties were the one thing Manao had and should be protected at all costs.

Now, approaching completion of the 18-month KFT programme, Aunty Song's laundry business is thriving



Home visiting for the Keeping Families Together programme.

Meet more people who, with your support, are empowering at the edges:
churchmissionsociety.org/empower

**With Jesus
With each other
To the edges**



and Manao is settled in a local school. They have a new puppy and there is plenty of laughter in their little home. They are exploring faith in a small house church that meets on Fridays. Though their problems haven't disappeared and slum life is far from easy, they are well connected and equipped for future crises.

Speaking about her experience in the programme, Aunty Song said: "The money [a small income generation grant] gave us a boost, but mostly the KFT team helped me to find strength in myself and my community that I didn't know was there."

Poverty is the biggest factor for placing children in institutions worldwide. In Thailand there are over 120,000 children in orphanages and it is estimated that 90 per cent of them have living parents. There are active orphanage recruiters in some areas, with overseas funding of unregistered orphanages reliant on keeping numbers high. Adults in situations like Aunty Song are finding they have little choice but to hand over the care of their children to "experts". The risks of attachment disorders, developmental delay and abuse in these settings are not widely acknowledged.

We believe that God places children in families; all children deserve families and institutionalised care should be a last resort. Families should be empowered to care for their own children. Poverty is complex and multi-faceted but it should never be the deciding factor in separating a child from their family.

The KFT project enables our team to get alongside a handful of vulnerable families in Khlong Toei and see the balance of power shifted at grassroots level. Making a difference for a few always has value, but systemic change is needed to redirect resources from institutions to strengthening families.

Jon works with the government pressure group Alternative Care Thailand (ACT) to advocate for reform in the Thai care system. Among other things, ACT is partnering with the government on a pilot project to safely rehome and reintegrate children from a large orphanage. It is slow work but results are promising. One teenager returning to his village after a decade in care said, "If you had helped our parents initially, we could have stayed with them instead of growing up in an orphanage."

Seeing children become aware of their rights is what fires our determination to work for justice and demonstrate God's deep care for the disempowered.

We are so thankful for your prayers and support enabling us to be present and engaged here. Change is possible and there are many signs of God's kingdom coming. May you be encouraged to champion the needs of marginalised people in your setting and be blessed in walking alongside those others may overlook.

Much love, Jon and Elise

Prayer Points

- ▶ Give thanks that our neighbour who has been missing for four months has been found safe and is receiving psychiatric treatment.
- ▶ Air pollution in Bangkok has been reaching hazardous levels. Please pray for us and our neighbours trying to mask outdoors and clean the air in our homes.
- ▶ Pray for the Thai government to prioritise the needs of children and families and to take bold steps towards systemic change.
- ▶ Pray for us to secure funding to expand the KFT programme to reach more local families as demand increases.



Photos from top to bottom: KFT healthcare training; home visiting with our Thai Christian teammate P'Nuy (centre); the shadow of the expressway brings welcome relief from the sun; airport reunion with our son Elliot – back together for Christmas!



Empowering people pushed to the edges of life

We've been encouraged to hear recent mission stories from around our wider area of work. In Ukraine, families are being assured they are not alone amid the hardship of war, and our colleagues in Paraguay have seen a young man overcome challenges to learn academically and spiritually. Read more at churchmissionsociety.org/empower

Please note that opinions expressed in updates are those of mission partners, not necessarily of Church Mission Society.

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