Staff showed incredible effort and persistence through the month of February, both drinking water and working out every day for fitness month.

The goals were to work out for 20 minutes and drink 5 water bottles per day. The staff were creative in ways to work out, posting pictures of group fitness classes, local gyms, lifting weights, swimming, badminton, rock climbing, and hula hooping. Prizes included movie tickets, yoga mats, coffee, tea, and massages. The grand prize for the most days spent working out and drinking water was split between Aoun, the Chiang Rai Resource Center Activities Director, and Naed, the maid for The Freedom Story. Congratulations to them for working so hard. Also in regards to fitness, one of our scholarship students was given an award for his performance in field and track at his university. They even honored him by featuring him in a local magazine.
The Pong Phrae Resource Center stayed busy this month with its weekly English and Computer classes. Students learned typing techniques and practiced using a program to improve their typing speed. Valentines Day is a largely celebrated event in Thailand and the students and staff invested a few days into decorating and planning. The staff held an event where students learned about healthy relationships and sex education while also having fun by cooking, playing games, and singing karaoke. One of our leadership students, Gung, led a discussion during Valentines Day regarding healthy relationships. Also this month, the students spent one Saturday doing community service by cleaning the sala and library. Service work is a way for them to understand the value of giving back to their community. The staff held a movie night where they watched The BFG and cooked noodles. Big news in the community this month was a visit by the royal family to the Pong Phrae School. Years ago the school was damaged in an earthquake and the Royal Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn funded the rebuilding of the school. This month she visited the school for the grand opening of the new building. The students and community anxiously awaited her arrival. She toured the school grounds and also presented an award to one of our scholarship students for his outstanding performance in story telling. It was an exciting event for the community and everyone involved.
The Chiang Rai Resource Center was also busy this month with Valentines Day activities. In preparation for Valentines Day, the staff made cupcakes and invited the students to come in after school throughout the week to decorate them and spend time hanging out together. The students were invited to a Valentines Day activity and movie called “I Love Myself” with Lux, the Awareness Director.

“It is important for the young girls and boys to value themselves and have self-worth. Then they can build healthy relationships with others.”

It was a great opportunity to build relationships with the students and get to know them better. Next month the students will start exams, so the Chiang Rai Resource Center staff hosted a hang out day for all vocational and high school students. This gave staff a chance to encourage the students and also allowed students to be stress free, talk about exams, and relax. Having a supportive community has been linked to resilience in children and the staff is working hard to provide a positive and encouraging atmosphere. Also this month, students came in after school for homework help and cooked egg tarts. Staff has been actively recruiting students for an upcoming photography and videography class that will begin next month with a volunteer from India coming to join our team. It is nice to see such a happy growing community of students at the newly opened center.
Fundraising in Bangkok

This month, staff participated in several fundraising and awareness events in Bangkok. Lisa, the International Liaison, and Tawee, the Thailand Director, both went to Bangkok to host the first ever Global Ping Pong event in association with the Australian organization Pingpongathon. The Anantara Golden Triangle Elephant Camp graciously donated a one night stay and elephant walk at their luxury resort as a raffle prize for the event. The Freedom Story hosted the event with two other anti-trafficking organizations and was able to raise 18,000 baht in ticket sales and raffles. The event will hopefully be the first of many future global ping pong events. The St. Andrews International School at Soi 71 also participated, hosting their own ping pong event and raising money for The Freedom Story at their school. Hoping to get more International Schools involved, Lisa has been meeting with several service directors at schools in Bangkok and Chiang Mai. The Early Learning Centre in Bangkok has an Art Auction every year, and this year they invited our students to paint a piece to sell. Lisa showed one of our films to a group of Grade 6 students as well as attended the auction to talk about The Freedom Story and raise awareness about the work we do. In addition to raising funds, two new students have now been sponsored by a parent and administrator at the school.
Online exploitation has been an area of focus for The Freedom Story staff over the past year. Because of the prevalence of Facebook, Instagram, and other social media, it is important that the students understand the risk involved in using them. Lux, the Awareness Director, invited students to come into the Pong Phrae Resource Center to watch the movie Trust. The movie tells the story of a girl who was using an online chat program to develop a relationship, but was tricked by an older man wanting to exploit her. After the movie, she led discussions and activities around the same topic. In educating our students on these risks, we hope to better prepare them to recognize or protect themselves against this kind of exploitation.

Counseling

Khae and Lux, our two counselors attended a training this month at the government hospital on psychotherapy techniques for both group and individual counseling. Our counselors are always actively seeking professional development and ways to share and learn new ideas and techniques. In addition to her own professional development, Khae co-led a staff training for The Freedom Story staff on the proper way to handle emergency case situations in regards to mental health, emotions, or special situations. Win, the Human Rights Manager, led the training with her, teaching the staff the legal regulations on involvement. Together they helped the staff develop the skills and knowledge necessary to be prepared for future intake of cases.
Over the past few months, the farmers at the organic farm have been working hard to produce the first rice crop. Last month, three different types of rice was packaged and made ready to sell. This month, the sustainability team took it to sell at food fair in Bangkok. Also this month, one of our leadership students went to Chiang Mai with Worn, the Sustainability Director, for the annual conference of The National Science and Technology Development Agency of the Northern Region of Thailand. They took both the rice from the farm and the organic fertilizer that was made from the Eri silk waste to show and sell at the event. They had a booth that allowed them the opportunity to share information about our products, network with others in the industry, and promote the work that the team has been doing. Back at the Pong Phrae Resource Center, Worn has been hard at work using natural materials like butterfly pea to tye dye cloths that will be used in our new Seri line products. We are looking forward to the launching of our new brand soon.