Happy Holidays and Happy New Year from The Freedom Story!

The Freedom Story staff celebrated the end of the year with our annual Christmas party. The theme of this year’s party was “Giving Creates Happiness”.

Staff, students, local organisations and families came to join in on the fun and celebrate the season of giving. High school leaders helped staff decorate the Pong Phrae Resource Center with Christmas trees and lights. The celebration included speeches by staff, games, a talent show, lunch and gifts.

“Happiness is not just in receiving but also for the ones who give, and they too can get happiness from the act of giving,” explained Thailand Founding Director, Tawee in a speech about the season for the attendees.

Opportunities to celebrate, have fun, and relax are often scares for our students and families.
Economic constraints, lack of free time, or, for our students who don’t live with their families, the absence of a caregiver mean many aren’t able to celebrate holidays.

The opportunity to do so at the Resource Center allows us to build relationships with the community, show our students we love and care about them, and ultimately facilitate open and honest relationships between staff and students, which means we can better support them in the future.

Staff celebrated with their own Christmas party as well. The flower themed event featured games, gifts, dinner and a lot of fun together.

It was organized and hosted by the Chiang Rai City Center staff.

It served as a great opportunity to thank staff and their families who sacrifice to such throughout the year in the pursuit of disrupting child exploitation.

Everything we do would not be possible without them!
In December, Lux conducted a training for students at the Pong Phrae resource center on depression.

25 students attended the half-day training.

She opened by showing pictures of famous people worldwide who have had depression, and shared about her personal experience of her friend having depression. She shared how her friend received help by talking about their condition and getting the support and help they needed.

She went on to explain about the symptoms of depression, and finished with asking the students to make posters about the symptoms of depressive disorder in children to help analyze the symptoms.

These trainings help equip the students with knowledge to help them make healthy life choices. Knowledge of mental health is minimal in Thailand. Lux asked the students to take a pre and post-test in order to check their knowledge, and their scores improved.

With this information, students can go forward with the ability to recognize depression in their lives and to access the resources they may need.

This training was a great follow up to the community training on depression that Lux ran in September.

In November, Lux also coordinated a Case Conference at Watanaseree to ensure that all staff were up to date about the status of the students in our program, ensuring they are properly supported.
This training will enable villagers to continue to make eco-friendly textiles, which can then be sold through Shop Seri, providing jobs and additional income while also protecting the environment.

Worn also went to Chiang Mai in December to participate in the 12th Fai Gaem Mai’s Lanna Ethnic Textile Exhibition held at Chiang Mai University.

While he was there he promoted and sold products from Shop Seri.
Every department talked about the programs they are running and shared any updates or changes.

The high school aged youth leaders performed a skit on the 8 types of human trafficking, which everyone greatly enjoyed!

Parents and students updated their personal data with staff, and had a chance to meet with mentors to get to know them more and understand more about our programs and resources available to them and their students.
In November, students from PREM International School came to volunteer one Saturday. Thank you for your partnership with The Freedom Story!
In November, Khae, our Counsellor, and Aoun, activities staff at Chiang Rai City Center, conducted outreach to Agape Children’s home in Chiang Rai.

Khae and Aoun led games that taught the students about self-esteem.

19 students ages 11-23 attended the training.

Activity-based learning is a great way for students to be introduced to new topics in a comfortable and non-threatening way.

Training on issues such as self-esteem equips students, such as these living away from their families, with the ability to process and express their emotions in a healthy and productive way.

This encourages students to have healthier relationships.

In addition, throughout November and December, Khae saw more than three scholarship students to provide one-on-one counselling.
In November, Ketsara, the Leadership Development Director, continued to run our twice weekly girls’ clubs. Meeting Thursdays and Saturdays, 11 girls joined in the clubs in November.

The groups are discussed ‘Peer Pressure’ together, giving the girls the chance to discuss their experiences and learn from each other, empowering them to advocate for themselves.

For the Parents’ Meeting, the Youth Partnership Program Leaders produced a play about the eight types of human trafficking.

In November, Ketsara and Tong, Scholarship Director, attended a three day training on digital communication in Chiang Mai with our partner, ECPAT. Equipping our students to use the internet safely and smartly is essential to protecting them in our increasingly digital age.

In December, with the help of the Activities staff, Ketsara, Ball and Bee ran a three day life skills camp at Pong Phrae Resource Center. They had a chance to spend time with students, teaching them about skills such as cooking. They even cooked the catfish the informal students have been raising!
In December, we said goodbye to Aoun, our Chiang Rai City Center Activities staff, and Win, our Human Rights staff.

Aoun has worked with The Freedom Story for over two years, helping to get the activities at the City Center up and running, mentoring our older students and making it a space where they feel welcome and able to spend time.

Aoun is taking some time to be with her family, before she heads abroad to be an Au pair.

Win has been working for The Freedom Story for over two years as well. He has worked faithfully to set up the Human Rights program. He used his background as a lawyer to share his knowledge with the local community and students.

Win is moving on to start practicing as a lawyer himself, using the skills and knowledge he gained in his degree and through passing the bar.

Thank you, Win and Aoun for your work for The Freedom Story!
In November, seven members of the Chiang Rai team, and Rachel Goble, attended the first ever Asia Region Anti-Trafficking Conference in Bangkok.

The four-day long conference was a great opportunity to network with other organizations working in the sphere of anti-trafficking in Asia and to learn more about the issue and the work being done to combat it.

While in Bangkok, Worn, Tawee and Lucy visited LUSH’s flagship store. LUSH has partnered with the Sustainable Development program for the last few years.

After the conference, Worn, Tawee, Ketsara and Lucy joined our partners, Ping-Pong-A-Thon, and other organizations that are partners with them for a three day retreat to the beach focusing on self and staff care. There were many great discussions about how we can grow this area of our programming for our staff in order to ensure our staff are doing their work sustainably and effectively while also taking care of themselves. Watch this space in 2018!

After the retreat, members of the Ping-Pong-A-Thon team were able to spend a day visiting The Freedom Story Resource Centers and the organic farm. It was a fun day with many opportunities to meet with new staff, and get to know each other more. At the end of the day there was even an opportunity to play badminton and basketball with some of our students at the Pong Phrae Resource Center.

Lucy, the International Liaison, traveled to Bangkok again in November to speak at the servICE fair hosted by NIST school. Lucy gave a keynote, and ran two workshops. She used the opportunity to speak about the issue of human trafficking in Thailand, the work of The Freedom Story and how the students can get involved to over 250 international school students and teachers. She was also able to sell Shop Seri products, just in time for the holiday season.