

THE  
*freedom*  
STORY

2021

# Impact Report

THEFREEDOMSTORY.ORG





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Our mission is to prevent child trafficking and exploitation through culturally relevant programs for vulnerable children and to share their stories **to inspire creative, compassionate people to act.**

Dear Friends,

Thank you for supporting The Freedom Story in 2021. We are so grateful for your partnership in protecting vulnerable children in Northern Thailand from child sex trafficking and exploitation. As we reflect on 2021, we are humbled by and thankful for the bedrock of support that you've helped provide, throughout all the upheavals rippling across the globe. Your dedication and commitment have been inspiring.

The past year's upheavals have made clear the importance of having margin – time to rest, a savings account, or a network of support in a difficult season.

In the communities we work with, margin is a privilege many do not have. The impact of Covid-19 or other exogenous shocks becomes that much more difficult for people who live day to day in already unpredictable circumstances.

This is our work. To offer margin in the form of financial assistance for schooling, food to put on the table, or training on safe migration and advice on citizenship applications. In 2021, our task was to maintain a bedrock of support through the challenges of social distancing requirements, while also adapting to the changing trafficking landscape.

Trafficking did not lessen in the face of the pandemic. People became more vulnerable to it, while traffickers merely adapted their methods. Meanwhile, seeking redress for victims became so much harder as judicial processes struggled to cope with quarantines, lockdowns, and travel restrictions. For many victims, the process took longer, and was fraught with challenges that exacerbated their stress and anxiety. The damage caused by trafficking grew.

We believe prevention is more necessary than ever. Many challenges loom on the horizon, such as rising food and energy costs that strain already tight incomes. We are committed to meeting these challenges and your partnership with us makes that possible.

Thank you for supporting The Freedom Story in 2021. With your help, we can continue to support at-risk youth in Chiang Rai and Nan through our holistic prevention programming, and help students continue their education, pursue their dreams, and break the cycle of poverty and exploitation.

With hope,  
Rachel Goble, CEO







# our programs

## Education

Our comprehensive education program ensures that at-risk youth have the financial and socio-psychological resources to stay in school and develop the life skills to care for themselves and live free from exploitation. Our students maintain a primary school completion rate of 99.5%, while the national average is 87%. Across Northern Thailand, 26.4% of students leave school by the age of 15.

**In comparison, the dropout rate for students of the same age in our program is only 5.7%.<sup>2</sup>**

Our resource centers offer after-school programs, academic support, and mentorship, reaching over 500 people in 2021. The centers were accessed over 16,000 times, despite long-term closures due to COVID. Our staff members mentor students and their families to ensure they have supportive relationships. Despite the pandemic, we provided 2,886 hours of mentorship in 2021 and 16 students graduated from our program.

<sup>1</sup>[https://www.epdc.org/sites/default/files/documents/EPDC%20NEP\\_Thailand.pdf](https://www.epdc.org/sites/default/files/documents/EPDC%20NEP_Thailand.pdf)  
<sup>2</sup><https://www.epdc.org/country/thailand>

## Human Rights

Our human rights programming raises awareness of trafficking and its root causes, equipping communities to advocate for their rights. By teaching about legal rights, child abuse, and online safety, we arm communities with knowledge they can use to protect themselves.

We also assist children in our program attain the legal status to which they are entitled. In 2019, with the support of a grant from USAID, we had expanded the reach of this project to include migrant workers from Burma.

Teaching migrant workers their rights and helping them access their due government services decreases their risk of being trafficked for labor purposes. Our human rights program reached over 1,500 people and was accessed over 2,500 times in 2021.

Our human rights program has been accessed **over 2,500 times**, teaching at-risk students and parents about their rights, child protection, and human trafficking.



**I would like to thank The Freedom Story and its sponsors for providing scholarships and great opportunities for my family and me.** We have gained more knowledge and understanding of family communication, have received good advice, positive energy, and many other things. Really, thank you. There is nothing else to say except thank you.

— SARA, THAILAND (NOT IN PHOTO)



COVID-19 is and will continue to put those at risk of trafficking even more at risk.

COVID-19 is and will continue to put those at risk of trafficking even more at risk. Rising poverty, isolation, students out of school for long periods are all causing children to be more at risk of trafficking. In Thailand, poverty rates were already rising, and the economy has taken a huge hit due to lack of tourism, which drives almost 20% of the economy.<sup>3</sup> Children are increasingly isolated, as their usual sources of support are taken away due to COVID shutdowns. Children of families who are struggling financially are also more isolated in general. Online sexual exploitation of children has skyrocketed in the last year, including in Thailand where the Internet

Crimes Against Children taskforce rescued over 100 children, almost double the years prior. We have seen this disturbing trend increasing in Thailand over the last few years, with a huge increase in 2021.

The pandemic brought unprecedented changes to our programs in 2021. However, through your generous support we were able to pivot our programs to meet needs in our communities. We distributed over 600 bags of dried goods to the neediest members of the community. We also distributed over 5,800 medical-grade face masks. 78 staff and students received a flu vaccine in 2021.



I am HIV positive. I live with my children, one of which also has the virus, and my mother. I couldn't risk getting COVID-19 and bringing it back to my family. I didn't work for an entire month. We survived on my mother's pension from the government of \$20. Even now I work 1-3 days a week down from 5 days a week because no one is hiring. We have no savings. I have to find work. Sometimes I go to work and they haven't paid me."

— SHARED ONE MOTHER OF OUR SCHOLARSHIP STUDENTS

3. [blogs.worldbank.org/eastasiapacific/thai-economy-covid-19-poverty-and-social-protection](https://blogs.worldbank.org/eastasiapacific/thai-economy-covid-19-poverty-and-social-protection)  
4. [ecpat.exposure.co/covid19?utm\\_source=Website&utm\\_campaign=Hero](https://ecpat.exposure.co/covid19?utm_source=Website&utm_campaign=Hero)  
5. [www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-sexcrimes-internet-trfn-idUSKBN23P33K](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-sexcrimes-internet-trfn-idUSKBN23P33K)

Sustainable Livelihoods

Our Sustainable Development programming builds on the existing skills of the families we work with and teaches about sustainable farming practices and business development through microloans. We also provide support at the household level, with training, workshops, and access to our Eco Learning Center. These projects empower communities and raise living standards, thereby tackling poverty as a significant risk factor for trafficking and decreasing the lure of traffickers.

We worked directly with almost 60 community members on this project in 2021.



Ethical Storytelling

We seek to foster a new standard of NGO storytelling, to move away from pity-based marketing towards telling stories in a way that honors and treats everyone involved with dignity, from beneficiaries to supporters. We provide workshops, training sessions, and webinars, and we host a podcast on the subject. We also identify stories of beauty and hope within our communities and tell those stories through photography and film.

Our storytelling serves two purposes. First, it offers healing and dignity to the communities we serve. Second, it expands awareness of the power of prevention and invites others to our work. In 2021 we continued to offer our podcast and resources to our online Ethical Storytelling community.

Additionally, we offered Ethical Storytelling workshops in Thailand, providing advice, capacity building, and support for organizations interested in Ethical Storytelling.

Our podcast currently has over 900 subscribers, and we have provided training to representatives of more than seventeen organizations in Thailand.







# our values

## RELATIONSHIPS

Whether our relationships with our beneficiaries in Thailand or those with donors and one another, we intentionally invest in our human connections each day.

## DIGNITY

Our individual dignity is tied to the dignity of us all. Whether teaching human rights in Thailand or sharing stories in the US, we strive to highlight the dignity of each person.

## POSITIVITY

Even in the midst of the darkest situations, positivity inspires hope. And hope inspires action.

## RESILIENCY

Systemic problems require long-term, systemic solutions in the midst of a changing world. All of our programs are designed to provide adaptable solutions that last.

## INCLUSIVENESS

Inclusion and dignity go hand in hand. We serve those in need without restrictions based on gender, race, religion, sex, age, background, nationality, et cetera.

## TRANSPARENCY

From our finances to our needs, from our successes to our challenges, transparency is central in all we do.



# Our impact

IN 2021

## JANUARY

Distributed masks to over 100 migrant workers.



## MARCH

59 children in local schools attended training on human trafficking.

27 families joined a training session on financial literacy.

## APRIL

Thailand's third COVID wave began, closing in-person activities.

## FEBRUARY

Provided over 300 hours of mentorship.

40 students attended entrepreneurship training in Chiang Rai.

## APRIL

20 new scholarship students were accepted into the program.



## MAY

73 COVID relief bags were distributed to migrant workers.

The Freedom Story Staff served as translators for government service providers assisting 42 people at risk of being trafficked.

## JULY

All staff attended the Asia Region Anti-Trafficking Conference.

Helped 20 migrant workers access their rights with the government.

## JUNE

10 students created an art book to teach others about their rights.

Our annual parents' meeting was held online for the first time.

## SEPTEMBER

Conducted training for 58 migrant workers on being volunteer leaders in their communities.



## OCTOBER

Conducted training on anti-trafficking for 49 migrant workers

## AUGUST

114 community members joined together to develop the surrounding area of our Nan office to make it fit for agricultural activities.

5 new families joined our sustainable livelihoods program.

## NOVEMBER

Distributed covid relief materials and conducted rapid tests for 240 migrants at risk of COVID

## NOVEMBER

Hosted training on statelessness for migrants and scholarship children



## DECEMBER

Helped to screen over 1,200 children for their legal status in Mae Suai district.



# our accomplishments

2,886

Hours of mentorship provided, despite social distancing restrictions

200+

Stateless students aided in documentation process to access fundamental rights

4,500+

COVID-19 protection kits distributed

1,015

Home visits conducted

30+

Families supported in creating sustainable alternative sources of income



1,500+

People reached by our human rights program, including home visits, activities and outreach.

23

Students Graduated

- 1 from their Bachelors Degree
- 3 from High School
- 14 from Middle School
- 5 from Elementary School





## CASE STUDY

# The Red Flags



The things that put children and young people at risk of trafficking don't usually happen overnight; they're vulnerabilities that start early, which is why we advocate for deep change—working to reduce vulnerabilities and build up resilience over time to prevent trafficking.

**We have a system for identifying who is most vulnerable, relying on key factors from a person's history that are recognized red flags.**

To illustrate how this works, let's look at the case of Chayu. Fourteen-year-old Chayu\* is a shy girl with a sweet smile, timid yet articulate. However, her family history has a lot of red flags.

## The First Red Flag

The first red flag was her parents' separation. She has spent the last few years bouncing back and forth between her mother and

father's houses. That alone would not cause concern, of course, but after her parents separated, her mother's income was unstable. She took on work as a housekeeper, but it was insufficient, so she began supplementing that income with sex work in Chiang Rai. She's not the only one in the family to do so. Chayu's paternal grandmother was also works in the sex trade in Malaysia, a hotspot for trafficking.

Although we distinguish between consensual sex work (which is voluntary) and sex trafficking, it raises a concern that Chayu might be more prone to following this path, even while underage. Whether her family encourages her to do it to support them financially or she takes it on herself—either way, due to her age, doing so would be considered trafficking. As it is, her mother sometimes takes Chayu with her when she goes out drinking at night. Though Chayu only drinks a soda on these occasions,

**The Freedom Story staff mentors believe there is a high risk of “learning by seeing.”**

Being around that environment could normalize sex work and seems inappropriate for someone so young.

Chayu's mother's new partner, who was much younger than her—in his late twenties—was another red flag. The Freedom Story staff believed that living with her mother and her partner in a one-room apartment wasn't appropriate, especially because there is a high rate of sexual abuse by stepparents in this area. Her stepfather also had a lot of debt, paying off the car he needed for his job. Burdensome debts are a frequently-cited reason people turn to trafficking: it's the promise of a lot of money earned quickly. Meanwhile, Chayu was often left alone with

\*Name changed for privacy.

him while her mother worked at night. This situation left a lot of opportunities for abuse.

Chayu's staff mentor shared that both Chayu and her mom felt uncomfortable with the situation and Chayu wanted to be able to move out.



**They were sharing one bed and she felt really uncomfortable, especially because they are so close in age. So she asked to move to live with her dad.”**

At her father's home, Chayu also experienced a lot of stress. She was often required to take care of her 1-year-old half-sister after school, which distracted her from the focus she needed to place on her school work. Her relationship with her stepmother was also fraught, and the two often wouldn't speak for days on end. Stressful relationships at home also facilitate the risk of trafficking, primarily if there is no safe place to turn to in time of need.

## How The Freedom Story Stepped In

Seeing all these red flags—the low income, the family debt, family history of sex work, instability, being left alone a lot with her stepfather, and strained family relationships—The Freedom Story's staff believed Chayu was at risk of trafficking. She was accepted into The Freedom Story's scholarship program, which helped alleviate the financial strain. TFS staff acted immediately to move Chayu to live with her father full time to reduce the potential for abuse. Due to COVID restrictions, her grandmother is back from Malaysia, which also helps relieve the burden of caring for her younger sibling. Our staff also facilitated a mutually agreeable system where her parents work together to ensure she is cared for and has transportation to and from school.

She is a dedicated student, working hard and thriving, even through the stress and disruption of moving to a new school. She will finish middle school soon, and though she's not sure what she'll want to focus on, she's looking forward to choosing her new subjects for high school. Our task is to continue supporting her financially through her education and providing emotional support to buoy her through challenges at home. We offer awareness-raising programs that might also help her recognize situations in which she might be vulnerable to abuse so that she can learn to avoid them or get help if they do arise. Together, these resources can keep her more safe and protected.



# our research

**We are always seeking to ensure that The Freedom Story's work is put into national, and regional perspective. Here is what we found in our research in 2021.**

As COVID spread rapidly in Thailand in 2021, we wanted to understand better its impact on our target community. In partnership with the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), we conducted surveys with 158 members of the community and did 40 in-depth interviews with key informants such as teachers, health volunteers, and community leaders.

Our research focused on women and children and it ended right as the biggest wave of COVID hit in April 2021, which created a limitation for our findings. We believe the situation on the ground is now even worse than these findings show.

## THE ECONOMIC HIT

We found that for many, the most significant impact was economic. Many lost jobs, had hours cut, or could not sell their agricultural products. At the same time, many reported increases in expenses. Among respondents, 37% said that their wages decreased, they became unemployed, or they had to leave work due to changing family situations.

The economic impact was especially felt by those on the margins, including stateless ethnic minorities and migrant workers. Neither of these groups has Thai citizenship and thus were ineligible for Thai government benefits or relief. Many within these vulnerable groups also reported increased

unpaid responsibilities, such as caring for children or the elderly.

## THE DISRUPTION IN EDUCATION

Another noteworthy factor was children's inability to access online education. When asked if they could support a child with online schooling, 55% said they were unable to, and the remaining 45% said they would need reliable internet access. Parents themselves have limited education and technological fluency, which leaves them ill-equipped to help their children study online. At the same time, almost 50% said there was no perceived risk to children spending more time online, demonstrating a lack of knowledge about online sexual exploitation.

One of our most significant findings was around mental health—a stigmatized issue in Thailand, with many unwilling or unable to discuss their mental health needs. However, we saw that the pandemic clearly put many under incredible strain. The reported frequency of well-being was nearly halved. Pre-pandemic, people reported feeling positive 80-100% of the time, but by March 21, that number dropped to about 40-60% of the time.

Overall, our findings confirmed what we had been seeing through anecdotal experience and have helped us design our programs for the coming period.

## TRAFFICKING

48% of adult respondents reported knowing someone who was trafficking others. They mostly mentioned people in the village recruiting others to work in restaurants or in construction jobs in southern Thailand.

65% of adult respondents reported that they knew someone who had been trafficked. Again, most mentioned being trafficked to work in restaurants or construction or agriculture in southern Thailand. A few mentioned international trafficking to countries like Japan.

When asked if they would work in a bar, club, karaoke bar or massage parlor (all of which are ways of referring to sex work) if their family really needed the money, 22% (7 of 32) said 'possibly', while 69% (22 of 32) said 'probably not'. The remaining 9% (3 of 32) said 'definitely not'. It is notable that a higher percentage of girls responded 'possibly'; 29.5% vs 13.3% of boys.

## CONCLUSION

This is an area with a very high level of poverty, with children at great risk of dropping out of education, and with a high prevalence of active trafficking occurring. We are committed to continuing our work in Nan and are looking forward to deepening our impact in this region.





SPOTLIGHT ON:

# Registering Stateless Children

Thailand has an registered stateless population of over 553,969 people,<sup>1</sup> and more than 200,000 of them are children.<sup>2</sup>

Stateless and hill tribe children are at particular risk of being trafficked. Statelessness means they don't have citizenship in any country; thus, they are unprotected and without access to the fundamental rights that citizens enjoy. It's much more difficult to access education or healthcare as schools don't always admit them or issue graduation certificates. Healthcare must be paid for out of pocket. Things like bank accounts and driver's licenses are also out of reach. Hill tribe children also are often undocumented—they come from semi-nomadic tribes that historically have been overlooked as national borders shifted and many live in often very remote, hard-to-reach areas.

Without access to legitimate work opportunities, stateless and hill tribe people are very vulnerable to the lures of traffickers. If their children must drop out of school to support their families, they may feel no choice but to accept what opportunity comes their way, regardless of the risk.



In the Mae Suai district—a community where we work—there is a large population of stateless and hill tribe children.

We recently began a major operation to identify the stateless and hill tribe students in schools and register them in the civil registration system.

**We reached over 1,300 students in 49 schools, with 850 students determined to be eligible for registration.**

This effort will enable these students to receive their 13-digit identification cards. It is hard to overstate what a big deal this is—many people fight for years to obtain such a card.

This identification card enables access to more of their essential rights, including access to Thailand's universal healthcare system, the ability to travel outside of Chiang Rai province, and getting a driver's license.

What's also important is that if these children are ever trafficked or exploited in the future, being registered makes it much easier for them to advocate for due justice and compensation. Documentation is critical for reducing vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation and for survivors of it to access appropriate care.

1. [https://www.unhcr.org/th/wp-content/uploads/sites/91/2022/01/UNHCR-Thailand-Fact-Sheet\\_31-December-2021.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/th/wp-content/uploads/sites/91/2022/01/UNHCR-Thailand-Fact-Sheet_31-December-2021.pdf)

2. <https://www.unicef.org/thailand/press-releases/progress-must-be-accelerated-end-cycle-statelessness-eu-and-unicef>





# Meet the Freedom family



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# Our Team



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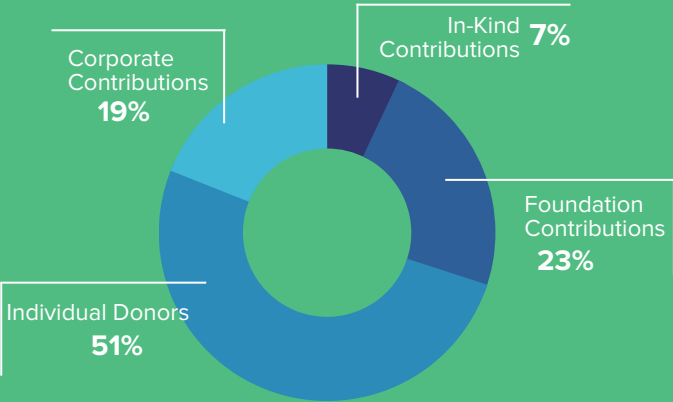


FINANCIALS

# U.S.A. income and donations

Corporate Contributions	\$	167,890.32
Foundation Contributions	\$	198,395
Individual Contributions	\$	444,244.6
Donated Goods & Services	\$	62,640

**Total Income** **\$873,169.93**

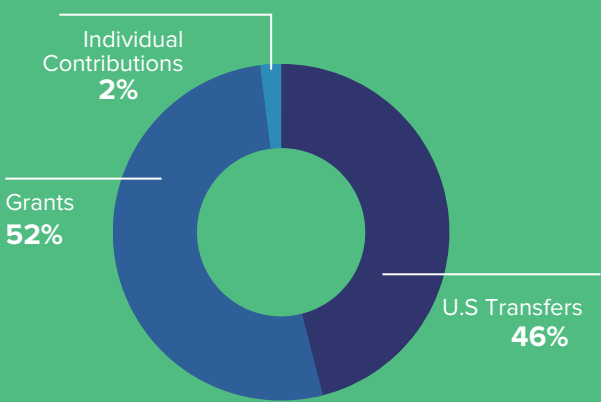


FINANCIALS

# Thailand income and donations

Program Transfers from US Office	\$	224,844.94
Grant Contributions	\$	250,486.16
Individual Contributions	\$	8,553.72

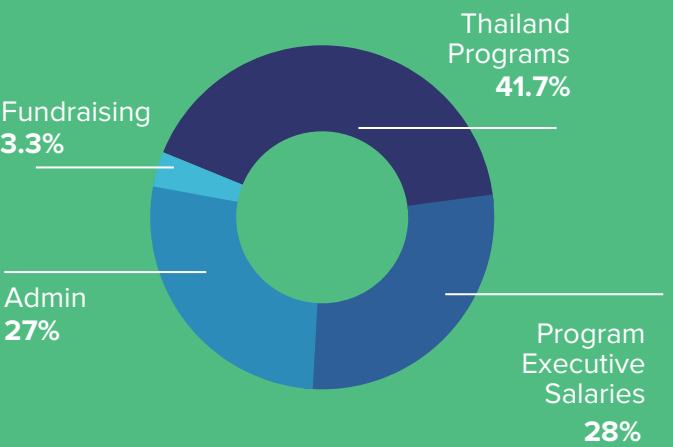
**Total Income** **\$483,884.82**



# our expenses

Thailand programs	\$	246,558.26
Program Executive Salaries	\$	165,670.65
Admin	\$	159,260.51
Fundraising	\$	19,985.54

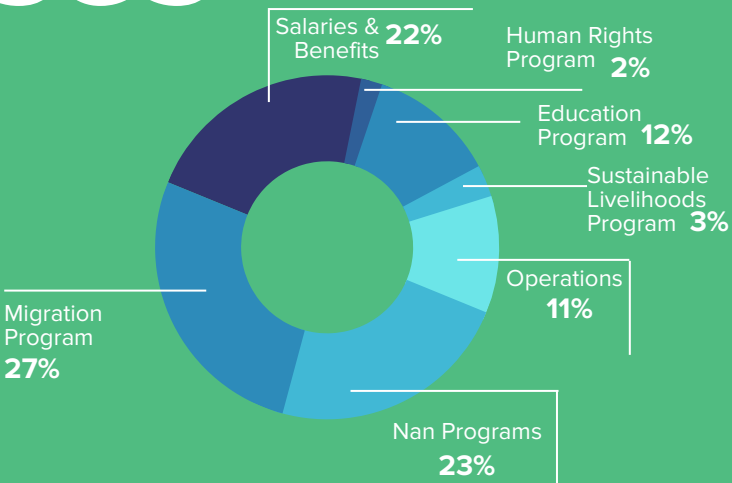
**Total Expenses** **\$ 591,474.96**



# our expenses

Salaries and Benefits	\$85,868.50
Human Rights Program	\$ 7,954.68
Education Program	\$ 45,669.35
Sustainable Livelihoods Program	\$ 9,807.22
Operations	\$ 41,406.03
Nan Programs	\$ 90,127.33
Migration Program	\$105,701.48

**Total Expenses** **\$ 386,534.59**





We couldn't be more grateful for each person who has so generously invested in The Freedom Story in 2021.

ALL INVESTORS \$500+

A

Adam Berg  
Aiden Yang  
Aileen Morrissey  
Alan Donley  
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Colorado  
Thelma Goble  
Tom and Ann Hagensen  
Tracy Ummel  
Transparent Fish Fund/Chao  
Foundation  
Trevor Cecil  
Troy and Tanya Stuart

V

Vivian Dickerson

W

Wendi Bublitz  
Westwood International

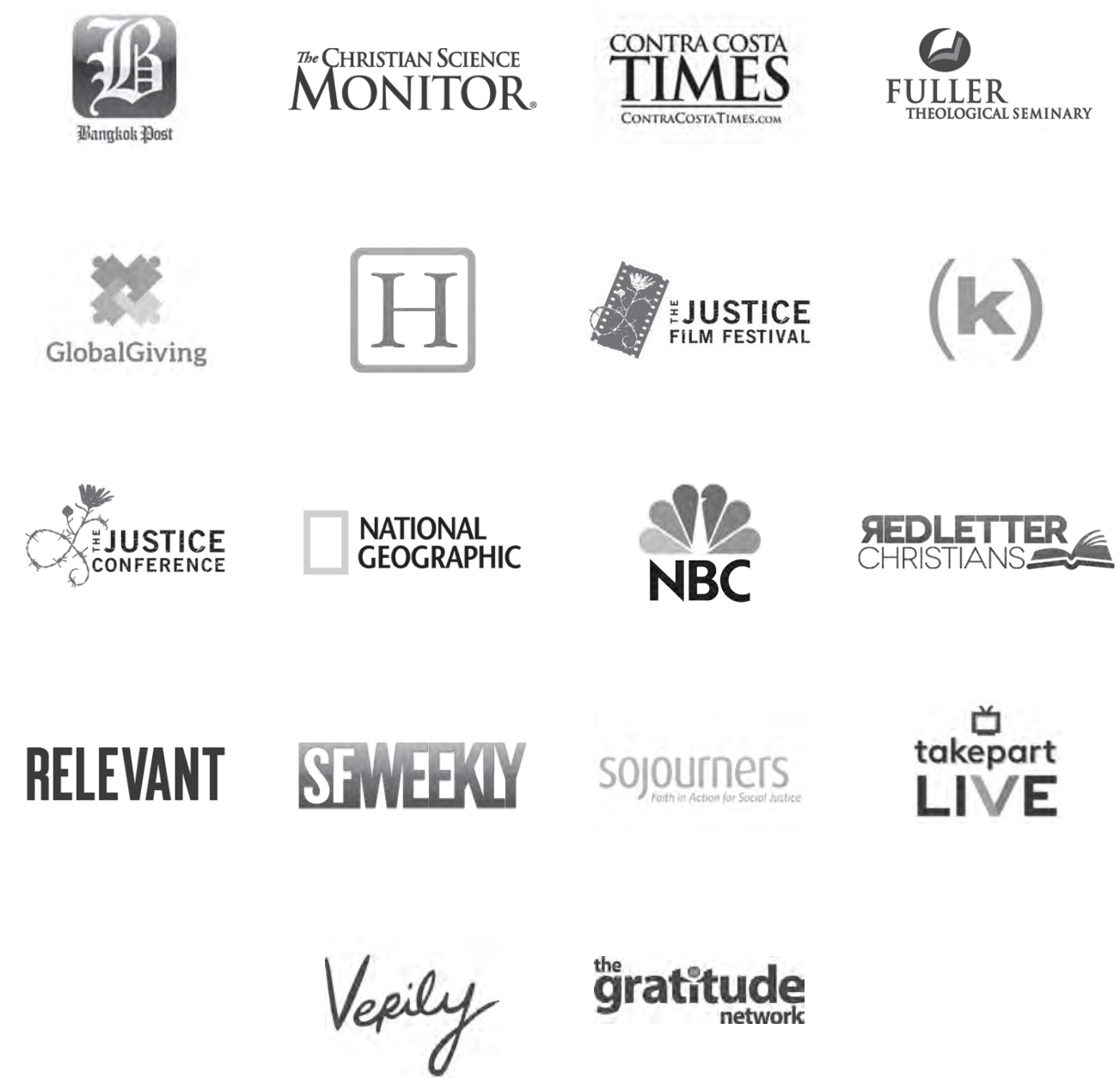


# our partners

Collaborating with and learning from other organizations is essential to our work. Our partnerships and relationships in the anti-trafficking world extend far beyond those on this page. We can't highlight them all here. But we want to give a special shout-out to the organizations we regularly visit during our Field Learning Trips, collaborate with on programing, and partner with to achieve our shared goal of ending modern day slavery. Their dedication to educating and inspiring future activists and their commitment to collaboration make them essential partners in our work of prevention.



# Press and Networks





# Thank you

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Rachel Goble  
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Sam Hara  
Six Flags Hurricane Harbor  
Winderlea  
Wines for Humanity

## EVENT VOLUNTEERS

We missed you! Looking forward to seeing you all again when it's safe to host an event.

## PHOTOGRAPHY & FILM

Benjamin Edwards Photography  
Kevin Kubota Photography  
Kelly Marie Photography  
Jonathan Hane Photography

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