

HELPING HANDS

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MATUL: 560

Community
Economics

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JULY 2014



HELPING HANDS: NEIGHBORS UPLIFTING NEIGHBORS

An initiative of Urban Neighbors of Hope (UNOH), Helping Hands aims to help the poor living in & around Klong Toey slum start small businesses. Utilizing the skills and assets the people already have, they invest in materials needed to help individual businesses succeed.

Developing Social Entrepreneurs.

The most densely populated impoverished area in Bangkok is a slum, which is locally referred to as klong toey. Home to around 100,000 residents who have squatted on Port Authority land. Most of the people that live in klong toey work at the shipping port nearby, barely making enough money to live on. As a matter of survival, people have reverted to dangerous or violent work such as intense labor or dealing drugs. A chain of command has formed in that the drug dealers, the wealthier ones, have the power and control over a majority of the residents of the slum. With limited resources & aid it is extremely difficult for the people of klong toey to climb up the social ladder.

The poor of Bangkok are among the hardest working people; laboring away for unreasonable hours every single day. Month after month, year after year of

exhaustive work with no sign of lifestyle improvement, a person starts to lose hope. "The economic well-being of persons in a nation depends on the value they add to the global economy through their work, skills, information control, and insights" (Meeks, 1989, p.117). Though the residents of the slum have little education, they do contribute greatly to the national economy by working jobs most people won't. Being skilled manual laborers, they could contribute even more to the economy than they already do if given a place to start.

Given the opportunity, the people of klong toey would do whatever it takes to improve their lives. Most of the people desire to be uplifted out of poverty, but they have no way to do that themselves. This is where social entrepreneurship comes in. "The poor know that this credit is their only opportunity to break out of poverty. They don't have any cushion whatsoever to fall back on" (Yunus, 1999, p.58).

CONFIDENCE = MUMBAI



over ten years. They began the Helping Hands initiative which was designed to help the residents of klong toey start up small business. Currently, Helping Hands has six small businesses that have impacted the lives of the people of klong toey. The following are stories from some of these small businesses.

The Beginnings of Confidence.

Christian micro-enterprise attempts to redivide the wealth of a city by supplying the poor with capital to start a business. Starting a small business creates jobs, increases income, and improves lives of generations to come. Micro loans enable the poor to have a boost of capital of which they could invest and reap the profits. Continually investing and reaping profits will ultimately, over time improve the lifestyles of the entrepreneur as well as the lives of the people they touch. Wealth should not be stored up, but recirculated. The year of Jubilee in the Bible is a way to bring justice back to a nation by forgiving debts and the mercy of God would be felt throughout the land. The economy of the world today has focused on the accumulation of wealth. Micro-enterprise is a present day form of the Jubilee because it gives capital to the poor and introduces a new type of economy.

Urban Neighbors of Hope

The Christian mission organization UNOH has been a presence in klong toey for

Munjai cafe, a coffee shop located on the outskirts of klong toey, is one of the many projects under the Helping Hands initiative. The UNOH staff became aware of a lack of support in the slum for the young adults. Often children are found not going to school because they must spend their time helping their parent's with their business. People who live in the slum have a difficult time finding employment because the employer takes one look at their address and immediately disqualifies them. People who live in the slum are considered to be untrustworthy, lazy, and violent. These stereotypes have trapped many people in the cycle of poverty. Munjai's mission is to create credible job experience for the adolescents of klong toey as well as provide spiritual and emotional development. At the time of the development of this idea, came a boy named Chai Yo. The neighbors in klong toey knew that Chai Yo had great potential to be a leader.

For the first twelve years of his life he never left the area of klong toey. Everything he ever knew was what he experienced in the slum. At twelve years of age, he wanted to apply for a private school outside the slum. Going to this school to simply apply to be a student was the first time he had left the only area of the city he knew. When he got to the school they automatically denied him because of where he resides. They told him to get out of the school and to never come back. Chai Yo's father, being a pastor in the slum was able to convince the school to let him in. The whole time they kept a close eye on him, afraid of him selling drugs or causing trouble.



One day he entered in a city-wide dance competition. Dance and music are his passions. He ended up winning the competition and brought great fame to his school. No longer were people afraid of him, but instead wanted to be associated with him. He took pride in the fact that he could show people that those who live in the slums are no different from anybody else. Taking this new found passion to help his neighbors in klong toey succeed in their dreams he joined UNOH to start up and manage Munjai Cafe. The name Munjai comes from the Thai word 'confidence' in that his vision is to help build confidence in the youth from the slum. Poverty mentality is difficult to overcome, but when people gain confidence through attaining new skillsets, their perspectives change.

Geek: an example of economic uplift

Ever since Munjai opened its doors in January of 2013, a girl named Geek has been a front runner to the success of Munjai. Geek lives in Klong Toey and has experienced the roughness of slum life. At the age of 14 she had to stop going to school in order to help her family with their business. When this happened, one of her neighbors, a lady named Poo began to teach her the art of cooking. A few years later Munjai opened up and Geek's younger sister introduced her to the cafe and suggested she apply to work there. The cooking skills that Poo had taught her previously served as a good asset for her new job at Munjai. Not just a coffee shop, Munjai also serves as a catering business.

As compensation for their work, every month Munjai pays their employees 6,000 baht (approx. \$200). Coming into work five days a week and preparing catering was Geek's primary role at the cafe. Having worked at Munjai for a year and a half, Geek has acquired many skills that she wouldn't otherwise have. At only 17 years of age, she has now moved on from Munjai after receiving a new job at a restaurant/coffee house in a different area of the city. Though this job is tougher, working six days a week 12 hours a day with a long break in between, Geek is now making 10,000 baht per month and couldn't be happier! She made it. By expanding her talents and knowledge base through a small business that gave slum dwellers a chance; she proves that the cycle of poverty can be broken.



Munjai cafe

" Growing confidence with every cup "

Cooking with Poo

The UNOH team has lived in klong toey for many years. One of their neighbors was a lady named Poo, the same lady who taught Geek how to cook. Poo had a husband and two children that she was providing for. Her husband worked in the motorcycle repair business and Poo cooked food from her home that she then sold in the community. She worked every single day for if she took a break then there would not be enough money to support her family. The day began at 5:00 in the morning when she would go to the market to buy goods for the day. Then she would spend the late morning preparing the food so that it was ready to cook when the customer ordered. In the early evening she would sell the food and afterwards had to clean up which went until 9:00 pm. Every day was a 16 hour shift in which she only made 200 baht.

A dilemma occurred in 2007 when the price of rice in Thailand skyrocketed. This meant that Poo, along with countless others, could no longer make a living off of their business. The UNOH neighbors that were living near Poo suggested that since she is a talented chef, why not start a cooking school. This would not only help offset the cost of rice, but had the potential to make substantially more income. She heeded their advice and by means of a monetary gift from UNOH, started a school called "Cooking with Poo". People came to her cooking classes that were originally held in the front room of her house. Soon she had such demand that she had to move to a different location that could hold larger classes. Focusing on healthy cooking, many foreigners were intrigued to attend her classes. In addition to her cooking classes geared towards foreigners, she also taught the staff at Munjai



Cafe how to cook and prepare food properly. These staff are now the primary chefs for the catering business which brings in the bulk of the money for Munjai.

Cooking with Poo is now six years old and employs seven people from the slum. Her husband was able to quit motorcycle repair and now drives the van and picks up the food for the cooking school. Her hours of labor have significantly decreased, she is earning significantly more money, and her health has improved. The hard labor she used to

endure day after day took a toll on her health, but now she looks younger, has less stress, and is better able to care for her family.

With the money earned from the cooking school, Poo saves a lot of it, hoping to put her two children through the university. Some of her neighbors in seeing her success are jealous of her happiness. The honorable quality about Poo is that she doesn't just keep

this new lifestyle to herself, but instead uses this blessing as an opportunity to assist other's in their small businesses in hopes that they too would have success.

The passing on of skills and hope

From the profits of the cooking school, 10% goes back to Helping Hands. Helping Hands then gives this money (from 5,000-23,000 baht) to people who are looking to start a business but need initial startup capital or have a business that could be expanded. Currently, fifteen businesses have been aided by Helping Hands, but only seven of them have proven successful. Each of the businesses that received aid must also give 10% of their profits back to Helping

Hands. This creates a pool of money to continually be given out.

One of the success stories was this man who was selling a coconut pudding dessert called khanom krok. He lives in klong toey and selling the dessert was his livelihood. He wasn't making



enough money to live on from selling

Second Chance's story.

Another one of UNOH's projects is a thrift shop called Second Chance. Sitting right at the entrance to the slum, the store is highly accessible and a desired commodity. People who live in klong toey cannot afford to buy new things, so a thrift store is a great place for people to purchase needed items and get rid of unnecessary things. Second Chance opened its doors in September of 2011. Every day

came to work for Second Chance they were sewing undergarments for a department store. Being employed at Second Chance has given them opportunities to be creative and expand their skill sets as well as provide a consistent income. All of the women look forward to coming to work each day because their work not just benefits themselves but their entire community.

Living among those you serve.

"IF WE DO NOT EAT WITH THE STRANGER,

we will never be able to establish oikic relationships with the poor in any conceivable way that approximates the intention of the Triune Community's righteousness/justice" (Meeks, p.124).

so Poo arranged for Helping Hands to give him money to buy better equipment to improve his business. The amount of desserts he could make at one time was doubled. After receiving the money, Poo visited the man to see first-hand his business. She tried the dessert and gave him pointers on how to improve the flavor. The man now earns more money and is eternally grateful for the gift.

Poo continually emphasized that *"it all starts with a smile."* People know that her product is trustworthy and appreciate her personality. The community knows that she cares about them and her presence brings hope to the neighborhood.



there is a line of people waiting in the morning for them to open their doors so that they can be the first to look through the items for sale.

The thrift shop is in the downstairs of the building. Upstairs, a few women are employed to make all sorts of sewing projects such as bags, decorations, and knick-knacks from discarded fabric. Before the women

The way in which all of these initiatives got started was through a group of people living among the poor. By spending time and learning from one another, the staff from UNOH was able to uncover real needs in the community. "If we do not eat with the stranger, we will never be able to establish oikic relationships with the poor in any conceivable way that approximates the intention of the Triune Community's righteousness/justice" (Meeks, 1989, p.124). By eating together and being present in klong toey, small businesses were able to start that now are making a huge impact on the community as a whole.

The church's role in helping the poor.

The continual pattern seen in all these stories is the desire for a better life. Difficulties of slum life create a yearning for something better. But what does a "better" life look like? The above stories point out that one way to better a person's life is through increasing income. "A 100 percent increase in income, even from one dollar to two, means a family eats better, enjoys better health, improves their housing, and has greater confidence and hope for the future" (Greer, 2009). Naturally, people desire these things. The Lord cares about a person's physical needs and calls believers to love the poor. The problem arises when Christians confuse the gospel with economic success. God does not promise believers a better life. Though He does promise to be all that we need.

Each of these initiatives have done a great job in economically uplifting the poor of klong toey in their own way. Munjai provides job experience for the youth. Cooking with Poo has uplifted her family, employs workers from the slum, as well as helps others start their own businesses. Lastly, Second Chance is a discount store accessible and affordable to the slum community. All of those initiatives have drastically improved the lives of many people. Where there seems to be a lacking is in the discipleship area. Physically people's lives have been changed for the better, but spiritually there seems to be little guidance.

If economic uplift comes before believing in Christ as the one true God, then the people will easily think that it was themselves, their hard work, and determination that got them out of poverty and not Christ. If people can do it themselves then why do they need Christ? We must be careful not to substitute God with the helping of the poor. When the poor accept Christ, there will be economic uplift (Grigg, 2004). The reason why Christians help the poor is because God



cares about us and our lives in this world. Christ dwelling inside someone is what compels them to better their lives in the perfect way that He knows, not what the world thinks is best.

Conclusion

According to Greer, "micro-finance is an opportunity, not a total solution" (2009). Giving the poor capital to invest with the expectation that a profit is reaped is a positive way to enable the poor to help themselves. With a hard-working attitude, all the poor need is some initial help to get started. This recirculation of wealth from the haves to the have-nots is a modern day example of the Jubilee. It may look different than described in the Bible, but micro-finance is an equalizer - bringing justice in the form of economic uplift. Though it has many benefits, micro finance alone will not end poverty. The Lord has ultimate control. As believers we can do our part through discipleship, teaching biblical economic practices, and walking alongside the poor.



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