



Photo by Samantha Nieman

The Shelter

Protection & Empowerment of Women and Children

www.runlaos.com

Stories of Captivity

The names of all persons in the following true stories have been changed to protect the victims' identities.

Tui's Story

Tui was 16 when she was tricked and trafficked into Thailand by a family relative, Ms. Anhmany. Tui and her family knew and trusted Anhmany and were led to believe that she had an employment offer that paid very well in a nearby village within their home province. Tui was promised work as a sales assistant in a shop that needed more help. Because her family was very poor, Tui saw this as an opportunity to help her family obtain more money. Anhmany claimed she had been working for this business for three months and that the owner asked that she recruit 5 more girls to come and work for him. Tui's mother, Mrs. Vieng, allowed her daughter to accompany Anhmany to the nearby village so long as she returned within 3 months. Anhmany promised that Tui would return in 3 months as requested.

Instead of taking Tui to the village as agreed, Anhmany took Tui by boat to Thailand where she sold her for 25,000 baht (USD \$625). The next day Anhmany gave Tui's mother 10,000 baht (USD \$250) and told her it was from her daughter as an advance on her salary. Mrs. Vieng never heard from Tui again. After exhausting efforts to find her daughter, Mrs. Vieng learned that Tui was sold into prostitution in Thailand. Tui's family can only hope that the Thai authorities find and rescue Tui, or that she can find a way to escape on her own.

The Story of Nong and Her Friends

Ms. Nong was from northern Laos in Luang Namtha province and was trafficked by someone she knew from her own village, Mrs. Thien. Nong was 16 when she left home for the first time with two other girls, Ping and Oi. Mrs. Thien promised a great paying job in Thailand that would help the girls earn money for their families.

Nong, Ping and Oi willingly went to Thailand with their mothers' permission. The girls were taken to a common transfer point used by traffickers and were then separated. Nong was sent to a house where about 30 other Lao girls were working. Two days later, a man came to the house and took Nong to a hotel where she was raped daily and later coerced into working as a prostitute.

Nong was locked up and forced to provide services eight to ten times a day. She never received money. In a fortunate opportunity, Nong was able to escape with the help of her friends Ping and Oi. Nong later discovered that Thien sold her for 30,000 baht (USD \$750). Thien did not succeed in selling Ping and Oi because they were not found suitable by brokers in the market. Ping and Oi escaped their situation before Thien could sell them as domestic servants.

These girls were lucky enough to escape their captors and return back to their families. They alerted the provincial police and reported Thien as a trafficker. The police eventually found and arrested Thien for her crimes.

Human Trafficking in Laos

Human trafficking is a worldwide crime affecting countless people. No one really knows how many women and children* are affected, but estimates for the East Asia region alone are between 250,000 and 400,000 persons per year. Approximately one-third of global trafficking in women and children occurs in or from this region. A significant proportion of this trafficking stems from the Mekong sub-region countries of Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos.¹

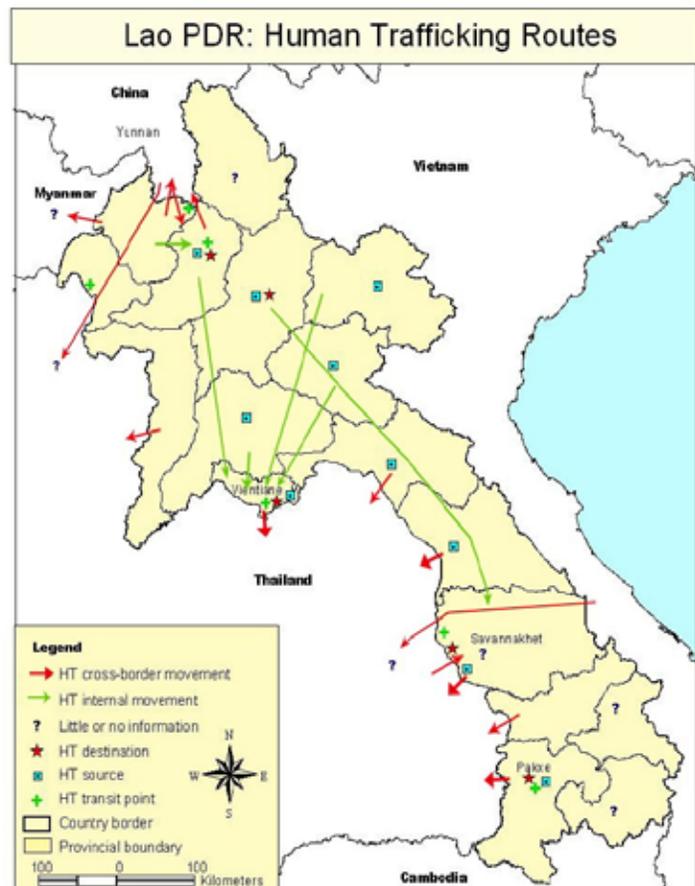
* Children are persons 18 years of age and younger.

Laos is a major a source for human trafficking. Lao women and girls are trafficked for sexual and labor exploitation as domestic or factory workers in Thailand. Children are often trafficked out of Laos by a family friend or relative. While there are no reliable estimates on the number of Lao who are trafficked, Thai authorities currently estimate there are at least 180,000 undocumented Lao workers in Thailand.²

World Vision Laos reports that 44% of parents do not know where their children are. Of children who returned home, 40% reported being locked up and 13% reported they were raped.³

The majority of trafficking victims (about 60%) are young females between the ages of 12-18 originating from rural communities. The number of trafficked persons from resettled villages (or villages supporting migrant workers) is disproportionately higher.⁴

Village Focus International (VFI) is working hard to tackle the problem of human trafficking by not only helping to prevent it but also aiding in the protection of vulnerable groups and victims. With VFI's help, women and children of Laos have a safe home they can return to.



1 MLSW and UNICEF, 2004 Broken Promises Shattered Dream:13

2 http://www.humantrafficking.org/countries/laos_pdr

3 2007 US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report

4 MLSW and UNICEF, 2004 Broken Promises Shattered Dream: 20

The Shelter

Protection & Empowerment of Women and Children

The Shelter Project is part of our Protection & Empowerment of Women and Children (PEWC) program, one of VFI's biggest programs. The Shelter is a safe haven, providing protection and empowerment for survivors of trafficking, through a residential center in southern Laos that reintegrates young women into Lao society through a program of personal care (counseling and health), education, skills training, and social support.

Key Elements of the SHELTER Include:

- **Rescue and Protection:** VFI works with non-profit organizations (NGOs) in Thailand to rescue young women and to place them in a protected environment away from traffickers.
- **Reintegration:** Healthcare and counseling for young women recovering from this traumatic experience, followed by an assessment of interests and skills.
- **Training and Placement:** Education and job training opportunities, followed by help finding stable, reasonable employment which empowers these young women avoid the cycle of trafficking in Thailand and other places throughout Southeast Asia.

Residents Served:

256 trafficking victims have been referred to VFI's Shelter in Pakse. This group is divided into three categories as indicated below:

- **Temporary Stay:** 147 residents
- **Mental Healthcare:** 10 residents
- **Long Term Stay (Vocational Training with Small Grants, then Reintegrated into Society):** 90 residents
- At present, there are 9 residents staying at the Shelter.

Residents' Places of Origin:

The provinces of Salavan, Champasak, Savannaket, Attapue, Khammouan, Sayabouly, Xiengkhouang and Vientiane.

Duration of Stay:

Duration of stay varies case by case as needed – lasting from 2 weeks to 2 years.



Shelter Projects

Drop-In Center

At the drop-in center trafficking victims and potential trafficking victims receive:

- Nutritious food
- Clothing
- Personal hygiene items
- Education around safe migration

Last year alone the center provided assistance to 100 'push back' cases from the Thai border. Push-back cases are technically illegal migrants arrested and pushed-back to Laos, but often are victims of trafficking as well.

Protect

At VFI's Shelter, the girls and young women receive training about safe migration, among many other strategies to protect themselves. All training is delivered to ensure that the residents are not re-victimized. The girls often become peer educators in their own communities, sharing information about protecting children and families from trafficking. Legal aid is also provided when and if their cases go to court.

Educate

While at the Shelter the residents receive the option of enrolling in vocational training programs. Each young woman chooses what she would like to learn, including looming (silk and cotton) and textile design, sewing and clothing design, and a variety of agricultural training activities (fish & frog raising, organic gardening, mushroom production, etc.).

Empower

Protecting and Educating also plays a role in Empowerment: building confidence, skills, awareness and livelihood options. With options, these girls and young women can choose how to go forward in their lives and not be victimized by circumstances beyond their control. Some of the OPTIONS for these girls and young women include:

Small Grants, Projects and Scholarships:

This year two girls from the Shelter received scholarships to complete their formal education and are enrolled in years 6 and 8 at the primary school. In addition, thirteen residents who completed the vocational course at the Shelter received small business grants and have all returned to their villages and set-up businesses in their communities.

Social Enterprise:

VFI's social enterprise in Pakse currently employs five graduates of the Shelter's vocational training. They design, weave, and sew all of the creations available at the shop, and receive salaries as well as housing.

Products of the Shelter



What Your Donations Can Do

\$5

- » Pays for one human trafficking survivor to attend one small business training course.

\$15

- » Pays for one human trafficking survivor to attend mushroom production training.
- » Ensures that a human trafficking survivor is able to attend one month of Informal Education or Vocational Training.
- » Supplies one month of regular healthcare check-ups and mental health interventions.

\$25

- » Pays for one human trafficking survivor to attend safe food processing training.

\$50

- » Ensures that a human trafficking survivor will be able to attend one month of formal education.

\$100

- » Allows a human trafficking survivor to complete a full-time training course on weaving, looming, textile dyeing and design.

\$150

- » Enables a human trafficking survivor to complete a full-time 5 month training course of sewing and tailoring.
- » Supplies one year of regular healthcare check-ups and mental health interventions for a human trafficking survivor.

\$350

- » Enables a survivor to become a Fully Trained Hairdresser.