

COMMUNITY

TSUNAMI RECOVERY

North Andaman Tsunami Relief Project

By Gategaeo Phetsawang

TWO ENGLISH ladies did a yoga course in December at Koh Pratong or Golden Buddha Island just before the tsunami hit the Andaman Coast. After they heard about the devastation they came back to the area and started helping local communities re-build and move on with their lives. Lucy Dixon-Clarke, a project coordinator told the Phuket Post, "Fortunately for me I was in Vietnam when the tsunami hit but I still kept in touch with Bodhi Garrett who set up the organization. Then I came back in January to help with emailing and organising donors, volunteers and counseling." Lucy said, "The North Andaman Coast we are working for is one of the worst hit and most disadvantaged areas of people who don't have a lot of money like the Moken. It's also a very beautiful area. The Buddhist, Muslim and Moken communities are all living together very harmoniously, which is a great lesson for other parts of the world."

"That's the sort of philosophy we have. Anything that people want for themselves, we just see whether we can match their needs, what we can provide, either through external funding, providing education or workshops."

"We have six permanent Thai staff who mostly are from the areas so they are wonderful contacts and a great link to the community. We have a rotating number of volunteers who come either for one, three or six months."

"The Rotary Club of Patong Beach helps us a lot and also the Samui Rotary. We work very closely with the Chief District Officer of Kuraburi District and Tambon Administration Organisations (OrBorTor) in all different areas."

"We help to coordinate other aid agencies so we make sure that we are not duplicating and people are not being missed out. We make sure that everybody is served in the way that they want to be."

Initially the organization was set for the emergency relief with the fresh food delivery and they also have worked with the other agencies with medical care and general supports for the different communities. She explained, "Now we are moving in the longer-term thing. We are looking for the sustainable livelihood and the potentials for different types of tourism in the area not the mass tourism but more like adventure tourism, which can be run by the communities there."



Lucy Dixon-Clarke and Rachel O'Gorman working towards self-sufficiency

"For example a two-year training program for people who are interested in the area and want to actually operate tourist activities for themselves rather than rely on big hotel chains."

"There are probably around 60 programs now operating because we work with seven different villages in Saksamran in Ranong as well as Kuraburi District in Phang Nga. We also have a couple of community centers where those people can meet particularly for those who don't have their real homes to live and there are a lot of them who are still waiting for their houses to be rebuilt."

Another project coordinator, Rachel O'Gorman from Ireland, who is responsible for the boat model-making project at Moken village in Golden Buddha Island, explained that the project started off very simply by asking first if the people wanted to do something,

One of the gentlemen in the Moken group is an artist. There are another six people interested. He began training those people and we provided them materials to do that as well. "After they had been training a little bit, we then came back and began to buy the boats that they were making so they could have the turnover and income. After four months they have improved dramatically."

The goal of the whole project is to allow them to do the business themselves and we will step out. They have their own bank account now and we are just helping for the marketing."

She went on to say that she has also been working with a group of ladies in Baan Talac Nok. When they work together as a team, they have a real potential to do business and gain an extra source of income.

"They are doing this while they wait for six

months for the fishing season and for their boats to be repaired. It's a seasonal activity in the monsoon season and they will do fishing in the fishing season. This gives them income all year round."

"They can get profits that are sufficient. It depends what they want to do with the profits in their own ways and use their money in a way that matches their interests."

She added, "It may take a couple of years to see what will happen to the Moken children who will be older and graduate by the time they will have to make a decision whether going to sea and be fisherman like their parents or trying to do something different."

Before this the villagers sold the model boats through souvenir shops to tourists but now they don't do that anymore because it's low season for tourists. Lucy, Rachel and other volunteers are helping to do the marketing by setting up certain connections for them.

"There is a tsunami giftshop in Khao Lak and we supply them the handmade boat models and soaps," said Lucy, "We also bring the members from the boat and soap groups to the shop so they can come and do the sales directly."

Lucy added, "The Princess's foundation has supported us through the shops in Bangkok. Once we have that connection and there's a permanent link, then the group can do it themselves. They won't need us to be there in the middle. This is just a system that we can give them this time while they are focusing on their own lives back together such as getting their new houses."

"We try not to put our own ideas onto anybody because I don't believe that is good community development work. I had worked in Africa and the only way I have found that things can be sustainable is when you really listen to people and let them archive their own goals. People know what's best for them."

The organization is looking for volunteers who can teach Basic English lessons. Some of the community members don't read or write in Thai so Thai teachers who can make lessons very good fun will really work well with people individually. Contacts such as gift shops and people who are happy to sell their products would be a great help.

Contact information: Relieffund@inet.co.th and www.northandamantsunamirelief.com