

Developing business in TaiLue Villages Ban NaNyang Tai and Ban NaNyan Neua

Training women to sew at Houey Hong Vocational Centre



Our four candidates, Sengmany, Mae Sam, Chantee, and Douangchan completed two months of sewing training at Houey Hong Vocational Centre in Vientiane. The first week they arrived I went to see them. They were all very nervous, except Chantee who is already a confident seamstress for Lao clothing. Mae Sam and Douangchan exclaimed " We're afraid!" I said " What of, living in Vientiane, the big city?" "No," they said, "afraid we won't be able to sew nice products for you."

The next time I saw them, two weeks later, they had nearly completed the month of sewing bags, cushion covers, and small products with Nola. There was no fear and the standard of sewing was very good, lining in cushion covers and zippers all neatly sewn.

At Houey Hong Centre they sewed six days a week, resting on Sundays. One Sunday we went on a day excursion around Vientiane as they had not visited the major temples of Vientiane.

They spent the next month with Kiam learning how to make jackets, dressing gowns, shirts, blouses and other more complicated patterns. For Chantee this was more broadening her ability by introducing western styles and some different techniques.



Back at the Village

After two months away from husbands and family, the four women and three children were happy to be home. They were happy to have one week of rest before delivering the new sewing machines and overlockers.



On 14 September I organized a truck and loaded it up with sewing machines, some visitors and an expat, Michel, a photographer, and Carol his wife, plus Troy a bar owner near my shop, and we set off to the villages for the day.



It was a very heartwarming day to see all their husbands there, ready to unload the machines, and enjoy a meal and baci together.



The baci is a traditional ceremony of bringing the spirits that live within our bodies back into harmony, it is performed at times of change and thanks, sending people off, getting over major illness or misfortune, celebrating new beginnings such as marriage this occasion.

I came with orders from a hotel for cushion covers and uniform shirts for another hotel's staff, as well as products for Ma Te Sai shop. There were some teething problems such as what about zippers and buttons, who is going to organize the orders, Mae Sam's machine did not work and she had to call in someone from Nambak (district centre about 30 mins away) to fix it.



Luckily I was going to Bangkok to visit a friend who is opening a gallery and see if we could do some textile business together, (I am sending samples from the village soon) and I went to Chinatown and stocked up on many of the small haberdashery items. Some of these are readily available in Luang Prabang, some only in Vientiane. I am sure over time we can all work out a system to make sure we have these in stock for the orders. Also I have employed Kate, a young Australian, part-time to help on Vientiane which will be valuable for this project, not only in sales but also this type of supplies coordination.



Chantee and her husband receiving the machine and uniform shirt she completed for the Apsara hotel.

The other girls did not feel confident cutting the material for the shirts, this is an area where skills could be improved.

Saturday 28 September I went back to see how they were going with the orders and to deliver the extra supplies, with more orders for the shop.



I am very pleased with the set up, Sengmany is taking control of the orders, and they are all working well together. They have had special tables built for the overlockers, as well as large cutting tables.

I was happy to stay over this time and speak with the other members of the families. Mae Sam and her husband are very happy as they have a daughter studying in Vientiane and say it is difficult for her to get work there and it would be good if after she has finished her studies in two years could come back and work in the village.

The women and I thank you and the ECM Foundation for this opportunity. There is still some areas where we could develop some skills further, as well as develop the village for small-scale tourism. I hope you can visit and see for yourselves.