



A MESSAGE FROM GEOFF AND LYNICE

Welcome to the inaugural edition of “Friends of Empower”! We are introducing a quarterly newsletter to update our valued supporters as to what has been happening and to promote upcoming events.

It has been quite a journey from feeling compelled to take action to combat the horrible injustices of human trafficking, to learning about the issues and the most effective way we can assist, to opening a retail shop in Bairnsdale and administering various projects. In this issue we take the opportunity to look back at some of the highlights along the way, but our focus is firmly fixed on the future and how we can be more effective in attributing value to girls/women and enabling them to fulfil their potential in every way.

We have been greatly impacted by the different producer groups we partner with and in each newsletter we will introduce a different group. In this first newsletter we feature Clear Skies House – a Children’s Safe House in Northern Thailand. The children and house parents are very close to our hearts.

We have been inspired by many people who work with these groups to empower girls physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually and socially. We have been overwhelmed by the encouragement and generous support from so many people in so many different ways – you know who you are and we give you our heart-felt thanks.

Geoff and Lynice Wigney

IN THIS ISSUE

- Empower highlights
- Introducing Clear Skies House
- Camel Trek Fundraiser



HIGHLIGHTS

- Visiting the various producer groups and establishing relationships with the girls/women so they can appreciate they are valuable, not because of what they make, but because of who they are.
- Opening of the Empower retail store in Bairnsdale on 15th August, 2011.
- Funding for two community houses in Cambodia to assist a group called Sak Saum (which means “Dignity”).
- Building trip to Cambodia (Battambang) in January, 2013 in which 11 Australians built a commercial kitchen to provide training and income for girls rescued from human trafficking.
- Funding for a workshop for “Rainbow Tree”, a group of women in Northern Thailand who make cards, photo frames and flowers out of handmade paper.
- Funding for a dormitory and kitchen/dining/games area at Clear Skies House (Northern Thailand) and a building trip to Thailand in January 2014 in which 16 Australians partnered with a Thai building team to build a second dormitory and a boundary fence.
- Ongoing child sponsorship for the 25 children living at Clear Skies House.
- Assisting in the creation of new businesses/employment in Tibet and Cambodia.
- Funding for girls in Thailand engaged in tertiary studies.
- Ronda and Geoff Clark selling Empower products at their home at 17 Heyington Close, Croydon.
- Encouraging, funding and supporting the development of a life and parenting skills course which will enable some once vulnerable children to live in safety.



The Empower retail store at 188 Main Street, Bairnsdale.

INTRODUCING CLEAR SKIES HOUSE

Empower has experienced a close connection with Clear Skies House since we first met the house parents (Pastor Jan and Nasse) and 12 children then living there in February 2011. At that time the girls were making small dolls to raise money to fix their bamboo hut, which was in serious disrepair. Despite the lack of resources the Lahu tribal children living at Clear Skies House experienced a loving and safe family environment, attended the school directly across the road and were happy and healthy.

Since then Empower has funded the construction of a dormitory, (which includes accommodation for the house parents), and a kitchen/dining area (which is also used for homework and other activities).

As the number of children living at Clear Skies House increased to 25, there was a need for a second dormitory.



Members of the building team hard at work.

In January 2014 an Empower building team of 16 Australians partnered with a Thai Building team to build the second dormitory, which is currently being rendered and painted and will be in use very shortly. A fence was also constructed around the boundary of the property to provide security for the children. Empower provided the funds for the building project in an amount of \$33,700.



The second Clear Skies dormitory built in January 2014.

Empower provides child sponsorship for the children living at Clear Skies House. Some of the children are orphans (ie no mother or father) and some of the children have one or both parents who for various reasons (alcohol or drug addiction, imprisonment or family violence) are unable to care for them.

Empower also funds a 12 month life and parenting skills course run by Pastor Jan and Nasse which aims to assist parents in addressing these issues and hopefully enabling some of the children to return to their homes.

There is a need to improve the supply of water to Clear Skies House and investigations are now underway to determine the most cost effective means of ensuring an adequate water supply.

The girls at Clear Skies House continue to make small dolls each Saturday morning, which are sold in the Empower store.



ABOVE: The building team who travelled to Thailand in January.

BELOW: The children and house parents at Clear Skies House.



CAMEL TREK

A FUNDRAISER FOR INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE MISSION

Meeting inspiring people and thinking “outside the square” has resulted in an unusual fundraiser for Empower. Between the 22nd and 28th August 2014 there is to be a girls only camel trek staged on Beltana Station, northern Flinders Rangers, South Australia, led by Paynesville camel expert, Tara Lea. It is an opportunity for eight adventurous girls to walk camels through the amazing Australian outback and to camp out under the stars.

The participants will be aiming to raise \$10,000.00 to provide to International Justice Mission, an organization which works with local enforcement agencies in various countries to rescue women from slavery. The proceeds will be specifically

used to fund the work of International Justice Mission in the Philippines, with respect to surveillance, raids, prosecution of offenders and the support of victims. To find out more about the excellent work of International Justice Mission, visit their website www.ijm.org

The fundraising has begun with a showing of the camel trek film “Tracks” at Bairnsdale Cinema and Boronia Cinema, which were well supported. If you are interested in the camel trek or supporting this fundraiser, visit www.charitycameltrek.com and/or contact Tara on 0417109551. Donations can also be made at the Empower store at 188 Main Street, Bairnsdale or via Empower’s website www.empower.org.au



HOW YOU CAN HELP

If you are interested, there are some ways you can assist us in our vision to “empower the privileged to empower the poor”. You could:

- Purchase products from our retail store at 188 Main Street, Bairnsdale
- Purchase products from our online store at www.empower.org.au
- Donate funds for a specific project or by way of a general donation - either in our retail store or online. (100% of funds donated are used towards projects)
- Promote Empower to your family, friends and associates
- Forward this newsletter to those who may be interested in Empower
- “Like” Empower on Facebook and encourage your online friends to follow us