



PRESS RELEASE

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AFESIP fighting trafficking with art

Fifteen staff at Acting for Women in Distressing Circumstances (AFESIP) in Vientiane last week explored art therapy as an alternative to help understand the psychological and emotional issues faced by trafficked individuals in Lao PDR.

The five day *Art2Healing* workshop, directed by Australian-based art therapist Lydia Tan, introduced AFESIP staff to art therapy as a different way to encourage individuals to speak out for themselves and communicate their needs and experiences.

Ms Tan explained that art therapy is used to provide additional psychological support in a non-threatening, non-intrusive way.

"Art therapy can help individuals to externalise difficult and overwhelming feelings caused by traumatic experiences such as trafficking," she said.

"It allows individuals to express their emotions through art; whether it be painting, drawing, writing, or movement; to help them confront their experiences and move on with their lives".

Art therapy can be an effective forum for therapy in Laos and South East Asia to help treat experiences of trauma.

According to Ms Tan, it is especially effective for individuals who find it hard to verbalise their thoughts and feelings.

"Different approaches to therapy practice, such as Buddhist meditation techniques, prayer and yoga which are in accordance with spiritual beliefs in South East Asia, can be very effective to help rebuild self esteem and confidence," she explained.

"In its method, art therapy is both culturally and contextually sensitive; this makes it a valuable approach to trauma therapy in Laos and South East Asia."

It is hoped art therapy methods can help AFESIP to better understand and meet the needs of trafficked women in Lao PDR, and so improve the rehabilitation process.

AFESIP Laos' Technical Coordinator Mrs Vonemaly Mantnormek believes the information gained using art therapy can make all the difference.

"The women and children we work with often don't feel comfortable to speak about their experiences," Mrs Mantnormek said, "and this makes it hard for us to understand each case individually."

“In one case, we realised that the needs of our victim were very different to what we thought; art therapy helped us understand what the real needs of the victim were, and this changed our direction for rehabilitation,” she said.

Obtaining accurate information on individual trafficking cases is difficult, and according to Mrs Mantnormek, the earlier art therapy is implemented, the better.

“Through art therapy methods, we can get most of the case information early and work out how to best help and rehabilitate each individual,” she said.

“This means we can plan for future cases and make the best possible decisions for rehabilitation.”

AFESIP hopes that if art therapy can foster more understanding of the psychological and emotional issues that victims face, stronger curative and preventative measures can be developed to aid trafficked persons.

By introducing art therapy into its program, AFESIP can give trafficked persons the option to use expressive art as a different medium to explore and heal trauma caused by trafficking.

As well as psychological support and counseling, AFESIP Laos provides vocational training, peer education, rehabilitation facilities, outreach social work and reintegration support to trafficked women and children.

For more information about the *Art2Healing* project or AFESIP Lao PDR, visit www.theart2healingproject.org or www.afesiplaos.org.

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