



## **PRESS RELEASE – WEDNESDAY 28 OCTOBER, 2009**

### **For immediate release**

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#### **Art Can Give New Ways to Help Human Trafficking Victims**

AFESIP staff attended a five-day 'Art2Healing' workshop in Savannakhet province last week. The workshop, directed by Australian-based art therapist Lydia Tan, explored art therapy as an alternative way for case workers to assess the psychological and emotional issues faced by people that have been trafficked in Lao PDR.

The art therapy training is supported by United States Embassy in Lao PDR which its grant was present a \$US16, 500 to AFESIP on October 28, 2009 to assist in the fight against trafficking in persons in Lao PDR. The grant will be implemented for focused activities from September 2009 to August, 2010.

The training objectives are to expose victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation to art therapy, increase AFESIP social workers' understanding of psychological trauma of trafficking on victims and create awareness of the psychological consequences of human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

There are three main activities will be implemented during the grant is being supported suchlike organization of two art therapy workshops with victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, training for AFESIP social workers on art therapy techniques and organization of awareness-raising activities on psychological consequences of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, using artwork created in art therapy training.

Specially, one of the three main activities that is organization of awareness-raising activities using artwork created in art therapy training will be implemented as an exhibition event for target audience in Vientiane capital, Savannakhet and Champasak provinces.

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

"Different approaches to therapy, 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. "Art therapy is thus both culturally and contextually sensitive. This makes it a valuable approach to trauma therapy in Laos and South East Asia."

"The women and children we work with often don't feel comfortable to speak about their experiences," said Ms Vonemaly Mangnomek, AFESIP Laos' Technical Coordinator. "This makes it hard for us to understand each case individually."

“In one case study that we did in the workshop, 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. “By incorporating art therapy and what we learnt in the workshop into our future work, we hope that AFESIP can make the best possible decisions for rehabilitation.”

For more information about the Art2Healing project, visit [www.theart2healingproject.org](http://www.theart2healingproject.org)

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

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