

Strengthening Migrant Youth Leadership through Personal Well-Being and Community Compassion

Help without Frontiers - Rays of Youth (RoY): A White Paper Review of RoY Programming and Practice



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Forward from Help without Frontiers Director

The origins of the story of the Rays of Youth program are rooted in the story of three young adolescents who would have become the founders and inspiration of this successful youth-led initiative whose activities impact the lives of thousands of people every year.

In 2008, the teachers of three migrant learning centers in Mae Sot, a small town in north-west Thailand, selected three young adolescents from Myanmar as representatives for their schools to attend a one-year youth leadership program organized by the Mekong Youth Net Project (MYN) within the Development and Education Program for Daughter and Education Center (DEPDC) in Chiang Rai, Northern Thailand. These students, Joli, Kiki, and Eh Mwe were selected to attend this unique leadership program based on the potential the teachers saw, that went beyond their demonstrable academic results. They also received a scholarship from Help without Frontiers Thailand Foundation to allow them to realize this opportunity.

The MYN was set up to train a new generation of 100 young leaders from six countries in order to combat human trafficking and other social issues across the Mekong region. The leadership program was the expression of the vision of Khun Sompop Jantraka, who believed in the power of the youth to transform their own communities and spur social change.

After having completed the leadership program, Joli, Kiki and Eh Mwe came back to Mae Sot where Help without Frontiers hosted them for a six-month internship.



Forward from Help without Frontiers Director

In August 2009, these three young leaders jumped into a new and challenging adventure: the Rays of Youth program. Drawing from the example of the leadership program that they had previously attended, Joli, Kiki and Eh Mwe wanted to pass their knowledge onto their peers. Their vision was to empower young leaders with knowledge and life skills to serve their communities and become active protagonists of social development.

It is difficult to summarize in these few words how the Rays of Youth expanded and evolved throughout the past ten years or to explain the path that led these three young adolescents to become such successful, influencing, and inspiring individuals, but today, the Rays of Youth program transforms adolescents into young socially active adults; by developing their ability to think critically and take informed decisions, their ability to understand themselves, their emotions and desires, their ability to interact with others and their interpersonal skills. The program releases the potential of these young leaders who in turn give back to their peers and become role models for their communities. Role models in projects that are at the cutting edge in raising awareness on social issues along the Thai-Myanmar border and in implementing sustainable development projects. All resulting in children, youth, and other community members in targeted villages benefiting from educational and life-changing experiences that they would otherwise never have the chance to access.



This white paper was conceived to capture the successful components of the Rays of Youth program and spread knowledge on its best practices as well as on the innovative methodologies that the youth use to pass knowledge onto their peers and their communities.

Help without Frontiers acknowledges and values the achievements of the Rays of Youth and considers the program of utmost importance in educating a new and responsible generation of young leaders who are capable, in turn, to play key roles for their communities and multiply the powerful effects of knowledge and education.

The talents and personal qualities of the participants to the Rays of Youth program are a source of pride for all of us at Help without Frontiers and a source of inspiration amongst the migrant youth that sparks hope for a better and brighter future.

Siraporn (Ann) Kaewsombat

Director

Help without Frontiers Thailand Foundation

Sponsors Note

When we visited Help without Frontiers (HwF) and Rays of Youth (RoY) in Mae Sot in November 2017 we were deeply impressed by the schools, medical station, community initiatives etc. and most and foremost by the commitment, dedication and enthusiasm that everyone in Ann's team demonstrated.

Benno Röggl, the founder of HwF had explained RoY to me many years ago, however, I did not quite grasp the concept and overall potential. The visit to Mae Sot improved our understanding but it also became evident that the uniqueness of the concept and approach was not easy to communicate effectively.

To do so, an independent and respected expert in this field should be asked to document the RoY approach and concept. I am grateful that Dr. Philip Cook and his wife Michele embraced the idea and drafted this document, which also helped me get a deeper understanding and appreciation of youth driven efforts and the possible long-term benefits.

RoY focuses mainly on young adults, primarily in their teenage years. The teenage phase is challenging for most people and probably even more for those coming from an ethnic minority. These formative years often determine the career and social path of the individual and their role in society. Many of them have an idealistic mindset and would like to make a contribution to society. Helping these youths to develop their ideas and potential, giving them authority and the required tools, combined with respectful guidance and support holds enormous potential for society, especially young societies.

After almost 10 years, the RoY concept and approach has proven to be effective in addressing teenage issues bridging different ethnic groups, employing contemporary multimedia communication tools and customizing these to fit the cultural understanding of the various ethnic communities.

For the future, it is my hope that the strength and dynamic of RoY, in particular, the autonomy of the youth leadership, can be maintained in a growing organization centered around empowered teams. With sufficient understanding and support, this innovative concept will have lasting and positive effects on many different levels.

Thank you for your support,

Reinhard Plank



Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the staff and youth from Help without Frontiers (HWF) who contributed to the White Paper. Special thanks are extended to Pi Ann (HWF Director), Luisa Tolusso, Pi Joli, Pi Kiki and Khun Eh Mwe (Program Managers) for their extensive support in organizing research sessions and giving their own time to being interviewed. Finally, we thank all the RoY youth leaders from the three cohorts who gave so generously and enthusiastically to the participatory research sessions. We hope your good words and thoughts, inspire not only those reading the White Paper, but others who will be touched by RoY in the future.

A special thank you is also extended to Reinhard Plank, for his ongoing support of this work.

Philip and Michele Cook, IICRD, Canada, September 2018

International Institute for Child Rights and Development

The International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD) is a registered charity located in Victoria, British Columbia (BC), focused on social innovation with and for children and youth. For the past 25 years, IICRD has been a bridge building organization working with a wide variety of partners in participatory, applied research, professional education, and community capacity building initiatives. Our programs and projects catalyze change, transformation, and healing for the most vulnerable young people in our society, in Canada and in over 45 countries around the world.



More information: www.iicrd.org



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Executive Summary

Introduction: The need for new approaches to support vulnerable migrant youth in Thailand

In the current global population, youth make up a disproportionate sector of the human family. The current number of youth between the ages of 15 and 24 is 1.1 billion; as such youth constitute 18 percent of the global population. Youth and children together, including all those aged 24 years and younger, account for nearly 40 percent of the world's population. The largest cohort of youth resides in Asia and the Pacific (Advocates for Youth, 2018).

Young people fleeing challenging and often violent contexts in their home country are in a particularly precarious position. They have frequently experienced the stress and anxiety of forced displacement, economic and social loss, and violence in many forms. They also face the additional and complex challenges associated with difficult daily living circumstances in their new "home" country and community. Adolescents and youth are often over represented in humanitarian contexts, yet their needs are poorly understood and they are therefore often underserved as a population.

This White Paper documents the RoY program and the specific impacts the program has had on the cohorts of migrant youth who have passed through its capacity building initiatives. The program is unique in being designed and delivered by older migrant and vulnerable youth and is therefore well positioned to offer lessons for other services serving migrant youth in Thailand as well as the youth sector more generally in ASEAN and around the world.

Research Methods

Goals of White Paper (WP) Research Report

Two overarching research goals guided the research that informs the WP. These are:

1. Explore general issues of well-being and challenges for youth participating in Rays of Youth/HWF programs
2. Understand ways in which the ROY programs build resilience and opportunity for young people in addressing these issues, as well as exploring where persistent challenges may lie

The sample selection and research tools were chosen to answer these guiding objectives.

Research Findings

Explore general issues of well-being and challenges for youth participating in Rays of Youth/HWF programs

The young people engaged in the research described significant differences in their lives before entering RoY program and afterwards. Many of the youth portrayed a life of hardship growing up in either Myanmar or living with their families in the migrant camps in Thailand. Almost all of the research participants had direct experience of poverty and discrimination. Many were members of Ethnic Minority groups, in particular the Karen. Other youth come from the dominant Burmese population, and there is a small community of Rohingya refugees fleeing the violence in Rakhine State.



Challenges faced by the young men and women participating in the research activities included:

- Family discord and violence
- Poverty
- Being shy and lacking confidence
- Feelings of loneliness
- Being bullied by Burmese or Thai peers
- Lacking empathy for others
- Having few friends
- Lacking in life skills
- Not having personal goals or a sense of hope for future possibilities

Some of the benefits of RoY programming described by youth participants included:

- Learning the true meaning of participation
- Understanding the importance of respecting and promoting human rights for all
- Becoming more physically active
- Growing emotionally
- Improving language skills
- More able to empathize and help others
- Finding opportunity for self-expression through creative arts
- Receiving more recognition and encouragement from parents and community members
- Learning about team work especially through creative tasks like producing music together

Understand ways in which RoY programs build resilience and opportunity for young people in addressing these issues, as well as exploring where persistent challenges may lie

Increasingly resilience theory, which describes key factors enabling young people 's ability to recover from situations of adversity, is being recognized as a core dimension of successful youth programming. In many of the research activities with the RoY youth, themes of overcoming adversity using personal strengths, emerged in the results.

These themes of resilience are categorized into four groups of findings and tools provided by RoY life skills. They include:

1. **Arts and identity:** Use of creative arts and media to establish a healthy sense of personal identity
2. **Encouraging generosity:** Helping youth give back to their community
3. **Peer support:** Learning from and with other youth
4. **Rooted in culture:** Building on cultural strengths

Conclusion and recommendations

Since its inception in 2009, RoY has developed a unique youth lead, culturally grounded and arts and media savvy program that has had significant impact on the three cohorts of youth leaders who have passed through its programs.

Some of the key determinants of success for RoY are:

- The development of a **successful life skill program** that equips youth to manage personal challenges, access employment and positively impact communities in Thailand and more recently Myanmar
- Developed by and for youth, **strong peer to peer learning and mentoring process**
- **Rooted in personal and cultural strengths**
- **Supporting individual and collective resilience**
- Draws on the innovation of **arts and creative media**
- **Cross border programing** that reaches young people in Thailand and Myanmar
- **Building peace-oriented networks between differing ethnic groups**



Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested to further strengthen and expand the impact of RoY:

1. **Evaluation and learning:** RoY's impact would be further strengthened by incorporating evaluation and ongoing learning strategies in all programs. Conducting a thorough internal review of RoY curriculum would help create a strong foundation for a new, expanded RoY
2. **Expand network of institutional allies to assist RoY youth:** RoY youth graduate with a strong base of life skills, cultural understanding and expertise in certain technical skills including media skills. HWF is now in an excellent position to leverage the success of RoY by helping youth access institutions such as universities and certain areas of employment. HWF recent meetings with Chiang Mai University, Centre for Ethnic Studies and Development is a good example of this outreach to allies.
3. Make explicit **RoY's psychosocial benefits for vulnerable migrant young women and men.** RoY seems to make a significant impact on migrant youth well-being and resilience. This could be further enhanced by developing a psychosocial framework and strategy. This focus could also be applied more directly to assist RoY find greater purpose and meaning in their lives through RoY interventions.
4. Share RoY as a **national, regional and international model of good practice** in youth lead life skills and development programming. Using this White Paper as well as some of the RoY materials on social media such as:

- YouTube channel, see <https://www.youtube.com/user/RaysOfYouth>
- Facebook, see:
Ray of Youth Project Thailand at <https://www.facebook.com/ROYprojectThailand/>
Rays of Youth Project Myanmar at <https://www.facebook.com/raysofyouthROY/>

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Introduction: The need for new approaches to support vulnerable migrant youth in Thailand

In the current global population, youth¹ make up a disproportionate sector of the human family. The current number of youth between the ages of 15 and 24 is 1.1 billion; as such youth constitute **18 percent** of the global population. Youth and children together, including all those aged 24 years and younger, account for nearly **40 percent** of the world's population. The largest cohort of youth resides in Asia and the Pacific (Advocates for Youth, 2018).

Young people fleeing challenging and often violent contexts in their home country are in a particularly precarious position. They have frequently experienced the stress and anxiety of forced displacement, economic and social loss, and violence in many forms. They also face the additional and complex challenges associated with difficult daily living circumstances in their new “home” country and community. Adolescents and youth are often over represented in humanitarian contexts, yet their needs are poorly understood and they are therefore often underserved as a population.

Thailand has a long history of hosting migrants and refugee families from neighboring Nations, especially Myanmar, as they are forced to leave due to conflict, discrimination and extreme poverty. Over the past decade alone, hundreds of thousands of migrant children and youth have fled, either alone or accompanied by their parents. Most of these young people are fleeing critical economic situations in Myanmar and other neighboring countries. These migrant workers currently fill key jobs in the agriculture, industrial and services industries, contributing to the Thai economy. As a result, many migrant youth end up staying in Thailand for considerable periods of time, though they're lives are often hidden due to economic and social insecurity. Many have overcome considerable difficulties and their resilience and fortitude offer a reservoir of social strength and innovation (Save the Children, 2014). There is currently a need for more programming for migrant youth in Thailand, especially programs that are tailored to their unique “lived experience” and support these young people not as sources of vulnerability or a potential security threat, but rather as resilient and a source of future possibilities in the economies of both Thailand, Myanmar and the ASEAN region as a whole.

This White Paper documents the RoY program and the specific impacts the program has had on the cohorts of migrant youth who have passed through its capacity building initiatives. The program is unique in being designed and delivered by older migrant and vulnerable youth and is therefore well positioned to offer lessons for other services serving migrant youth in Thailand as well as the youth sector more generally in ASEAN and around the world.

The White Paper (WP) shares the findings of a review of Help without Frontiers (HWF), Rays of Youth (RoY) program, highlighting key successes and challenges of RoY and positions RoY as a leader in the field of migrant youth leadership programs.

The report uses the label of White Paper to highlight the unique “best practice” aspects of RoY in responding to the needs of a highly vulnerable population – migrant youth living on either side of the Thai-Myanmar border.

Finally, the White Paper (WP) summarizes 2 months of desk review and one week of intensive field research with participating youth and program manager and the Director. The WP is targeted at programming and donor agencies supporting migrant youth. It suggests lessons learned, keys to success and makes recommendations for further refinement of migrant youth programming.

1 The concept of youth as applied to the young migrant women and men participating in this study covers an age range from 15-25. This differs from the WHO definition of youth (18-25), and is consistent with the young people participating in RoY programming.

Help without Frontiers (HWF), Rays of Youth

Help without Frontiers (HWF) is a registered Thai Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that strives to create a world where help is provided to the most vulnerable and marginalised populations, in particular their most vulnerable members, children, without discrimination, without exclusion and without borders.

In 2017, HWF celebrated 10 years of Help without Frontiers providing support along the Thai-Myanmar border to displaced people that find themselves in emergency situations. Most of these displaced people are children and youth, for whom HWF seeks to give all a chance for a better and brighter future. Specifically, Help without Frontiers programs focus on five core areas; Education; Youth Empowerment; Child Protection; Health; and Community Development.

Rays of Youth (RoY) Program.

The unstable socio-economic and political conditions in Myanmar have forced many people to flee the country. In their journey to Thailand, young Burmese and ethnic minority migrants are often exposed to forced labour, human trafficking, sexual exploitation and drug addiction. Their vulnerability is aggravated by the consistent lack of a proper education, a permanent condition of poverty and poor health conditions.

Children and youth particularly suffer the double jeopardy of vulnerability due to their young age and lack of education and life skills. In addition, children and youth from Myanmar are particularly vulnerable to the effects caused by hardships as they lack proper guidance and support. Due to the oppressive dictatorship that has been governing Myanmar for decades, youth lack proper models of leadership which they can look to for inspiration. Moreover, drug and alcohol abuse as well as child abuse are still a widespread reality in Burmese familial and community settings.



Consequently, their lack of life-skills, educational credentials and access to opportunities further exposes them to the dangers of the street. Without the right education and support networks and interesting activities to engage in, they risk becoming prey to present antisocial temptations that could jeopardize their future.

In 2009, Help without Frontiers launched the Rays of Youth (RoY) project to keep these vulnerable migrant children and youth off the street by educating them on child rights and protection, human trafficking, environmental problems, health and personal hygiene, empowering them with a brighter future. The program offers a strong creative arts, media and communication foundation to its training, and its peer-led management and design format makes it unique in the youth leadership field.

In Thailand, Burmese and ethnic minority youth attending Migrant Learning Centres can apply for the RoY programme and choose between the Peer Leadership and the Music curricula.

The RoY Peer Leadership program involves 20 youth who dedicate the first part of the one-year program to their own personal training, growing their confidence and personality, and learning how to stand in front of an audience and moderate public events. In the meantime, the youth receives training on social issues such as human trafficking and safe migration, human and children rights, gender equality, sexual reproductive health and rights, and much more. As a conclusion of the one-year program, the youth pass on what they have learnt to their peers at migrant schools as well as onto their own communities through Mini Projects, thus becoming leaders for social change.

The ROY Music program involves another 20 youth who receive one-year training on music composition and learn to play instruments such as keyboard, guitar, bass and drums. The participants to the Music program also receive trainings on social issues and convey knowledge onto peers and community members through producing educational music videos and albums.

The enthusiasm with which youth engage in the RoY projects is expressed in the roadshows they hold for local communities, with a creative mix of music

and drama. In these performances, youth give back to their communities by acting as role models and raising awareness on social problems like human trafficking, forced labour, child labour, child rights abuse, sexual exploitation and drug abuse. The RoY team regularly engages in media workshops and trainings to further disseminate their messages and expand their knowledge and creativity.

Since 2014, the Rays of Youth team launched the **Cross-Border Project** in Karen and Rakhine states to conduct awareness raising activities in Myanmar. Preliminary visits to select villages in Karen and Rakhine states were conducted in order to build up a network of community leaders, teachers and political representation. In addition, a needs assessment was carried out to identify the specific problems of villages in order to tailor workshops addressing those specific needs of the youth, establish community development projects and promote campaign events. Following the baseline studies, the Rays of Youth found that many remote areas, especially in Karen state, have scarce hygiene practices and do not have access to sanitary services. As a response to the needs of the communities, since 2016, the Rays of Youth Cross Border team has been implementing a Toilet project in remote villages of Karen state so as to build toilets and empower the local population with knowledge and skills on basic hygiene and toilet sanitation through capacity building trainings as well as through awareness raising campaigns and events.

In April 2017, the Rays of Youth Cross Border Project set up an office in Hpa-an, Karen State. The long-term objective of the project is to expand the network of community leaders, NGOs and CSOs across Myanmar to empower children and youth with knowledge and skills to lead social development. Nowadays, the cross-border project activities target villages and communities in five states, namely Karen, Rakhine, Mon, Shan, and Kayah states. In 2019, the first group of 25 youth has been selected from the five targeted states inside Myanmar to join an intensive six-month **Myanmar Leadership program** held in Mae Sot, Thailand.

In 2019, the Rays of Youth project will celebrate its tenth anniversary. Since the inception of the Rays of Youth program, more than 100 youth have been trained and graduated from the Leadership program. Awareness raising activities and events have reached more than 49,000 community members.



Research Methods

Goals of White Paper (WP) Research Report

Two overarching research goals guided the research that informs the WP. These are:

1. Explore general issues of well-being and challenges for youth participating in Rays of Youth/HWF programs
2. Understand ways in which the ROY programs build resilience and opportunity for young people in addressing these issues, as well as exploring where persistent challenges may lie

The sample selection and research tools were chosen to answer these guiding objectives.

Research Process and Sample

The research took place from May – October 2018 and involved two months of desk review and one week of intensive, participatory field research with participating youth, focus groups with staff and one on one interviews with RoY Program Managers (youth themselves and past graduates of HWF programs) and the HWF Director.

The sample was purposive, including groups from each of the three RoY cohorts. The sample size was thirty, fifteen girls and fifteen boys. In addition, four RoY Program Managers took part in:

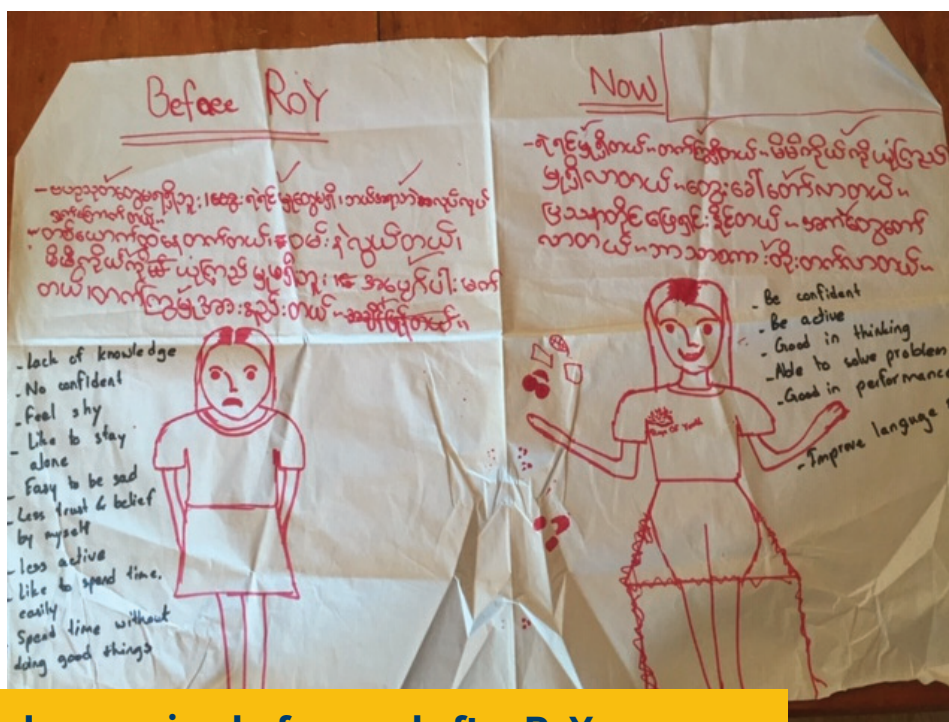
- Participatory “Spidergram” activity in which a subset of likert scales are discussed and marked according to present circumstances and likely future goals
- Focus group discussion on the team mentorship role of the Program Managers in supporting boys and girls participating in RoY
- One on one interviews exploring personal experiences as a former vulnerable migrant youth, role in shaping the RoY curriculum and future goals and recommendations for RoY

Finally, an in-depth interview was conducted with the HWF Director, who is herself a former vulnerable young person who was mentored by Khun Sompop, a well-known and respected Thai leader and youth mentor in the child rights field.

The WP research tools included:

1. Participatory Action Research (PAR) Tools

- Body Mapping: Before and After – used to assess challenges for young people before entering RoY program and benefits (or challenges) that have been experienced after participating in RoY programming



Body mapping before and after RoY program

- Social Mapping – used to identify community geo and socio-spatial places of risk and support for girls and boys
- River of Life: Most Significant Change – Identifies the most significant changes arising from RoY program interventions, over the life of the program, gathering these experiences in narrative stories
- Spidergram – Collective likert scale activity to explore specific dimensions of RoY leadership training and to use current scores on the scales to plan for future RoY goals

RoY: River of Life: Most Significant Change Activity
RoY Program Manager engages in Spidergram Activity



Youth create a storyboard for their Most Significant Change story

2. Case Studies – In depth interviews with individual RoY girls and boys to track life changes arising from participation in RoY activities
3. Focus Group Discussions – Collective discussions what’s working well and areas of improvement in RoY interventions, including developing future recommendations
4. Individual Interviews – One on one semi-structured interviews with RoY Program Managers and the HWF Director exploring lessons learned since the 2009 inception of RoY, success and challenges encountered along the way, and plans for future program development

Research Findings

Explore general issues of well-being and challenges for youth participating in Rays of Youth/HWF programs

The young people engaged in the research described significant differences in their lives before entering RoY program and afterwards. Many of the youth portrayed a life of hardship growing up in either Myanmar or living with their families in the migrant camps in Thailand. Almost all of the research participants had direct experience of poverty and discrimination. Many were members of Ethnic Minority groups, in particular the Karen. Other youth come from the dominant Burmese population, and there is a small community of Rohingya refugees fleeing the violence in Rakhine State.

One of the challenges faced by the youth coming from Myanmar is the day to day difficulties youth and families face from corruption and lack of good adult role models, particularly amongst the Nation's leaders. This was contrasted with the human centred, gender sensitive leadership style that they are learning at HWF.

In Myanmar, we grew up learning that the country's leaders were corrupt and could not be trusted. Many of our families faced daily violence and discrimination, things were often so bad that we had to leave and come to Thailand. Here the challenges are also large, but the leadership we learn through Rays of Youth is a different kind of leadership. It's about respect, expressing yourself with confidence, allowing girls to be leaders (as before only boys were respected), helping your peers and working to make our communities stronger (Interview with young Karen man).

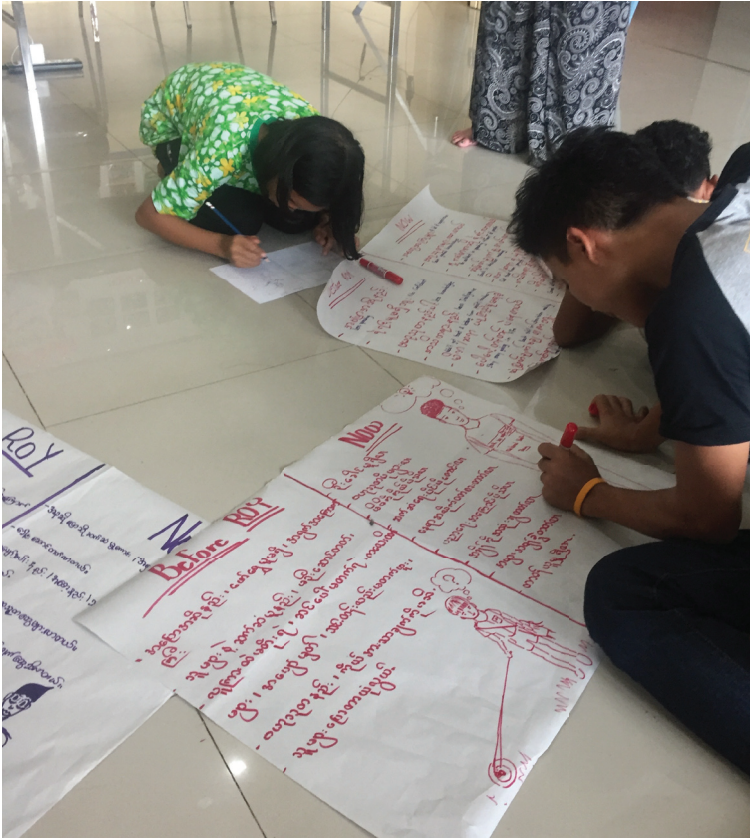
Other challenges faced by the young men and women participating in the research activities included:

- Family discord and violence
- Poverty
- Being shy and lacking confidence
- Feelings of loneliness
- Being bullied by Burmese or Thai peers
- Lacking empathy for others
- Having few friends
- Lacking in life skills
- Not having personal goals or a sense of hope for future possibilities

I used to be isolated, I had no friends and lacked confidence. I would never speak in public and people hardly noticed me - sometimes I was bullied by other kids for being so quiet. Now I feel confident, I have practiced communicating and public speaking and love to perform dramatic skits about social change in front of family and friends. I feel I can make a difference (Interview 16 year old female RoY participant).

Some of the benefits of RoY programming described by youth participants included:

- Learning the true meaning of participation
- Understanding the importance of respecting and promoting human rights for all
- Becoming more physically active
- Growing emotionally
- Improving language skills
- More able to empathize and help others
- Finding opportunity for self-expression through creative arts
- Receiving more recognition and encouragement from parents and community members
- Learning about team work especially through creative tasks like producing music together



Youth describe their lives before and after RoY

Understand ways in which RoY programs build resilience and opportunity for young people in addressing these issues, as well as exploring where persistent challenges may lie

Increasingly resilience theory, which describes key factors enabling young people 's ability to recover from situations of adversity, is being recognized as a core dimension of successful youth programming. In many of the research activities with the RoY youth, themes of overcoming adversity using personal strengths, emerged in the results.

These themes of resilience are categorized into four groups of findings and tools provided by RoY life skills. They include:

1. **Arts and identity:** Use of creative arts and media to establish a healthy sense of personal identity
2. **Encouraging generosity:** Helping youth give back to their community
3. **Peer support:** Learning from and with other youth
4. **Rooted in culture:** Building on cultural strengths

Arts and identity: Use of creative arts and media in establishing a healthy sense of personal identity

A unique feature of the RoY program is its use of media, digital storytelling, radio programs and artistic expression through drama, dance and music, to help young people tell their story, find their gifts and connect with others in building social and cultural capital.

The RoY capacity to support youth resilience through leadership and creative arts skill building is described in the case study below of Naw Mue Lweh, a young Karen leader.

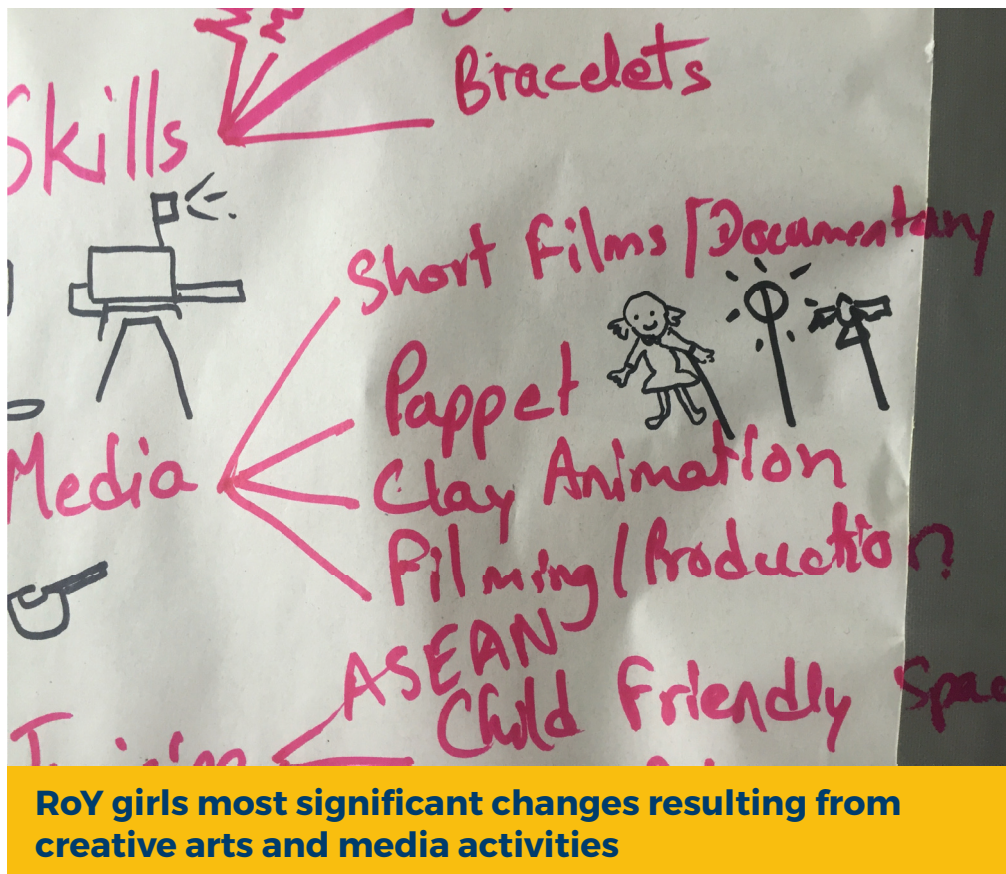


My name is Naw Mue Lweh Paw. I am 24 years old and have been involved with HWF since 2010. I am originally from Ta Aye Say, a small Karen village in Northern Myanmar. My parents and younger sister are still there. My brother is here in Mae Sot with me and just started the leadership music program here at HWF. I was born in Myanmar and went to the local school until grade 7. Then my parents ran into financial difficulty and could no longer afford to send me, so I dropped out. Lucky for me though, my uncle came to visit a year or two later and asked my parents why I was not in school. When he understood the situation, he offered for my brother and I to come to Mae Sot with him to attend Parami Migrant Learning Center. It was there that I saw the flyers about HWF's Rays of Youth Leadership program and applied. They had over 50 applicants that

they interviewed that year (2010) and I was one of 20 students selected to attend. I felt very lucky, so even though it was difficult getting all of the homework done with doing school work all week and the leadership program on the weekends, I stuck with it. I learned so much in the leadership program; practical thinking, creative skills, project writing and presentation skills. The leadership program is different than school, it uses creativity and drama to share information and gives you lots of opportunities to practice identifying your personal strengths and building on these strengths. I don't think I could have learned to be brave without this. It really helped to build my confidence. Now I have the ability to lead my team and am very good at presentations. Often the teachers even come to me for help to do their power points. The best part is sharing my knowledge and skills with my community. While this started as one of our mini projects (the final stage of the leadership training), it has now become part of our rural development project in Myanmar that we are doing as part of our Cross-Border Project. They really need it! We have shared our drama and social change skills with community youth and Elders in Myanmar and used these tools to address the need they expressed of building community latrines to address problems of water contamination and sickness. Change takes time, but I am so happy that I and RoY could help share this important information with my community and that it has made such a positive difference. I think that now even if ROY were not there they would continue on with the toilets and the community event days. That makes me proud! (interview with female RoY leader)

These elements of creative arts and media were referenced as creating some of the most significant changes for RoY participants in the River of Life activity. Specifically, girls spoke of the impact of drama, use of puppets and clay-mation (modeling clay figures and filming animation skits with clay figures) in allowing them:

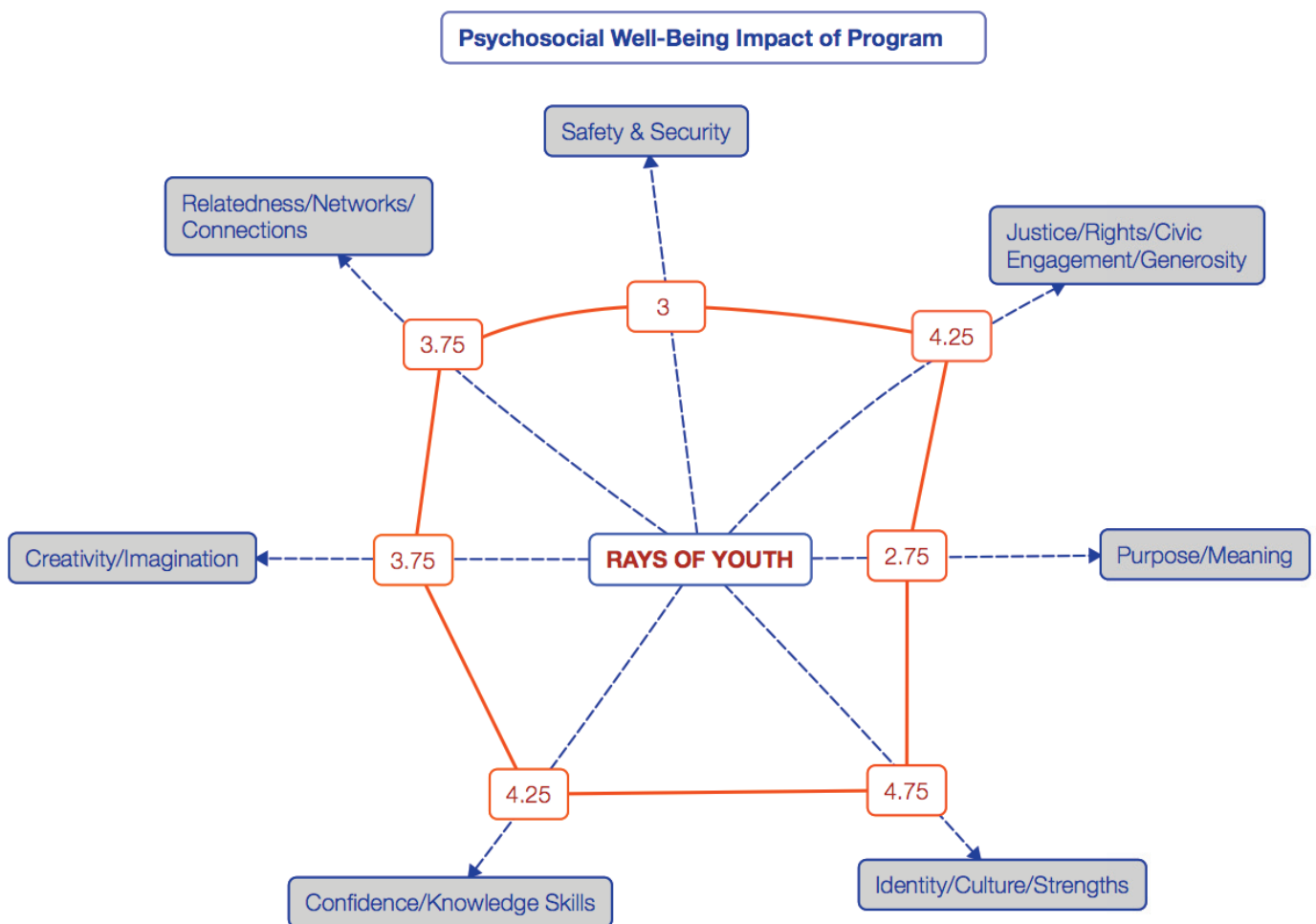
- to explore different gender roles (e.g. peer leader, community leader)
- to express through body movement and dance expressed in drama, and
- to find their voice in developing unique skits and narrative stories.



Encouraging generosity: Helping youth give back to their community

RoY leadership activities do not only focus on improving individual youth well-being, they also benefit community well-being. A key finding in the research is that young women and men engaging in RoY find giving back to community one of the most significant aspects of the group interventions. Whether in the form of traveling “roadshows” in and around Mae Sot, “mini-projects” that help youth implement skills learned at the end of their 2 year RoY training, or through helping rural communities in Myanmar in the Cross-Border Project, RoY participants spoke about the significant impact of helping others. They felt it increased their own sense of self-esteem while helping vulnerable communities in the process. This finding is significant as many youth programs only focus on ways young peoples’ individual well-being can be boosted through activities that increase individual social, emotional and physical well-being. For youth participating in RoY activities, youth shared that the most significant interventions were those that tie personal skill development with altruism, agency, empathy and compassion.

This dimension of youth “generosity” was reinforced in the spidergram research activity with RoY Program Managers which sought to measure the impact of the Roy Programs on the psychosocial well-being of RoY participants. The spidergram applies 4 dimensions of well-being from the ADAPT model of psychological well-being developed by Silove (2013). In the ADAPT model the 4 dimensions of psychological thriving are: Safety and security; Bonds and networks; Justice; and Roles and identities. In the current review, based on discussions with the RoY Program Managers these were slightly altered to: Safety and security (stays the same); Confidence; Relatedness; Justice and rights; Identity and cultural strengths. Two additional dimensions were also added – Creativity/Imagination and Confidence. The results of the spidergram are shown below.



Interestingly, RoY PM's ranked the programs' effectiveness from quite high (creativity, relatedness) to very high (justice and rights, identify, cultural strengths, confidence), with the exception of purpose and meaning which was ranked as adequate. The explanation provided for the lower score on "purpose and meaning" for RoY programs is that the migrant youth entering RoY often live in very unpredictable life circumstances where the long-term purpose and meaning are less clear.

Finally, the RoY PM's suggested that the dimension of "justice and rights" be expanded to include active citizenship and giving back to community. This concept of youth compassion and generosity is explained in the following interview with the PM's.

We see that for our youth leaders, it's not enough that they benefit personally from the RoY program, many of them want to help their families. They want to support those less fortunate than them back home in the communities, and they would very much like to help the Thai society that has allowed them to come here and study for a better future. (Interview with RoY Program Manager)



RoY Leaders helping with community development projects in the Myanmar Cross Border Project

Peer support: Learning from and with other youth

From its founding RoY has been inspired by leadership from older youth. This makes the program especially important in regards to recognizing young people's own capacity to mentor their peers. A key theme emerging from the research activities was RoY cohorts speaking about the important role that young men and women can play in identifying both their challenges and assets, or strengths, that can be drawn upon to face these challenges. This is described in the following case study of Kyaw Min a RoY youth leader.



Nay Shine, Mon, RoY Youth Leader

In 2004, I came to Mae Sot with my grandfather from Myanmar from my village of Pago in Mon (an Ethnic Minority) State. I was 9 years old. First, I studied in the Mae Sot Migrant Learning Centre, my father and mother eventually joined us with my father working as a Mason and my mother in a local factory. I have 4 siblings who are all married. My parents want me to be a professional because I like learning. I would like to be a teacher or a translator. I joined RoY in 2014, after meeting and speaking with Pi Joli (RoY Program Manager and one of the founders of RoY), she inspired me when she described the 2 year program. I respected the person she had become. In many ways she became a role model for me. She helped me learn drama and media, both of which I love, especially video, editing and performing plays and helping educate other youth about their rights and protecting themselves from domestic and community violence and exploitive migration. Lately my older RoY youth leaders have been helping us learn our ethnic languages, and I can share things with my parents that please and surprise them. I also hope to learn more about

my traditional Mon dance. Soon we will conduct our mini project in Myanmar villages with support from our older RoY brothers and sisters. Eventually, I want to return to Myanmar and help my country, this is very complicated as jobs are scarce. I believe the life skills learned from other youth in RoY will help me make my way to a better future and help other youth along the way! I love the making music with other youth and this aspect of teamwork has helped me work with people with different abilities and skills. RoY youth leaders help us draw on the best from our cultural roots while learning modern life skills (Interview with RoY participant).

This is an important finding as the young people coming from Myanmar who join RoY bring a very unique and complex, constellation of challenges that require an equally tailored response. These challenges are frequently changing and having young people on the cutting edge of these life experiences take the lead in designing and delivering RoY programs, assists programs keep pace with a rapidly evolving environment.

This is reflected in the following quote from one of the RoY Program Managers.

Youth, whether boys or girls, enter RoY with special challenges and strengths. Our job in designing programs is to find the best way to target problems by building on personal strengths. Using modern tools like media, internet and youth driven music and arts, helps address these challenges using youth friendly approaches. This is why our programs are always evolving, while we have similar life skills formats for each RoY cohort, the content varies based on new innovation that we (the Program Managers) introduce. (Interview with RoY Program Manager)

A critical aspect of RoY youth focused work is changing adult attitudes towards youth, especially in helping adults see the benefits that life skills training brings to youth and their communities. RoY has had some success in bringing this awareness to teachers, community leaders, and other key adults in create a more enabling environment for youth to support themselves and each other.

The details of all significant impacts from RoY as well as the most significant changes resulting from RoY programming with all three cohorts are captured in results of the following River of Life: Most Significant Change activity shown in the diagram below.

River of Life Most Significant Changes Help without Frontiers, Rays of Youth Program, Mae Sot, Thailand

Activities reported by  ROY Group 1  ROY Group 2  Cross Border Project

2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Leadership Camp Life-skills/Team building/Cultural Performance	Leadership/Study Tour/DEPDC Youth Camp	Are you ready Youth Camp Active Citizen /Proposal Writing Study tour/Internships/Graduation	Leadership Camp Life skills/team building Leadership	Summer Camps	Summer and Music Camp Voice training	Peer Youth Camp Collaboration with Teachers TOT Refresher/Teachers	GROUP 3 SUMMER CAMP TOT Refresher/Teachers
Media Radio broadcasting/Sound editing	Short film/Documentary/Production	The Way - Short film Comic books	Media - Music Program Team work Game - Are you ready?	Guitar/Drums/Song Writing Production Camera/editing/Script W	Album prod/Sound Mgt Mini Projects Smart phone/Sexual health	New media SHRH short SRHR refresher	Music training Theatre for Change Training BKK Script writing
Training Child Rights/Human trafficking	ASEAN/Child friendly spaces /Drugs/Traffic rules/adolescent health Child protection	Mini Projects Birth Registration Child and human Rights	Training CRC, human trafficking, Human Rights, Drug Awareness	Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)	FIRST AID/Soap making	Children on the Move(COM) traffic rules, Sexual health	COM/SRHR Refresher Activity Design and Dev Proposal Writing
Skill Development Computer/language	Soap Making Natural Detergents Gardens/safe spaces	Child friendly Spaces at Migrant learning Centers	Skill Development Child friendly Spaces at Migrant learning Centers	Dish washing detergent Activity Design Drama/Dance May-Youth -Mothers &	CRC, Basic Hygiene, Human Trafficking, Drama, Teacher Training/Traffic rules	COM- safe migration, smart trafficking	Proposal Writing TForC/Drama for Communication Hygiene/sanit'h
Campaign Events Community Road Show (MaePa/Factory)	Children Day - May Day/traffic rules/Thai PBS/MTV EXIT	Campaign Events I do I can Share/ Active Citizen Youth Exchange/ National youth Day/ Community Roadshow	Campaign Events I do I can Share/ Active Citizen Youth Exchange/ National youth Day/ Community Roadshow	Cultural Exchange Fund raising/youth Day Congratulation Ceremony	Child Can Change/fundraiser I do I Share We Stand for Children Roadshow/	Study Tour - BKK/CM Child Can Change/fundraiser Anti Trafficking	Hygiene/sanit'h Anti Trafficking May Day/Migrant Worker Day
	Karen State Field visit Survey/Hygiene training	CROSS BORDER PROJECT Community visit/study tour Human Trafficking Training Data Collection	CROSS BORDER PROJECT Survey/Hygiene training	Happy Children's Day Human Trafficking Training One House One toilet Community Survey	Happy Children's Day OHOT follow up Baseline HWF 10 Years	Happy Children's Day /Hygiene Toilet Sanitation Drama Baseline Youngsaki/Shan	

Significant Change Reported by  ROY Group 1  ROY Group 2  Cross Border Project

- One House One Toilet**
*Changed Social Norms
Villagers using toilets
- Leadership Program**
*Deeper understanding of own culture/non-discrimination
*Mini project led to work as coordinator
- Leadership Program, esp. Life Skills/Drama**
*From shy to confident/became role model in school
*New perception of leadership (Humble/Supportive)

"RAYS OF YOUTH helps students find their unique gift, so each of us show our leadership/style differently!"

Rooted in culture: Building on cultural strengths

While RoY has been successful in leveraging the strengths of peer networks, it also supports vulnerable young men and women by reconnecting them with their cultural roots. Whether through language programs, local dance, painting or music, RoY helps young Ethnic Minority leaders rediscover a sense of pride and belonging in their cultural origins.

The importance of culture in expanding HWF's work to Myanmar is highlighted in an interview with the Help without Frontiers Director.

We have recently expanded our work to five states in Myanmar; Karen, Mon, Shan, Rakhine and Kayah. In these states we are helping communities with needs that they identify, like our recent latrine projects. In this way RoY youth give back to communities in very tangible ways, and they learn more about their own and other cultures. We believe this will help build a strong network of youth in Myanmar that can support the Government youth strategies. (HWF Director)

A number of the youth and program Managers spoke of the importance of learning age old cultural competencies for Ethnic Minority young people living in Thailand who face a rapidly changing and often politically hostile environment.

Our cultures have withstood challenges throughout our history, we can draw on our cultural strength and pride to help us manage the modern challenges we youth face. As a young female leader I feel I can help my culture in old and new ways! (Interview with RoY young woman)



RoY graduates wearing traditional dress

The RoY and HWF ability to draw on youth focused cultural strengths was initially helped through a partnership with the Development and Education Programme for Daughters and Communities Centre in the Greater Mekong Subregion (DEPDC/GMS, see <https://depdcblog.wordpress.com>). This was particularly inspired by the Mekong Youth Net a youth leadership training program for youth in the Greater Mekong Subregion that focused on life skill development using many of the competencies that informed the early development of RoY.

The following quote explains ways in which RoY helps young people build self-respect and enhance belonging through learning about their culture.

Many young migrants coming to Thailand imitate Thai culture to try and fit in, but they are often still not accepted. As a result, most of these youth don't know their own culture. When they do learn about their culture it helps them draw on the best of their Ethnic Minority and host Thai culture. (Roy young man)

Often culture is used as a medium to convey messages to youth and adults at the community level through skits, mime and musical performances. This occurs in various formats including:

- Participants mini projects
- Campaigns (e.g. Happy Children’s Day)
- Community Road Shows
- RoY performances in local migrant schools
- Theatre for Change (Bangkok)

Recently RoY launched a campaign in Mae Sot to create greater cross-cultural understanding and appreciation through a food fare. This was greatly appreciated as food from different cultural and religious groups was shared while youth performed creative skits exemplifying youth capacity to help others, support human rights and create a healthier social environment. The food fare was further enhanced by promoting a Friendship Recipe Book and HWF is planning on hosting a Friendship Fair on the Friendship Bridge border between Thailand and Myanmar. This project has helped reduce tensions between differing ethnic groups and promote cross-cultural peacebuilding.

Finally, some of RoY community projects, such as the latrine building through “One house, one toilet” campaign in Myanmar are subtly changing deeply rooted social norms that hinder youth and gender rights. For example, one young woman involved in “One house, one toilet” recounted how women are now safer from sexual assault as they can urinate in a safe, gender appropriate site as opposed to having to use the bushes.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Since its inception in 2009, RoY has developed a unique youth lead, culturally grounded and arts and media savvy program that has had significant impact on the three cohorts of youth leaders who have passed through its programs.

Some of the key determinants of success for RoY are:

- Development of a **successful life skill program** that assists youth manage personal challenge, access employment and positively impact communities in Thailand and more recently Myanmar
- Developed by and for youth, **strong peer to peer learning and mentoring process**
- **Rooted in personal and cultural strengths**
- **Supporting individual and collective resilience**
- Draws on the innovation of arts and creative media
- **Cross border programming** that reaches young people in Thailand and Myanmar
- **Building peace-oriented networks between differing ethnic groups**

RoY's lifeskills programming areas appear to be comprehensive in their wholistic approach and effective in their impact on youth psycho-social well-being. This is underscored by the literature on programming for migrant youth affected by conflict and systemic discrimination. In Sommer's (2006) review of such programs 6 types of intervention are identified: vocational training, reproductive health, basic skills, peace education, empowerment, and psycho-social programming.

RoY covers many of these areas with the exception of direct psychosocial programming. RoY goes above and beyond these areas with its delivery methods of youth lead, peer to peer programming and use of creative arts and media, including social media. Based on the findings from this White Paper these 2 added dimensions bring definite added value to RoY and contribute to global learning on effective programming for migrant youth.



RoY serves as a model for other youth-oriented programs and while it being adopted by government partners in Myanmar would be a useful approach for Thai Government agencies seeking to assist migrant young peoples. In addition, RoY's focus on promoting human rights and assisting communities sustainable development are well suited to become enablers of components of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's see

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>).

This pertains particularly to goals:

- 1 - ending poverty
- 5 - gender equality
- 10 - reduced inequalities
- 16 - peace and justice

The UN now has a targeted strategy for youth supporting the SDG's (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=2857>) and RoY would be a positive model for other youth oriented SDG programs, especially those working with Ethnic Minority and Indigenous populations.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested to further strengthen and expand the impact of RoY:

1. **Evaluation and learning:** RoY's impact would be further strengthened by incorporating evaluation and ongoing learning strategies in all programs. Conducting a thorough internal review of RoY curriculum would help create a strong foundation for a new, expanded RoY
2. **Expand network of institutional allies to assist RoY youth:** RoY youth graduate with a strong base of life skills, cultural understanding and expertise in certain technical skills including media skills. HWF is now in an excellent position to leverage the success of RoY by helping youth access institutions such as universities and certain areas of employment. HWF recent meetings with Chiang Mai University, Centre for Ethnic Studies and Development is a good example of this outreach to allies.
3. Make explicit **RoY's psychosocial benefits for vulnerable migrant young women and men.** RoY seems to make a significant impact on migrant youth well-being and resilience. This could be further enhanced by developing a psychosocial framework and strategy. This focus could also be applied more directly to assist RoY find greater purpose and meaning in their lives through RoY interventions.
4. Share RoY as a **national, regional and international model of good practice** in youth lead life skills and development programming. Using this White Paper as well as some of the RoY materials on social media such as:

- YouTube channel, see <https://www.youtube.com/user/RaysOfYouth>

- Facebook, see:

Ray of Youth Project Thailand at

<https://www.facebook.com/ROYprojectThailand/>

Rays of Youth Project Myanmar at

<https://www.facebook.com/raysofyouthROY/>



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Biographies of the Evaluation Team



Dr. Philip Cook is the founder and Executive Director of the International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD) and Associate Faculty in the School of Leadership Studies at Royal Roads University (RRU). His Doctorate is in Cross-Cultural Psychology. Dr. Cook has been working on issues of Indigenous peoples' and children's human rights for over 28 years. Much of this effort has focused on developing "bottom up" social policy in partnership with children, youth, families, Elders and traditional leaders. This has involved development and humanitarian partnerships with diverse State Governments, UN agencies such as UNICEF, UNESCO, UNHCR and UNDP, International non-governmental organizations (INGO's), and various Indigenous organizations both in Canada and in over 45 countries in every region of the world. This includes both developed and less developed countries, countries and contexts of crisis, conflict, climate affected environments and mass migration. Dr. Cook is a self-described research-practitioner and his publications, lectures, public speaking and policy and strategic advice draw from this extensive experience and IICRD's rich partnerships applying human resilience and social innovation to managing human adversity.

Biographies of the Evaluation Team



Michele Cook is the Capacity Director of the International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD). She has a background in Physiotherapy and Community Development and has dedicated the last 28 years of her professional life to engaging the perspectives of children, vulnerable families in community asset building, and the development of capacity building tools and materials that draw on local strengths and facilitate systemic change. Michele has worked in Indigenous and vulnerable communities in Canada, and around the world, including Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, South Africa, Malawi, Mali, Thailand, Myanmar, Indonesia, Mexico, Colombia, Lebanon and Jordan. Her latest passion and focus is capturing learning and insights to help IICRD and other organizations better support young people, families and communities build on their cultural wisdom and innate resilience. These perspectives are used to equip practitioners with the tools to better understand themselves, and meaningfully engage young people in creating positive change.

