



A Nursery for the Urban Poor

**Foundation for Slum Child Care:
Providing Child-care Services in
Bangkok's Slums**

Center for Philanthropy and Civil Society, National Institute of Development Administration

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With the patronage of a royal princess, two women from different sides of the railway track came together to establish a daycare center in one of Thailand's most notorious slums to change the lives of poor urban families.

Situated in the heart of Bangkok, the Klongtoey slum presents a jarring contrast to the glittering skyscrapers and malls that characterize much of the city. In the 1980s, a walk through Klongtoey and across its railroad tracks would have been a harrowing experience for any visitor. Ragged, starving toddlers who had been left in the care of aging grandparents roamed the streets unchaperoned.

Things have changed in Klongtoey over the past three decades. With Thailand becoming more prosperous, living conditions have improved for many slum households. Poverty and drug addiction remain stubborn social problems, but the symptoms are less visible than before. Formerly open sewers have been covered, and a concrete path that runs through the neighborhood has replaced a



Two girls in the FSCC play area. (FSCC)

rotting wooden walkway. Visitors are less likely to see an unattended, uncared for infant in Klongtoey today. It has become a rarer sight since the establishment of the Foundation for Slum Child Care (FSCC), which set up its headquarters and first child-care facility for the urban poor there in 1981.

A DAY AT DAYCARE

The day starts early at the child-care center. From Monday to Friday, working parents living in the slum area drop off their young babies and toddlers at around 7:30 a.m. and are met by carers who are respectfully greeted as “Kru” – or honored teacher – in the Thai language. Some parents stay to feed their children breakfast, or to spend time with them in the play area before leaving to begin their work day.

As their parents leave, some of the children start crying, although it is not long before they are calmed down by the center staff, who clean and groom their charges and change them into uniforms. While babies under 18 months are put down for a morning nap, the older children line up to sing the national anthem, chant prayers, and sing a song in honor of the late Her Royal Highness (HRH) Princess Galyani Vadhana, royal patron of FSCC. Following physical exercises in the yard, they proceed to the classroom to focus on early childhood learning skills.

The morning schedule at FSCC Klongtoey is similar to that at any other nursery that might be found in central Bangkok. At first glance, the children do not seem that different, either – freshly bathed and neatly dressed in their blue uniforms. But all of them come from disadvantaged backgrounds, born into urban poverty. A closer look shows some are smaller and thinner than average from malnutrition.

The children are fed lunch before they brush their teeth and retire for a nap, after which they gather for play-based learning activities developed by FSCC staff. With titles such as “Working Ants” and “Trains,” the games have been designed to support early childhood cognitive development and are clearly loved by the children. The young

charges are then fed a snack and changed into their own clothes, ready to be collected by their parents or guardians at 3 p.m.

This can present a challenge for those parents who need to work into the evening to make ends meet and are unable to make alternative arrangements. In such cases, they are safe in the knowledge that their children will be well cared for by the center staff until they are able to leave work. This trust is reflective of the central role that the FSCC child-care center has taken at the heart of the Klongtoey slum. It plays a crucial role not only in providing quality, affordable or free child care to poor households, allowing parents to go to work and earn an income, but also in supporting family life and child protection in the community.

Staff members are well-known within the slum from their door-to-door visits to check in on the well-being of young children. The vast majority of these visits are welcomed by parents, who recognize the contribution of FSCC to the well-being of their families. “My husband and I both need to work for a living,” said one mother who has benefited from FSCC’s crèche facilities. “Without FSCC, I am not sure how my life – or that of my family – would have turned out.” As a token of gratitude, she spends what little spare time she has making toys for the center’s children.

For more than three decades, the center has become integrated into the fabric of life in Klongtoey, creating employment for local people and fostering strong links with the community. “Care givers here are usually local residents from the community; they have a thorough understanding of local needs and constraints,” said Silada Rangsiakumpum, general manager of the FSCC who is also known as Kru Tor.

FSCC was officially started in June 1981, and through a series of fortuitous events would come under the royal patronage of the late HRH Princess Galyani Vadhana. For nearly 35 years, it has worked to improve the quality of life of Bangkok’s slum children: in 2014 alone, 2,133 children less than five years old were cared for by FSCC, whose

operations have extended to four other slum communities in the capital. Beyond the delivery of daycare services for the urban poor, the FSCC has established itself as a benchmark for child-care services and early childhood education in Thailand through its affiliate network and cutting-edge training programs, which include certification courses for informal nurseries and general early child-care development courses.

The FSCC's emergence was in part a response to the contours of social policy in Thailand, where public child care for children under the age of two was not available at the time. Parents of newborns and young babies had few options, with many relying on family networks or private child-care services if both needed to earn income. The shortfalls of this approach were perhaps most evident in the 1980s in Klongtoey, where a generation of babies and young children were born into miserable conditions while lacking adequate care and supervision.

RISE OF AN URBAN SLUM

Established in the 1940s, the Klongtoey slum expanded rapidly in the 1970s, as Thailand undertook the journey to industrialization spelled out in the government's *Second National Economic and Social Development Plan (1967-71)*. Development of the country's export manufacturing sector was a key pillar of the plan, which would require modern port facilities for shipping goods overseas. Thailand's main international port, Klongtoey, was to be expanded and upgraded.

This infrastructure project required a large workforce, with migrants pouring in from the countryside to Bangkok in search of a better life, meeting that need. Many of the workers settled on a large patch of land near the port, Klongtoey, which quickly became Bangkok's largest slum. Living conditions were miserable, with not even the most basic public facilities available to its residents, whom the local government authorities, the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, considered to be illegal settlers.

The vast majority of rural migrants scrambled to make ends meet, and their struggles were clearly

reflected in the health of the slum's children. Many parents gave their children diluted condensed milk or whatever they could find as a substitute for powdered or fresh milk. Malnutrition was a common scourge in the slum, resulting in stunting and developmental problems among its younger residents.

More often than not, poor rural migrants needed to work long hours to keep their households afloat, and were forced to leave their young children in the care of elderly grandparents or siblings. It was not uncommon to see unaccompanied children wandering the slums, playing in the garbage, and scrounging for food in rubbish heaps – naked and shoeless. One slum dweller described seeing a small infant tied by a rope to a pillar so he would not distract his sibling carers from their domestic chores.

This was not lost on Sirichai Narumitrekakarn, then the chief architect for the National Government Housing Authority; he saw the substandard living conditions in the slum when he was as-



The streets of Klongtoey slum. (CAPS)

signed to work on redevelopment of the Klongtoey District. He described the situation to his sister, Nongyao Narumitrekakarn, also known as Khun Nongyao, cultural officer at the United States Information Service, whose sense of social justice led her to visit the community. The government was focused on poverty alleviation, but the vast majority of resources was being channeled to the countryside, bypassing the new urban underclass emerging in slums across Bangkok. Khun Nongyao was appalled at the conditions she saw. “It was surprising to me how people could live in such an environment,” she said.

TWO LIVES, ONE MISSION

On one visit to Klongtoey, Khun Nongyao had an encounter with “Kru” Prateep Ungsongtham that was to change both their lives. Born and raised in the Klongtoey slum, Kru Prateep was already known as a community leader, having established a “one-baht-a-day” school in her home for the many neighborhood children without access to education. She was just 16 years old when she started her school in 1968.

By the time she met Khun Nongyao, she was widely recognized for her 1972 efforts to save the school from threatened eviction by the Port Authority of Thailand (PAT). In response to the public outcry, PAT made a new site available for the school, which was reopened in 1974. Kru Prateep received international acclaim for her activism, including the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Public Service in 1978. In 1981, she also became the first Asian person to win the John D. Rockefeller Youth Award for her “outstanding contribution to mankind”.

The two women from very different worlds would find common ground in the fate of the children of Klongtoey. Kru Prateep had observed many of her students missing school because they had to stay at home to care for their younger siblings. For Khun Nongyao, the vulnerability of the children left to fend for themselves in the slum while their parents were working prompted her to take action. With the support of other founding members,

including a friend of Khun Nongyao’s brother, Narrat Tungprakorn, a Japanese investor named Shunsuke Iwazaki, and Kru Prateep’s mother, Thongsuk Ungsongtham, they co-founded a “nursery for the poor” in the Klongtoey slum to provide daycare services for children from three months to three years of age.

Drawing upon Kru Prateep’s prize winnings from the Magsaysay award and with THB 40,000 (US\$1,818 at the time) of Khun Nongyao’s own money, the FSCC was formally established with seed money totalling THB 330,000 (around US\$1,800 at the time). Both women, believing in the importance of hiring staff with relevant professional experience, agreed that the organization had to be administered by an expert in child development and women’s issues. They asked Khunying Jantanee Santabut, chair for the National Council of Women of Thailand, to become the first chairperson of the foundation.

FSCC began its operations in a rented two-story house on Block 12 of the slum, with the ground floor partitioned to provide an office and children’s activity area while the upper level was designated as a sleeping area. In its early days, the organization focused on the provision of services to care for young children: crèche services for parents who needed to work during the day; antenatal care for underprivileged pregnant women, and protection for children most at risk of domestic violence or delinquency. Little by little, the new center raised interest within the community, gradually increasing the number of children under care to between 25 and 30 per day. Parents began to trust the FSCC to take care of their children after seeing fellow residents working at the center help with basic operations, food preparation, babysitting, and laundry services.

In the hope that mothers would be breast-feeding their newly born children, the FSCC did not accept children younger than three months in its early days. It would change its policy quickly after realizing that many women were required to return to work immediately after giving birth. Eventually, FSCC accepted children up to five

years old to ensure that they were supervised during the day before entering the formal, compulsory primary school system.

An early plan was to charge parents a service fee on a sliding scale – anywhere between THB 5 (US\$0.2) and THB 30 (US\$1.2) per day – to impart a sense of accountability to parents as clients of the service. It quickly became apparent this was beyond the means of a large number of residents in the community; so at this stage, FSCC often waived fees in favor of at-risk children being in a safe environment. “We just wanted to see the child safe,” said manager Kru Tor.

As with any new philanthropic venture, fundraising was a priority – especially given the lower than expected collection of user fees. Having formed several public- and private-sector contacts in her prior role, chairperson Khunying Jantane was able to raise initial financial support, while Khun Nongyao drew upon her skills honed at the United States Information Service to draw media interest to the FSCC. Some early coverage appeared in the *Bangkok Post*, Thailand’s leading English-language newspaper.

A ROYAL VISIT

The coverage caught the attention of HRH Princess Galyani Vadhana Krom Luang Naradhiwas Rajanagarindra, the sister of His Majesty the King, a revered philanthropist who was intrigued by the concept of “a nursery for the poor.” She invited a committee from the FSCC to the Royal Palace to discuss their work and they in turn invited her to visit the community. Princess Galyani Vadhana’s visit would attract much attention and spur some infrastructure developments in Klongtoey; in preparation for her arrival, local government officials built a concrete path to replace the unstable wooden walkway that ran through the slum.

“Those who have never visited the slum will never understand how miserable and piteous their lives are,” wrote HRH Princess Galyani Vadhana in her memoir. She was especially moved by the plight of Klongtoey’s slum children, and she agreed to

extend royal patronage to the FSCC, which in 1983 was formally renamed the Foundation for Slum Child Care under the Patronage of HRH Princess Galyani Vadhana Krom Luang Naradhiwas Rajanagarindra. This marked a major turning point not only for FSCC but also Klongtoey. Following the royal visit, the slum’s sanitation system was upgraded, and an improved road connecting the slum to the city was built.

Royal patronage gave FSCC a new level of public exposure that was to prove vital in 1985, when the Port Authority of Thailand reclaimed land on which the FSCC premises were located to develop new warehouses. FSCC was forced to move from its Block 12 location to temporary space on the second floor of Ungsongtham’s Daung Prateep Foundation, an organization focused on slum development. Faced with an urgent need for a permanent residence, the FSCC ramped up its fundraising efforts.

The prestigious Siam Society Charity Lecture Forum chaired by HRH Princess Galyani Vadhana was a major contributor to the campaign, raising some THB 400,000 (around US\$16,000 at the time) of which THB 50,000 (US\$2,000 at the time) was personally donated by the princess. With donations from international organizations and many smaller contributions from the public, FSCC was able to construct a permanent child-care center in Block 6, which was named the Galyani Vadhana Building; it opened in November of 1985. Staffed by 18 babysitters and 28 support staff, the building could cater to 70 to 90 children per day, with still enough space for an office. The new center was referred to by locals as “Baan Somwai”: a home for small children providing care that corresponds to their age and specific nutritional and developmental needs.

A GROWTH PERIOD

As FSCC laid its foundation, the need for their services became increasingly apparent to members of its board. Not only had the Klongtoey slum expanded rapidly as more migrants headed to Bangkok in search of work, but new slums were mushrooming across the city. The growth of a “Rubbish Commu-

nity” in a Bangkok Metropolitan Administration landfill in On-Nut District was a case in point.

The grim situation moved Belgian volunteer Dr. Anne Marie Van den Bossche Trongtieng to action after she visited the On-Nut slum to conduct a survey on maternal health in 1986. She found small children left unattended, playing among heaps of rotting rubbish. Some suffered from respiratory diseases such as asthma and pulmonary infection because of an ever-present layer of dust in the air. When speaking to the children, Trongtieng was struck when they told her what they wanted to be when they grew up: many said that they hoped to become garbage truck drivers or rubbish collectors, just like their fathers. Trongtieng realized that these children saw no way out of their lives in the landfill.

Trongtieng set up a small health clinic in the On-Nut rubbish community. She saw that many children were left to fend for themselves while their parents worked on the landfills during the

day, prompting her to contact FSCC, which collaborated with Trongtieng to begin providing daycare services at the clinic. When Trongtieng eventually returned to her Belgium homeland in 2002, FSCC took over the administration and day-to-day operations of the clinic and daycare centre.

By 1992, child-care centers from across Bangkok in the On-Nut rubbish community, Pracha-Uthit slum community, Nong Kham rubbish community and the Klong Pak slum community came under FSCC management. By 1996, the Klong Pak community had become capable of managing the nursery, and it became self-reliant. This development pleased FSCC, because it had been increasingly encouraging slum communities to become self-sufficient in delivering child-care services. This ambition would prove challenging with the onset of the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997.

TOUGH TIMES

As the first country in Asia to be hit by what Thais refer to as the “Tom Yung Kung Crisis,” the domestic economy plunged into a recession that had implications for the FSCC on two fronts. Donors were forced to cut back on funding, curtailing FSCC’s revenues. At the same time, many parents in Bangkok’s slum communities found themselves out of work, and households were pushed further below the poverty line. Although more parents were now at home during the day, they had no source of income. The slums became an even harder place to live for many children.

With depleted revenues and slum communities sinking deeper into poverty, FSCC leaders realized that they needed to adapt their approach. By providing its goods and services for free in many cases, FSCC had inadvertently encouraged a dependency among some households. “Since its inception, the FSCC had always intended to provide child-care services for slum children on an affordable fee basis,” said Khun Nongyao. “We told donors that powdered milk was for sale and not for free.” This model had been difficult to implement in the early phases when staff felt obliged to react to hardships



Two children pay respect to a portrait of FSCC patron HRH Princess Galyani Vadhana. (FSCC)

suffered by the children under their care. But now that resources were less readily available, the FSCC turned its attention to the issue of sustainability.

For the most part, this was a matter of changing attitudes towards FSCC and engaging with the community as an equal partner. “Our primary intent early on is that we did not want to just give charity, as the community needs to be self-reliant,” said Khun Nongyao. “FSCC needs to be in partnership with the community rather than just be an alms-giving organization.”

This translated into FSCC establishing partnership arrangements with the community; for example, in the construction of a child-care center in the Pracha-Uthit slum community, FSCC provided building materials and the community agreed to raise funds and provide labor. To assist FSCC in purchasing powdered milk available at bulk rates, the Milk and Food Supplementary Fund was set up in 1983 with the support of the Galyani Vadhana Royal Charity Fund and Royal Grandmother Fund. Although the fund was intended to support procurement of milk powder to make it affordable for parents in the slum communities, many thought that these were free donations, so FSCC went into the community to change misconceptions.

In the wake of the financial crisis, Bangkok’s urban poor had little in the way of social safety nets to support them, and households that had been reliant on charitable gifts were hit hard when charity declined. At the same time, cheaper and more readily available illegal drugs saw some people turn to trafficking and trading within the slums, exacerbating social problems. In light of this, FSCC amended its mission from solely the provision of child-care services to focus more of its efforts on community development. This new orientation saw its staff become more involved in supporting vulnerable families, building trust with parents, and encouraging the community to participate in child development initiatives.

FSCC staff began to take on the roles of social workers in the community, visiting households with newborn children and following up on cases

of suspected neglect and abuse. With the support of FSCC, a child watchdog program was established in Klongtoey in 2004 and other slums in Bangkok where a network of housewives kept watch for cases of domestic violence and child abuse. FSCC Klongtoey staff described the case of a two-year-old girl, whose father was imprisoned for drug trafficking and whose mother abandoned her. The toddler was found living on her own in a dilapidated shack and was subsequently referred by the FSCC to the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, which placed her in a government orphanage.

Seeking to address the root causes of such cases, FSCC also began to run family and community programs. One such initiative is a family camp, where fathers are encouraged to spend time with their families and learn about their roles and responsibilities in the development of their children. Staff also started educational programs for pregnant women with an emphasis on antenatal care and children’s rights. And in slum communities where social problems with drugs persisted, FSCC ran rehabilitation programs for drug-dependent mothers.

FSCC has deepened trust in the community with health education programs and child and youth development initiatives supported by resident volunteers. Volunteers from outside the slums are also encouraged to participate and contribute, with child-care volunteers, interns from Bangkok nursing schools and the Thai Red Cross, and students from Thammasat University’s Social Welfare department dropping in frequently.

SCALING UP

The need for affordable child-care facilities in Bangkok’s urban slums became increasingly evident to FSCC workers in their day-to-day engagement with the communities. Many informal facilities sprang up organically to meet demand. This was the case on Pattanakan 51 Road, in the Hua Mak Yai Canal area, where Sompong Boonmalert lived. Known locally as “Uncle Sampong,” Boonmalert was born into a large family of 12 siblings and was familiar with the tasks of babysit-

ting and caring for children. Many of his neighbors worked as street vendors and department store employees, and they were unable to look after their children during the day. They started to drop their children off with Boonmalert, whose home became an informal neighborhood daycare facility.

In 2002, Boonmalert was approached by the FSCC to join the Network for Childcare Services Co-development (NCSC) or “Baan Ruam Pattana Dek” – My Second Home. Established in 1999, NCSC grew out of the realization that FSCC would be unable to grow sufficiently or quickly enough to meet the increasing needs in Bangkok’s slums. Rather, there was an opportunity to impart knowledge and expertise to those organic facilities emerging within communities, and to set standards in a sector that remained outside of the government regulatory system.

“Many of the legal specifications for child-care service providers as stipulated by the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security were so unrealistic and ambitious that only the rich and well-to-do centers could abide by them,” said Ladda Tongsangkaew, a deputy manager of the FSCC who is also known as Kru Lek. “This meant many centers in the lower tiers are unregulated, and that children are outside a formal system and more vulnerable to mistreatment.”

To address this, FSCC would recruit community-level child-care centers and provide proprietors with professional training on best practices in child care. “The network concept incorporated independent, unregistered – and sometimes illegally established – child-care centers under the FSCC,” said Kru Lek. “At first we were not sure if this would work within the Thai context, but we believed in the expertise and knowledge we had accrued to get this off the ground.”

It was a progressive approach that won support from the FSCC’s advisory board, including Khun Nongyao, Dr. Juree Vichit-Vadakan from the National Institute of Development Administration, and former FSCC Chairperson Khunying Jantane. HRH Princess Galyani Vadhana donated a seed

fund of THB 500,000 (around US\$20,000 at the time), and the FSCC would accrue support from the Bernard van Leer Foundation in the Netherlands to the tune of THB 20 million (US\$800,000 at the time) to establish and expand the network between 2001 and 2009. This was a great boon to FSCC, which had hoped only to raise between THB 1-2 million (around US\$40-80,000) for the project. “We were so excited and happy,” recounted Kru Tor. “We then believed that we were on the right track with our idea to build a network of child-care centers that upheld high standards.”

Each new member of the network – typically representing an informal child-care provider recruited by FSCC staff – received 15 days or 420 hours of theoretical and practical training from child development experts. Having completed the course, Boonmalert now applies the same philosophy to his own daycare facilities as those under the FSCC’s administration. “The activities organized here are based on the principle that children are free to learn anything they want,” he said. “They learn independently and undertake activities that correspond with their age.”

Those who pass the course receive a certification conveying that they have met the standards for child-care service delivery established by the FSCC. Since its inception, 19 batches of child-care center practitioners have been trained under the NCSC, and certified participants can register their facilities officially with the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. Prior to this, it was difficult for informal child-care providers to operate legally, given that the requirements of registration surpassed what many could live up to or afford.

By 2014, 81 child-care centers from 67 communities within 26 Bangkok districts had joined the NCSC, with some 4,719 children benefiting from this initiative. For FSCC, the network resolved a number of strategic challenges that it faced as a growing organization. Most apparently, it precluded the need for FSCC to expand its physical assets, a resource-heavy undertaking. Rather, informal

providers that were operating within the slums were being supported to provide quality daycare for the community.

The expansion of NCSC has not been without its difficulties, one being the recruitment of members. “To persuade independent child-care service centers in communities where FSCC does not have a presence to become a part of the network was not an easy task at all,” said the network coordinator, Kanjana Prangtui, also known as Kru Yui. “They looked at us with suspicious eyes and thought we were insurance brokers masquerading as child-care providers.” Once recruiters had gone through the time-consuming process of persuading independent carers to join the network, it was still very difficult for those selected to spare the time for training sessions and for the FSCC to coordinate training schedules. “It has been a challenge for us to design the child-care service training sessions to be flexible enough for their needs,” said Kru Lek.

The relative success of NCSC has inspired FSCC to take the initiative to the next level – beyond child-care centers in the slums. The organization had developed best practices and standards that could help to raise the quality of care in the early childhood education sector across the board. A crit-

ical catalyst for FSCC to expand its focus outside of Bangkok came when staff were taken on a tour of the areas affected by the 2005 Indian Ocean Tsunami in southern Thailand. The nurseries they visited were eager for advice, and FSCC received many requests from the provinces for assistance.

In 2013, the FSCC branch in the Pracha-Uthit began offering a vocational qualification in child-care, providing training to early childhood educators from 161 centers across 43 provinces. By 2014, 213 people had been trained under the Kru Dee Nai Jai Dek scheme – “Good Teachers in Children’s Mind” – and it is estimated that 5,329 children have benefited. “We have gained confidence in child-care service delivery from what we have done over the past 30 years,” says Kru Tor. “Kru Dee Nai Jai Dek represents a courageous step in improving professional child-care services in Thailand and developing early childhood education.”

LESSONS AND CHALLENGES

From its modest beginnings in Klongtoey, FSCC has blossomed, with four child-care centers now under its umbrella and a wide network of affiliates under the NCSC. Its most recent vocational training scheme run out of the Pracha-Uthit branch is



FSCC charges donning their blue uniforms at a daycare facility. (FSCC)

helping to position the organization as a national center of excellence for professional child-care services training. Over three decades, FSCC has evolved to meet new needs of urban poor families and emerged as a national standard bearer in early childhood education and care.

Royal Benefactors

The royal patronage of HRH Princess Galyani Vadhana was a major turning point. The credibility and recognition the royal seal of approval imparted to the FSCC within Thai society cannot be underestimated; it goes beyond the financial resources that the Royal Princess helped FSCC to secure. HRH's legacy lives on at the FSCC. Since she passed away, the Galyani Vadhana Charity Fund and the Royal Grandmother Fund continue to provide funds annually. Moreover, HRH Princess Maka Chakri Sirindhorn serves as honorary president of the FSCC, carrying on the work of her royal aunt through the next generation.

Meeting of Minds

FSCC is in part a product of the meeting of minds of two very different women, who saw a gap in the social safety net for the urban poor. Using their considerable resources and playing on their respective strengths, Khun Nongyao and Kru Prateep were able to create an organization that helped highlight and find solutions for problems the public sector was unable to solve.

Changing with the Times

Upon realizing that child-care centers were struggling to operate within the parameters outlined by the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, FSCC developed the NCSC certification scheme to help reform the gray market in child-care and impart quality and oversight principles. The NCSC certification would be transformative for many of the child-care providers who underwent training. Beyond the evident commercial gains of being able to better manage and formally register their facilities, carers came away with a



Children left unattended in a Bangkok slum. (FSCC)

greater sense of pride for child care as a vocation through networking with peers and their affiliation with FSCC. Its foray into the development of training programs is another example of how FSCC has adjusted its services to Thailand's changing needs.

Staying Cutting-edge

Changing times obligate FSCC to maintain its leading expertise on early childhood development and to evolve and learn from the latest educational research. "The development of sensible child-care training programs requires collaboration with many stakeholders: child development psychologists, teachers, and babysitters," said Kru Tor. "Designing child-care training programs that can best benefit all parties is still a big challenge." Members of the FSCC board are helping to meet that challenge. Some are academic specialists in health care and able to provide hands-on support in curriculum design and stand alongside staff to deliver training.

Communities First

Another critical component in designing training programs has been to recognize the contribution

of professionals and to reinforce the value of child care as a vocation. “Working in child-care services is stressful, and the turnover rate is quite high,” says Kru Lek. Compensation for child care is relatively low in Thailand, so FSCC works hard to motivate its trainees while building the public prestige of child-care providers. “Carers may not be satisfied with the monetary rewards, but they are devoted to the children and their development,” said Kru Lek. The FSCC staff members are a testament to how quality child care can change lives; many are recognized speakers on the issues of child care in urban slums, while also knocking on doors to keep a watchful eye on vulnerable households. For their efforts, they have earned the honorific “Kru” in the communities that they serve.

A Proactive Board

In tandem with FSCC staff, the board has played a critical role in guiding the FSCC through new challenges by providing members’ expertise and networks to help it navigate always-challenging times and take advantage of opportunities. “FSCC has come a long way from being a small charitable entity to playing a pivotal role in fostering quality, early childhood care in Thailand,” said Jitrapa Himathongkham, who served as the secretary general of the board for many years and was one of those who provided guidance and support to staff and management, while helping to communicate FSCC’s value to external stakeholders and win public trust.

Financial Viability

Thailand has emerged from the financial crisis of 1997 as a resilient, middle-income nation. In line with this new prosperity, international organizations and foreign donors have been less inclined to donate to causes in Thailand and have turned their gaze towards lower-income countries in the region. In response to this, FSCC is having to diversify its revenue base by purchasing land and constructing the Pracha Uthit center – the first property under FSCC’s direct ownership.

It has also refocused its fund-raising efforts primarily on domestic donors, a strategy in which its board members’ networks have helped to produce results. “In a break from the past, funds raised are primarily from Thai individuals these days,” said Kru Tor. “Proof of the children’s well-being has been a magnet in drawing assistance and support from the public. Rather than talk about it, we have really just shown our results.”

Outlook

FSCC will continue its core mission of providing child-care facilities for the urban poor and helping to professionalize child care in Thailand. FSCC is now well-placed as a centre of excellence in social service areas that have been neglected by the government for decades. It has an opportunity to work with provincial and local government partners to reach more of Thailand’s poor households and try to ensure that no young children are left to fend for themselves at home alone. To achieve this ambition, FSCC must play a more prominent role in influencing public policy on early childhood care and education. With the expertise it has accumulated, it is in a strong position to do so.

A mild-mannered 18-year-old woman recently entered the Klongtoey child-care center and was greeted affectionately by Kru Tor. It is not unusual for former charges to drop in and for families to retain ties to the FSCC, where staff assist parents with education planning after children leave the center. As a young child, that day’s visitor was cared for at the daycare facility until she was five years old. She has flourished since then and gone on to study accounting at a renowned university in Bangkok. Within three years, she will become an accredited accountant.

Like FSCC, she too had come a long way. 

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QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS

Financial

Planned budget or income versus actual expenditure for the fiscal year*	Income = THB 26 million (approximately US\$0.8 million)* Actual expenditure = THB 20 million (approximately US\$0.6 million)*
Income composition by source: individuals, corporations, events, trusts, other (please specify)	Foundations/NGOs and Associations = 10% Corporations: 10% Individuals: 80%
Income composition: domestic versus international	Domestic: 97% International: 3%

Personnel

Staff retention rate	78 staff retained in 2014
Turnover rate	17 staff left in 2014 (turnover rate = 17.8%)
What is the board composition?	Advisory board members: 4 (all female) Board members: 37 (20 female, 17 male)
How many meetings does the board hold per year?	2
How many staff members are there?	96 people
How many staff members have attended some non-profit or management training course?	Yes, 25 people attended programmes on positive thinking and communication for conflict resolution
What topics were covered?	A wide range of training programmes (over 80) are offered

Quantitative Indicators Continued

Organizational

Do you publish an annual report?	Yes
How many sites/locations do you currently operate in?	1,435
Do you measure results?	Yes Children's quality of life evaluation (0-5 years old) Quality of family auditing (especially of households where there is known to be drug abuse) "Good Youth" evaluation (6-12 years old) "Cooperative Nursery" performance evaluation
What types of outreach?	Print media, donation box, website
Do you regularly meet with government representatives?	Yes, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security
If yes, on a scale of 1-3, how close is the relationship with government? 1 = not close; 2 = somewhat close; 3 = very close	Closeness of relationship = 3

* Exchange rate, THB 32.5 = US\$1. Average for year 2014.