THE PURSE PROJECT:
A CAMPAIGN AGAINST THAILAND’S SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

“When women thrive, all of society benefits, and succeeding generations are given a better start in life.”
--Kofi Annan, Former Secretary-General of the United Nations

BACKGROUND
Once a sleepy fishing town located on the east coast of the Gulf of Thailand, Pattaya is a now beautiful city and popular tourist spot. But underneath the facade of sparkling beaches, temples, and zoos, the rapid growth of tourism brought about substantial negative consequences.

Westerners’ and tourism's demand for sex during their vacations to Thailand is the foremost stimulus of sexual exploitation of young females. These underprivileged women have not acquired life skills and education, and therefore turn to prostitution as a sole source of income. The powerless, impoverished women seek money as a means of empowerment, and yet find themselves victims of sexual, mental, physical, and verbal abuses.

Necessary actions are needed to empower and enable women to take control over their lives and make them less susceptible to abuse, poverty, and health complications. The fight for women's independence and self-control would improve their mobility and social interaction, lead to changes in their labor patterns, gain access to resources, and control over sexual decision-making.

PROJECT PROPOSAL
Our vision is to implement a handmade bag initiative called The Purse Project during the summer of 2009. The project would provide women with an alternate occupation, other than in the sex industry. We have begun collaborations with Step Ahead, a non-profit organization based in Thailand. Step Ahead focuses on serving the working poor of Thailand, through sustainable microfinance services, mentoring and training in their communities. Through partnership with Step Ahead, the economic development initiative would provide a holistic approach to empowering the women. The women would be able to receive training provided by Step Ahead, such as English and computer skills. The Purse Project would give the women a means to provide their families with better healthcare, education, and overall wellbeing. Kim Quinley, director for Step Ahead’s Women and Children at Risk has completed the design for the purses. Step Ahead has agreed to sell the fashionable purses through ThaiTotes based in Virginia, and would send the profit directly back to the women and their families in Pattaya.

THE PROJECT DETAILS
Step Ahead Training Center
Step Ahead has rented a community facility center that would serve as a Training Center for Thai and non-Thai speakers to learn languages, hospitality, and computer skills. Step Ahead has recently hired a regional coordinator who will direct the Pattaya Training Center. Step Ahead is also responsible for securing volunteers who would operate as teachers and tutors to the people benefiting from the center. The organization has already opened a successful training center in Khao Lak, Thailand, which currently has the top reputation for language study and hospitality and hotel service training.

Recruitment of The Purse Project Employees
Step Ahead works along with other groups, such as Tamar Center, who are already established with women living in the slum communities of Pattaya. Tamar Center is a non-profit organization that works with local churches to bring healing to women involved in prostitution. Through networking with Step Ahead, at risk women or women who are not yet working in prostitution would be referred to the Step Ahead and The Purse Project.

Dynamic Economic Development Initiative: The Purse Project
The Purse Project's objective is to introduce an economic development endeavor into the Training Center by supplying the means for employees to create purses in exchange for an income, independence, and support for their families. The purses would be made at the Training Center, which would include all the necessary supplies
We purchase from local manufacturers, such as leather, sewing machines, etc. Step Ahead has agreed to help us secure a group of prospective employees.

We concentrate on the USA market where sales are connected to interest in the project and the women's lives. There is a much greater opportunity for profit per unit in the USA market than the local Thai market. We work with churches and the network of our friends and contacts in the USA who is already marketing there. We intend to keep expanding the network and thus the market over time. The Purse Project will be sustainable in the long term because Step Ahead has clear plans to take it on after we conclude our summer of implementing the project.

**Weekly Interactive Seminar & Discussion (Duration: One Month)**

In addition to heading The Purse Project and volunteering our services at the Training Center, we would host weekly interactive seminars and discussions (1.5 hours) during the evenings to address women empowerment and sexual exploitation. We would also share our journey by updating a blog that could be read on the internet. With the information we acquire, we hope to increase awareness about Pattaya’s controversial sex industry in the United States. Adrienne Piazza, administrative coordinator of the University of Richmond Bonner Center for Civic Engagement, has embraced the idea of dedicating a Brown Bag Discussion in the Fall of 2009 to our initiative. Through this, we would increase understanding about issues relating to sex trafficking and exploitation.

**EXPECTED OUTCOME**

We strive to build skills that would last a lifetime. The expected long-term benefits of The Purse Project are listed below.

- Sustainable income to enhance the women and their families' quality of life
- Employability and marketability within the hotel employment industry
- Developed Skills, such as computer and language ability
- Enhanced woman empowerment and confidence
- Increased awareness in the United States and campus communities

**COMMUNITY PARTNERS**

- **Step Ahead MicroEnterprise Development**
  - John H. Quinley Jr., Step Ahead CEO
  - Kim Quinley, Step Ahead Women and Children at Risk Director
- **ThaiTotes**
  - Non-profit organization that was started to help women build an income after the devastating 2004 Asian Tsunami
- **Tamar Center in Pattaya**

**ABOUT US**

Tran Doan is motivated to make a difference by her mother’s struggles as an impoverished native of Vietnam and immigrant to the United States. As a pre-medical student and global health advocate, she performed research and became passionate about the issues of sexual exploitation and sex trafficking, especially in Southeast Asia.

Carter Quinley grew up in Thailand and had the first-hand opportunity to witness the disparity between social classes and the resulting negative consequences. She is inspired to learn about sexual exploitation and wants to apply her knowledge to raise awareness to sex trafficking issues around the globe.

**FINAL STATEMENT**

In our world today, human trafficking is the world’s third largest criminal enterprise, after drugs and weapons (International Justice Mission). In Thailand alone, it is estimated that there are 200 to 300 thousand sex industry workers in the country, either underage or in involuntary bondage (humantrafficking.org). These women are daughters, sisters, and mothers who have been forced to work in the most degrading and hurtful situations. Our mission is to give the disadvantaged women the chance to receive an alternative employment outside of the sex industry. The Purse Project is an creative and tangible proposal that would enhance women’s value in Thailand and opportunity to leave their heartbreaking circumstances within prostitution.