A WOMEN’S REFUGE
How an activity centre helps raise awareness on trafficking dangers, safe migration and legal rights

THE PROVEN PRACTICE:
Creating a community centre for female migrants in destination cities and for females in villages who are considering migrating where they can share experiences, find information on their rights and employment laws, legal aid, skills training, cultural entertainment and, if need be, recourse to bad employment experiences.

Activity centres for women in Yunnan province, China

THE INITIAL CHALLENGE:
Many of the migrating girls and women in Yunnan province tend to stay within the province, heading to the major cities, such as Kunming and Simao, for employment opportunities. Most migrants look for jobs using irregular channels, thus typically do not obtain legal employment information, know where to go for help, find an organization for support or protection or feel safe in pursuing protection when encountering bad experiences.

In villages, women have had little opportunity for collective activities or exchanging information and ideas, which means little chance for any one individual to learn from the experiences of others or even feel a community bond.

THE RESPONSE:
Through the International Labour Organization’s Mekong Sub-regional Project to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women (ILO-TICW), the Yunnan Provincial Women’s Federation has, over the period of 2005-2008, set up 12 “Young Women Migrants’ City Homes” (drop-in centres) in four districts with a high proportion of migrant workers in Kunming City.
They also set up “Women’s Homes” in 53 locations in four rural counties in Yunnan province where many migrants are originating from, as a kind of clubhouse or community centre for villagers that doubles as a training and resource centre. Local people also use the centres for cultural activities and to obtain information on migration, employment and income-generating activities.

The Provincial Labour and Social Security Department worked with the Provincial Agriculture Department to provide awareness raising on trafficking and safe employment, including production of videos and print materials. Officials have established a network among local government, NGOs and communities for disseminating information about safe employment and legal rights, as well as developing village skills training and microcredit facilities to families of young women migrants.

“The project is a successful model not only in Yunnan Province but also in the whole of China,” said Gu Xiulian, Vice Chairman of the National People’s Congress and President of the All-China Women’s Federation after visiting the project in Sanheying Community in 2005.
THE PROCESS:

In Kunming City, the Women’s Federation of Wuhua and Panlong districts conducted baseline analysis and identified 3,375 female migrants, many working in entertainment establishments. The analysis also identified two communities as suitable project sites for setting up a drop-in centre where migrants can learn about trafficking risks and labour laws and rights. With the assistance of the Women’s Federation, the community established a “leading group” against trafficking, with the Community Director as the team leader and eight members. The leading group then worked on sensitizing local government officials on the project’s objectives and the problem of human trafficking. In response, the local government officials committed to providing facilities and funding for setting up the two Young Women Migrants’ City Homes. In Wuhua, a spare government office was refurbished for the drop-in centre while in Panlong, space was found in a community office.

The “home” serves as a classroom, library, multimedia entertainment outlet and legal aid service. For example, lawyers seconded to the centres have been able to assist a number of migrant workers in wage disputes with their employers. Project funding allowed for the purchase of audio and video equipment, desks, table, chairs and entertainment items, such as tennis tables.

Meanwhile, ILO-TICW project staff and Yunnan Provincial Labour and Social Security Department distributed pamphlets that contained information on labour rights, human and children’s rights, and trafficking awareness to employees and migrants in various entertainment establishments. They distributed questionnaires for understanding the needs of young female migrants. And they invited them to participate in several symposiums on preventing and combating trafficking in children and women, safe employment, the relevant laws and regulations (including on child labour and rights of migrant workers) and health issues, such as AIDS. These efforts were designed to build a network of young migrants and to attract them to the drop-in centres.
Local leaders attended the opening-day ceremonies of both centres. Consultants and volunteers conduct trainings and activities for young female migrants.

In villages, Women's Federation members first met with county, township and village authorities to discuss the idea and gain their support. Following that, several organizations made contributions: Village Committees donated buildings, Agriculture and Judicial Bureaus made donations to the library, and the Women's Federation took responsibility for managing the Women's Homes.

Subgroups were created through the homes to perform travelling shows (drama, sketch, comic dialogue, dance, local ballad, antiphonal singing) on trafficking, gender issues, drug abuse, HIV prevention and relevant laws and regulations in communities. In some areas, the subteams conducted social surveys with villagers to identify good and bad things taking place, such as trafficking practices, or tricks, the school enrolment status, gender relations and income generation. Activities such as knowledge contests on trafficking and gender equality for children were organized.

The services offered in the homes included:

- Training on trafficking awareness and prevention, various Chinese laws on protection of rights, labour protection, labour laws, HIV prevention, as well as agriculture and animal husbandry.
- Legal consulting and aid, such as help in recovering deducted or delayed wages;
- Videos produced by the Provincial Employment Centre on migrating and employment information.
Meeting the Challenge

- Free book borrowing.
- A venue for socializing, exchanging market information or experiences in improved crop cultivation or animal raising.
- Art and literature performances, sports tournaments and other activities to provide creative outlets and cultural life.

The homes also created a space and attention on the need for the community to meet together and discuss how best to prevent the trafficking.

OUTCOMES:

- 12 Young Women Migrants’ City Homes have been established in four districts with a high density of migrant workers in Kunming City, providing legal and social support services to female migrants in need.
- 53 Women’s Homes have been established in sending areas, i.e. four rural counties in Yunnan Province providing information services to young potential migrants helping them to find secure employment prior to migration.
- More than 11,000 people have participated in training on trafficking-prevention awareness through the homes. Legal and social support services, dramas, sketches, comic dialogues, dances and singing shows have been developed to spread trafficking prevention messages and assist women in need.

The Kunming City Women’s Federation announced in early 2008 that they have opened another 50 Young Women Migrants’ City Homes in Kunming City, replicating the original concept supported by the ILO-TICW project.

Members have become aware of trafficking pitfalls and how to avoid them, improved their working and living skills and developed a sense of citizenship. Members have been encouraged to inform others, either in their home villages or in Kunming City about what they have learned on trafficking and legal rights. The centres provide training for young women in a variety of legal and health issues, including courses on labour law and AIDS awareness. Books can be borrowed from the library and regular artistic and sporting activities are organized – providing a home away from home.

The centres have begun to train women to run the services themselves.

Many activities in the homes were approved and supported by employers; thus improving the relationship between the female employees and their bosses, which has resulted in better protection of benefits. When the home offers a symposium, employers have been known to send their young female employees to participate and a few of the employers even attend, sometimes giving a speech.
The drop-in centres have become more than just places where people can get information, discuss anti-trafficking issues and receive training – they are focal points where local people congregate, thus making an important contribution to the social cohesiveness of the communities. It is a comfortable space where women and girls can get information and have discussions on trafficking and related social issues.

The activities have brought villagers together to care about the social and economic development in their community, to exchange information and acquire knowledge and skills about project activities. Township and village cadres meet with women there to discuss factors leading to trafficking and solutions to prevent it; villagers exchange agriculture product price information and the education of their children.

“We all benefit from the Home,” noted Li Xueyan, a young Bai ethnic woman. “The community takes care of us, so we are willing to participate in the trainings and various activities organized in the community.”

When eight young women reported withholding of wages by their restaurant employer, legal experts working with the Young Women Migrants’ City Homes investigated the charge and, after discussing the relevant laws with the boss, were able to get the back wages.

A young female restaurant worker added, “Through the study in the migrant’s home, I learned many things. My awareness of self-protection has improved. Now, when someone tries to introduce a new job to me, I will think it over and over and not just consider the salary, as I would have done before. It is a great difference with the past.”

LESSONS LEARNED:

- The 12 centres for migrant women that have been established in Kunming City are the result of careful analysis into the target group. The Young Women Migrants’ City Homes have involved local government and the local communities in their establishment – ensuring that the centres become an accepted part of their localities.

- Participants of the Women’s Homes are mostly middle age and young women but some men are also availing the services provided by the centres – people largely newly out of school and single, open-minded and active. Thus trainings, entertainment and interaction activities should be designed appropriately. In the Young Women Migrants’ City Homes, training plans, activities and equipment should be in response to young female migrants’ interests and requests.
- Popularity of the Women’s Homes became so great that electricity costs doubled or tripled. Budgets should be prepared for this.
- Travelling shows involving some type of communication media should be in local languages; creating the subteams to perform tends to reinforce anti-trafficking efforts among them and improve their self-protection abilities.
- Women’s Homes tend to address many more factors that contribute to trafficking, such as boredom among young people. These centres have become spaces to address many more of the factors that contribute to trafficking than was originally planned. Future community-based information centres should take into account the key role they can play in nurturing community activism, creative activities (such as plays about trafficking prevention) and in providing opportunities for social interaction.
- A good social organizer can maximize the benefits of the Women’s Home for preventing trafficking. Activities and management of the centre should be reviewed periodically and updated if necessary.
- Because the Women’s Home is located in a central spot in each village, efforts are needed to reach out to remote villages where women and children are also at risk of trafficking.
- Close collaboration between relevant bureaus is necessary to supply each Women’s Home with materials on trafficking, gender issues, income-generation alternatives and on relevant laws and other legal knowledge.
- Involve the young migrant members in the organizing and managing of the community centre to guarantee its worthiness, their continuing interest and the overall sustainability.
• If funding is available, provided training in computer use, English, culture, management, skills or any other requested topic that will enhance the members’ well-being or vocational potential. Provision of such opportunities will give the centre more value and vitality.

• Relevant staff in communities and government departments most likely will need some degree of capacity building to oversee management of the Young Women Migrants’ City Homes and for committing needed resources.