

# It Takes a Village

Bangkok Parenting Networks offer an invaluable source of community, support and connection for parents and families.

It takes a village to raise a child--Linguistic experts assert that the wisdom of the Nigerian Igbo proverb, "It takes a village" comes to us from, "Ora na azu nwa" and that it is more than just a saying--it is a concept central to the culture. Shari Forbes, Masters of Social Work, Licensed Clinical Social Worker and mother of preschool aged twin boys confirms this notion, "Raising children is very difficult--especially in a foreign country. 'Raising a family takes a village' is a very real concept because a manual on how to raise your child is not provided at birth."

One result of our modern urban lifestyles is a disconnection from the "community" of times past. For families and parents, especially ex-pats living far from their extended families, raising children without the benefit of others is not only a challenge, but a real loss. Bangkok, for all it offers in terms of convenience, this sense of community can be difficult to recreate without formal organizations that aim to connect parents, children and families. As Terry Arnold, Research and Development Director of the International Parenting Network (IPN) and mother of three adolescent boys told us, "This is why parents join IPN; to find answers, to gain new insights into the world of parenting, and to give and get the support they are looking for, in order to help them raise happy, healthy and well balanced children in today's fast-paced society."

While we may mourn the loss of wisdom and support that was once the domain of village elders who passed it down to younger generations, as Terry points out, we also have practical 21st century needs and questions, "With society changing so rapidly and seeing the effect and influence that modern technology is having on our children it can become increasingly stressful and even overwhelming at times." As Shari explained, "Being a parent in the 21st century is downright scary. The



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obstacles our children face today seem to far surpass the challenges faced by our parents or grandparents. Our children are bombarded with much higher educational expectations today and they have an overwhelming amount of exposure to technology coming at them through internet, television, music and video games." She said that as parents, "We constantly worry about our children and wonder--what if my child uses drugs? Has sex at an early age? Becomes a behavioral challenge? Is unable to keep up in school? We worry from the time they are born."

Navigating our big metropolis in an effort to create a happy and healthy family requires pragmatic answers to practical questions, the support of others and the exchange of tips and strategies. As Mel Habanananda, founder of the group Bangkok Mothers & Babies International (BAMBI) says, "I think that motherhood in Bangkok can now be a lonelier and more isolating experience as more ex-pat mothers are working. Everyone seems to be busier with less time to meet, share and care."

Shari added that parenting networks are especially valuable to parents who are new to Bangkok, "There are often language barriers and cultural norms to negotiate which makes networking on your own slow. Parenting



organizations have done the research and are aware of where there are organized children's activities, which hospitals work with foreigners well, which schools are appropriate for particular age groups and where the play dates in our area are located. Support systems and networking organizations for parents are particularly helpful when parents are new to a foreign country, because they provide invaluable resources which ease the transition for parents and children. As a parent, we continuously try to keep our children healthy, safe and well-adjusted. When a move occurs, a detailed plan for emergencies is needed, along with having safe areas to play, nutritious food choices, and opportunities to socialize with other children. Parents new to the area need to quite quickly navigate the environment to locate what they need for their family."

Here in Bangkok there are a number of networks and organizations designed to support families and children, and while each organization has a slightly different focus, the all essentially aim to promote connections amongst members. In celebration of mother's day, we will take a closer look at BAMBI, as it is a mother-led volunteer organization with over 650 members. According to Raphaele Borie Acuna, BAMBI's New Members Coordinator, members are a varied group of parents. "There are Japanese,



French, American, British, Australian, German, Dutch, Spanish, Colombian, Swiss, Thai, Chinese, Italian, etc. I've met at least one member of all these nationalities and there are many more." She went on to say that "there many ex-pats of course, but we also have local Thai people as well."

BAMBI provides information, support and companionship for pregnant women and mothers of babies and small children. They host any number of activities such as sponsoring playgroups, support groups, hosting coffee mornings, and organizing activities throughout Bangkok. They offer members a wide range of helpful services like providing news, resources and information, and support services. Raphaelae Borie Acuna explained that for her, "it is about being able to connect, and recreating a sense of community. Mums and mums-to-be are able to make friends, to talk, to ask questions, to exchange tips and opinions. I personally found it very reassuring to know that there were other women in the same situation as me. And it really made a huge difference for me not to

feel isolated!" Pacharee (Nui) Pantoomano, BAMBI's Assistant Event Coordinator, told us that she "joined BAMBI shortly after I had my first child and was amazed by the amount of resources available. I began volunteering in 2007, after I had my second child. The ladies that serve on the committee are incredible and I believe the organization lives up to its motto of 'support and friendship through the common bond of motherhood!'"

One of the greatest challenges for new and soon to be mothers is navigating the mysterious world of childbirth and breastfeeding. Women can join BAMBI's popular mommy group called Bumps & Babies, which serves as a support group for women who are pregnant, or have recently given birth and who need breastfeeding support or general child health information—this group partners with The Childbirth and Breastfeeding Foundation of Thailand. Bumps and Babies is sort of a flagship for BAMBI as it is a great place for mums-to-be to begin. Raphaelae Borie Acuna explained, "I personally became a member because of Bumps and Babies. As



I stopped working when I was pregnant with my first baby last year, I was worried that I would go out of my mind staying at home and not knowing anybody. I joined Bumps and Babies and I was able to connect with quite a few people very quickly. Not to mention that I really enjoyed the speakers they had."

Another group that addresses the needs of mothers of preschoolers, (pregnancy through age 5) is a group called Mothers of Preschoolers, (MOPS). They also provide moms with support and resources for being great parents to the very young. MOPS Bangkok will connect you to other moms who aim to encourage one another and gain practical parenting skills. MOPS meets the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays of the month from 9:30 – 11:30 a.m. at the Evangelical Church of Bangkok on Sukhumvit Soi 10.

When children get beyond infancy, mothers have new needs and questions. Toddlers are social beings and benefit from interaction other kids their age (not to mention that mommies can use a break too!). There are dozens of

playgroups in Bangkok. According to Shari Forbes MSW, LCSW, "Parenting organizations are particularly important in a place like Bangkok because children's programs and play groups are so spread out." BAMBI and MOPS can both provide details about current playgroups, helping mothers pick the right one for their children.

For families with pre-schoolers, finding the right school is a big decision. Location, quality, and curriculum are important factors to consider and, the options can be overwhelming. BAMBI maintains a listing of more than 50 pre-schools located in central Bangkok, Chaengwattana, Minburi and the surrounding areas. For families with children who have special needs, The Rainbow Room is another Bangkok group that supports parents by exchanging resources that are unique in helping to address certain challenges—especially in the realms of providing support to fellow parents and providing assistance in choosing the best schools for children with special needs.



The International Parenting Network, or IPN, is another organization that provides parents and childcare professionals with a platform to share and exchange knowledge on parenting issues and resources while promoting family values among parents and children through commitment, respect, love and unity for one another. They do this by helping to develop and encourage effective communication between parents and children in many different ways. At its heart, IPN offers connection, community and friendship to parents. According to its founder and Business Development Director, David Arnold "IPN specializes in supporting parents with children of all ages; from newborns right up through the teenage years."

Terry mirrored these sentiments when she told us, "kids today are growing up faster." She went on to talk about the difficulty of finding healthy, constructive, activities for young people and families in Bangkok, the impact of technology and media in their lives, having to worry about cyber-bullying, and young people having to stand up and deal with to peer and sexual pressure.

To address these issues, IPN hosts monthly events on the last Tuesday of each month, at Bangkok Hotel Lotus (formerly Novotel Lotus), on Sukhumvit Soi 33 (BTS Phromphong) from 6:30pm to 8:30pm. At the events, parents are offered the opportunity to meet with child psychologists, counselors, physicians, pediatricians, authors of parenting and children's books, school principals, and other families from around the world to share with one another how to raise happy and healthy kids in today's fast paced world. Some of the topics that have recently



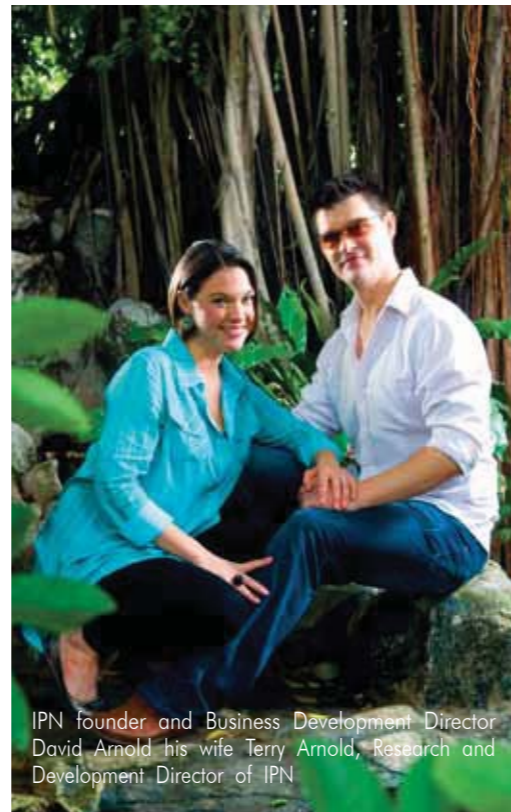
been addressed at these events are: Raising Your Child the Holistic Way in the 21st Century, How to handle difficult behavior in kids, Watch your child's grades, enthusiasm and confidence soar, Needs, Implementing Homework Without Tears and Parenting Tips on Sibling Rivalry, just to name a few. Check their website for a listing of upcoming events.

With all the challenges facing 21st century Bangkok parents, it's nice to know they don't have to do it alone! After all, "It takes a village."

For more information about BAMB!, please contact [newmembers@bambiweb.org](mailto:newmembers@bambiweb.org) or visit the website at [www.bambiweb.org](http://www.bambiweb.org)  
To find out more about IPN, visit the website at [www.ipnthailand.com](http://www.ipnthailand.com)

To learn more about Mothers of PreSchoolers, visit the MOPS website at [www.ecbbangkok.org/women/mops/mops.html](http://www.ecbbangkok.org/women/mops/mops.html) or email [mops@ecbbangkok.org](mailto:mops@ecbbangkok.org)

For more information on Rainbow Room see [www.facebook.com/specialrainbow](http://www.facebook.com/specialrainbow)



IPN founder and Business Development Director David Arnold his wife Terry Arnold, Research and Development Director of IPN