



## Stories of Impact

### “Entrepreneurship and Volunteerism as a Tool for Uplifting Women and Children”

The International Presentation Association is committed to honouring and advancing the rights of women and children, and has pledged to provide support, strengthen partnerships, encourage information sharing, and raise awareness. Women are often subjected to gender discrimination, are disproportionately affected by poverty, and face wage discrepancies compared to men. UN Women asserts that “[i]nvesting in women’s economic empowerment leads to greater equality, poverty reduction and economic growth.”<sup>1</sup> To this end, Presentation People around the world invest in entrepreneurial opportunities for women and girls, helping them to achieve secure and successful lives. Presentation People also invest in systems of volunteerism, organizing people, resources, and time to help provide for the immediate needs of the most vulnerable. This Story of Impact centers around a common theme of “milk” and will explore examples of entrepreneurship and volunteerism in the actions of Presentation Sisters in South India and Thailand, respectively.

In South India, at the local village level, the women from Arpanam Women Self Help Groups (SHGs) run what is known as a ‘milk society’. Before the installation of the milk society, the women from the local villages used to manually carry heavy containers of milk nearly two



kilometers to a neighboring village, often after having worked a long day caring for the cattle. Due of the distance and time this effort demanded, the women were not benefiting from the existing system.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment-5>

IPA gives thanks to Srs. Flora and Sudha from South India for the Milk Society Project write up, as well as Gemma Thomson for sharing the details about Sr. Joan’s mission in Thailand.

Under the vazhthukattvroom scheme, the government in South India wants to train and motivate women to be entrepreneurs. Therefore, the government provided the financial support needed to create this initiative and to buy the necessary equipment to run the society.

The milk society project is financially supported by the government Scheme of Common Livelihood Group (CLG), given for women self-help groups under Vazhthukattvom Scheme in the year 2013. Today, nearly 15 families from the Murugan and Vedivelli women SHGs engage with the program, pour the milk, and benefit from the society. The milk society exists in multiple villages, saving neighboring peoples much time and difficult labor while providing opportunities for economic growth and sustainability. Women manage the accounts and send the milk to the Aavin milk society and to Thiruvallur. Every year, the government audits the expenses and gains, and the milk societies share the surplus money. Presentation Sisters and other members of the Arpanam Trust NGO monitor the Milk Society Project every month, providing guidance and support to the women coordinating the initiative.

In Thailand, the actions of Presentation People take a different approach, one founded on an example of selfless service and sustained by volunteerism. Sister Joan Evans PBVM, a member of the Western Australia congregation and former school teacher in Perth, Western Australia, moved to Bangkok, Thailand in the early 1990s to help the poor in the spirit of Nano Nagle. For the next 25 years, her ministry would expand to numerous initiatives, many of which continue on to this day with the volunteered support of Presentation People in Thailand and in Western Australia. One such initiative is the "milk run", a fortnightly distribution of baby formula milk and full-cream powdered milk to young moms. This ministry has directly supported the healthy development of hundreds of babies and has assisted numerous mothers who find themselves facing poverty, illness, and demanding work conditions.



Photo of Sister Joan Evans PBVM, borrowed from the "Presentation Slums Mission Bangkok" Facebook page.

The Milk Run was founded in 1992 in response to high mortality of newborns and babies at that time and has been a continuous initiative ever since. Every two weeks, the program delivers milk formula to moms who cannot breast feed for various reasons, sometimes because they are HIV

positive or because they have demanding work schedules, among other reasons. “The babies are entitled to 1 box of baby milk formula every 2 weeks until their 1st birthday. Some continue past that point – our oldest recipient is a 27 year old, severely handicapped girl.”<sup>2</sup> When Sister Joan returned to Perth, Western Australia in 2016, a group of volunteers were entrusted with continuing the Milk Run, as well as a number of other missions initiated by Sister Joan, such as the [Rice Run](#)\* and the [School Run](#).\* In 2018, Sister Joan was awarded the title of Officer of the Order of Australia “[f]or distinguished service to the international community of Thailand through humanitarian assistance programs for the disadvantaged, and to improving the lives of women, children and the elderly.”

The Milk Run, and other projects initiated by Sister Joan, are remarkable examples of sustainability within volunteer-based initiatives. Their [website](#) is active and up-to-date, with current events being shared via a blog, complete with photos and updates on the various projects. The most recent Milk Run, which took place on 9 December 2022, is shared in detail [here](#). Their [social media](#) presence is also active, with over 1300 followers able to connect fluidly and immediately to ongoing volunteer opportunities. Furthermore, much of their volunteer work is easily accessible; even the location where volunteers meet is highlighted on [Google Maps](#) and is shared through their website with meeting times and dates. Presentation Schools and the Congregation in Western Australia donate money regularly each year to support the work of the Presentation People on the ground in Bangkok helping to sustain this mission.

These examples of Presentation People responding to the needs of women and children demonstrate the impact of entrepreneurial and volunteer-based approaches. Each brings with it distinct strengths and challenges, while both inspire us to find meaningful and sustainable approaches to our respective missions. The International Presentation Association will continue to uplift these inspiring examples, and will continue to honour and advance the rights of women and children around the world.

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<sup>2</sup> [Milk Run – Assist \(sisterjoan.org\)](#)