



**EMDR training –Thailand, report**  
**Alan Cohen**

The first three days Monday–Wednesday were all taken up by the EMDR training course for over 60 mental health professionals.

The next day I conducted a small special interest group in the home of two of the translators, a Dutch couple, Dick and Johanna de Koning, clinical therapists and counselors, for those wanting to know about overall preparation of organizations for emergency and disaster.

I flew to Phuket on the Saturday night with Jane & Eva, the course coordinators. Sunday morning I joined Aiton & Fran at the displaced persons centre working with the kids on drawing, butterfly hugging and singing about coping with the disaster. Later that morning I joined Dr. Su (an incredible lady you read about in Fran’s report) in her visit to the village of Nam Khem which was almost entirely destroyed by the tsunami.

People had started rebuilding their homes and physical and mental rehabilitation of the village and its inhabitants was in progress.

There we met with a team put together by a hotel proprietor whose hotel was totally destroyed and who had lost relatives and was offering to combine resources and help the village residents on a long term basis.

We met together with them again in Bangkok the day we left to make some practical and hopefully useful suggestions.

That afternoon we went first to another village nearby where Fran set to work on the village elder and his family who had lost many family members in the tsunami and the others went off to another centre and met with refugees.

I met with a couple who had lost their 2 only children and the father had taken to drink to distract himself from his situation.

I worked with them using EMDR in a long session both with apparent good results, but it is difficult to say without long-term follow up.

Jane will do follow up on them. I was helped by a young volunteer interpreter

who did an excellent job despite being severely emotionally shaken by the couple's tragedy. When we left the site, the husband was tidying up their makeshift home, a wooden cubicle, for the first time since the disaster.

We then returned to the first site with the children to help take a larger group of children to the sea – Aiton had initiated a small group the day beforehand. 25 – yes twenty five, in a small van, "just to take a look at the sea and build some sandcastles". Now if it is possible to take 25 kids "just to take a look at the sea and build some sandcastles" without having most of them dive into the water, then we must be talking about a different breed of child. Fortunately they all returned home that day. Some kids needed and received individual help to be able to cope with this return to the water edge.

On the Monday morning Jane suggested I go to give personal supervision to a clinical psychologist, at his hospital in Suritthani. It was a long and not very comfortable bus journey but by about 3pm I was ready to work that day. The psychologist had already invited a client for a session before I could suggest planning how one should introduce EMDR into his workload. He actually did EMDR with him and probably more by luck than sense things seemed to go well. The next day we managed to sit down and discuss what I had wanted and the next session (with a glue-sniffing man with violence problems) was much more along the lines of planned treatment, he only did EMs for a safe place and the rest was preparation. I hope this connection with the psychologist will continue and he will take his EMDR further – I suggested by making a presentation to his colleagues and by keeping email contact with me. The return journey to Phuket and flight to Bangkok was much better than the previous day's journey.

On the Wednesday – we met with the group put together by the hotelier and made suggestions how we could combine forces to help out in the villages there. I then joined Aiton who was making a presentation at the nursing school on EMDR with children and gave a short lecture on my topic of Community Stress Prevention. It was well received.

Comments – The original plan to finish the training and go south directly to supervise the trainees was impracticable for three reasons, participants were unable to take extra time off work to volunteer at the disaster sites on the days immediately after the EMDR course.

The Sunday was election day in Thailand and Tuesday was Chinese New Year (Year of the Rooster). It appeared that only one week later would the volunteer groups rota take effect and that Jane would supervise them in the south.

Definitely the concept of supervision needs to be refined and worked on, so does the encouragement of self-help groups from within the trainees. It is not enough just to focus our efforts on the disaster site although that is the main reason for our being there and the easiest point to supervise trainees. Individual and group supervision must be a part of all future HAP trainings.

As a final comment, I was impressed by the resilience of the survivors, the modern training facilities in Bangkok and by the organization of the international volunteers, Jane, Eva and Caroline and the local team who made all this possible. And of course with our own "energetic" (words of Jim Knipe) leader Gary and the local EMDR gang, Joel, Aiton & Fran who as always are a pleasure to work with.