

Innovative Liberation

It was 2004 when Ralph Kramer was perched in a taxi riding the periphery of Chiang Mai's watery moat and was "struck immediately" by the fountains and lights of "this beautiful city."

“ I feel liberated here...
Long may Chiang Mai
survive. ”

Here, Kramer cultivated the establishing of his worldview, including learning about Libertarian ideals and alternative education methods. He returned to the U.K. having soaked up a lot of influence from music groups promoting liberationist-type ideals, such as the Incredible String Band.

Most interested in using group settings for working with maladjusted children, he sought a foothold in the counselling field. Once again lacking the formal experience for advancing professionally, he took advantage of an atypical education path to strike off in a fresh direction.

After some twists and turns, bumps and jumps, Kramer pooled facets of his life experiences and pioneered a non-profit organization called "Y.E.S." – a public service providing teens with free counselling that, at the time, was ushering in a revolution in youth and community work.

"Including the fact of being my own boss, which was key – my liberation; here it comes," he said.

Kramer sought making the Youth Enquiry Service open and accessible; "Anything and everything that would make young people want to come in.

"We're here for you guys! Come on! Come and get it! Whatever it is you need, we will try to do it" was the marketing strategy.

"I love young people," and "Kids loved us because we were doing things for them...It was about being alongside them, believing what they said and not making them into minors."

Rallying people around this vision, an essential component of this non-profit organization (still operating nowadays) is its offering to volunteers – many of whom had been "in the wilderness of drugs and crime," now serving as youths' first point of contact before meeting with a professional – accredited training certificates empowering them also toward forging positive life pathways by helping others.

Besides, legislation mandated that the local authority support teens deemed legally homeless. Therefore, coupled with other fundraising efforts, government financial services for Y.E.S. funnelled in. Although Kramer was independently at the helm, his income also sprouted from this source (and still does). Innovative liberation.

"It was so successful, man! It was off the wall. It was a tangible vibe, and people eventually were saying, 'you've been yes-ified!'"

Neither Kramer's ingenuity nor zest for life has ceased. He just doesn't stop living life full-throttle.

Although he's now located near Doi Saket, he has constructed a house in a Lahu village in the neighbourhood of Chang Dao. Here, he attempted building a home-stay service and a coffee co-op for helping local villagers. He also taught villagers English skills as a "relationship maker" and later, government employees in Chiang Mai.

These days, beyond being very physically active, Kramer has been involved with a local Burmese refugee organization, is supporting world travellers via sharing his home and is once again teaching English.

He's living it up, in the "magical fairy-land of the North."
"I feel liberated here. I feel free to live my life in the way I wish to, in a place where no restraints and judgements are made about this.
"Long may Chiang Mai survive."



"Oh my God! It's so pretty!" he told himself.
Kramer knew few future details of this unfolding adventure – a fresh life in this land of smiles, "civil liberties...social attractions...and culture, where people drive (life) the way they feel like driving."

He knew only that just days previous, the United Kingdom's Prince Charles was personally honoring him with Membership of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) – setting a well-polished capstone to a dynamic, innovative career in youth and community work.

Like the youngsters he had just lived a professional lifetime working with, Kramer is also "a young person at heart, quite prepared to be impulsive", and an experimenter with life who tosses markers onto the roulette table and "sees what happens" kind of guy.

Although his optimistic sentiments related to Chiang Mai flow easily, the roads traveled before arriving in this new life-playground of his have required some survival techniques and innovative visions that have percolated into every facet of his being.

Kramer considers himself an "educationalist," with strong views on ways for optimizing people in terms of their education, which he believes is rooted in cultivating personality and character.

Although this logic had become the basis of his life's work, Kramer ironically left the UK's public school system at the age of 16, after the splitting of his parents spiralled him through a whirlwind of upsets.

Beforehand, feeling as though squeezed by society; feisty, "I rebelled, and was one of the naughtiest. 'Kill me if you want to! I don't care!'" was his defense mechanism.

"I got caned a lot (in school). So I took against the education system because I felt unjustifiably targeted. I was a nice guy but was also pretty much a non-achiever in most subjects (unless interested). I was a school failure."

With few employment opportunities available for a lad leaving school early, Kramer explored the world of retailing. He capitalized on a management training opportunity that, although he was successful, he became bored with. He then "dropped out of society" and "buggered off" to Switzerland.