



## **BRP Annual Report 2013**

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## **In Memory of Kur**

We would like to dedicate this annual report to Kur, one of our scholarship students, who tragically passed away in August after being involved in a traffic collision in Chiang Mai. Kur had overcome many difficulties to gain a BRP scholarship and a place at his school. Since starting at his new school, he had been achieving top grades and glowing reports from his teachers. His accident was a great shock to us all and his loss will be deeply felt within the community. He is survived by his wife and daughter.

His full profile can be found on our website.



## **Introduction: our progress in 2012-13**

This year marked a significant time of change in the history of the Burmese Refugee Project (BRP). Since we began serving Burmese Shan migrant communities in 2000, the BRP founders, Peter Muennig and Celina Su, have done an amazing job directing the BRP: fundraising in the US, managing the organization remotely and making annual trips to Thailand to liaise with the BRP staff and communities. As our programming has expanded, we have decided that the BRP would be better managed on-site. As such, executive control has moved to Thailand while our board and most fundraising activities remain in the US.

In line with this, we have been working to strengthen our mission, our goals and our programming. Since its founding, the BRP has grown organically, instituting many valuable initiatives in response to the needs of the communities we work with in the fields of education, health, sanitation and law. Over the last few years, however, our programming has evolved to consist of mainly educational initiatives. Myanmar has been taking great strides towards democratization; however, change is an ongoing process and many areas of the country are still unstable. Our communities are uncertain about how the political change will influence their plans for the future but for now, they still live in legal limbo in Thailand. Whatever they decide to do, having an education will infinitely improve their opportunities. Going forward, we have decided to make education our main focus and have rewritten our mission and goals to reflect this strategic shift.

This direction reflects our areas of expertise and the changes in the communities we work with which have, over the years, become more established. Most children are now in local schools; however, without extra support many are unlikely to graduate high school and very few would be able to continue on to higher education. We are trying to equip them with the skills and the personal and financial support to make this a possibility. Our vision is that they will then go on to use their education to help their families and others in their community.

To this end, we are now focusing most of our resources on three principal programs spanning every level of education from pre-school to university: the Banyan Center Program, the After School Program and the Scholarship Program. Details of each can be found in this report and on our website.

**We are making our presence in Thailand official by registering as a non-profit organization in-country, giving us the freedom to operate more visibly and thus conduct a wider range of activities. This will also involve changing our name. As of next year, the organization will be named ‘Kwah Dao.’ Read more about the inspiration for our name change below.**

We are very excited about the progress our organization has made and what we have in store for the year to come. We would like to extend a huge thank you to all our friends and donors – without your support none of this would be possible.

## Projects and Developments

### *NEW LEADERSHIP*

At the end of 2012 Celina Su stepped down as Executive Director and **Lydia Prongnamjai**, our Project Manager, took over. Lydia has been in charge of BRP programming since 2010 and has an intimate knowledge of our projects and strong ties to the local community. We are thrilled that the leadership of the BRP is now based locally with Lydia at the helm. Celina Su and Peter Muennig are still actively involved as board members.

**Tierney Tobin**, a former intern, had taken on a permanent position with us as Assistant Program Director, working remotely from the US for the past year. Beth Matlock, the Banyan Center School Director, left in June and Tierney moved back to Thailand to take over as the new School Director. With a degree in education, experience in the US school system and familiarity with the BRP and our mission, we look forward to the new direction the school will take under her leadership.

We have also welcomed a new Chairman of the Board. **David Rosenthal**, Ph.D., is the Director of Behavioral Medicine in the Family Medicine Residency program at Columbia University and also teaches in the Department of Health Policy and Management in the Mailman School of Public Health. Previously, he was the Executive Director of the Lower East Side Harm Reduction Center. He has served on a number of community boards, including the Iowa City Hospice and the Institute for Social and Economic Development.

### *NGO REGISTRATION AND NAME CHANGE*

The BRP is registered as a 501(c)(3) organization in the US, but until now has been operating in Thailand unregistered. While this is common practice for small NGOs in Thailand, it has meant that we have had to keep our activities under-the-radar and limit our visibility in the broader community. We have decided this year that it is time to become officially registered. However, under Thai law we must be helping Thai nationals, therefore, our name cannot include references to either Myanmar or refugees. Thus we are officially announcing our new name: Kwah Dao. In Thai, 'Kwah Dao' means 'reach for the stars.' The idea came from a project we did in one of our after-school English classes, in which the kids drew and described their dream house. One of our students, Totae, drew a picture of his dream house on the moon. He added himself sitting on the edge of the moon fishing for stars. We felt that this concept perfectly captured our goal of equipping youth with the skills and opportunities to achieve their dreams or catch their stars. We have started the registration process and will be officially changing our name within the year.



### *AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM*

The after-school program has been going from strength to strength over the past year. Regular attendees of our after-school program have been progressing steadily. Our oldest group, in the sharecropping community, are now competent readers of English and confident enough to interview Western tourists in the town. These classes have become too advanced for new students to join, so this year the students requested we set up 2 new groups for beginner students. These sessions have been very popular, with 10-20 kids aged 5-10 years old attending every week. Some of these students, though, have recently had to spend their Sundays picking apart heads of

garlic so the individual cloves can be sold, making their hands hurt and their skin itch. Despite the fact that they have to work to support their families, they are dedicated students who attend every tutoring session they can. Their parents have stated that they are thrilled their kids have the opportunity to learn English through our program, as they can't afford the extra English classes that many Thai children attend. Some locals have even commented on how good the Shan kids' English is compared to other children!



We have been teaching in the Rock Village for several years now, always in less than adequate bamboo structures. This year we finally built our own classroom area. We supplied the materials and the Rock Village parents provided the labor for free. With many people participating in the construction, the whole structure was built in just a day! With our own official space and a bigger area, the students feel a sense of ownership and have become increasingly more enthusiastic.

Over the past year, we have been making use of the Banyan Center by taking the BRP students there on the weekends. The kids love the space and working with the school materials. At the school we can better accommodate all of our students and provide a wider range of activities catering to the different levels and interests of each child. Using the school has presented a new set of challenges in arranging affordable transport with our limited budget, as local taxi prices are high due to tourists. Weekend sessions typically last for 3-4 hours involving English, playtime and snacks, arts, crafts and sports.



We have added weekly art, craft, or activity sessions as a permanent component of the after-school program. We vary the activities to give the children a creative outlet to express themselves, to exercise critical thinking and to learn new skills. Over the last year these have ranged from making origami to homemade ice cream, sock puppets to elephant toothpaste, and stop-motion animation films to cooking pancakes.

In order to keep our after school program running we rely on regular interns and volunteers. This year we have had an impressive international team of interns from Malaysia, the US, Canada, Great Britain and Australia. Many thanks to Alicia, Portia, Shela, Sue, Philippa, Catherine and Khalil – we could not continue this program without you!

### *SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM*

This year we arrived at a long-awaited milestone for the BRP: our first 2 students graduated from high school and started university. Tankee and Nuan have been involved in the BRP programs since we first started 13 years ago and we are excited to now support both in their first year of college. Tankee was awarded a scholarship to study computing, and Nuan, our first scholarship

student, was accepted into a Chinese and Business degree. These two young women are the first in their communities to reach this level of education. We are so proud of them and we look forward to their future achievements.

Since last year we have taken on four new scholarship students, bringing the total to eight – six of whom are studying outside of the area, and two locally.

All of our scholarship students excelled academically over the last year, gaining excellent GPAs and placing near the tops of their classes. Artit (pictured) is attending a vocational school studying electronics and was awarded special honors in his grade for the second year in a row. He also won a regional competition for building a radio. Tawon is climbing up the ranks in his class. In his latest exams he placed 2<sup>nd</sup> in his class of almost 50 students in a top Chiang Mai school. It is wonderful to watch these students excel now that they are able to focus on their studies. As role models for younger community members, our scholarship students are proof of what is possible with hard work and ongoing support.



Full scholarship student profiles can be found on our website.

#### *BANYAN CENTER PROGRAM*



The Banyan Center was originally founded as a Montessori-based preschool, but upon further consideration the team felt we could better prepare students for success in public Thai schools with increased direct instruction in both English and Thai. Under Tierney's leadership, the curriculum and instructional methods have been adjusted to include both child-directed exploration and teacher-guided activities.

Our team also includes two full time teachers and a housekeeper. We welcomed back Noi, our Thai teacher, and hired Portia, a new English teacher from America. We have also hired Ying, a member of our Shan community, as our full-time cook and housekeeper. She has become a valuable member of the team as a connection between the school and the BRP communities.

The team works together to create interdisciplinary and bilingual lessons to engage each of our 17 students from Shan Burmese, Thai, American, British, Portuguese, Canadian, Spanish and Russian backgrounds. Our diverse learning community is one of our greatest strengths and encourages students to build cross-cultural relationships and develop essential communication skills.



With our new staff and curriculum, the students have been showing impressive gains in literacy and math. Equally as important, every day we observe students exhibiting an astounding work ethic and taking pride in their efforts and accomplishments. We strive to facilitate an environment where students take responsibility for their education, ask questions and engage in hands-on learning.

## *BUSINESS PROJECT*

We will soon open an online shop selling hammocks in partnership with one of our community members, Ying. For many years she has been working for a local shop making hammocks in the evenings as an extra source of income. In our Etsy shop we will provide the materials and manage the sales, while Ying will make the hammocks. Profits will be split equally. By partnering with us, Ying will get more per hammock than she is currently paid. She was very keen to participate in this endeavor as the BRP profits will go directly into helping sustain the after school program which her son, Mon, attends, and the scholarship program of which her sister, Nuan, is a part. Long term, we view online marketplaces as a potential opportunity for our community members to engage in small businesses free from discrimination. We hope to be able to involve other community members in the future as this initiative grows.



## *CENSUS*

At the beginning of 2013 we conducted a census of the BRP communities to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their situations, their needs and their opinions of our current programs. The response was overwhelmingly positive as we interviewed over 50 families, which included almost 70 children.



The amount of time families have been in Thailand ranges from just a few years to over 40. Almost without exception the adults are employed in low-paying menial work including construction, cleaning, washing dishes or collecting rocks from the bottom of the river. On average they are paid THB 5,000 (USD \$180) a month. This is enough to survive day to day, but it is near impossible for them to plan for the future. Some, however, have managed to overcome tremendous odds to earn enough income to improve their situations. For example, one family we work very closely with saved enough to build a concrete house. In order to do this, however, their mother had to work two jobs from 8 am until 11 pm seven days a week for years with only one day off every few months.

When asked about their hometowns in Myanmar most families reported that infrastructure was improving; however, they had mixed opinions on whether the political changes were having any real impact on daily life. While some said things were starting to improve, others said that it would take many more years to see any real change. Most of the people we spoke to were not planning to return to Myanmar. They had worked hard to establish a life here and their children are settled in school. Many still have family in Myanmar and visit occasionally, but the cost of returning is high.



Almost all parents recognize the importance of education and want their children to stay in school; however, many say that money is likely to become an issue as their children progress through high school. Many children started school late so are not in a grade appropriate for their age, making it more likely for them to drop out before graduating. All families with children involved in our after school program were very happy that their children have the opportunity to learn English, access extracurricular activities and gain additional personal support.



## Financial Update

A complete financial summary can be found at the end of the Annual Report.

### *INCOME*

This year the Burmese Refugee Project raised a total of USD \$24,483 in donations. The Banyan Center has been operating as an almost financially independent, private kindergarten by charging tuition of able-paying students. The entire USD \$13,366 gained through tuition and the negligible donations directly to the school was spent throughout the year on Banyan Center expenses.

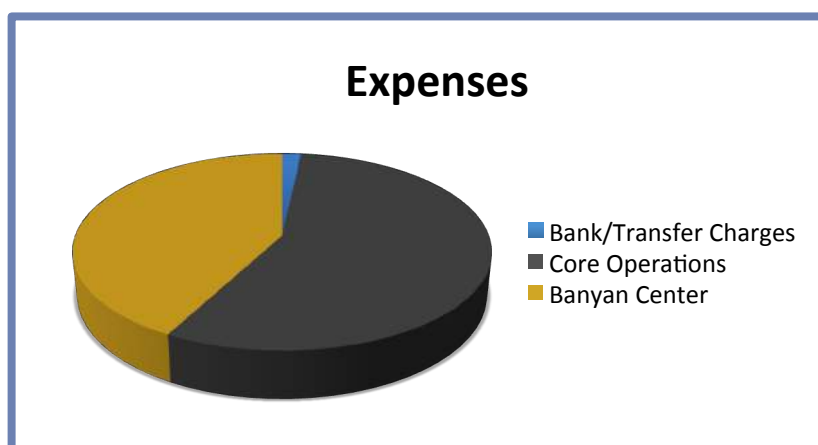
### *EXPENSES*

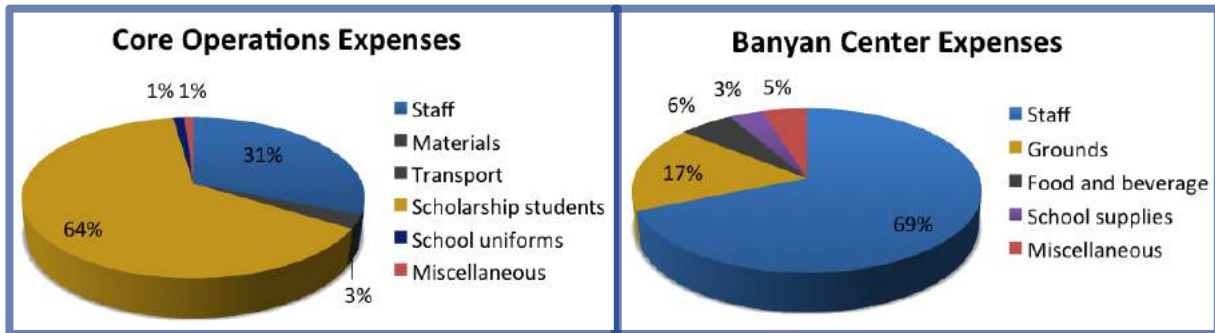
This year our total expenses, including both our Core Operations and the Banyan Center, came to USD \$46,887.02 when we assume an exchange rate of 1USD=30THB. This is a significant increase from last year's expenditures (USD \$11,595 excluding the Banyan Center), due to the increased university and secondary school fees of our

scholarship students, the transfer of the leadership team to those on the ground in Thailand, the hiring of essential new program staff and the inclusion of the Banyan Center as one of the organization's core programs, thus including its expenses and income in the BRP budget.

We are proud to report that all of our expenses, except bank charges, are incurred on the ground. We rely on volunteer interns who assist in operations, development and marketing to keep our overhead costs minimal. Our paid staff members take on multiple responsibilities, including both program implementation and administrative work. The Banyan Center is also used as a space for the After-School Program on the weekends and as an office when needed. We currently run the After-School Program within our communities during the week. Our primary overhead costs include bank charges, international transfer fees and fees from donations accepted online.

The following charts break down the Core Operations and Banyan Center expenses. The majority of our core operations expenses went to school fees and living stipends for our scholarship students. The majority of the Banyan Center expenses went to the school staff, including the School Director (who teaches and conducts administrative work for the center and the BRP as a whole), the Thai teacher, the new English teacher and the housekeeper/cook. Grounds and maintenance-related expenses are a large portion of the Banyan Center expenses as safety and cleanliness are of the utmost importance at the school.





## BUDGET

Starting next year, we will be disseminating our Annual Report every May to coincide with the Thai school year. Our yearly budgets and financial reports will start in May; however, this year we completed a yearly financial summary from July 2012-July 2013 to follow our Annual Report from last year. To transition to the May to May reports, our attached predicted budget overlaps with our financial summary by 2 months and starts in May 2013.

We estimate next year's expenses to come to USD \$55,400. Overall, our budget reflects few changes from this year's expense report. The increase is primarily from the increasing number of scholarship students, the rising tuition fees and new staff expenses at the Banyan Center. We have secured USD \$28,954 thus far in our fundraising, but we have planned for decreased income from student tuition at the Banyan Center as we prepare for our school transition in May 2014. The school change is further detailed in the Plans and Projections section. A full budget is attached at the end of the Annual Report, following this year's financial summary.

## Plans and Projections

### SCHOLARSHIP STUDENTS

In 2014 we are expecting the graduation of 4 more students: Jab, Artit, Moa and Pai. All of these promising youth are hoping, with our support, to continue onto higher education. Moa is featured as our student profile below.

As our program moves on and our students come of age, we are committed to supporting as many as possible through university. With a degree, our scholarship students are better poised to improve their quality of life, access their human rights and go on to impact their larger communities. Without financial assistance none of these families would be able to afford a university education for their children. Costs of university are high and in order to support the many students we expect to apply for scholarships over the coming years we will need increased funding. We are currently looking for individuals to sponsor our students, for one academic year or beyond.

### AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM

Our after-school program is in a transitional phase due to the organizational changes and the Thai NGO registration process. We are currently in the planning stages, and are weighing our options with staffing and budgetary considerations, but we plan to announce exciting progressions in the next few months. Watch for e-newsletters and like us on Facebook for updates.

### *THAI LITERACY CLASSES*

A major obstacle facing many of our adult community members is the fact that they cannot read or write Thai. This seriously limits their employment opportunities and puts them at a grave disadvantage in any legal proceedings. To this end we are in the process of organizing Thai literacy evening classes. A local Thai community member has volunteered as a teacher, and we plan to hold the classes at the Banyan Center two evenings a week starting in the New Year.

### *BANYAN CENTER*

We are thrilled to report that next year we will continue building on our growth and improvements by adjusting our school direction. The Banyan Center recently received the funding necessary to better align with the mission of the Burmese Refugee Project by primarily targeting and serving our disenfranchised communities. Our former business plan relied on tuition from able-paying students and reserved a small number of scholarship spaces for Shan Burmese. With the financial support from the LifePrep Foundation, we will be able to enroll 13 Shan students who are charged a small tuition fee and five able-paying English or Thai speaking students chosen through a lottery system. We value our diverse learning community, which is essential for students to build the cross-cultural relationships that promote future peace and respect.

We envision creating a learning environment that better equips students with the skills to excel in local Thai schools and beyond while keeping the same high standards and child-centered methods. Early childhood is a critical period of time for nurturing curiosity, intrinsic motivation and a lifetime love of learning. We will achieve our goal of equipping students with the foundation to become socially aware and academically successful by implementing an engaging literacy and mathematics curriculum, offering activities that foster critical thinking skills and providing personal support so children develop the confidence to dream of greater opportunities.

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## Student Profile



Moa is 18 years old and now in her final year of high school. She has been part of the BRP since it was founded in 2000 when she attended the Rainbow School. Moa's parents are from Baan-Haad village in the Lankur District of Shan State. The first time they came to Thailand Moa was 2 years old. They walked through the jungle for 5 days, taking turns carrying her, and settled in a refugee village. Not long after, everyone in the village was arrested for working without a permit and while her father escaped, Moa and her mother, Tuay, spent a week in prison before being fined and deported. They reunited in Myanmar and stayed for

a few more years, making a living growing rice and sesame seeds. When Moa was about 6 and her younger sister, Suay-mat, was about 3, the family saved and borrowed enough money to go to Thailand again. Since then she has been back to Myanmar once, when she was in Grade 8.

The family live in the Rock Village and Moa's parents, like most of the residents, work collecting rocks from the river. This is backbreaking work, which involves standing in the river all day scooping rocks out from the bottom and sieving them. They each earn approximately THB 200 a day. This is barely enough to live on with the rising cost of living in Thailand, and far under the Thai minimum wage of THB 300 per day.

Neither Moa, nor her sister, have a birth certificate causing them much anxiety. Moa says that if she had one she would probably be able to get Thai nationality and thus gain acceptance from society in the country she calls home. In fact, up until just last year, the sisters thought that they would be unable to get graduation certificates from school, as that is what they had originally been told by their teachers. This would make it impossible for them to continue their education beyond high school. After BRP staff encouraged them to go and ask again, the next week both sisters came to us in tears as they told us they had now been informed that they would be able to graduate, the same as the Thai students.

Although quiet and shy, Moa is also very hard working and driven. She has always studied hard and achieves top grades. She loves school and hanging out with her friends, despite reporting that she sometimes gets harassed by others and called names because she is Shan. This is something she says she has come to accept as a part of life. For several years now she has worked after school and on weekends in a shop in the town, saving most of the money she earns. Over the last two years she has managed to save up THB 20,000 (USD \$670), an impressive feat for a teenager whose family has so little.

Moa is planning to go on to study either law or teaching. At the beginning of this school year she enrolled in a distance pre-law course run by a prestigious Bangkok university. This involves self-study and trips to Chiang Mai, the nearest city, for lectures every few weeks on top of her final year of high school. Moa had planned to pay for the course herself. After BRP staff heard about this we offered to pay the fees for her. Despite this, most of her savings have already been used up in just a few months from travel and other related expenses.

Moa recognizes education as the only way she can improve her life and that of her family. She sees her parents working in the river everyday as they have done for over a decade in order to send her and her sister to school. She wants to be able to support them and make them proud of her. She sees both teaching and law as subjects from which she can take what she learns and go on to use it to help others like her. **We want to support Moa throughout university and are currently searching for an individual sponsor for this inspiring young lady.**

## REPORT July 1, 2012 - June 30, 2013

	TOTAL USD	USD	THB
<b>Starting balance US</b>	2,339		
<b>Starting balance Banyan</b>	1,923		57,703
<b>Starting balance Thai</b>	3,231		96,921
<b>Transfer from old bank account</b>	14,564		
<b>BRP Core Operations</b>			
<b>INCOME</b>			
<i>Donations</i>	24,483	24,483	
<b>US EXPENSES</b>			
<i>Transaction Cost for Donation</i>	89	89	
<i>Bank Charges</i>	90	90	
<i>Exchange rate loss</i>	585		
<b>Total US Expenses</b>	764		
<b>CORE PROGRAMMING EXPENSES</b>			
<i>Staff</i>	7,980		239,400
<i>Teaching program</i>			
<i>--Materials</i>	670		20,100
<i>--Transport</i>	17		500
<i>--Food and drink</i>	0		0
<i>Scholarship students</i>	16,334		490,020
<i>School uniforms</i>	323		9,700
<i>Miscellaneous</i>	248		7,450
<b>Total Core Expenses</b>	25,572		767,170
<b>Banyan School</b>			
<b>INCOME</b>			
<i>Student tuition</i>	13,008		390,240
<i>Donations</i>	358		10,752
<b>Total Banyan Income</b>	13,366	24,483	400,992
<b>EXPENSES</b>			
<i>Staff</i>	13,217		396,500
<i>Grounds</i>	3,277		98,299
<i>Food and beverage</i>	1,108		33,249
<i>School supplies</i>	696		20,876
<i>Miscellaneous</i>	920		27,590
<b>Total Banyan Expenses</b>	19,217		576,514
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	45,554		
<i>Ending Balance</i>	14,352		

## BUDGET May 1, 2013 - April 30, 2014

	TOTAL (USD)	THB
<b>INCOME</b>		
BRP Core Operations		
<i>Donations (secured)</i>	22,945	
Banyan School		
<i>Donations</i>	6,000	
<i>Student tuition (estimated)</i>	10,000	300,000
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>38,945</b>	
<b>EXPENSES</b>		
<i>Transaction Cost for Donation</i>	120	
<i>Bank Charges</i>	100	
<i>Exchange rate loss</i>	600	
<b>Total Estimated US Expenses</b>	<b>820</b>	
BRP Core Operations		
<i>Staff</i>	9,313	279,400
<i>Intern stipends</i>	583	17,500
<i>Teaching program</i>		
-- <i>Materials</i>	200	6,000
-- <i>Art supplies</i>	800	24,000
-- <i>Transport</i>	160	4,800
-- <i>Food and drink</i>	357	10,700
<i>Scholarship students</i>		
-- <i>High school</i>	14,400	432,000
-- <i>University</i>	6,167	185,000
<i>School uniforms</i>	323	9,700
<i>Online business project</i>	67	2,000
<i>Miscellaneous</i>	167	5,000
<i>Lawyer fees</i>	2,233	67,000
<b>Total Core Expenses</b>	<b>34,770</b>	<b>1,043,100</b>
Banyan School		
<i>Staff</i>	13,933	418,000
<i>Grounds</i>	3,333	100,000
<i>Food and beverage</i>	2,000	60,000
<i>School supplies</i>	1,000	30,000
<i>Insurance</i>	1,000	30,000
<i>Visas</i>	3,333	100,000
<i>Miscellaneous</i>	500	15,000
<b>Total Banyan Expenses</b>	<b>25,100</b>	<b>753,000</b>
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>55,398</b>	<b>1,796,100</b>