



# *Tourism Stories*

THE THAILAND EDITION

IN HONOUR OF HIS MAJESTY,  
THE LATE KING BHUMIBOL ADULYADEJ

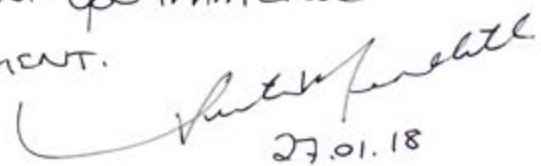
Tourism is a powerful tool  
to transform life ! A good example  
is the Women's Massage Centre in  
Chiang Mai . Thank you for contributing  
the story to this Book.

Xu Jing  
World Tourism Organization  
(UNWTO)

27 Jan 2018

DEAR MASAME,

SAWADDEKA. WHAT A SPECIAL PLACE  
YOU HAVE CREATED, BRINGING TOGETHER  
CHIANG MAI'S KIND HEARTS AND TOURISTS  
SEEKING TO DISCOVER THE SPIRIT OF THE  
THAI PEOPLE. YOU ARE AN EXAMPLE OF  
TRUE GOODNESS. I WISH YOU IMMENSE  
SUCCESS + FULFILLMENT.

  
27.01.18

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## VOICE #1

### CELEBRATING GINGKAN MUANGWILAI

HER STORY: CREATION OF A WOMEN'S  
MASSAGE CENTER BY AN EX-PRISONER

FROM: PRAO, CHIANG MAI

### INTRODUCTION:

After leaving the physical prison, ex-offenders often find themselves in a "second prison" upon re-entering society. Often, the social barriers associated with entering society are fueled by fear, misunderstanding, and distrust, and are simply too high of a hurdle for ex-offenders to overcome. The ongoing social stigma does nothing to aid in their social reintegration or to prevent recidivism. Job discrimination against female ex-offenders, in particular, remains rampant. However, finding employment is important because it could mean the first step towards getting accommodation, reuniting with their children, and slowly rebuilding their lives.

Recognizing the prospect of employment as a crucial element of ex-offenders' rehabilitation and social integration, Chiang Mai Women's Correctional Institution was the first correctional facility to offer a traditional Thai massage training program to female offenders as part of the rehabilitation and social reintegration program over a decade ago. The course, which was selected due to its low cost, is managed by professionals from the Department of Skill Development, under the Ministry





of Labor. The program also offers soon-to-be-released prisoners actual practical experience at Chiang Mai Correctional Vocation Center and saves a portion of the money earned for them for when they are released. Once the trainees complete the requisite 180 hours of practice, they are accredited by the Ministry of Labor. The certificate is even recognized internationally. Yet, despite obtaining the necessary certification, many ex-offenders still reported difficulty in gaining employment.

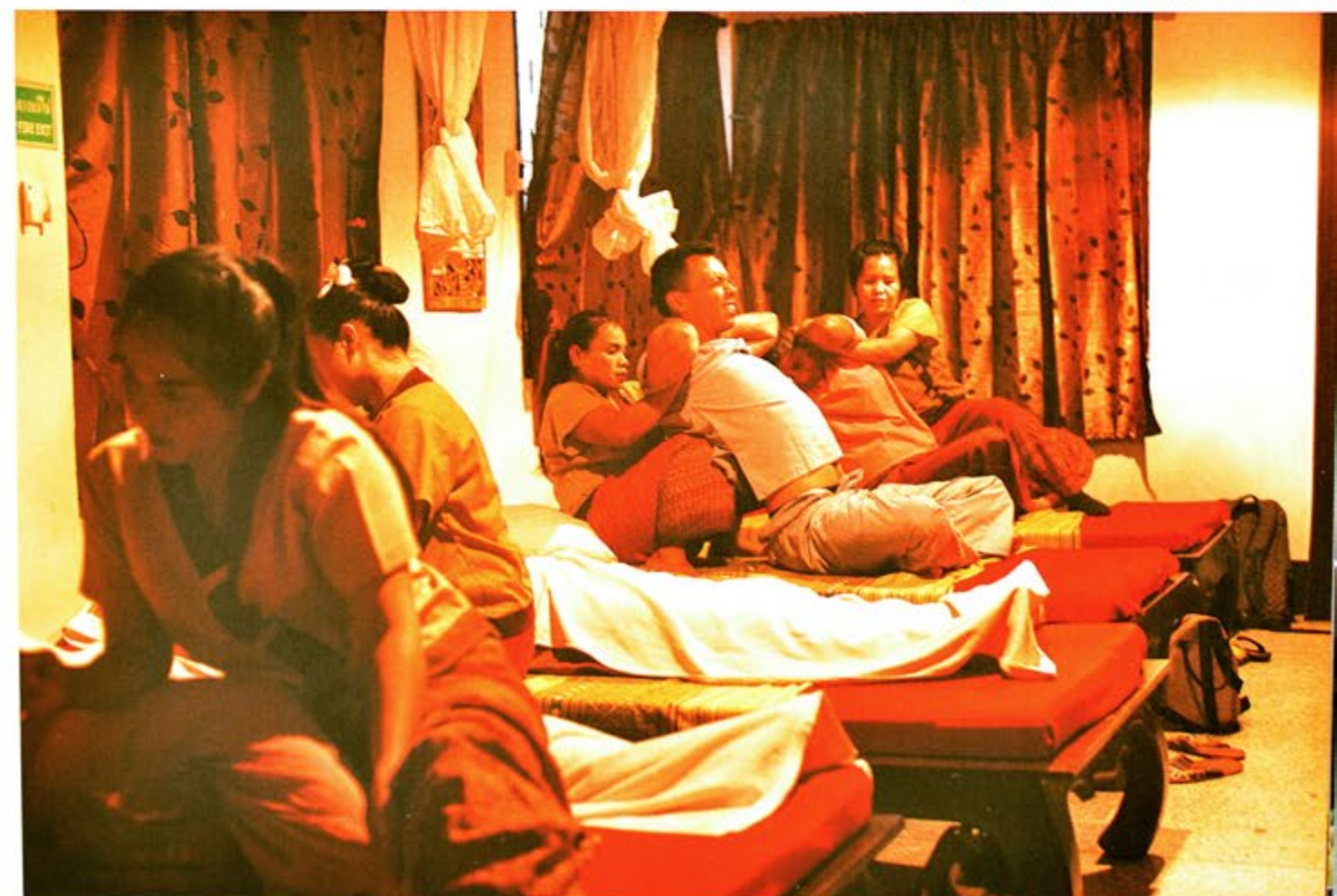
The Women's Massage Center by Ex-Prisoner, created to help support qualified ex-offenders in their social reintegration, was established by an ex-warden of Chiang Mai Women's Correctional Institution. Her former job was not only to follow administrative procedure but also to care for the offenders. She was made well aware of their difficult plight, as well as the near impossibility of building a life after their release. She and her partner then decided to use their life savings to open a small massage center that exclusively employs ex-offenders. For this purpose, the Massage Center

was first opened within a block from Chiang Mai Correctional Vocation Center, where the offenders train. In support of the massage parlor, the Vocation Center often directs overbooked clients towards the shop.

The massage parlor seeks to fight back against the social stigma attached to ex-offenders and gamely promotes all the masseuses as ex-prisoners. In this way, the negative connotation has become the selling point. While the name of the shop may not be politically correct, it was chosen to directly combat the social misunderstandings surrounding ex-offenders. The name was designed to empower all the women working there and to encourage them not to hide from their past lives but to instead build upon them. All of the visitors and patrons are understanding, and willing to support the good cause. They are attracted by the

reasonably-priced that is offered by the qualified masseuses.

Women's Massage Center by Ex-Prisoner continues to slowly break Thai social stigma. Today it boasts three branches in Chiang Mai old town, and is looking to expand soon.







#### HEAR HER VOICE:

*Sawasdee Ka, my name is Gingkan Muangwilai, and this is my story - my life after six times in prison...*

*I was a repeat offender, sentenced six times for drug offences. The criminal charges against me included possession and distribution of heroin and amphetamines. Despite, or perhaps due to, being born and raised in the small district of Chiang Mai Province called Prao, I embarked on this never-ending cycle before I had even turned 18. The first time I tried drugs was because I had been persuaded by a friend. She described the feeling as euphoria, the likes of which I had never experienced before. I bought into her fantasy and tried heroin while I was working in a non-traditional massage parlor. I was in denial and refused the label of 'junkie' until I started experiencing withdrawal symptoms. Before long, I could not earn enough to cover the cost of my habit and had to resort to drug distribution. I managed to*

*secure a reliable supplier near a hill-tribe village, not too far from my hometown. My first clients were my neighbors. I then stopped going to work and turned to the illegal drug trade full-time. The more money I made, the more drugs I used.*

*The first time I was arrested, I was on the return journey from procuring drugs in the mountains. I was incarcerated and sentenced to one year in prison when I was barely 18 years old. However, since I had already turned 18, I was not afforded the luxury of a juvenile correction center. My first criminal sanction was relatively light due to the fact that I had no prior criminal history.*

*After my release, I started working as a singer in a seedy bar in my hometown. It was hard to rebuild my life when I was surrounded by alcohol and drugs. In a way, I felt like I was destined to fail in my rehabilitation. I soon succumbed to a peer pressure and started experimenting with amphetamine. There is no adequate word to sufficiently*

*describe the feeling of becoming alive when on the amphetamine high. I could see all colors in vivid detail, could hear all the sound crisply, and certainly felt more intensely. I found a new supplier who could provide me with ample quantities of amphetamines and I earned a lot of money from each procurement trip. The wealth was just as addictive and hard to turn down once I had gotten a taste of it.*







I had a husband who was also a drug abuser, with whom I had two children. That was when the cycle repeated itself. My second arrest occurred when I was 25 years old. The sentence was reduced from 12 years to six years because I cooperated with the authorities and confessed to the crime. Once I realized the reality of another tour of the correctional facility, I was forced to shed my pride and asked my mother to look after my two beautiful children. After serving four years and 11 days, I received a pardon on the occasion of the 60th Birthday Celebration of Queen Sirikit (now the Queen Dowager of Thailand).



I was arrested and convicted four more times. The final time, I was sentenced to seven years of imprisonment in Lamphun Provincial Prison. The conviction was set particularly high because the Thai government was leading a war on drugs at the time and also because, by that point,



I had accumulated an extensive record of drug offences. While I was serving my time, my husband left me and remarried a younger woman. For the longest time my mind festered with anger and hatred. Prison can be a lonely place where you are left with nothing but your thoughts. I felt stuck in an infinite limbo with no escape. Some days I could see the light at the end where it was so close it appeared almost reachable but when I tried to reach out the light dimmed and eventually disappeared. Inexplicably, without any supernatural occurrence or spiritual intervention, I realized I was not alone. I had two children waiting for me. They were not informed that I was arrested and convicted and instead were told that I had gone to work overseas. I strived to turn my life around to provide a future for them...a better future, far away from all of my past temptations.



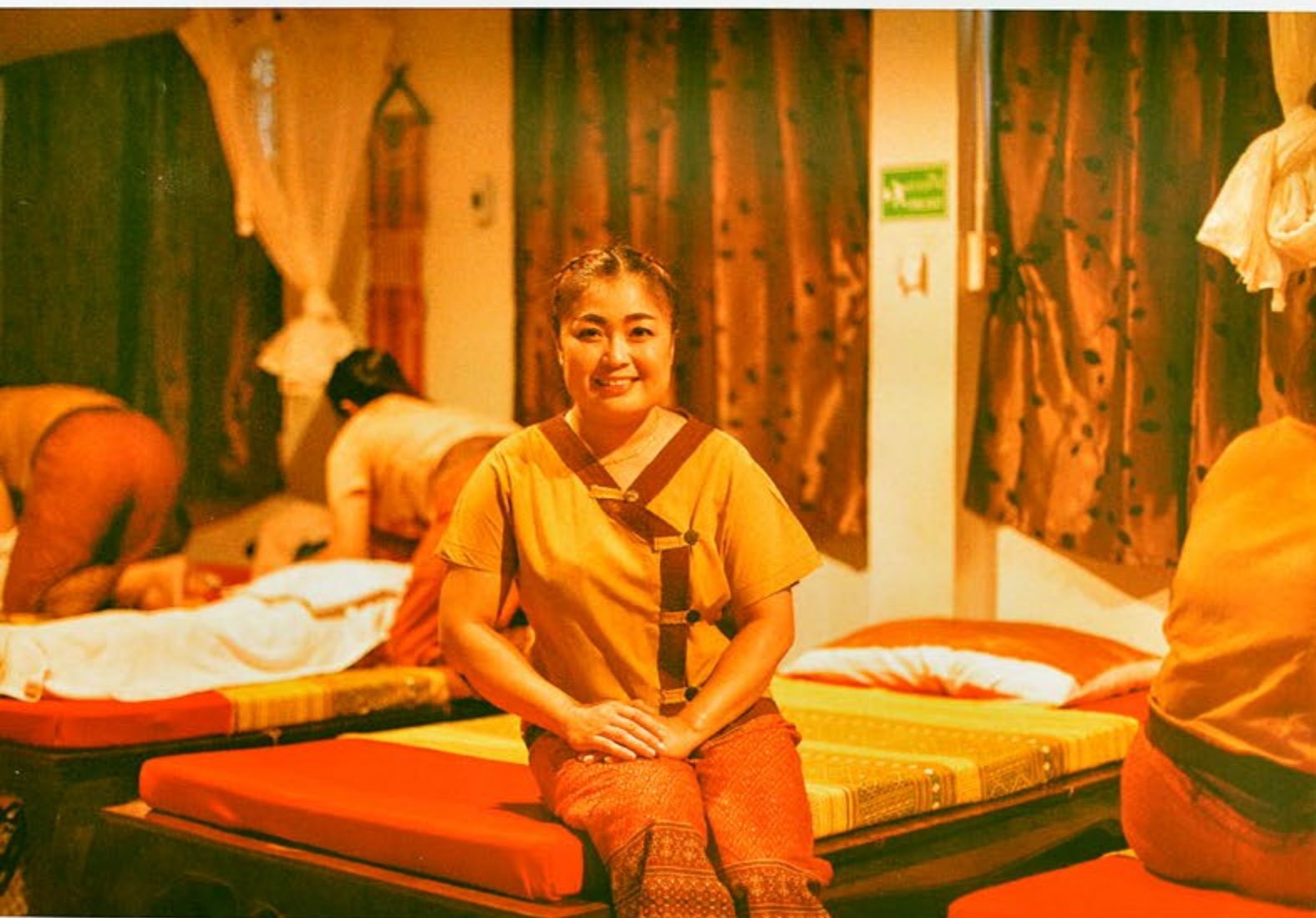


I worked hard, following every instruction and obeying the warden. I was awarded the title of "Prisoner of Excellent Class" since I participated in all the sports and musical activities. I also attended the traditional Thai massage training program offered by the prison and received a certificate in foot massage. That piece of paper does more than attest my ability as a masseuse; it also demonstrates my perseverance and dedication to turning my life around. I was determined to lead an honest life and make that prison stint my last. Thanks to the training program, I discovered my affinity towards the service sector. In my opinion, being a masseuse is a sustainable career, one which I can still maintain as I grow older.

I was finally released when I was 38. I knew from firsthand experience how difficult it is to obtain a job offer as an ex-offender, especially a six-time recidivist like myself. People do not look too kindly on us, let alone offer us a job. They assume we are unreliable and dishonest. I cannot consciously blame their attitude given my own past record. Chances are not given freely to the undeserving. It was fortunate that I was introduced to the Women's Massage Center by Ex-Prisoner by a warden, and I have been working there ever since my release. Most of the clients are foreign tourists on a holiday in Chiang Mai, which translates to extra traffic during the tourist high season. I am grateful for the opportunity since it provides me with a sense of stability in life.

Despite my fear, I was able to finally quit drugs. I have never used, procured, or traded any form of drugs since my release. I can proudly state that tourism gave me a second chance when nobody else would even glance my way, and I am determined not to waste it. After all, I need to set a good example for my children, who are now in their teens.

The sufficiency economy philosophy, to me, is the realization of sufficient happiness. True happiness happens when you are not seeking it. I now have a reliable income earned from an honest profession, a good partner, and a never-ending supply of good conversation with visitors from different parts of the world. I will not turn my back on this hard-earned second chance.







## Women's Massage Center

We would like to express our gratitude to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, and the United Nations World Tourism for including the valuable story of one of our successful masseurs.

Our first massage center opened in 2014 with just a handful of the Thai Massage vocational graduates from the women's prison in Chiang Mai. Those who wished to use their newly earned skills in traditional Thai massage were eager to join and extend their skills.

In a short time, this program became internationally known, and well and is appreciated by tourists and the local.

Currently there are four massage centers are running to for these women in vocational rehabilitation who need practical support, in a safe environment. Many of these women also leave prison with little or no financial resources.

With continual training once these women join the professional society, the services have expanded into aloe vera massage, and other specialty massages.

The staff are managed and supported by a team of professionals made up of academics and government officers, while gradually incorporating the rehabilitated women into manager positions as the project grows.



The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is the United Nations specialized agency responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism.

**Traditional Thai Massage**  
250 baht / 1hr.  
500 baht / 2hr. (full body)

**Back/Shoulder/Neck/Head**  
250 baht / 1 hr.

**Foot Massage**  
250 baht / 1hr.

**Oil Massage**  
450 baht / 1 hr., 800 baht / 2 hrs.

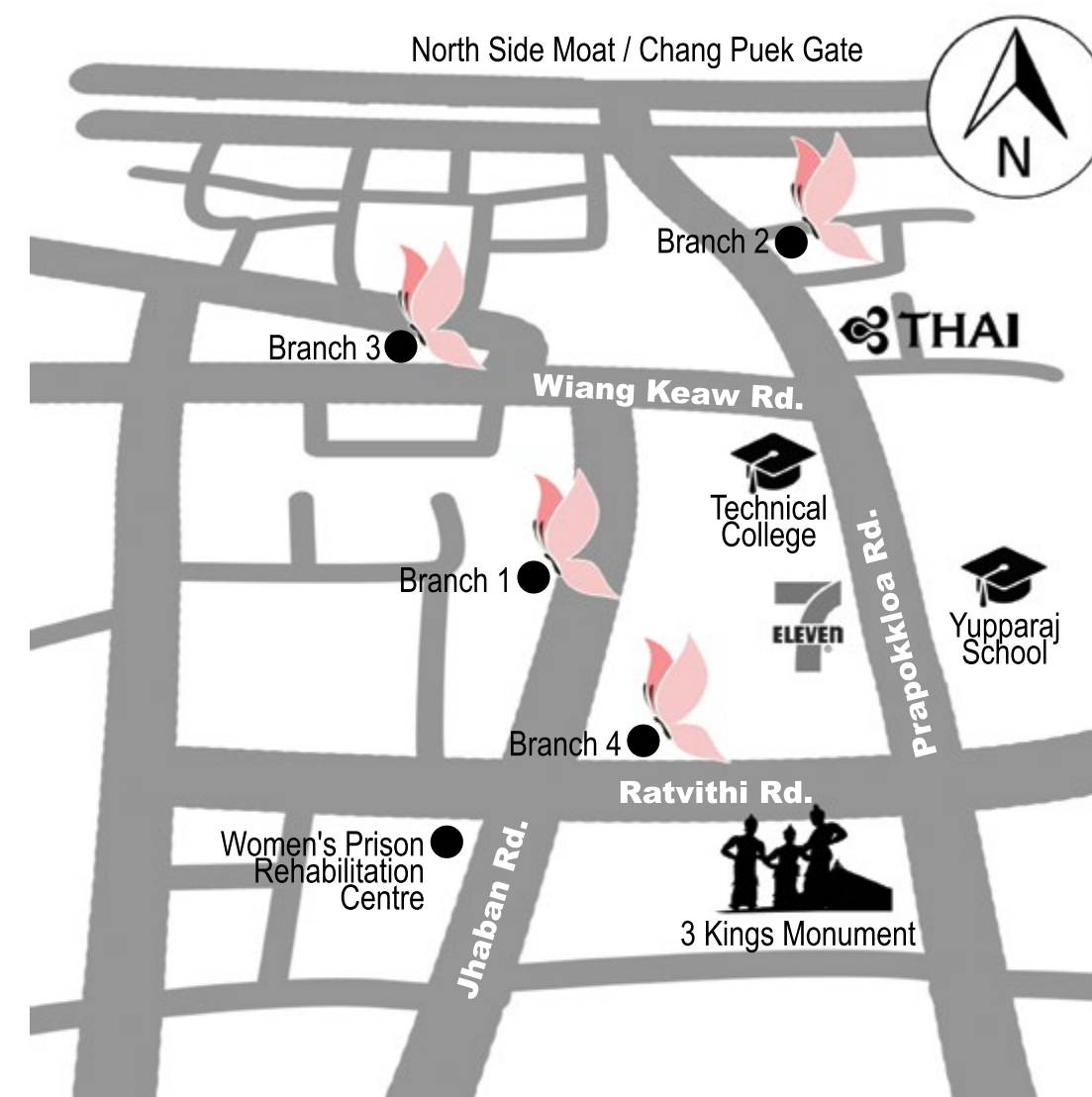
**Traditional Thai Herbal Facial Scrub & Massage**  
350 baht / 45 mins.

**Aloe Vera Body Massage**  
550 baht / 1 hr.

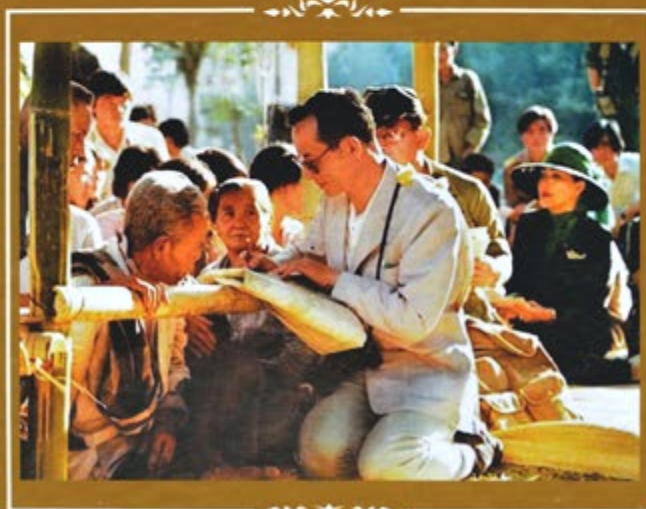
**Open 9am - 9pm Daily**  
Tel. 093 984 0532  
Bookings in person only  
[www.DignityNetwork.org](http://www.DignityNetwork.org)

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Branch 2: 252/15 Prapokklao Rd.  
Branch 3: 18/2 Wiang Kaew Rd.  
Branch 4: 74/1 Ratchavithi Road  
Sri Phum, Mueang, Chiang Mai

Women's Massage Center is a Project by Dignity Network.  
Helping female ex-prisoners reintegrate into professional society successfully.  
\*Prices subject to change without notice







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