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## BAMBI ANNUAL REPORT 2024

THE CURIOSITY  
CODE

YESTERDAY'S TRADITIONS,  
TODAY'S INNOVATIONS

APRIL 2025

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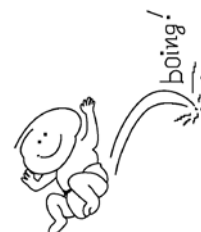
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*Hello!  
Can you find me  
in the magazine?*



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SCAN TO APPLY



Dear BAMBI members,

I hope 2025 is treating you all well! My name is Shelka and I am the New Members and Pop Up Playgroups Coordinator. This month's magazine is all about imagination and innovation—concepts I always encourage my daughter to explore.

Not just to my daughter but to all kids I want to say:

Imagine a world where anything is possible. You could have flying cars, robots that help with homework, or even playgrounds on the moon! Imagining is like using your superpower to think of things that don't exist yet. It's when your mind starts wondering, "What if?" and dreaming up new ideas.

But just imagining isn't enough. To make those dreams come true, you need to innovate. Innovation is when you take your cool ideas and actually make them happen. It's like when you draw a picture of a treehouse, but then you build one with your friends! Innovation is the magic that turns a thought into something real.

Think about all the amazing things we have today, like smartphones or video games. At one point, those things were just ideas in someone's mind. Someone imagined them, then worked hard to figure out how to make them real. That's what innovation is all about—it's turning your imagination into something that can help people and make the world a better place.

Being imaginative and innovative is important for everyone, especially kids like you. When you imagine, you can think of new ways to play, new games to create, or even new ways to help animals or the planet. And when you innovate, you can make those ideas come to life. Maybe you'll invent a toy that helps kids learn or create a game that everyone loves to play. You just have to believe that your ideas are important.

So, let your imagination soar. Think of things that no one has thought of before, and who knows—you might just be the next big inventor or creator. The world needs your ideas, so start imagining and innovating today!

Readers, I would like to thank each one of you for being part of BAMBI and helping us to be better everyday. Your feedback and suggestions are always welcome.

See you all at the next Pop Up Playgroup or New Members' Coffee Morning!

Best wishes

Shelka Sharma

BAMBI New Members and Pop Up Playgroups Coordinator







A few years ago, I found a dog sitting next to my then six-year-old daughter—not a real one, but one she'd cleverly crafted out of milk packs. As she excitedly explained her method, I remember feeling relieved that she hadn't asked me to make it because I probably wouldn't have managed. I don't lack creativity or imagination—I write, make costumes, and problem solve—but turning milk packs into animal shapes just isn't in my skill set.

The truth is, as we age, we see things at face value and get lost in routine and practicalities. Kids though, with their innate sense of wonder and boundless imagination, view the world differently. The more we encourage them to explore and experiment—within safe boundaries—the more likely they'll be to develop confidence, creativity, and a lifelong passion for learning. This April, in honor of World Creativity and Innovation Day, we explore how to nurture creativity in children and families.

In "Yesterday's Traditions, Tomorrow's Innovations", Rachel Ofo explains how using traditional toys and modern-day gadgets together can help raise free thinkers. In "The Curiosity Code: Raising Children Who Love to Ask Why", Chrissy enlightens us on why answering our kids' questions for the umpteenth time works wonders for them.

"Toddlers and Their Toys" by Kelly Patten tells you what toys can nurture creativity and imagination in little ones. For tips on integrating creativity into your own schedule, check out "Keeping the Parental Spark Alive: Finding Freedom in Structure" by Sonali Vongchusiri. Further ideas can be explored in "Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear" by Elizabeth Glibert and "What Do You Do With an Idea?" by Kobi Yamada—books reviewed by Kit Lang in Readers' Corner.

Joe Barker delivers "An Ode to the Humble Cardboard Box", in which Marty and Alice's fascination with boxes and wastebaskets proves that an adult's trash can indeed be a child's treasure.

In non-thematic content, Anatta Zarchi shares tips on "Keeping Relationships Strong Through Disagreements", and we provide an update on BAMBI's 2024 performance with our Annual Report. There's also a Songkran-themed word search in Fun Corner.

So this month, embrace creativity, imagination and new possibilities. Wishing you all a joyful Songkran break with your loved ones!

Sanam Rahman  
Editor



## Join BAMBI as our WEBSITE COORDINATOR!



Are you detail-oriented, organized, and eager to contribute to a vibrant parenting community? BAMBI is looking for a website coordinator to keep our site fresh, informative, and engaging!

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BAMBI is run by a group of lovely and dedicated volunteers, and from time to time, a number of critical roles need to be filled to ensure ongoing service to our members. BAMBI is a fun and welcoming community of like-minded parents trying to support and improve the parenting experience for all families in Bangkok. If you have some time and passion to spare, come and join us. To apply or if you have any questions about these volunteer opportunities, please email [vicechairwoman@bambiweb.org](mailto:vicechairwoman@bambiweb.org), detailing which position(s) you are interested in. Please note that as per BAMBI's constitution, interested candidates are required to have an active membership at the time of applying.

# CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS



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# YESTERDAY'S TRADITIONS, TOMORROW'S INNOVATIONS

Rachel is mixing the old with the new as her daughter enjoys some of the games of Rachel's childhood while exploring today's modern digital delights. Together these help inspire her all-important creativity and innovation.

Photo by Robert Daly from Getty Images

## About the Author

Rachel Ofo moved from the US to Bangkok in 2016 and spent six and a half years there. She has a daughter, whom she loves dragging around on various adventures like hikes and fishing trips. In her free time, she enjoys reading, watching movies, and trying new restaurants. She also enjoys being out in nature.





## CREATIVITY

*You've gotta think outside the box.* Many of us have heard some form of this phrase at one point or another in our lives, and if we asked a random person what their understanding of it is, we would get the general idea that we have to be creative to get results.

Creativity is the ability to generate original ideas, solutions, or expressions by thinking beyond conventional boundaries. It involves imagination, curiosity, and the courage to explore new perspectives. Whether in art, science, business, or daily life, creativity transforms the ordinary into something meaningful. It thrives on problem-solving, adaptability, and diverse influences. The Harvard Business School highlights various benefits of creativity, including increased productivity (1). Overall, it's a great skill to have for success, regardless of the industry or situation we might find ourselves in.

Have you ever had to think on your feet to string together a combination of broken Thai and mime to get your point across? Have you ever had to come up with a distracting activity to keep a child from a public meltdown? Have you ever fashioned something adequately absorbent out of a bunch of receipts because you left the house believing your child was fully potty-trained? Well, all these took a whole lot of creativity—creative skills we learned as children and polished as we matured.

So it's important to build a creative foundation in our children, not just for future careers or parenthood, but for the now. Creativity can help our children with processing emotions, understanding control, and just learning how to be themselves (2). Creativity appears more valuable when the benefits are laid out.

However, some may feel that a skill like creativity is a bit different from something like product management, which can be taught. Some believe you either have it or you don't. Some may even lament never having painted a beautiful



Photo by Vanessa Loring from Pexels

picture or written a heartfelt poem. But creativity isn't just about making something "beautiful"—it's about seeing the world differently and reshaping it in unexpected ways. Basically, creativity is a blend of inspiration, experimentation, and the willingness to take risks in pursuit of something unique and impactful.

Creativity is just as important in a science lab as it is in an art class. Both rely on having an open mind to create something of value, whether aesthetically or functionally. In other words, creativity works hand in hand with innovation.

## INNOVATION

Innovation is the process of turning creative ideas into practical, valuable solutions. It involves execution—applying creativity to develop new products, services, or processes that create real-world impact. So yes, that receipt-diaper would be considered innovative. Every time we act on what we ideate, that's innovation, even if it appears small or is just a one-time occurrence. And that action requires the push of a creatively developed mind.

In short, creativity is the spark, while innovation is the fire. You can be creative without being innovative, but innovation requires creativity to drive meaningful change. Creativity is about ideas; innovation is about

action and implementation. Both of these can be taught and passed down.

## TRADITION

Tradition is the passing down of customs, beliefs, and practices from one generation to the next, shaping cultural identity and social cohesion. We've seen families with generations and generations of musicians. Or families where the scientists go as far back as the invention of the first lightbulb. Was this just creativity and innovation? Of course not. There had to be a bit of tradition.

Tradition provides a sense of continuity, connecting people to their history, which can be expressed through storytelling and daily habits, reinforcing shared values. While traditions offer stability and belonging, they also evolve over time, adapting to new societal influences. I can say with (a bit of) confidence that most traditions have undergone some sort of transformation over time. Whether within families or nations, traditions influence how people communicate, learn, and navigate life's milestones, serving as a bridge between the past, present, and future.

## THE PAST

Some can remember their youth, late nights outdoors, riding bikes



Photo by Vika\_Glitter from Pixabay

around, and chasing after the ice cream man. We spent hours making up new games and reinventing old ones. Our parents helped by throwing us a few extra bucks, or a few extra hours. But the choice to do what we wanted as kids was ours. We had relative freedom to think and create. Yes, the world looked a bit different then, but kids are kids, regardless of where or when you see them. Yes, we want to hold on to those memories and pass down our favorite games, but circumstances may not always allow for that. I would love for my daughter to experience the joy of playing outside until 2am with 20 other kids, but I've accepted that just as our community has changed, ideas I'd hoped to pass down will adjust as well.

### THE PRESENT

Today our children live in a more digitally inclined world than we did. So what if we give in and buy the tablet or give them a few extra minutes of TV time? The goal is to foster creativity by sharing what we

had in the past with what we have now. We simply let our children be themselves, growing in the present, but with a sprinkle of the past. We can still encourage their creativity with things we might not have had, like coding robots.

Thirty years ago, STEAM wasn't even a phrase, but now there are toys created specifically to help them grow creatively and innovatively. Thirty years ago, creativity might have looked like crayons, yoyos, and lots of glitter. Now, our children can still enjoy these things in different, sometimes less messy, ways. And for some items that have stood the test of time—I'm talking to you, Rubik's Cube—we incorporate them with the newer items. I find open-ended toys, that is, toys that can be used in multiple ways, are longer-standing.

We recently took my daughter to a toy store, and she ran straight for the slinky, which brought a wave of nostalgia and pride. However, she still asked for her tablet later that day. Our kids can enjoy the

things we did, without severing their connection to the modern world. My daughter has played with Play-Doh but has also enjoyed kinetic sand. We combine the old with the new.

### TAKEAWAY FOR THE FUTURE

Ultimately, the end goal is the same now as it was in the past. We want creative and free thinkers. We want movers and shakers. We want kids who believe they can change the world. Although the methods may vary, the ideas and motivations are the same. As much as we want to hold on to the past, we don't want it to hinder our children's growth. So just give them the bowl of marbles, step back, and watch the creative juices, and glass balls, flow—even if it's in front of a big-screen LED smartTV, which can be used to share your favorite childhood shows with your kids. Creativity and innovation are not restrictive, so don't let traditions restrain them. Tradition can be innovative and creative; innovation and creativity can turn into tradition.

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# THE CURIOSITY CODE: RAISING CHILDREN WHO LOVE TO ASK "WHY?"

To parent is to be driven to distraction by endless questions. Chrissy shares why those questions are so important and how we can learn to encourage and celebrate our children's curiosity.

Photo by Thomas Ronveaux from Pexels



## About the Author

Chrissy, originally from the UK, moved to Bangkok in 2017 to work at an international school. With 20 years of experience in education and science, she now focuses on science writing and allergy education consulting. Chrissy enjoys attending BAMBI events with her three-year-old son.



There's a moment familiar to every parent of a curious toddler. You've just answered what feels like the hundredth "why" question of the day, and before you've even finished your sentence, that little voice pipes up again: "But why?"

I remember the day my son discovered this magical question. We were walking through the park when he pointed at a bird and asked why it was flying. After explaining that the bird might be finding food or escaping predators, I watched his eyes widen with that beautiful spark of wonder, followed immediately by, "But why so high?" That afternoon turned into a marathon of bird-related questions that left me simultaneously exhausted and in awe of his budding curiosity.

As both a mother to a question-generating machine and a science educator with two decades of experience, I've come to believe that this natural curiosity is perhaps the most precious resource our children possess—and one we should protect fiercely.

I've spent much of my life fielding questions. In the classroom, I was prepared. I had equipment, diagrams, models, simulations, and well-structured answers. But nothing quite prepared me for the sheer tenacity of a three-year-old who wants to know why he can't have cake for breakfast for the fifteenth time in a row.

Yet here's the thing: that relentless questioning is exactly what we want to nurture. Research tells us that curiosity is one of the key predictors of academic success. A study published in "Pediatric Research" found that children with higher levels of curiosity perform better in school, regardless of socioeconomic background (1). Another study from the University of California suggested that curiosity enhances memory and learning by activating the brain's reward system (2). In other words, a curious child isn't just an inquisitive one; they're one whose brain is actively wiring itself for deeper learning.

### THE CURIOSITY CRISIS (3)

Research suggests we may be facing what some people in education call a "curiosity crisis". Studies from developmental psychologists show that children ask fewer questions as they progress through school, dropping from an average of 100 questions per day at age four to just 10 questions per day by age ten. As Dr Susan Engel, author of "The Hungry Mind", puts it, "Curiosity is a delicate flower that needs nurturing—and can be easily trampled". So how do we nurture our children's curiosity?

### THE TODDLER TRAINING GROUND

Raising a curious child starts with embracing the chaos. My own pre-schooler is an expert at turning everyday moments into deep existential inquiries. A trip to the shop is never just about buying milk—it's about why



*Photo by RDNE Stock project from Pexels*

cows produce milk, why he has oat milk instead, and why we can't take the dog that sits outside home with us.

As a teacher, I always encouraged my students to ask questions. I even had a "Wonder Wall" in my classroom where students could pin their biggest "why" questions, and we'd tackle them throughout the week. But I've realized that fostering curiosity isn't just about answering questions—it's about resisting the urge to shut them down. While it's tempting in the rush of daily life to say, "Because I said so", those four words can be curiosity killers. Instead, I try to flip the question back: "That's interesting! What do you think?"

### THE SCIENCE OF "WHY?"

Curiosity is like a muscle—the more it's exercised, the stronger it becomes. Neuroscientists at Johns Hopkins University found that when children are encouraged to explore, their brain's prefrontal cortex—responsible for higher-order thinking—develops more robust connections (4). That means their constant questioning isn't just about annoying their parents—it's about actively sculpting their intelligence.

So how do we keep that curiosity alive when the natural world of "why" collides with the real-world demands of getting out the door on time?

### PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR RAISING INQUISITIVE CHILDREN

#### Embrace the 'I don't know' moment

Kids have an uncanny ability to ask questions that even Google would struggle with. When my son asked me why flamingos stand on one leg, I was flummoxed. But



*Photo by RDNE Stock project from Pexels*

instead of brushing it off, I turned it into a game: “That’s a great question! Let’s look it up together.” It turns out that flamingos do it to avoid muscle fatigue and to conserve body heat when standing in water. Who knew? (Well, flamingos, apparently.)

### **Model curiosity yourself**

Children mirror their parents. If they see you asking questions, wondering about the world, and seeking out knowledge, they’ll learn that curiosity isn’t just for kids—it’s a lifelong trait. At dinner, I sometimes ask my toddler, “I wonder where the sun goes at night?” It sparks conversations that are both adorable and, occasionally, surprisingly profound. Rest assured you don’t have to have all the answers.

### **“I wonder” walks**

During strolls in the soi or the park, we play the “I wonder” game, taking turns pointing to something and wondering about it. No answers are required—just the joy of questioning. “I wonder why the leaves change color?” or “Why do the pink flowers look black in the dark?”

### **Let them make mistakes**

Curiosity is messy. It means letting them experiment, even when you know the outcome. When my son wanted

to see what would happen if he mixed blueberries and ketchup, my first instinct was to say, “That’s gross.” But I let him do it. He tasted it, made a funny face, and declared, “I don’t like that.” Lesson learned, no lecture required.

### **Encourage open-ended play**

The best toys aren’t the ones that light up and sing. They’re the ones that let children create their own worlds. Blocks, cardboard boxes, sticks in the garden—these are the tools of an inquisitive mind. When children have the freedom to explore, they develop problem-solving skills that go far beyond childhood.

### **Celebrate the questions, not just the answers**

When my son asks particularly thoughtful questions, we celebrate them as achievements in themselves. “That’s such an interesting thing to wonder about!” has become a common phrase in our household.

## **THE LONG GAME**

As a science teacher, I’ve seen what happens when curiosity is nurtured. My most engaged students were not the ones who memorized facts. They were the ones who asked, “But what if...?” and “Shall we investigate the effect of this?”

As a mom, I’m playing the long game. It’s exhausting sometimes—I won’t pretend otherwise. But I remind myself that every “why” is a sign that my child is thinking, engaging, and learning how to make sense of the world. And that’s worth every minute of answering why dinosaurs don’t wear shoes. Sometimes, the greatest gift we can give our children isn’t answers but the space to develop their own theories—however fanciful—followed by gentle guidance toward understanding.

So, the next time your child asks you “why”, take a deep breath, embrace the moment, and remember: you’re raising a thinker. And who knows? Their next “why” might even teach you something new.



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# SONGKRAN WORD SEARCH

Jump into the Songkran fun and see if you can find all the words in the grid below!

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B	B	P	W	K	F	M	w	N	U
L	A	L	D	R	W	E	A	B	R
M	H	D	E	I	X	R	T	E	M
R	S	O	R	S	K	I	E	W	S
G	A	F	U	G	S	T	R	F	T
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# BOOKS TO INSPIRE

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## BIG MAGIC: CREATIVE LIVING BEYOND FEAR

By Elizabeth Gilbert



"Big Magic" challenges the myth that creativity is a rare gift bestowed upon only a select few. Instead, Elizabeth Gilbert reminds us that creativity is a force available to everyone, waiting to be embraced. Through her concept of Big Magic—the mysterious energy behind ideas—she encourages us to approach creativity with curiosity, not fear.

One of the book's core insights is that ideas are like living beings, often seeking out those who are open and willing to act on them. Gilbert inspires us to be playful and persistent, urging us to let go of perfectionism and self-doubt, which can block our creative flow. The book is filled with personal stories and wisdom, emphasizing that creativity is not about the pressure to succeed, but about the joy and freedom found in the act of creation itself. Gilbert encourages us to make space for inspiration, trust the process, and allow ideas to flow naturally.

*"Big Magic" was published in 2016 by Riverhead Books. You can find a paperback copy in the nonfiction section of the Neilson Hays Library.*

## WHAT DO YOU DO WITH AN IDEA?

Written by Kobi Yamada and illustrated by Mae Besom



"What Do You Do With an Idea?" explores the journey of idea generation and creative growth. The story follows a child who is initially unsure about an idea that feels out of place and overwhelming. As the idea develops, the child learns to embrace and nurture it, realizing that even the most unexpected ideas can lead to powerful results.

The book delivers an essential message about the creative process: don't dismiss your ideas, no matter how strange or intimidating they may seem at first. It encourages readers to give their ideas space to grow, evolve, and transform into something meaningful. Mae Besom's soft, whimsical illustrations visually capture this process, highlighting the transformation from doubt to confidence.

This story is not just for children but for anyone engaged in creative work or idea generation. It's a reminder that every great innovation starts as an idea, and the key is to trust the process and let it flourish.

*"What Do You Do With an Idea?" was originally published in 2013 by Compendium Incorporated. A copy of "What Do You Do With an Idea?" and "What Do You Do With a Problem?" can be found in the Children's Corner of the library.*



**Prepared by Kit Lang for Neilson Hays Library. IG: @mskitlang**

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# AN ODE TO THE HUMBLE CARDBOARD BOX

Who doesn't love a good cardboard box? This week Joe is thinking about all the bizarre things his children love to play with—from wastebaskets and boxes to stones and stairs.

Photo by Carolin Voelker from Baseimage



## About the Author

Joe and his wife Diane moved to Thailand in 2018. Since the arrival of their son Martin in 2021 and daughter Alice in 2024, Joe has been a stay-at-home father. The whole family enjoys BAMBI playgroups and Thai beach holidays.



We all love getting out of Bangkok for different reasons. Marty and Mummy love playing on the beach, I look forward to running in the countryside, and at eight months old we finally learned what Alice travels for. As we stepped into our hotel room, her little face lit up with joy as she caught sight of the wastebasket and crawled toward it. As I watched her enthusiastically licking it, I wondered why we go to so much trouble cleaning and sterilizing her bottles, given all the disgusting things she tries to eat. My reverie was interrupted by my wife suggesting I should perhaps stop Alice before she ate the whole thing. Having duly rescued the wastebasket and restored a disappointed Alice to her toys, I started to ponder all the things that children seem to prefer to the toys we lovingly provide them with.

### MAKING TRACKS

On our last trip to the UK, the highlight for Marty was the IKEA delivery. Hiding the screws and instructions while I struggled to assemble beds and cupboards was fun, but the giant cardboard boxes were the real joy. We built castles, trains, and trucks. Then we turned them into railway tracks that wound around the living room and were tripping Mummy and Daddy up for weeks. It was a sad day when the ramshackle old cardboard line was consigned to the trash, but Marty was consoled by the promise of the two unused boxes waiting under the bed for next year's visit and a new era of epic construction.

This love of the cardboard box seems to come instinctively to our children as Alice is already striving to reach any boxes she sees, and once placed in her cardboard cave, she sits there, happily giggling to herself and peeping out at passers by. She was also quickly converted to one of Marty's favorite games: cardboard chariots. Where that reluctant old steed, Daddy, is forced to push Marty at high speeds, and Alice rather more sedately, around the living room race track, delivering thrilling cornering and spectacular crashes until an exhausted Daddy's back cries "no more!"

My favorite box game is the simple "Mail the Marty", where Marty is shut in a box and totally fails to stay quiet as he is delivered as a "surprise" present to an unsuspecting Mummy. If only, I sometimes think, I were allowed to really mail him off to distant relatives. He seems keen—it's just those pesky post office rules that stop me, and maybe a little concern for his health.

### DIGGER DELIGHTS

As a two- and three-year-old, Marty was a big fan of diggers. After the tragic death of yet another cheap, plastic digger, we decided to get a stronger metal digger. "Marty will be so pleased," we thought. "He'll play with it all the time." Well, we were sort of right—every day the digger would be carefully slid out of its box, and every evening it would be lovingly tucked back

in before bed, even if that meant fishing the box out of the trash. Sometimes the digger would even do some digging, but mainly it just went in and out of its box, for weeks on end.

It's not just cardboard boxes and wastebaskets that are more exciting than the things that come inside them. Marty's first Christmas was all about the wrapping paper, and Alice followed suit this year, contentedly chewing the wrapping paper while ignoring the expensive sensory toy that Granny had lovingly chosen.

Speaking of sensory toys, until recently the only thing that Alice really wanted in life—apart from the wastebasket and every electrical outlet—was a bit of crumpled newspaper or plastic. No toy could match those satisfying sounds. Now she's broadened her horizons to include sand and gravel, which she'll crawl infeasible distances to taste. The only tastier thing is whatever food she can find on the floor. Like a squirrel, she seems to primarily treat mealtimes as an opportunity to fill her secret floor food reserves—one for now, three for later is her approach to any plate of food. Perhaps she simply prefers the flavor of lightly trampled food?

### FINDING TREASURE

Martin is rarely unhappy to be outside, but one day nothing seemed to please him in the park, and we were all about to return home hot and bad-tempered—until he caught sight of something in the trash can. Was that a broken toy car? Whatever it was, it instantly became the most desirable item in this two-year-old's whole world.





Heat and unhappiness forgotten, he clung to the edge of the trash can, desperately trying to reach the broken red car. When it was finally rescued, it proved to be missing a wheel and cab, but nonetheless it provided a joy that was ended only by the approach of bedtime.

As we headed home I subtly returned the car to the trash and thought no more of it. Until the next evening, when an excited Marty announced we were going to the park to play. When we arrived he marched straight to the trash can and searched for his new favorite toy. The next evening we were not surprised to find this routine repeated, but fearful that the garbage collector might come, we decided to keep the car. Sadly, something about bringing it home killed its magic appeal, and a few short days later it was consigned to the trash for the final time, unnoticed and unlamented.

## BEACH BOUNTY

Of course this love of salvaged toys could be inherited, given that Martin and Alice's entire, and substantial,



beach toy collection consists of things Mummy and Daddy have found on beach runs. This is why they have eight plastic turtles, four rakes, and innumerable fish, but only one four-inch-long spade. I've been banned from collecting any more fish moulds on my runs but have my eyes constantly peeled for digging implements. Of course it's important when retrieving toys on the beach to make sure they have been abandoned and washed up by the tide rather than merely resting while their owners seek ice cream and a little shade. No one enjoys being chased down the beach by a hysterical six-year-old, and their irate family, whose favorite spade you've just stolen.

## STEPPING UP

Now what would you consider the key requirement of a good playgroup? The snacks? Water play? Exotic toys? Nope, for Marty, it was all about the stairs. We'd pay our expensive entry fee to a state-of-the-art venue and then spend our entire visit climbing up and down the steps. Of course, when we thought we'd learned our lesson and took him to a free park with a few steps, they turned out to be entirely the wrong kind of stairs and Marty insisted we go home.

Like any good amateur enthusiast, Marty is keen that everyone should share his passion for his chosen hobby. So he insists that now Alice can crawl, she must practice stairs regularly. His dedication appears to be rubbing off as Alice frequently attempts the long and perilous ascent of our stairs, during which she'll inevitably teeter uneasily until falling on her nose. Like a true climber she is undeterred by a few tears and soon prepares to try again. It looks like I'd better start researching Bangkok's best staircases again.

*Photos courtesy of the author*



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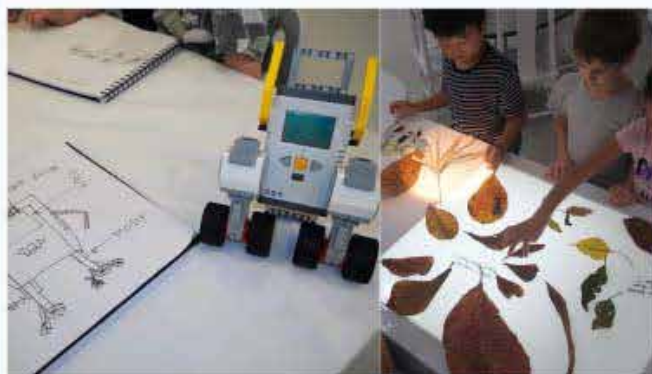


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- Elements of light and shadows
- Structural landscapes



**Ages:** 3 - 11 years (K1~Y6)  
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# BAMBI ANNUAL REPORT 2024

This report was presented at the annual general meeting held on March 19, 2025 at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel in Sukhumvit, Bangkok.





BAMBI EXECUTIVE BOARD’S REPORT

2024 was an exciting year for BAMBI with lots of new initiatives, some goodbyes, and some new faces joining the team. This report aims to present a snapshot of BAMBI’s journey in the past year.

With BAMBI choosing to maintain its management structure of delegating specific responsibilities within the chairwoman’s role to an executive board elected by the committee, Chiaki Takegawa, Sara Chow, and Rocky Farheen led the organization into 2024 as Executive Board members. By the end of the first quarter though, Sara stepped down from her role and Daisy Soongswang took over from her. With the support of the committee members, the Executive Board worked diligently to guide BAMBI through the year, ensuring continuity, collaboration, and a shared commitment to supporting the community.

Notable highlights of the year include the opening of many new playgroups in response to the changing needs of our members; BAMBI’s popular annual events—Halloween, Splash Bashes, Songkran Fiesta, Yard Sale, Volunteer Appreciation Day, and Christmas lunch with Santa; a variety of Me-Time activities enjoyed by members; greater engagement and growth in the number of followers on social media; new relationships forged with new benefits partners, venues, and sponsors; and a total profit of approximately \$257,739 from all offerings in the year. Nearly all departments generated profits, and in 2025, BAMBI will reinvest these into enhanced and impactful initiatives for its members. 2025 will also see BAMBI amplifying its charitable impact, extending further support to those in need and strengthening its commitment to giving back.

The Executive Board is dedicated to cultivating a warm and supportive working environment within the BAMBI team. As 2024 came to a close, Lynda Suchintabundid and Frances Billones officially stepped up to succeed Daisy and Chiaki, joining Rocky to form BAMBI’s

Executive Board for 2025. Looking ahead, the Board aims to welcome new, like-minded individuals into the organization and drive BAMBI to new heights, making it more vibrant, inclusive, and impactful than ever before.


BUMPS & BABIES

BAMBI’s Bumps & Babies team is dedicated to supporting expectant parents and those with infants by providing a welcoming and supportive community. Through playgroups, informative sessions, and social events, the team helps new and expecting parents connect, share experiences, and access valuable resources during this special stage of parenthood. In 2024, headed by Joanna (Jo) Cox as the coordinator and supported by volunteer Iasnaia (Yaz) Maximo, the team organized and offered the following activities and events:

Activity / Event	Total number of sessions in the year
Small World Playgroup	10
Infant Massage	25
Pregnancy Info	7
Splash Bash	3

Notable changes in 2024:

- Closure of the Small World playgroup in May due to the lack of a playgroup leader and venue.
- Reduction in the frequency of Infant Massage sessions from weekly to twice monthly due to a conflict of interest with the venue. Since mothers preferred the weekly option though, this resulted in a drop in the number of attendees.

2024 AT A GLANCE			
<b>\$1,334,090.7</b> Total revenue	<b>\$1,076,351.36</b> Total expenses	<b>424</b> Members at year end	<b>55</b> Volunteers at year end
<b>16,535</b> Followers on social media	<b>51,694</b> Visitors to the website	<b>148</b> Playgroups	<b>45</b> Bumps & Babies initiatives
<b>66</b> Activities for older children	<b>10</b> Me-Time activities for parents	<b>114</b> Number of print copies distributed	

**Highlights of 2024:**

- Growth of pregnancy information session on birth partner's preparation into a well-established and highly attended event
- A total profit of \$24,308 generated from total income of \$49,950 versus total expense of \$25,642

**Plans for 2025:**

- Recruitment of a new Bumps & Babies coordinator following Jo's resignation
- Expansion of operations and offerings for members by recruiting more volunteers and establishing connections with new venues and partners

**PLAYGROUPS**

BAMBI's playgroups provide a fun and engaging environment for young children to play, explore, and socialize while offering parents a supportive community to connect with one another. With a variety of playgroups held across Bangkok, the Playgroups team ensures that families have access to safe, inclusive, and stimulating spaces where children can learn and grow through play.

2024 was another successful and profitable year for the team. Headed by coordinator, Hilda Anita, and supported by playgroup assistant, Sassy Bairan, and playgroup leaders Ratthar Sridum, Nana Jiravaraphan, Ashley Mitchell, Shivangi Tripathi, Arisa Hirade, Rei Koyama, Mika Takahashi, Kahoru Matsumoto, Hilda Anita, Mimi Su, Ting Rodgers, Nobuka Ishikawa, Natasha Duffin-Jones, Deshna Bhansali, Ryoko Uchiyama, Deshna Bhansali, Annika Timm, Makiko Takishima, Risa Imaizumi, Emiko Morita, and Padonda Ali, the team hosted the following playgroups in 2024 in coordination with venues across town:

**Notable changes in 2024:**

- Suspension of the British Club Playgroup due to high venue cost and low attendance

Playgroups	Total number of sessions in the year
Wonderkids	30
Kiddiezilla	18
Kiddieville	38
British Club	25
Little Birds	11
Little Treehouse	4
Yenakart	8
Saturday Nana	10
Little Panda	4

**Highlights of 2024:**

- BAMBI playgroups received a total of 2,044 attendees during the year. Kiddieville and Wonderkids continued as the highest attended playgroups in 2024. Little Birds and Little Treehouse enjoyed full bookings but failed to reach maximum capacity due to no-shows and cancellations.
- Launch of three new playgroups:
  - Kiddiezilla on August 13, 2024
  - Little Panda on November 19, 2024
  - Little Treehouse on August 30, 2024
- The Playgroup Leaders' Breakfast Morning held on June 21, 2024 at Hoshi Cafe, Ekkamai
- A total profit of \$120,363 generated from total income of \$231,233 versus total expense of \$110,870

**Plans for 2025:**

- Recruit more playgroup leaders to replace those who are stepping down.
- Launch one new playgroup at Sparkles and Sprinkle in February 2025 and others at various international schools in mid 2025.
- Expand operations and offerings for members by recruiting more volunteers and establishing connections with new venues and partners
- Organize refresher training for all playgroup leaders and the annual Playgroup Leaders' Breakfast Morning. This event gives the team a chance to socialize and share information while enjoying the venue's refreshments and play space.

**ACTIVITIES**

BAMBI's Activities team organizes engaging and enriching experiences for children aged three and above, providing them with opportunities to learn, play, and develop new skills. From creative workshops to active play sessions, the team curates a diverse range of activities designed to encourage exploration, socialization, and fun in a supportive community setting.

In the absence of an activities coordinator, Executive Board member Lynda Suchintabud managed the operations of the department with support from activities leaders Maria Hinde, Takako Toyama, Rosie Zhang, Hideko Narusawa, Eriko Yoneyama. The activities offered in 2024 included:

Activity	Total number of sessions in the year
Toddler Music	32
Football	30
Toddler Tunes	4



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Notable changes in 2024:

- Closure of Toddler Tunes in February 2024 due to low attendance and high operational costs (venue fee of ₱2000 per event and instructor fee of ₱1300 per event) resulting in losses.

Highlights of 2024:

- Successful delivery of activities to 736 children over the year.
- Healthy attendance rates in 2024 for Toddler Music, the only dip occurring in August and September with many attendees returning to school. Nonetheless, this activity made an overall profit in 2024.
- Increased participation, higher sign-up rates, and an improvement in show-up rates for football activities due to the creation of a LINE group to boost engagement, improve attendance, and share regular updates and reminders. The recruitment of a new coach also resulted in an operational cost saving of ₱500 per session, and greater engagement from the children due to the new coach’s personalised teaching approach.

Total income, expenses and profit from all BAMBI Activities in 2024

	Toddler Music	Toddler Tunes	Football
Income in ₱	132,525	9,700	43,050
Expense in ₱	109,779.76	13,613	58,956
Profit/Loss in ₱	22,745.24	(3,913)	(15,906)

Plans for 2025:

- Organize after-school activities for children aged six and above
- Recruit more activities leaders

EVENTS

The BAMBI Events team takes pride in delivering well-organized, engaging, and memorable events that bring families together and strengthen our community. As with previous years, in 2024, the team planned and hosted

all of BAMBI’s annual events with great enthusiasm, dedication, and attention to detail.

The year started with the Executive Board running events for the first half of 2024 given the absence of an events coordinator but ended with Clarisse Chan at the helm.

Highlights in 2024:

- The Songkran Fiesta, BAMBI Monster Mash Halloween Party, and BAMBI Christmas Lunch with Santa, which were held at Wells International School, American School of Bangkok, and Hilton Hotel (Ploenchit), respectively. Over 200 families attended all three events and the Halloween and Christmas events even generated profits.
- The annual Yard Sale in May, which generated ₱3,944 in table-booking fees, all of which were donated to the Giving Tree Project—a community-driven initiative focused on planting trees to promote environmental conservation, enhance biodiversity, and foster ecological awareness among local residents. Baby and child goods leftover from the Swap Shop during the event were also donated to the Baan Nokkamin Foundation.
- Volunteer Appreciation Day held at Safari Garden. This was a great success that celebrated all BAMBI volunteers and thanked them for their hard work throughout the year. 31 families participated in the day’s festivities.

Plans for 2025:

- Recruit an events assistant
- Continue to uphold tradition by organizing three major events that have become annual highlights for everyone—the Songkran Splash Fiesta, Halloween Party, and Christmas Party
- Closely collaborate with the BAMBI Charities department to explore new initiatives as well as organize a Charity Day and the annual Yard Sale

NEW MEMBERS AND POP UP PLAYGROUPS

BAMBI believes in establishing a community where all families feel welcome and supported, fostering meaningful connections through shared experiences and resources. In 2024, The New Members and Pop up

Total income, expenses and profit from BAMBI events in 2024

	Songkran Fiesta	Monster Mash Halloween Party	Christmas Lunch with Santa	Volunteer Appreciation Day
No. of Families	114	143	32	31
Income in ₱	19,400	31,150	26,000	N/A
Expense in ₱	30,340	11,091	37,805	30,122
Profit/Loss in ₱	(10,940)	20,059	(11,805)	(30,122)



Playgroups team led by Shelka Sharma and supported by volunteers Sayoko Okamoto, Jeannie Kim, Emily Crane, and Aya Yamanaka worked hard to promote this belief and introduce BAMBI and its offerings to families in Bangkok.

### Highlights in 2024:

- Six New Members' Coffee Mornings held during the year. A total of 122 families attended these.
- Five Pop Up Playgroups held during the year. A total of 405 families attended these.
- A total profit of ฿13,740 was generated from total income of ฿19,600 versus total expense of ฿7,300

### Plans for 2025:

- Organize more pop up playgroups and coffee mornings to boost community engagement and membership
- Widen BAMBI's reach and recognition by exploring opportunities to collaborate with new schools
- Expand the team by recruiting more volunteers and assistants

## BAMBI ME-TIME

Managed solely by Me-Time Coordinator Aoi Nakazawa, who took over from Aya Yamanaka in March 2024, BAMBI Me-Time activities have flourished into a diverse and engaging program, offering enriching experiences that cater to parents' well-being and personal growth. In 2024, 59 parents from the BAMBI community participated in the following Me-Time activities:

- Compassion Gathering with Cecilia
- Body Check with Medical Treatment
- Thai Silhouette Painting
- Groove Dance
- Embroidery
- UCC Coffee Workshop
- Zumba
- Yayaz Chocolat Workshop
- Dot Mandala Workshop
- Mini Terrazzo Workshop

### Highlights of the 2024:

- Greater variety of activities and workshops focusing on food, fitness and art were offered in 2024 compared to previous years.
- Since March 2024, all Me-Time activities have been profitable, thanks to successful negotiations with venues and instructors on costs related to refreshments, rentals, and fees.
- A total profit of ฿241 was generated from total income of ฿22,075 versus total expense of ฿22,316.

### Plans for 2025:

- Conduct a members' survey to gauge demand for Me-Time activities and understand members' interests
- Explore potential activities and workshops across Bangkok based on the survey findings
- Recruit more volunteers in the Me-Time department if the survey reveals that there is demand for evening,

- weekend, and/or more frequent Me-Time activities
- Design and implement strategies to reach out to non-members as well

## BAMBI MAGAZINE

2024 was another exciting year for the BAMBI Magazine team with new themes covered and fresh perspectives introduced, enriching content for our diverse readership. Sanam Rahman continued in her role as the editor, while Joe Barker took over the role of deputy editor from Anelia Van Zyl in early 2024. The rest of the team consisted of assistant editors Monisha Gurbani, Rachel Ofo, Natasha Duffin-Jones, and Chrissy O'Brien, feature writers Jeannie Kim, Kelly Patten, and Sheena Low, and photographers Jana Capek, Chikako Takahashi, and Chihiro Hiki.

### Highlights of 2024:

- 11 issues of BAMBI Magazine published over the year
- 114 articles and other contributions curated from external and in-house writers. Topics covered included child development, parental musings, diversity, mental health, crafts, book reviews, gender, nutrition, and so on.
- Around 400 print copies distributed every month
- New design and page layout implemented in the magazine
- Close collaboration with BAMBI Media team to boost magazine's online presence
- Built and maintained connections with new and old external contributors such as Anatta Zarchi from New Counselling Services (NCS), Kit Lang from the Neilson Hays Library, Anelia Van Zyl, and others
- Conducted BAMBI Magazine Readers' Satisfaction and Interest Survey 2024

### Plans for 2025:

- Continue to forge and nurture relationships with new and existing contributors to bring more exciting content
- Implement new strategies to further boost readers' engagement
- Recruit assistant editors and invest in skills enrichment programs for the team



- Expand “Fun Corner” to include content relevant to two groups of young readers: 0–3 years and above three years
- Conduct a readers’ satisfaction survey to gauge readers’ interests and the magazine’s performance
- Plan content for 2026 based on the survey results
- Explore the possibility of creating a separate BAMBI Photography department to be led by Jana Capek

## MEDIA ACTIVITIES

In 2024, the BAMBI Media team made great strides, fostering community engagement through creative content designed by BAMBI promotional designers Yumi Shimada and Atsuko Ikeda, and setting the stage for new initiatives in 2025. All social media operations were handled by coordinator Eva Ngolo with support from Arisa Hirade, social media assistant. Towards the end of the year, Arisa was being trained to take on the role of media coordinator from January 2025 following Eva’s resignation in November.

BAMBI Social Media Growth: Followers and Engagement Trends (2024–2025)

Platform	Followers in 2025	Followers in 2024	Growth %
Facebook	15379	14900	3.2%
Instagram (IG)	1117	673	65.5%
LinkedIn	39	24	62.5%

### Highlights of 2024:

- Crossing the “1000 followers” threshold on IG
- Successful expansion of BAMBI’s reach and community involvement (as reflected by increased registrations and participation in playgroups) driven by the team’s strategic content efforts—enhancing IG engagement through more posts and reels, and simplifying the registration process with direct links in stories
- Growth in the number of followers. Shares and tags by members of the BAMBI community, in particular, helped attract more followers.

### Plans for 2025:

- Sign an annual agreement with BKK Kids for advertising placement
- Recruit a social media assistant
- Continue to enhance IG reels and story posts for greater engagement

## MEMBERSHIP AND DATABASE

The BAMBI Membership and Database team plays a vital role in managing member registrations, renewals, and volunteer applications, ensuring a seamless experience for families joining our community. In 2024, Database Coordinator Daisy Soongswang led assistants Yoko Mito and Shiwani Palikhe to better support BAMBI’s growing

network in coordination with other departments.

### Notable Changes in 2024:

- 279 new memberships and 141 renewals were processed
- At the end of 2024, Daisy began training Shiwani Palikhe to take over the role of database coordinator from January 2025

### Highlights of 2024:

- Collaboration with Glue Up and the BAMBI Website team to migrate the previous database to the Glue Up platform. This involved training all departments in implementing activities and events through the new system.
- Supporting onsite membership registrations and renewals throughout the year
- Achieving significant reductions in returned magazines each month by refining the database, removing expired memberships, and filtering out invalid addresses

### Plans for 2025:

- Create manuals for tasks within the Database department
- Continue supporting various BAMBI departments with onboarding volunteers
- Recruit another database assistant

## MEMBER BENEFITS

The BAMBI Member Benefits team is dedicated to securing valuable perks for our members by partnering with businesses and institutions across Bangkok. In 2024, Lynda Suchintabundid, Benefits Coordinator, single-handedly expanded our network of benefit providers, offering exclusive discounts on refreshments, services, and family-friendly activities to enhance the BAMBI membership experience. At the end of the year, total benefits available for all BAMBI members stood at 34.

### Highlights of 2024:

- Four new benefits partners gained in the last year—Hakata, Bangkok Hospital, UCC Coffee Roastery, and Nextgen

### Plans for 2025:

- Continue exploring more benefits for BAMBI members by reaching out to businesses and institutions that are of relevance to the BAMBI community and securing partnerships with them
- Recruit a new benefits coordinator

## WEBSITE

The BAMBI Website team serves as the organization’s technological backbone, managing everything from website maintenance to database support and event scheduling on Glue Up. In 2024, their expertise ensured smooth digital operations, enhancing efficiency across BAMBI’s platforms and improving the overall member





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experience. In 2024, Frances Billones served as the website coordinator and Anshul Singhal joined as the website assistant in May.

#### Highlights of 2024:

- 51,694 visitors to the website in 2024
- Recruitment and training of Anshul
- Successful development and implementation of an efficient template and workflow for large annual events, such as the Yard Sale and Christmas Parties, which can now be duplicated for future events

#### Plans for 2025:

- Divide the website coordinator responsibilities to make the role more manageable and sustainable, as its complexity has made recruitment and retention challenging
- Collaborate with the Database department to manage our contacts allowance and ensure we have sufficient numbers for incoming members each year

## CHARITIES

Since its founding, BAMBI has been committed to giving back to the community by supporting non-profit organizations that share similar values and vision. Through both cash and in-kind contributions, BAMBI's Charities department plays a vital role in making a meaningful impact, ensuring that resources reach those who need them most.

In 2024, Lynda Suchintabundid led BAMBI's charitable efforts by organizing the annual Yard Sale in coordination with the Events team in May and the Giving Tree Project at the end of the year. Leftover baby and child goods from the Swap Shop at the Yard Sale were donated to the Baan Nokkamin Foundation, and all proceeds from table-bookings (฿3,944) were used to finance six out of 26 gift bags donated to the Giving Tree Project, a community driven initiative focused on planting trees to promote environmental conservation, enhance biodiversity, and foster ecological awareness among local residents.

#### Plans for 2025:

- Coordinate with the BAMBI Events team to organise more events that will help raise funds for charity

## TREASURY

BAMBI's Treasury department, consisting of Treasurer Ritika Bhargava and assistants Saeko Omura, Takako Toyama, and Rieko Takagi, is responsible for managing the organization's financial resources with transparency and accountability. From budgeting and financial planning to overseeing petty cash and expenses, the department ensures that BAMBI operates sustainably while maximizing its support for charitable initiatives and community programs. SAS Group managed BAMBI's administrative accounting services, and Khun Tan at S.T. Accounting & Taxation remained as the auditor.

#### Highlights of 2024:

- Net profit of ฿257,700. This is higher than in the previous year when a net loss of ฿170,000 was accrued. In 2024, BAMBI's revenues were ฿1.33 million, about 12 percent lower than 2023 revenues, but 12 percent higher than the budgeted revenues. Expenses were ฿1.07 million, 36 percent less than budgeted. This year was profitable as we were able to cut down on our costs through the following measures:
  - Closure of British Club Playgroup in December 2024, leading to savings in venue fees.
  - Re-plugging Yard Sale table-booking fees into financing the Giving Tree project.
- Additionally, playgroup bookings increased, driven by an 11.6 percent increase in memberships from last year, leading to greater revenues.

#### Plans for 2025:

- Move BAMBI banking operations online. We plan to open a new bank account for petty cash transactions online. We also plan to move BAMBI's payments from a hard copy check-writing process to a digital payment system in order to reduce the finance team's workload and BAMBI's payment processing timeline.
- Implement data-driven decision making based on regular monitoring of the annual budget. We will put in place a process to monitor spendings against the budget allocated, and discuss every month if any spending exceeds the budget. The formulation of an annual budget, and the implementation of a monthly tracking system, will together allow BAMBI's committee to make data-driven decisions so that we can increase revenue and decrease expenses.
- Utilize this year's budget and make spending adjustments throughout the year as appropriate.

We welcome any questions you may have on the above information. Please write to us at [treasurer@bambiweb.org](mailto:treasurer@bambiweb.org) or [chairwoman@bambiweb.org](mailto:chairwoman@bambiweb.org).

*Photos by Jana Capek*



**BAMBI's Profit/Loss Statement for 2024**

	Jan - Dec 23	Jan - Dec 24	%Δ YOY
<b>REVENUE</b>			
Playgroups	813,300.00	720,060.00	-11%
Events	60,380.00	68,370.00	13%
Memberships	631,900.00	523,600.00	-17%
Misc. Revenue	16,135.84	22,060.77	37%
Total Revenue	1,521,715.84	1,334,090.77	-12%
<b>EXPENSES</b>			
Advertising	1,850.00	5,200.86	181%
Office Expenses	15,994.00	6,509.10	-59%
Meeting Expenses	104,384.13	125,489.04	20%
Maid/Cleaning		500.00	
Transportation/Parking	120,154.00	101,035.00	-16%
Vendors at Events	129,956.67		
Supplies	22,930.02	18,742.00	-18%
Gifts to Volunteers	62,290.00	35,000.00	-44%
IT, Computer, Domain	288,294.03	83,370.67	-71%
Professional Fees	124,585.00	152,533.00	22%
Rent and Rates (Venues)	514,071.91	477,516.06	-7%
Donations (Charities)	221,478.00	3,944.05	-98%
Misc. Expenses	20,863.37	5,948.54	-71%
Non Deductible & Depreciation	64,957.35	60,562.17	-7%
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	1,691,808.48	1,076,351.36	-36%
Profit (Loss) for the Year	-170,092.64	257,739.41	

**THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS**

BAMBI extends its gratitude to the following business and institutions for their invaluable support throughout 2024:

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Bumrungrad Hospital	Little Gym	Urban flower
Curtain Up	Neilson Hays Library	Verde
Ergobaby	Nextgen	Wonder Woods
GAB	Pain Away Clinic	Co-learning Space
Hegen	Plantoyo	& Kids Cafe

**Venues for New Members' Coffee Morning & Pop Up Playgroup:**

Brighton College Bangkok  
Little Koala International Kindergarten  
Kids Academy International School  
First Steps Pre-School  
OISCA International School and Nursery  
Melodies International School Kindergarten  
Precious Learners World  
St. Andrews International School Sathorn  
Storytime Preschool

**Venues for Playgroups:**

British Club  
Wonder Woods Co-learning  
Space & Kids Cafe  
Playville  
Noddy by Elizabeth Pre-School  
Nancy Language School  
Kidzilla  
Storytime Preschool  
Little Treehouse



# PLAYGROUPS & ACTIVITIES

BAMBI holds regular playgroups and activities around town, open to both BAMBI members and non-members. Our playgroups are characterized by free play and the use of venues' toys and playgrounds. BAMBI Activities provide a wide range of opportunities for children aged one to six years old to develop their athletic, creative and cognitive skills.



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For more information about the playgroups and activities we offer, please scan the QR code above. Bookings are required to join playgroups and activities. Register today for unlimited fun and the chance to be a part of a great community!



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# KEEPING RELATIONSHIPS STRONG THROUGH DISAGREEMENTS

In the chaos of child care and daily life it can be all too easy for minor disagreements with our partners to spiral into major arguments or sullen silences. Anna has some great advice on how to work together, calmly and effectively, with our other halves.



Photo by by Aflo Images



## About the Author

Anna works for New Counseling Service (NCS), the first and only licensed mental health center in the heart of Bangkok. NCS has provided counseling services in Thailand and surrounding regions for over 20 years, with therapists specializing in a wide variety of issues such as anxiety, depression, work stress, relationships, and more.

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Relationships and marriages can be tricky. People are all unique: we come from different backgrounds and cultures, have different values and needs, and different ways of doing things. No two people are the same, no matter how similar, and even the closest of friends have their disagreements. Not seeing eye to eye on everything is normal; it's how we deal with it that shapes the course of a relationship.

## COMMUNICATION

So how can couples keep relationships strong through disagreements and arguments? Much of it boils down to one main factor: communication.

New Counseling Service (NCS) counselor Rex stresses the importance of defining commitment. Ask each other these questions: *What is our commitment to each other? What does that mean in terms of accountability?* People don't necessarily have the same understanding of what a relationship entails; therefore, conversations like this can help couples make sure they are on the same page.

Miscommunication often stems from assumptions. We naturally assume that people see and understand things the way we do, but that isn't always the case. According to NCS's founder and counselor Johanna, one of the most common causes of conflict among couples is how to split responsibilities. This includes finances, chores, taking the children to school, and so on. "These things need to be determined beforehand. Both parties should express their expectations clearly," she explains.

Communication also means talking about your past, your values, and your needs. "Past experiences shape different needs and values," NCS counselor Pam says. "Understanding your partner's experiences can help you better understand where they are coming from."

Relationships often go sour when values don't align. If possible, try to find a middle ground where your values meet. Most importantly, respect each other even through disagreements. That doesn't mean you shouldn't talk about it—keeping things hidden can often be a relationship's downfall. However, those discussions should remain calm and respectful.

Be aware of each other's needs and try to imagine how the other person is feeling. NCS counselor Dave adds, "Don't expect your partner to meet all of your social and emotional needs. Some needs need to be met outside the relationship, such as with friends and family." This also helps prevent isolation.

## FIND A MIDDLE GROUND

Finding a middle ground doesn't mean that one party should completely change their own needs to accommodate the other person's—having mutual agreements on things like personal space and boundaries is much needed. If you have trouble finding a



Photo by Andres Ayrton from Pexels

middle ground, you can always see a couples counselor or mediator to help figure it out. Couples counseling can be a great way to strengthen relationships. There's no need to wait for a major issue to arise in order to see a counselor. You can either go ahead and book a session together, or, if you come in for individual counseling due to relationship issues, the counselor might recommend couples counseling if you're comfortable with that.

## HOW TO CONSTRUCTIVELY COMMUNICATE

You might be wondering how to actually put this into practice. It's easy to say you'll try to stay calm during a discussion only to lose your cool. Our counselors at NCS have compiled a list of communication tips that can help you and your partner engage in more productive conversations.

### "I" statements

Start your sentences with "I" instead of "you". Try starting with, "I think that..." or "I've been feeling...". This helps center your words around what you're feeling. On the other hand, starting sentences with "you" often leads to assumptions and attacks that escalate the argument. For example, "I've been feeling pretty lonely on the weekend as you're often out with your friends. What do you think about having one day together and one day to hang out separately?" versus "You're always going out with your friends and leaving me alone." Try to imagine the tone that often accompanies these statements. The first one will likely elicit a better response that will help meet your needs.

### Avoid "why" questions

Asking questions that start with "why" often requires a response that acts as a defense. For example, "Why are you always going out?" Instead, try, "I feel a little lonely since you go out a lot these days. How do you feel about spending some time together?" This and "I" statements help people avoid accusations.

### Differentiate between fact and feeling

The way we express our feelings can often turn into a judgment. For example, "I feel like you never help me with anything" is a judgement, not a feeling. Expressing a non-judgmental feeling would be, "I feel pretty upset that you haven't been helping out." Upset is the feeling, and you haven't been helping out explains how you view the situation without framing it as an emotion in itself.

### Effective listening

Let the other person finish talking before responding. People often interrupt each other when they disagree, but this only leads to a heated discussion where both people are talking but neither is truly listening. Let your partner finish what they're saying even if you completely disagree. Try to really hear them out despite your anger or frustration.

### Summarizing

Once your partner has finished talking, summarize what they said and ask if you understood correctly. This prevents misunderstandings and ensures that you got the right message.

Using these tips does not necessarily mean that you will end up agreeing with each other. In which case the next step would be to see whether this is something you can agree to disagree on.

Last but not least, a healthy relationship should ideally be based on friendship. Spending quality time together is essential in strengthening a couple's bond. Do something both of you enjoy, or take turns choosing

an activity. Enjoy each other's company without distractions—avoid work calls or excessively texting. And of course, continue having open conversations about your needs, values, expectations, and feelings. These things sometimes change as we grow, which can potentially alter the relationship dynamic. Talk about how these things have changed for you if needed, and try the tips given above.





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# TODDLERS AND THEIR TOYS

There are a lot of great toys out there for toddlers. Kelly explores some examples and reminds us that the perfect toys for our families are the ones we love, not the ones we see on our Instagram feeds.



## About the Author

Kelly is mom to Freya and Daisy and recently went back to work as an early years teacher. She previously worked as a primary educator and literacy specialist. Kelly loves reading fiction books, listening to true crime podcasts, and watching Disney princess movies.





Photo by InfonesiaNatureID from Pixabay

## #NOTMYKIDS

If you've dipped your toe into the side of social media that focuses on raising toddlers, I'm sure your algorithm looks something like mine: #Montessori #PositiveParenting #LearningThroughPlay. While there are some truly amazing ideas floating about—freezing toys into ice cubes, anyone?—it can feel overwhelming when you scroll through an endless feed of perfectly organized playrooms and kids who just want to fold pretend laundry and wash pretend dishes. Not my kids. Instagram can dredge up deep-seated feelings about parenthood. Am I failing my kids? Will they fall behind? A healthy reminder is that we all want what's best for our kids. It may look different from family to family, but that's what makes us the best parents for our own children!

## OPEN-ENDED TOYS

Before you develop an inferiority complex about toys and play, let's explore some options that are available. Social media does a great job convincing parents that open-ended toys are essential—and they are! An open-ended toy has multiple functions and there is no end goal. Favorite examples include blocks, dolls, toy cars, animal figures, and playdough

among many others. These toys are often beloved because there is no "right way" to play with them, and they are designed to inspire creativity and imaginative play. My daughters love our play scarves—some days they are lily pads and we are frogs, other days the floor is lava and only the scarves are safe. My one-year-old loves them for peekaboo and her latest game is making everyone wear one as a hat. We've used them as blankets when we play Christmas Eve, and they always seem to find a way to work themselves into restaurant play. Open-ended toys encourage language and communication skills as the "rules" are invented as the game is played. Critical thinking skills are used as children analyze and evaluate the toys and how they will be incorporated into play.

## CLOSE-ENDED TOYS

While open-ended toys encourage imagination and creativity, close-ended toys are designed for a specific purpose and often require children to follow a set of instructions or rules. Examples include puzzles, board games, sorting and stacking toys, lacing cards, and books. These types of toys are designed for children to practice specific skill sets, such as fine motor skills or reading. Close-

ended toys also help children to develop greater focus and attention to details. Sitting down to complete a puzzle with your child is the perfect way to bond over a mindful task that encourages a strong sense of perseverance. My three-and-a-half-year-old recently started playing Candyland—the Disney Princess version, of course. Board games are excellent toys to encourage turn-taking, following a set of rules, basic counting, and understanding the concept of winning a game. While turn-taking is still a work in progress, my daughter loves the concept of following the path and making sure everyone is abiding by the sometimes flexible rules.

In the age of social media, it is no surprise if we second guess our choices surrounding parenting, and specifically toys and play. Cognitive overload is real, and making decisions about toys can feel complicated when presented with complex and sometimes contradictory information. As with all things, consider your individual child and their unique interests, and then seek to find a balance. A healthy mix of open-ended and close-ended toys will allow your child to develop both imagination and a sense of accomplishment.



# KEEPING THE PARENTAL SPARK ALIVE: FINDING FREEDOM IN STRUCTURE

We value and encourage creativity in our kids, but far too often we lack the time or energy to meet our own creative needs. Sonali shares her top tips for effortlessly building creativity into our schedules.



Photo by Barbara Olsen from Pexels



## About the Author

Sonali is a parent coach, speaker, and founder of Forward Together

Parenting. She's been where you are with her own sensitive, strong-willed kids, and has worked with thousands of parents worldwide. Her work is dedicated to sharing how you can confidently parent, have fun, and create lasting change that feels good.



Of course we want our kids to be creative. We understand that our kids expressing creativity is the birthplace of joy. As adults, the daily schedule runs in the background of our minds, and we often get focused on maintaining a structured daily routine for our families. Because we understand both creativity and structure are important for our kids.

We often tell ourselves that there isn't time for us to be creative. After all, time is a limited resource and we prioritize being secure, solid, and sturdy for our families. We make dinners that are tried and tested, we stick to our activity schedule. We let our kids hold the space of creativity, while we hold the space of routine.

However, as Brené Brown says, "There's no such thing as creative people and non-creative people. There are only people who use their creativity and people who don't. Unused creativity isn't benign. It lives within us until it's expressed, neglected to death, or suffocated by resentment and fear." (1)

Oof. That's a hard truth. And what I hear in her words is that while it can be a challenge for parents to balance creativity and structure, both are important and necessary.

## THE SCENE

You are so busy shuffling your kids to activities and playdates that you don't have time to be creative yourself. Then you notice yourself feeling drained or some of the other not-so-fun emotions Brené quotes above, and you try to squash those feelings down. And it's all because you love being a parent so much.

## PERSPECTIVE

When I explain the importance of balancing both creativity and structure, I often share this example. Baking a cake is a creative activity. However, when we bake a cake, we need a bowl—this is the structure. Without the bowl (structure), mixing



Photo by studioroman

the cake ingredients (creative) would not be possible. Or, perhaps, very very messy.

Now, attempting to create a whole separate bowl for our creativity—by taking an art class for example—may be impractical, as there simply isn't the time. However, what we can do is be creative inside the structure that already exists.

## SET UP A SYSTEM FOR FUN

Meet your needs for freedom, creativity, and fun by building it into your routines. My favorite example is from one of my team members, Marisa, who has a weekly snack schedule that brings both structure and creative freedom. Her schedule goes like this:

- Muffin Monday
- Smoothie Tuesday
- Whatever Wednesday
- Sweet Treat Thursday
- Fruity Friday

What her schedule does is take the decision fatigue out of after-school snacks and gives her kids a sense of what to expect. She knows Mondays are muffins—but she has creative freedom about what type to bake. Freedom and flexibility are important to her, and she knows that mid-week she needs a buffer—maybe she's

busy and needs to buy a snack or maybe she has an excess of crackers to finish—so she's built in "Whatever Wednesday" to give her that freedom.

For yourself, you could try a few ways to blend structure and creative freedom. Think of it as setting up a system for fun.

- An after-school snack or dinner schedule
- Plan activities six days in the week, and keep one day free. We have Stay-Home Saturdays which are plan-free. We like Saturdays for this because Saturday traffic is always bad. It's a great day to go to the park, invite a friend over, draw, cook together, or jump in the pool.
- Play a daily game around the dinner table. My kids and I like to play Two Truths And One Lie about our day, 20 Questions, Connections, I Spy, and so on.

## WHY IT WORKS

We are the organizers in our families. That's not going to change. But we also need freedom, creativity, and fun. Building these needs into our existing systems means that they take little or no time, which makes them sustainable and enjoyable for us.

## References

1. Brown, B. (2010) The Gifts of Imperfection.

# **BAMBI: THE TEAM**

BAMBI is managed by an elected committee of volunteers and all BAMBI members are encouraged to volunteer. Vacancies can be found on the Call for Volunteers page in this magazine and are posted online; you are welcome to contact [vicechairwoman@bambiweb.org](mailto:vicechairwoman@bambiweb.org) with inquiries.

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**The views expressed in the articles in this magazine are not necessarily those of BAMBI committee members and we assume no responsibility for them or their effects.**

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