

# Building Community Resilience through Employment-Based NGO Intervention: A Case Study of the Jang Wan Kha (Hire Me) Project for the Homeless in Bangkok, Thailand

Anussorn Roekudom

*Graduate School of Integrated Sciences for Global Society, Kyushu University, Fukuoka 819-0395, Japan*

(\*Corresponding author's e-mail: [roekudom.anussorn.033@s.kyushu-u.ac.jp](mailto:roekudom.anussorn.033@s.kyushu-u.ac.jp))

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## Abstract

This study examines how the “Jang Wan Kha” project, an employment-based intervention initiated by an NGO in Bangkok, Thailand, contributes to community resilience among homeless populations. Using a qualitative case study approach and in-depth interviews with the project leader and post-homeless participants, the research identifies four key strategies that support collective resilience: (1) Capacity for building a new mode of social reproduction, (2) Provision of care and its abeyance effects, (3) Leveraging political connections with state support, and (4) Being a strategic actor in influencing state intentions. These interrelated strategies show how grassroots initiatives not only provide basic services but also foster mutual support networks, adaptive capacities, and long-term stability within vulnerable communities. Framed through the lens of community resilience, the study emphasizes how NGO-led interventions enable bottom-up responses to the homeless issues, especially in contexts where formal welfare structures are limited. Beyond the Thai context, these findings may offer insights for other Global South contexts, though they remain grounded in the Bangkok case highlighting the potential for NGOs to bridge critical gaps in state provision and contribute to more inclusive, collaborative forms of urban governance.

**Keywords:** Homeless, NGO, Community resilience, Social innovation, Urban poverty, Thailand

## Introduction

One of the most visible outcomes of COVID-19 pandemic in Thailand was the significant increase in the new homeless. According to Visetpricha et al. (2020), the number of new homeless people rose by 19.42% compared to pre-pandemic conditions. The situation highlights a deeper structural issue. Many economically insecure individuals became homeless after losing jobs and lacking safety nets. Over half of the new homeless wanted jobs to secure their livelihoods. This aligns with a study by Thailand Science Research and Innovation (2019), which found that short-term employment was the most needed form of government assistance. Similarly, Tangtamarak et al. (2019) found that employment is a critical factor in preventing at-risk populations from falling into

homelessness and in enabling current homeless individuals to exit the cycle of street life. In response to the emerging crisis and needs of the new homeless, the Mirror Foundation, one of Thailand's long-standing non-governmental organizations, launched the project named *Jang Wan Kha* (Hire Me) in 2020. This project was designed as an emergency employment initiative to offer immediate income opportunities, improve access to food and water, and restore a sense of dignity and self-worth among the homeless. It further aimed to rebuild participants' motivation, foster reconnection with broader society, and raise public awareness about the structural challenges surrounding homelessness. The majority of participants in the program were the new homeless whose

livelihoods had been disrupted by the first wave of COVID-19 in early 2020. Jang Wan Kha was specifically conceptualized to accommodate this fallout and was expected to serve as a safety net for additional individuals likely to fall into homelessness (Mirror Foundation, 2020).

Viewed through the lens of community resilience, *Jang Wan Kha* stands out as an example of social innovation led by an NGO during times of crisis. It plays a critical role in fostering resilience, particularly by enabling individuals to cope with everyday disruptions in unstable contexts (Shantz, 2013). Importantly, the project has sustained its operations beyond the immediate crisis period, continuing to collaborate with both public and private sector actors (Brand Buffet, 2025; Cajaiba-Santana, 2014; The Young Foundation, 2012). In this way, Jang Wan Kha is not only a timely intervention but also a dynamic model of how NGO-led innovation can evolve within disrupted systems to meet persistent community needs. By providing employment opportunities and social support to those excluded from formal safety nets, the project enabled individuals to regain income, autonomy, and dignity. Its ongoing adaptability and multi-sectoral engagement reflect key dimensions of community resilience, especially within the voluntary sector, which must constantly adjust to shifting structural and political conditions (DeVerteuil, 2015; Adger, 2000). Thus, Jang Wan Kha serves as a compelling case study of how community resilience can be cultivated through locally driven social innovation.

Accordingly, this study aims to explore *how the Jang Wan Kha project demonstrates community resilience through its activities and strategies in combatting homelessness*. This also aims to identify policy implications that enhance collaboration between the state and NGO, in order to improve employment-based interventions and resilience-building strategies for homeless populations. The Jang Wan Kha initiative continues to offer valuable insights into how grassroots efforts can foster community resilience, restore dignity for vulnerable populations, and promote more inclusive development. As Thailand and other nations work through long-term socio-economic recovery, the lessons drawn

from this case provide meaningful contributions to both policy design and community development strategies.

## Literature review

### NGO and its role in building community resilience

There are several key activities that build community resilience within homeless populations. One of the most important is equity and inclusion, ensuring that resilience efforts reflect the needs of those most affected by urban precarity. Meaningful participation from the ground up is essential, while top-down structures must provide resources without imposing control. Resilience also relies on recognizing diverse forms of knowledge, including informal “survival strategies” and local expertise that formal systems often overlook. Strengthening social capital through trust, mutual aid, and collaboration further builds collective capacity. At the same time, resilience requires both immediate crisis response and long-term planning to prevent future vulnerabilities. In line with this, resilience literature has evolved to explore how communities not only endure but also reorganize in response to adverse events such as economic disruptions, pandemics, and housing crises that frequently push vulnerable groups into homelessness thereby restoring functionality and fostering new pathways for recovery, reintegration, and structural transformation (Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Boston et al., 2024). This perspective is particularly relevant to homelessness, where resilience involves not merely survival but also the creation of inclusive systems of care and opportunities for social and economic participation. Community resilience can also be understood as the collective capacity to mitigate damage, heal from disruption, and rebuild social and spatial systems that sustain everyday life (Chandra et al., 2013; Cutter et al., 2008; Herrmann-Lunecke & Villagra, 2020). Accordingly, the link between voluntary sector resilience and community resilience becomes particularly clear when viewed through the lens of both social and spatial dimensions. Social resilience refers to the capacity of communities to endure, adapt, and recover from systemic hardships through everyday survival practices, mutual care, and interdependent networks of support. These

practices are often quiet, improvisational, and rooted in relational networks rather than formal institutions enable individuals and communities to “get by” in the face of economic, political, or environmental pressures (Adger, 2000; Katz, 2004). Social resilience operates not only at the level of individual coping, but also as a collective capacity. Within this framework, NGOs and other voluntary actors play a crucial role in reinforcing resilience by scaling up, institutionalizing, and supporting these everyday practices. They provide both tangible resources such as food, housing, employment, and legal assistance and intangible support, including trust, advocacy, and representation, thus embedding themselves within the everyday geographies and temporalities of vulnerable populations (Klinenberg, 2002; Wilson, 2013). While spatial resilience highlights how the NGO-community relationship is grounded in place. Urban service hubs, inner-city areas with high accessibility where NGOs cluster, serve as spaces of last resort, providing shelter, services, and a sense of belonging. Their existence supports not only individuals experiencing homelessness or precarity but also the broader ecosystem of care and solidarity (DeVerteuil, 2009).

NGOs, by maintaining their presence in such areas despite rising rents, gentrification, and public stigma, actively defend and reproduce the spaces needed for community resilience to function. One mechanism through which NGOs cultivate resilience is through social innovation. As Cajas-Santana (2014) argues, social innovation refers to new ideas, services, or practices that address societal needs more effectively than existing solutions, often generated by grassroots actors rather than formal institutions. In the context of resilience, social innovation offers adaptive strategies that enable communities to survive, cope, and rebuild. It is particularly crucial in the Global South, where state resources are often stretched thin and NGOs fill critical service gaps. Shantz (2013) notes that social innovation within the voluntary sector is not necessarily about bold or dramatic change; rather, it often takes the form of quiet, practical responses to everyday problems. These small-scale innovations such as community kitchens, temporary work programs, or mobile health units help people

navigate instability and insecurity in ways that are meaningful and sustainable. They form the base of what Hall and Lamont (2013) call “reconfiguration”, the creative recombination of existing resources, relationships, and institutions to foster new patterns of social reproduction and resilience. In the context of vulnerable populations, such innovations often create pathways for social reintegration, enabling individuals to move from exclusion to renewed participation in society through stable housing, employment, and restored social networks (Busch-Geertsema, 2010; Tosi, 2005). Voluntary sector interventions thus not only sustain everyday survival but also foster innovative practices that support reintegration, showing how resilience and innovation intersect in shaping long-term well-being.

Accordingly, Jang Wan Kha offers a compelling case study of these dynamics in action. Developed by the Mirror Foundation in response to a growing population of newly homeless individuals in Bangkok, the project provided a dignified, employment-based alternative to traditional shelters during a time of heightened vulnerability. Instead of relying only on charity or shelters, Jang Wan Kha focused on community care, daily income, and partnerships with local authorities and private actors (Brand Buffet, 2025; The Young Foundation, 2012). Its ongoing operation, years beyond the peak of the COVID-19 crisis, demonstrates the project’s ability to evolve and adapt in response to changing social and economic conditions. Viewed through the lens of community resilience, Jang Wan Kha illustrates how NGO can act as sites of social innovation during periods of disruption. In sum, NGOs contribute to community resilience not only through service provision but also by reimagining what care, survival, and solidarity can look like in times of crisis. Their resilience strengthens the resilience of communities as a whole, illustrating how voluntary sector strategies, when grounded in local needs and relationships, can build lasting foundations for collective well-being.

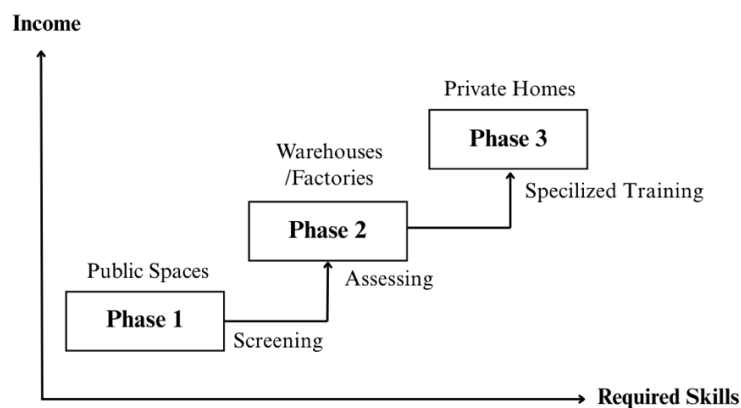
#### **Jang Wan Kha: NGO intervention in combatting homelessness**

Jang Wan Kha project is a sub-project of the Street Patients and Homeless Project run by the Mirror

Foundation. It was initiated in response to the serious challenges homeless people face in terms of quality of life. A significant number of people experiencing homelessness struggle to find work due to limited job opportunities and the absence of in-demand skills. Most work as general laborers in low-skilled jobs, making it essential that employment opportunities provided to them are suited to basic skill levels and do not require advanced training. Essentially, Jang Wan Kha serves as a platform that connects homeless individuals with potential employers, acting as a trusted intermediary to coordinate job placements and build employer confidence. This project aims to create space and opportunities for homeless people to enter the job market, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, which severely impacted the economy and led to increased unemployment. The ultimate goal of this project is to enhance the quality of life and well-being of homeless individuals by providing sustainable employment that helps them overcome homelessness and reintegrate into society. Its name, Jang Wan Kha which translates to “*hire me*” in Thai captures

this mission, emphasizing its goal of connecting homeless individuals with employment opportunities (Mirror Foundation, 2020).

The project also includes activities related to job training and skill development, aiming to equip homeless individuals with better abilities particularly in the use of cleaning equipment so they can take on higher-paying jobs that match their skill levels. After training, participants undergo a screening and assessment process to evaluate their knowledge, capabilities, and specific skills. This helps determine appropriate job placements and ensures that each individual receives training and opportunities suited to their needs. Importantly, the assessment process also promotes fairness and standardization in job assignments, ensuring that no group of homeless individuals is given preferential treatment over others. Ultimately, job placement focuses on cleaning work, which aligns closely with the abilities and context of most participants, many of whom are elderly and have limited education or professional experience. Job placement is divided into three phases:



**Figure 1** Three Phases of Homeless Employment in Jang Wan Kha Transitioning from Basic to Skilled Work

**Source:** Roekudom (2022) (Adapted from Mirror Foundation, 2020)

**Phase 1:** This phase focuses on large public areas, aiming to engage as many homeless individuals as possible and help them enter the employment system properly. It also serves as an initial screening process to identify suitable candidates for passing them to Phases 2 and 3.

**Phase 2:** This phase targets work in large private spaces such as warehouses, factories, and general domestic tasks. Jobs offered in this phase typically provide higher wages than those in Phase 1, depending on the nature of the work and the level of skill required.

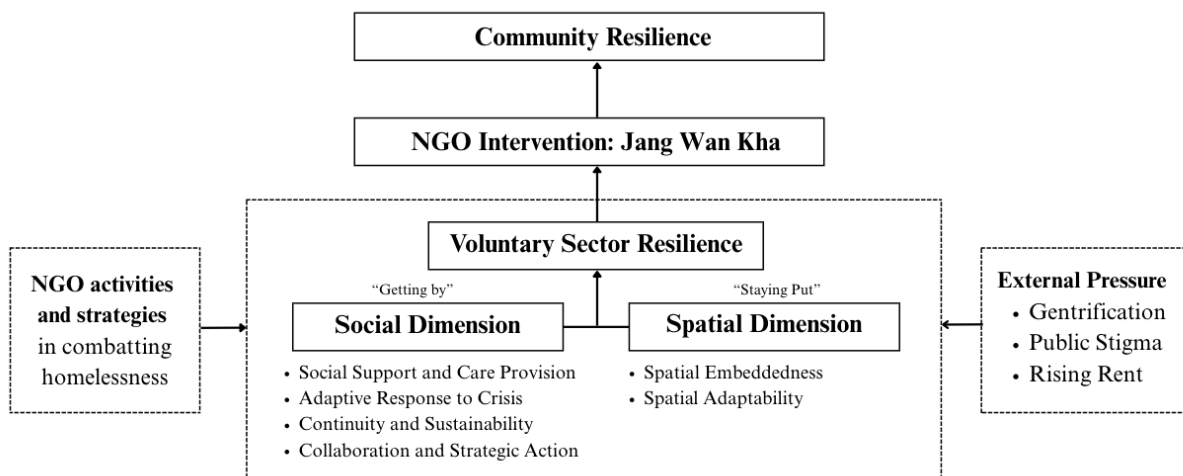
**Phase 3:** This phase emphasizes skilled work and more individualized placements, such as housekeeping

jobs in private homes. Homeless individuals who have received training, developed their abilities, and demonstrated strong job performance will be supported to take on these roles. Accordingly, employment in Phase 3 offers higher pay than in the previous phases.

The employment and job placement system under Jang Wan Kha operates on a rotational basis, progressing from Phase 1 through Phase 3. This system gradually increases income for participants. Its goal is to help them secure housing and end the cycle of street homelessness. According to statistical data in 2021 from Jang Wan Kha project, participants include a range of vulnerable people such as the urban poor, long-term homeless people who have been living in public spaces for over a year, and new homeless individuals who were recently laid off, unemployed, or economically affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Since July 2020, the project has maintained 100–120 rotating members. Between launch and 2021, 59 individuals participated: 44 men, 11 women, and 4 identifying as another gender. The participants had an average age of 53 years, with the youngest being 32 and the oldest 74. Notably, 33.9% of the participants were elderly, as defined by the Elderly Act of 2003, which classifies Thai nationals aged 60 and above as elderly (Department of Older Persons Affairs, 2014). The

members in this project fall into different categories based on their current living situations: some remain homeless, some currently have stable housing, and others have regained housing as a result of employment through the project. Those who are still without permanent housing continue to reside in public places in the inner city of Bangkok, including Victory Monument, Ratchadamnoen Avenue, Rama VIII Bridge, Hua Lamphong Railway Station, Mo Chit Bus Terminal, Sanam Luang, and Rajavithi Hospital (Jang Wan Kha Project, 2021). According to the latest data from 2024, there are currently 160 members participating in this project. Approximately 50% of them are homeless individuals, while the remaining 50% are elderly urban poor. A noticeable trend is the increasing number of elderly joining the project. Although the project initially focused on supporting homeless people, not specifically the elderly, it has gradually evolved in response to demographic realities. Today, 70–80% of homeless participants are over 50, and more in their 40s are joining. Job roles, work environments, and income structures must adapt to older adults' needs. This approach ensures that all participants regardless of age are given a suitable opportunity to transition from homelessness to stable employment and housing (Bangkok Biz News, 2024).

## Research framework



**Figure 2** Research framework

**Source:** Author (Adapted from Adger, 2000; Boston et al., 2024; DeVerteuil, 2009; DeVerteuil, 2015; Hall & Lamont, 2013; Katz, 2004; Klinenberg, 2002; MacKinnon & Derickson, 2012; The Young Foundation, 2012)

This research framework is designed to examine *how the Jang Wan Kha project exemplifies community resilience through its NGO-led activities and strategies in combatting homelessness*. Drawing from the concept of voluntary sector resilience as a foundation for broader community resilience, the framework highlights two interrelated dimensions: social and spatial.

On the *social dimension*, associated with the logic of “getting by,” the project demonstrates resilience by providing continuous care and support to homeless individuals, responding adaptively to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring long-term sustainability of services, and building strategic collaboration with both public and private sectors. These practices not only serve the immediate survival needs of marginalized populations but also lay the groundwork for long-term recovery and empowerment.

On the *spatial dimension*, described as “staying put,” the framework explores how Jang Wan Kha maintains its operational presence in central urban areas, despite lacking permanent infrastructure. Through spatial embeddedness and spatial adaptability, the initiative adapts to challenges such as gentrification, public stigma, and rising rent by maintaining visibility in public spaces and adjusting its service model accordingly.

Importantly, this framework views *community resilience as a bottom-up process*, rather than one driven by state-led or top-down approaches. As MacKinnon and Derickson (2012) suggest, community resilience often emerges through grassroots practices that emphasize local knowledge, collective self-reliance, and strategic action. Jang Wan Kha represents such an initiative, a form of social innovation that operates outside traditional welfare infrastructures while forming alliances with diverse actors. By anchoring care and visibility in contested urban spaces, the project builds resilience from the ground up, creating alternatives to exclusionary urban transformation.

### Materials and methods

A qualitative case study approach was employed to investigate how community resilience is enacted through the NGO via the Jang Wan Kha project. Case study research is particularly appropriate for exploring complex, real-world processes embedded in specific social and spatial contexts, especially when addressing “how” and “why” questions (Yin, 2009). As such, this methodology enabled a nuanced understanding of how a grassroots NGO intervention mobilized resources, adapted to crisis conditions, and supported marginalized groups particularly homeless individuals in Bangkok during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic (Patnaik et al., 2019).

### Case selection criteria

**Table 1** Case selection criteria based on NGO resilience

Criteria	Dimension	Explanation	Jang Wan Kha Case
1. Social Support and Care Provision	Social Dimension	Delivering care or sustenance to vulnerable populations, enabling their everyday survival in times of crisis (DeVerteuil, 2009; Katz, 2004).	Provided paid employment and basic-need support to homeless individuals during COVID-19.
2. Adaptive Response to Crisis	Social Dimension	Having capacity to absorb shock and reorganize effectively during disruptions (Adger, 2000; DeVerteuil, 2015).	Emerged as a grassroots response during COVID-19 to address sudden rise in homelessness.

Criteria	Dimension	Explanation	Jang Wan Kha Case
3. Continuity and Sustainability	Social Dimension	Involving not only short-term coping but sustained engagement, allowing services to continue operating post-crisis (Hall & Lamont, 2013; The Young Foundation, 2012).	Continued operation for over three years, supporting vulnerable groups beyond the initial phase.
4. Collaboration and Strategic Action	Social Dimension	Collaborating with the state and other actors reflects strategic agency, allowing NGO to gain visibility and influence over public policy (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014; DeVerteuil, 2015).	Worked with Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) and private sector actors to support implementation.
5. Spatial Embeddedness	Spatial Dimension	Enhancing accessibility and defensibility of NGO action spaces (DeVerteuil, 2009; Klinenberg, 2002).	Operated visibly in inner-city Bangkok, especially in areas like Phra Nakhon.
6. Spatial Adaptability	Spatial Dimension	Having the ability to continue service provision even in the absence of fixed infrastructure (DeVerteuil, 2015).	Did not rely on fixed shelters; provided outreach and mobile services in public and semi-public spaces.

To ensure conceptual alignment with the framework of NGO resilience, this study employed two key criteria in selecting the Jang Wan Kha project as a case study: social and spatial dimensions. Socially, the project showed crisis adaptability, long-term sustainability, and direct care for vulnerable groups. These are key features of resilience (Adger, 2000; DeVerteuil, 2015; Katz, 2004). Spatially, the project stayed visible in the inner city without fixed infrastructure. This shows both spatial adaptability and embeddedness (DeVerteuil, 2009). These characteristics make Jang Wan Kha a strong case for examining how NGO-led interventions foster resilience within marginalized urban communities.

#### Unit of analysis and data collection

The Jang Wan Kha project was selected as the unit of analysis due to its visibility, longevity, and perceived contribution to fostering both individual and collective resilience as mentioned above. The research relied primarily on documentary evidence, including project reports, media articles, and prior studies, which helped establish the timeline and broader institutional and urban context of the intervention. These were supplemented by in-depth interviews to generate grounded insights into

lived experiences and organizational strategies. Data collection took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, which created significant barriers to direct access to potential participants. To ensure reliability, participants were selected by purposive sampling facilitated through the Mirror Foundation, which acted as a referral channel to identify eligible interviewees, with strict inclusion criteria: (1) they had previously experienced homelessness and participated in the Jang Wan Kha project, and (2) at the time of the interview, they had transitioned out of homelessness, secured stable housing, and maintained steady employment. As the project was still in its early phase, the number of participants who met these criteria was small. Furthermore, only individuals with sufficient literacy skills to share their experiences in detail were invited, in order to provide rich narrative data. While this limited the sample size, it allowed the study to capture the perspectives of those who had directly navigated the project's pathways to reintegration. For the detail of the key informants, three interviewees were post-homeless individuals who participated in the early phase of the project, while the fourth was the project leader affiliated with the Mirror Foundation, a key informant who played a vital role in designing, coordinating, and sustaining the

intervention. The leader's deep involvement provided critical insight into how the NGO adapted, collaborated with other stakeholders, and enacted forms of social innovation to meet community needs. This study views community resilience as more than individual recovery. It is also the collective capacity of communities and institutions to adapt and reorganize during adversity. By focusing on the interplay between NGO actions and the needs of homeless populations, the research illustrates how voluntary sector resilience contributes to the broader project of building community resilience. In this case, resilience is demonstrated through the creation of meaningful work opportunities, relational care, and the strengthening of civic infrastructures that support vulnerable groups in situ.

#### Data analysis

The interview data were analyzed using a thematic approach and content analysis (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992; Morgan, 1993). Transcripts were systematically coded and clustered into themes and sub-themes that captured recurring patterns in participants' narratives (Clarke and Braun, 2006). This process allowed for the organization of rich qualitative material into analytically meaningful categories, while retaining illustrative quotations to demonstrate the lived experiences of participants. In addition to interviews, documentary sources such as online news articles, NGO reports, and public communications were reviewed. These were not coded in the same manner, but rather read closely to extract factual details about the project's implementation, public

reception, and state responses. The purpose of these sources was to corroborate interview findings and serve as a form of triangulation, ensuring that emerging themes from the interviews were consistent with broader public records and representations of the Jang Wan Kha project.

#### Human research ethics approval

Given the study's focus on individuals experiencing homelessness during the COVID-19 crisis, the researcher submitted the research protocol to the Ethics Committee in Human Research under National Institute of Development Administration for approval. The submission detailed data collection procedures, including informed consent, the use of audio recordings, photographs, and pseudonyms to protect participants' identities, and the anonymized presentation of findings. The research ensured respect for participants' privacy and human rights, aligned with international ethical standards, and included procedures for securely destroying all recorded materials after the study's completion.

#### Results and Discussion

Based on the document review of the Jang Wan Kha project case study and in-depth interviews, the findings highlight key activities and strategies that demonstrate the resilience of the voluntary sector and its contributions to building community resilience, particularly in adapting to and addressing homelessness. Table 2 outlines the main theme and its corresponding sub-themes, categorized by dimensions of resilience. A detailed discussion of these thematic characteristics is provided below.

**Table 2** Emerged themes

Main Themes	Sub Themes	Resilience Dimension	
		Social	Spatial
Capacity for Building	1) Data-based program design	✓	
New a Mode of Social Reproduction	2) Tailored work pathways	✓	
	3) Transitional and rotational design	✓	
Provision of Care and Its Abeyance Effects	4) Employment for reintegration	✓	
	1) Basic sustenance and support	✓	
	2) Abeyance as containment		✓

Main Themes	Sub Themes	Resilience Dimension	
		Social	Spatial
Leveraging Political Connections with State Support	3) Invisible governance via service hubs		✓
	4) State tolerance through abeyance		✓
	1) Partnerships with local government	✓	
	2) Access to public spaces for employment		✓
Being a Strategic Actor in Influencing State Intentions	3) Use of state-run facilities		✓
	4) Accessible sites for marginalized		✓
	1) Policy advocacy and model proposition	✓	
	2) Decoupling from state agendas	✓	
	3) Designated public spaces (e.g., Fresh Station)		✓

### Capacity for building a new mode of social reproduction

The success of the “Jang Wan Kha” project exemplifies resilience not only as the ability to withstand shocks but as a capacity to build a new form of social support and created either flexible or adaptive framework. Through its data-driven management and context-based design, the project established an alternative support system that compensated for the absence of adequate state welfare and addressed the limitations of the formal labor market (Clifford, 2012), challenges that were further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. By categorizing participants based on vulnerability and work potential, and then tailoring levels of support accordingly, the project enacted a flexible, ad-hoc and adaptive framework that responded to real-life complexities with dignity and pragmatism. (Deverteuil, 2015)

“There is a group of participants that works 4 days a week. We focus on helping them make a transition. Most of them are new homeless. I can say that the project’s success mainly comes from collecting and using data to manage everything.” (N1, Project leader)

“We work with Jang Wan Kha four days a week. To get through each phase, they observe our performance whether we do the job well. If we do, they assign us more tasks, and our income increases. When we first joined, it was mainly to earn enough money to pay rent. After about three to four months, they evaluate each person’s work and

give us a chance to move up. It’s really about upgrading ourselves through our own effort.” (H1, Temporary staff)

“At first, I worked in the field, cleaning parks and doing district office jobs under the project. Later, my employer saw that I was hardworking, so he let me work at the warehouse. (H3, Full-time employee)

At the outset of the project, the team conducted in-depth data collection from over 100 individuals experiencing homelessness. This information was used to analyze and categorize participants based on their levels of vulnerability and work potential. The resulting insights not only provided a realistic understanding of each person’s situation but also served as the foundation for designing tailored work arrangements, determining the number of working days per week, and developing appropriate support strategies for each group. Based on this analysis, participants were divided into three main groups. The first group, referred to as “the long-term homeless” were mostly elderly, had fewer obligations, and retained the ability to earn income through other means. This group was assigned one workday per week, based on the principle of providing support as a form of unconditional assistance. The second group received two workdays per week, with the goal of helping them maintain a minimum standard of living and avoid further decline for instance, by enabling them to afford rent or meet basic daily needs. The third group comprised “the new homeless,” who demonstrated strong motivation and effort to improve their

circumstances. This group was offered four workdays per week to support their transition toward greater stability. Notably, those who consistently show determination, diligence, and self-discipline such as saving money or securing their own rental housing are often promoted to work four days per week. This not only enhances their income security, but also signifies a recognition of their reliability and a step toward deeper integration through opportunities for permanent employment with the Mirror Foundation, providing a pathway for long-term development beyond the project's timeline.

“We see this as a space for rotation where people who've been in the system for a while can move on, and new people can come in. Like I said, this place is meant to help them get back on their feet and move toward a better life. We don't want them to stay here forever. We want them to understand that there are others out there who also need a chance to come in and go through the same process.” (N1, Project leader)

“They don't want me to stay in this project for too long because they need to make space for new people to join. They have to help new people and prioritize those who are the poorest or need help the most.” (H2, Full-time employee)

Apparently, the project adopts a deliberate strategy to establish a “rotational space”, one that does not aim to keep participants within the system indefinitely. Instead, it encourages individuals to transition toward more stable and independent living conditions, thereby creating room for new groups of homeless who have not yet had the opportunity to enter the system. This mechanism circulates social resources effectively. It supports vulnerable populations not as a final destination, but as a transitional bridge toward long-term resilience. In this light, the Jang Wan Kha project is more than a temporary work program; it operates as a dynamic mechanism for cultivating new forms of coexistence, ones that emerge not through dramatic upheaval, but through the quiet yet resilient rhythms of everyday life (Shantz, 2013). Whether through continuous evaluation, individualized

development pathways, or intentional planning for reintegration into the broader workforce, the project exemplifies a grounded and forward-looking approach to social resilience. This locally grounded system of care and work allocation did more than just provide temporary relief, it functioned as a form of social commons (Shantz, 2013).

In this way, Jang Wan Kha operated as a resilient service hub, not through dramatic transformation but through rehabilitating individuals. Participants who showed consistent commitment were even absorbed into the Mirror Foundation's long-term workforce, further illustrating how the project generated pathways toward stability and systemic reintegration. Moreover, it was not established solely in response to the COVID-19 crisis, but rather as a prototype tested in real-world conditions, designed to be sustained over time and to support the continued transition of more homeless individuals in the future.

#### **Provision of care and its abeyance effects**

One of the fundamental characteristics that enable the resilience lies in the role of the voluntary sector in providing essential services particularly “care and sustenance”. These functions ensure the everyday survival of marginalized and surplus populations and are often central to the identity and purpose of such organizations (Deverteuil, 2015). In the case of the Jang Wan Kha project, this principle is clearly demonstrated through the intentional design of a support system tailored specifically for people experiencing homelessness, especially the new homeless who clearly show their motivation to reintegrate into society. The project provides daily-wage employment matched to participants' abilities, with a strong focus on enabling them to earn enough to rent housing again and regain a measure of stability.

“The new homeless often need jobs that offer a reasonable and consistent that allows them change the way of their lives. The work we offer for this group is typically a full-week schedule, which helps provide that steady income and builds their confidence to make decisions about their future. For instance, if they're able to earn

6,000-7,000 baht (180-210 USD), they begin to see the possibility of renting a room, setting aside savings, or simply having enough to meet their daily needs.” (N1, Project leader)

According to the data from the interview, the new homeless emerging from COVID-19 era often demonstrate a clear goal toward stability. They approach work with purpose, setting income goals and showing a willingness to work consistently in order to regain autonomy in their lives. To respond to this need, the project provides more regular and structured work (up to four days per week) for the new homeless, recognizing that stable income plays a vital role in building their confidence and supporting life decisions such as renting a room, saving money, or affording food and basic necessities. Jang Wan Kha tailors its employment scheme to participants’ needs and motivations. This creates a care model grounded in empathy and structural support. This provision of care not only fulfills immediate material needs but also reflects a long-term developmental vision grounded in social rehabilitation.

“We might help cover their rent for the first three months, then gradually let them manage on their own. The goal is to support them in earning a stable, moderate income, enough so that paying rent no longer feels like a burden.” (N1, Project leader)

“Back then, I still couldn’t save enough in a month, so I told the project staff that if I didn’t get any income soon, I might have to go back to living on the streets. So, they helped me by finding a place to stay and covering the rent in advance. After that, I continued working and gradually paid them back.” (H1, Temporary staff)

“When I was working with Jang Wan Kha, I was still sleeping in public places. Once I had some income, I rented a place that other workers from Jang Wan Kha recommended. It was cheap, only 200 baht (6 USD) per month. During COVID, when we couldn’t work, the project would cover the costs.” (H3, Full-time employee)

At the same time, the project performs what scholars refer to as “abeyance functions” (Deverteuil, 2015). By providing temporary employment, income, and housing pathways, the project also contributes to the management and containment of the homeless populations, helping to keep them “off the streets” and decrease their visibilities. This aligns with how resilient service hubs often gain a level of state tolerance or implicit support, precisely because they serve to reduce visible urban disorder and social disruption. In this sense, the project benefits not only the participants but also the broader social and political order, functioning as an informal mechanism of urban governance (Johnsen & Fitzpatrick, 2010). While this dual function, care and containment, may appear contradictory, it is precisely this tension that highlights the complex role of voluntary-sector interventions in social resilience. The Jang Wan Kha project, then, is not only a site of compassion and support, but also one of social ordering, where acts of care intersect with broader strategies of urban management and control.

Even though the relationship between care and the management of homeless populations can be complex and sometimes contradictory, the provision of everyday sustenance often helps to soften the more disciplinary aspects of abeyance. It becomes a way to bring the homeless into spaces where real care and support can be provided (Deverteuil, 2015). In this case, participants in the project sometimes find apartments through suggestions from their co-workers within the project. These accommodations typically have low rent and are often managed by voluntary sector organizations collaborating with one another in the service hub. This creates a supportive environment that eases their lives by surrounding them with a network of care, where useful information such as job opportunities or available services is actively shared (Roekudom, 2022). In this sense, even an approach to poverty management that feels both ambivalent and supportive can still enable survival, something that lies at the heart of what resilience means in this context. Moreover, the need to perform this dual function, care and containment can actually contribute to the spatial resilience of the service hub itself. By making the hub politically or practically useful such as by helping

to manage or reduce visible homelessness, it becomes more likely to receive support or be allowed to continue operating (Arvidson & Lyon, 2014).

### **Leveraging political connections with state support**

Another key resilience of Jang Wan Kha project lies in its ability to cultivate and maintain constructive, flexible relationships with local government agencies (Clark, 1993). Rather than operating in isolation, the project has strategically collaborated with public sector such as the District Offices of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) and the Baan Mitr-maitree Protection Center for the Homeless under the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. These partnerships though often informal have allowed the project to access public spaces and secure short-term job opportunities for homeless participants. Looking ahead, the foundation has outlined plans to significantly scale up its operations. The project aims to expand its employment areas in 2024 to accommodate over 100 homeless individuals (Bangkok Biz News, 2024). This planned expansion reflects not only a growing demand for inclusive employment but also the project's continued commitment to building sustainable pathways out of homelessness through coordinated efforts with state partners.

“We usually approach public sector as a request for cooperation, more like asking for a favor. For example, we talk with the district office to request public space and see how we can work together on things like cleaning community areas. We try to understand where the district office is short on people or support, and then we match that with the people we have in the project.” (N1, Project leader)

Instead of relying on rigid bureaucracy, the project cooperates with state actors. It negotiates with district offices to find public areas needing maintenance and matches these tasks with its workforce. This flexibility allows Jang Wan Kha to serve both state needs and social objectives by integrating homeless participants into local

public service work. This form of collaboration reflects more than just service delivery, it demonstrates a deliberate and strategic use of political relationships to build resilience. In this context, the voluntary sector is not only a passive recipient of state directives. Rather, it acts as a strategic intermediary, capable of negotiating with state actors to align state needs with the project's social mission (Asad & Kay, 2014; Evans, 1995). Such activity illustrates how voluntary organizations can actively shape their operational environment, using political cooperation to maintain autonomy and achieve sustained impact. Moreover, this strategy underscores the project's capacity to adapt to constraints such as limited state welfare or formal labor market exclusion by leveraging existing state structures to serve its own objectives. The ability to turn bureaucratic relationships into opportunities for employment creation reveals a form of “adaptive resilience” (Martin, 2012) rooted in mutual benefit, negotiation, and a strong sense of purpose.

“We requested to use the space at the Thonburi Homeless Protection Center as a meeting venue. Before COVID-19, we held monthly meetings there to plan and organize the work. Sometimes, when the new homeless weren't ready to rent a place just yet, they wanted to save up a little first, we'd let them stay at this center temporarily until they felt ready.” (N1, Project Leader)

“Back then, before I could start working, I had to do work register at Baan Mitr-maitree. So I chipped in for transportation with three or four friends to get to the registration spot, it was in a public area.” (H1, Temporary staff)

In addition to negotiating access to public spaces for employment activities, the Jang Wan Kha project has also successfully established a constructive relationship with public sector, which enables the organization to access state-owned facilities for organizational coordination and service delivery. One key example of this collaboration is the consistent use of the Thonburi Homeless Protection Center and Baan Mitr-maitree, operated under the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security as a

regular meeting venue for both planning activities and mobilizing participants. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the project held monthly coordination meetings at this government facility, during which project leaders, staff, and participants would gather here to discuss about work distribution and progress. This resource sharing not only facilitated operational efficiency but also served as an important social infrastructure for the homeless participants (Cook et al., 2023), who often lacked stable housing or personal space for such engagements. For newly enrolled participants who were not yet financially ready to rent accommodation, temporary shelter arrangements were made available at the same center, demonstrating a practical integration of care and employment support. This form of collaboration reflects a broader dimension of spatial resilience or the ability of a voluntary-sector organization to maintain a consistent and central location for its operations (Wolch, 1981). Although the project does not hold formal tenancy over the facility, the Ministry's provision of a rent-free or low-cost meeting venue effectively protects the organization from displacement pressure. As a result, the Jang Wan Kha project has been able to "stay put" in a strategic urban location that remains accessible to its target population (Deverteuil, 2023). Moreover, the Ministry's role as a non-commercial landlord shows how state support can stabilize the spatial infrastructure of voluntary-sector. This ongoing cooperation helps the project maintain operational centrality, ensures the visibility of services to the homeless community, and enables more sustained forms of intervention. In doing so, the state indirectly reinforces not only the spatial resilience of the voluntary sector but also the broader social resilience of marginalized populations by allowing continued access to care, employment, and community-building.

### **Being a strategic actor in influencing state intentions**

In the early stages of the Jang Wan Kha project, initiated around 2021, the project demonstrated a clear strategic vision to expand employment opportunities for the homeless while simultaneously advocating for structural solutions to homelessness through state

collaboration. From the start, project leaders engaged local state actors especially the BMA not just as service providers but as strategic partners. Their goal was not to passively receive state directives but to shape and redirect state practices in a way that aligned with the project's mission and on-the-ground realities.

"If the BMA decides to support Jang Wan Kha, I really believe we could scale this up in a big way. If they adopt this model as part of their policy and allocate a budget to let us take the lead in organizing it, we're ready. We've already got a clear framework and model. We've already tested it, and it's proven effective." (N1, Project Leader)

"The government really needs to take the lead in managing this. Like in Bangkok, they could set up a central coordination point so if anyone wants to distribute food, they can sign up in advance and take turns. That way, it becomes more organized, not just anyone handing things out anywhere. Moreover, it has to start with the state making sure people have access to food, hygiene services, a place to shower, change and wash their clothes." (N1, Project Leader)

The Jang Wan Kha team proposed a comprehensive model to local authorities, which included organizing homeless individuals into collective groups to improve visibility and accessibility to state services, and providing designated public spaces for food distribution, hygiene, and temporary assembly.

Finally in 2024, these proposals successfully materialized into tangible initiatives such as Sod Chuen Sathan (Fresh Station) providing hygiene services, including mobile laundry units, sanitized water and free shower and toilet for the homeless and urban poor (BMA Data Center, 2024). This form of cooperation reflects what scholars term strategic decoupling where voluntary sector actors maintain a degree of independence while selectively aligning with or resisting state agendas (Arvidson & Lyon, 2014). Rather than being co-opted or fully absorbed into the state intentions, Jang Wan Kha has operated as a "strategic actor" capable of negotiating, influencing, and

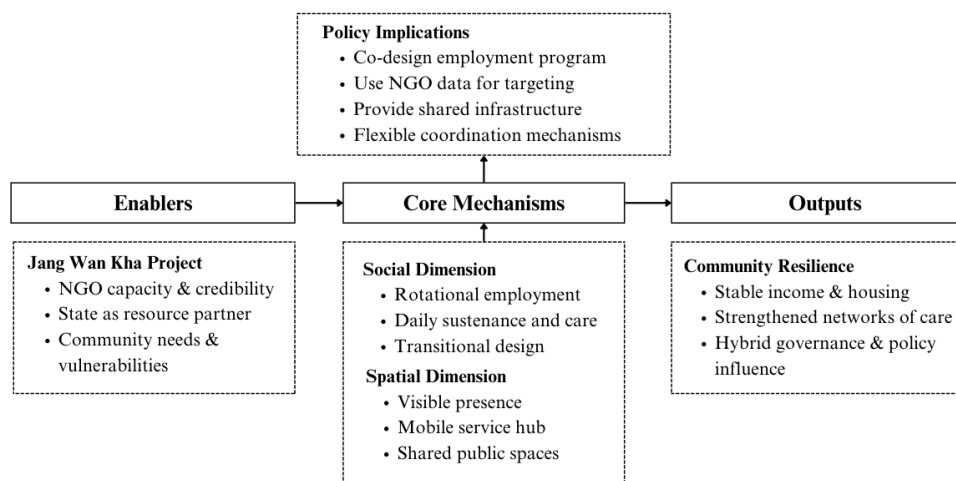
even setting policy models. (Elwood, 2006). The project’s influence extended to state policy circles, with its leaders and former homeless participants being invited by government agencies to share success stories and best practices at the special event, contributing to the visibility and dignified representation of the homeless population. As the project leader emphasized, systematizing such services through state coordination such as by managing food distribution schedules or offering shared spaces for bathing would increase dignity and functionality in homeless people’s daily lives. This type of state-voluntary sector interaction underscores the quasi-independence of

resilient voluntary organizations (Deverteuil, 2015) . Rather than remaining peripheral, Jang Wan Kha actively participated in shaping welfare responses, using its position and field knowledge to influence how the state engages with marginalized populations. It did not merely absorb state objectives but helped redefine them. This aligns with the broader literature on resilience through strategic navigation wherein civil society actors operate within, yet also tactically apart from, the state leveraging cooperation without subordination, and expanding welfare imagination from the bottom-up approach.



**Figure 3** Fresh station: Strategic voluntary sector response to homeless hygiene needs

Source: Author



**Figure 4** Mechanisms of Community Resilience from Jang Wan Kha Model

Source: Author

## Conclusions

The phenomenon of homelessness must be understood as a structural outcome of neoliberal globalization and global capitalism rather than an individual failing (DeVerteuil, 2015). Since the 1970s, welfare state retrenchment, fiscal austerity, and the rise of supply-side policies have reshaped how advanced economies manage poverty (Ebbinghaus, 2015; Peck & Tickell, 2002). Rather than expanding redistributive protections, governments increasingly regulate the poor through selective and disciplinary welfare. In this context, those facing homelessness are often expected to be self-sufficient, entrepreneurial, and individually responsible for structural hardships (Cameron, 2007; McDowell, 2004). Against this backdrop, the case of Jang Wan Kha shows how voluntary-sector initiatives can act as enablers of resilience in conditions of urban precarity. The Mirror Foundation's credibility, its partnerships with state actors, and its responsiveness to community needs provided the basis for adaptive and trust-based interventions (Clark, 1993; Cook et al., 2023). These enabling conditions activated a set of core mechanisms across both social and spatial dimensions. Rotational employment restored dignity, income, and daily sustenance, while visible, mobile service hubs sustained community presence despite lacking permanent infrastructure (DeVerteuil, 2009; Katz, 2004; Shantz, 2013; Klinenberg, 2002). Together, these mechanisms embody what Cajas-Santana (2014) terms social innovation: localized, improvised practices embedded in community life that serve as infrastructures of transition.

The outputs of these processes extended beyond individual survival, producing broader community resilience. Participants transitioned from street life to stable housing and employment, regaining social ties and dignity (Busch-Geertsema, 2010; Tosi, 2005). Moreover, the project enabled new forms of hybrid governance in which NGOs mediate between policy frameworks and lived experiences, making state interventions more targeted and adaptive (Arvidson & Lyon, 2014; Asad & Kay, 2014; DeVerteuil & Wilton, 2009). These practices represent not just emergency relief but new modes of a social reproduction in contexts where welfare regimes are

increasingly residual (DeVerteuil, 2015; Katz, 2001). From a policy perspective for the government, four implications emerge: **(1) embed employment within localized care strategies; (2) leverage NGO data and knowledge for smarter targeting; (3) provide shared operational infrastructure; and (4) institutionalize flexible coordination mechanisms.** These strategies highlight NGOs not as substitutes for the state but as mediators translating between structural policy and everyday vulnerability (Hall & Lamont, 2013; Kornatowski, 2010).

In sum, while homelessness reflects the deepening contradictions of neoliberal restructuring, the Jang Wan Kha case demonstrates how locally rooted voluntary-sector innovation, supported by state partnerships and embedded in community relations, can build durable pathways of adaptation and transformation. This underscores that resilience is not simply coping with precarity but reconfiguring governance from the ground up. However, further comparative research is needed to see how these mechanisms work in different contexts. Still, Jang Wan Kha provides a strong model of how locally rooted voluntary-sector innovation can build and sustain community resilience amid chronic urban precarity.

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