

Fr. Ray Foundation Newsletter

March 2010

Message from Father Apisit – Acting President



Fr. Lawrence Patin, C.Ss.R.

Can I just start by telling you Fr. Lawrence Patin, our President, is currently on sick leave back home in the U.S. and I am writing to you in his absence. Please remember Fr. Patin in your prayers.

I hope that you enjoyed our last newsletter giving you a view of what went on here in Pat-

taya over the last year. Christmas and New Year have passed for another year and although we are now in March it is never too late to wish you a very happy, healthy and prosperous 2010. This first newsletter of this year will focus on education, as we here believe that an education can, and will, change the lives of the children and students under our care.

Never too young...

At the Father Ray Foundation we believe that a child is never too young to start learning. The youngest children who attend the Fr. Ray Day Care Center may only be two years of age but they are learning a lot. They are learning to interact with other children, they learn through play, they learn to share and each morning they recite their ABC's, both in Thai and English. When we first opened the Center



many of the children spent most of the day crying as they did not want to be with us, but now some of them forget to say farewell to their parents as they run into class each morning, kicking their shoes off at the door and throwing their satchel down.

...or too old...

At the end of each school term we invite many young disabled adults to come to Pattaya and apply to become students at our Vocational School. Most travel for many hours on busses or in the back of pick-up trucks, many of them accompanied by their families, and all hoping that they will pass the entrance test and interview. In April last year a young lady arrived hoping to be admitted into our school.



When Khao was two years of age she contracted polio, the result of which left her unable to use her legs. Due to her disability her parents decided not to send her to school; getting from home on the rice fields to school each day was almost impossible so Khao stayed at home helping with the household chores. Her younger sister and brother attended regular school and it was her younger sister who helped Khao to learn to write her name, but that was about all she learnt.

When she became old enough to work she found employment in a factory dyeing locally produced cotton and silk and worked there for several years.

The work was hard, especially as this young lady is wheelchair bound, and due to her lack of education she was not paid much, but Khao always held on to

the dream that one day she would go to school. A short time ago her younger sister, who had now left school after earning good grades thanks to the encouragement she received from Khao, and is now working in a well paid job, persuaded Khao that now is the time to think of her future and 'lift up her life', and this is what she has done. At the age of thirty three Khao applied to join our school and is now studying on our Informal Education programme. Along with several other young disabled women she is now learning to read and write, recite her multiplication tables and learn how to use a computer. The Informal Education course gives these students the help and assis-



tance they need to be able to complete and receive their Grade 6 certificate, something most children reach at the age twelve, and something they will need when looking for and applying for a decent job.

...or too late...

Earlier last year, towards the end of March when most of the schools were closing for the long summer holidays, ten new residents arrived at the Fr. Ray Children's Home. These young teenagers had been living at the Drop-In Center for some time after running away from home and living on the streets. For the first few days at their new home these ten young people stayed as close to each other as a shoal of fish, but as the days passed they started to make new friends. They got used to their new surrounding, got to like the staff and eventually got used to the idea of going back to school. I must admit to you that there are a few boys who I thought I would never see wearing a school uniform, but I was wrong, and they do look very smart leaving each morning, though never as clean on their arrival back home.

...to receive an education

For many of these young people from the streets going back to school and finishing their education is the least of their concerns. Here in Thailand a student can not move into one grade unless



they have finished the previous grade, therefore if a former street kid has missed several years of schooling they will return to the class they were in when they last went to school. Many teenagers have no desire to sit in a class full of much younger children, they are embarrassed and some will last a few days, others may not even last a full day, and we can not force them to stay and like many teenagers they think they know what is best for them. So it takes a lot of patience from our social workers and teachers to persuade these young people to go back to school.

Some of these young people refuse to go back to school full time, so we can arrange for them to attend what we call non-formal education. These classes are taught on Saturdays and Sundays and give the young people a chance to complete their education. Without their school certificates they are unable to find worthwhile employment. Once again it can take a long time to get them to agree to go back to school, we have to motivate them,



get them to see that an education is the way to a better life, but the final decision is up to them. We have a good success rate getting these young people back into school, but we realise that we are not miracle workers and there are some children and teenagers who will not listen to us and will not return to school no matter what we say to them. But many do succeed with the love and the care we give them, and for every one who does complete their education and gets a job it is saving a life that without us would have had little hope for the future.

Begging to learn

Some children come to us and can not wait to attend school and one young boy, whom I shall call Chai, even begged to be allowed to go to school. He arrived at the Fr. Ray Children's Home when he was just thirteen years of age. From a broken family Chai's mother was



just too poor to look after him so he was sent to Pattaya to live with his uncle who eventually brought him to live with us. He worked hard at his studies and now ten years later at the age of twenty three he has graduated, with honors, from a local vocational training college and in March this year he will graduate with a degree in Industrial Business Management. One of our many success stories.

There are quite a lot of children who used to live at our Children's Home but who are now living with their families. We cover the costs of schooling, and although this may sound like a cliché, we are actually 'breaking the cycle of poverty' by making sure these children from poor families are getting the education they need. Now, school is free here in Thailand, but it is the additional costs that many people can not afford. Each child, boy and girl, must have four different uniforms; a regular school uniform, a sports uniform, an activity tunic which is worn one day a week and every school child in Thailand is a member of the Scouts, which means another uniform. Then there are all the books, satchel, pens and pencils to be purchased.

So it can become very expensive to send a child to school, even though they are supposed to be free. Before each new term starts our staff must go and buy new uniforms, and the stores owners must have a smile on their faces when they see our workers arrive.

For this term alone...

At the Children's Home for this term alone we purchased two hundred and sixteen school skirts for the girls and two hundred and forty four pairs of trousers for the boys. The two hundred and nineteen brand new shirts and blouses all needed to have the name, school and grade of the child embroidered onto them, and we need a separate van to carry the 225 pairs of black, brown and white shoes. Each term the children get several new pairs of underwear and so for this term we went out and bought 1061 pairs for the boys and girls, and all this is before we start to buy the scout uniforms and sports clothes.

Learning to read with their fingers...

Many of the blind students do not start their education until much older than sighted children. In many cases these young children have been over protected by their families; the parents know no better, they don't know what a blind child is capable of doing so they do everything for them and the child never learns anything. So when a parent eventually decides to bring their blind child to us their education starts almost immediately. It is not just their ABC's they will learn but they will learn how to take care of themselves; washing, bathing, feeding and dressing themselves.



Then their classroom education will start, and learning the Braille language, both reading and writing is one of the first lessons they will learn. There are many difficulties when teaching a blind child, but the teachers at the School for the Blind treat every child as an individual, no two students are the same and no two students are treated the same.

...and walk with a white cane

One of the first tasks that the blind children learn is how to walk using a white cane. Like many children our younger blind students try to run before they can walk, but first they must learn how to use and handle the cane before they even start to walk. They practice walking around the school grounds until the teachers feel that the students are able to venture out onto the streets. This is a very nerve wracking time for the teachers watching their students walk up the busy roads, most of which have no pavements and the lorries come thundering past. But the students don't complain as they have now become more independent.



Now you can help give our young children an education

At the Day Care Center all that each child needs, food, uniforms, books etc is provided by us, except that we charge each family 5 baht per day (US 15 cents or €10 cents). This does not cover the costs for each child, but we save this money for them so that when each child goes on to full time schooling they will have enough money to pay for their first school uniform and text books.



It costs just 2800 baht (US\$85 - €60) to provide teaching for all our children at the Day Care Center; would you like to help cover these costs?

If you or a family member has a birthday or wedding anniversary coming up and you wish to give a different type of gift then please think about sponsoring our Day Care Center on that special day. If you wish to remember a loved one on a day of remembrance then sponsoring a day of teaching is a very worthwhile way of paying tribute to them.

If you sponsor a day, and you can of course choose which day, our children will say a special thanks to you in their morning prayers, and your chosen day will be 'YOUR DAY' at the Father Ray Day Care Center.



Our website is regularly updated with recent news from here in Pattaya, and you can also read more information about our work on www.fr-ray.org

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