

# Father Ray Foundation Newsletter



March 2013

## Message from Chanasta Reunyen - Teacher

*Redemptorist Vocational School for People with Disabilities*



The first thing I must do in this newsletter is wish you all a very Happy New Year. Here in Pattaya we all had a wonderful time celebrating the Christmas and New Year festivities.

I first came to Pattaya in 1993 to study at the vocational school. Then the school was much smaller than what it is now. I studied information technology for one year and in the

early days of the school I was one of just a few female students. Once I graduated I took a job in a hotel in Bangkok and then at the local government offices in my home town before being invited back to the school to join the English department.

Many people look down on a person who has a disability. I have often heard people say that they are treated like a second class citizen because of their disability. But I can tell you that growing up in the rural part of the country, and as a female who contracted polio at an early age and uses a wheelchair, I was often treated like a third class citizen.

In 2001 when I was invited to join the school as a teacher I did not have to think twice about coming back to Pattaya. I wanted to work for an organization that encourages all people, men and especially women, who are living with a disability to take responsibility for their own life and do something that will give them a better future.

Twice a year, on the day of a new school term, I watch out for all the new female students. For many of these new students this is the first time away from home, the

first time in the big city and the first time away from the comfort and security of their families. But for most of the new female students it is harder for them than the new male students; men with a disability are more likely to have gone to regular school and although it is often difficult to find a job, they still have more chances than a young girl with a disability.

The wonderful thing about this school is how it changes the lives of the students. For every day a student is at the school I see them grow. After just a few days the female students start to lift their head and they start to smile. You see, at the school no one is going to laugh at them, make fun of them or treat them any different to all the other students. They start to make friends, have a social life and their confidence and self-esteem grows more than they could ever have imagined.

Each December I watch with pride as my students receive their graduation certificates. It is difficult to think that these confident young ladies, holding their heads high, are the same students who two years earlier were too shy to even look me in the eye as I spoke with them. The lives of the students really do change when they are with us and I am very happy to be part of a school that is able to do this.



## A sad farewell

In 2007 we welcomed a new Director to the Father Ray Children's Home. Khun Supachai Satheerasilapin had retired from the civil service after many years as a senior social worker. He had even been involved with writing the national child protection policies and guidelines, so persuading him to come out of retirement and work with our children was a great achievement for us.



After five years he once again decided to retire and the ceremony our children organized to say farewell left many with tears in their eyes.

The ceremony started after dinner with Khun Supachai giving a speech to all the children and workers. Then one by one they came forward and he tied a small piece of white string on their wrists. This is a sign of wishing everyone the best of luck.

Once this was over the children and workers then stood in one large circle. As Khun Supachai walked round the circle each member of staff, in a small group with 3-5 children, then presented Khun Supachai with a small posy of flowers, each member of the group with a grip on the stems to make sure they all presented the flowers.

Once he had completed collecting all the flowers the children then stood and started singing a song. Not just any song, but a favourite of Khun Supachai from when he was a young boy. As soon as he recognized the



words from the song a huge smile appeared on his face. After the final note of the song Khun Supachai was asked to stand in the middle of the circle. Each small group then came forward, knelt down on the floor, placed both hands together and bowed their heads to show the love and respect they have for the man who had done so much for them.

As the ceremony came to an end every child then once again came forward for one last hug and a few words of encouragement.

Khun Supachai will be missed by everyone, not just at the Children's Home, but by us all at the Father Ray Foundation, and he has promised to come back to visit and advise us when we need it.



His words of advice, comfort, encouragement and praise have turned the Father Ray Children's Home into a wonderful environment for our children to live and grow. Children who thought they could never succeed at school are now top of their class. Teenagers from poor uneducated families are now studying at colleges and universities. Former residents are employed in positions where they are earning more than they could ever imagine.

But just as important is that when visitors to the Home are leaving most are surprised at how happy and well cared for the children are. Thank you Khun Supachai and have a long, happy and well deserved retirement.



## Whizzing around

At the beginning of each term, in early May and again in November, the Redemptorist Vocational School for People with Disabilities welcomes a new batch of students. They come from all over the Kingdom; some wheeling themselves in their chairs while others can be heard before they are seen as their old artificial legs come clanking along.

But one young man in the recent intake of students surprised us all.

Thirty year old Jim is from Chumphon province in southern Thailand. Disabled from birth, his disability has left his body severely deformed. He is unable to sit upright and has very little strength in his body, not even enough strength to use a wheelchair. Instead, he uses a home made contraption made from a piece of wood nailed to two set of wheels. He lies on the wood, steers with two pieces of string and moves the rear wheels with his neck and feet.

On flat surfaces he is able to move around, but any rough piece of road or a steep ramp and it is almost impossible for him to get by.

Within hours of arriving at the school he was presented with a new electric wheelchair that had been donated by a local supporter.

Now Jim is racing around the school with a smile on his face. He is able to climb the ramps with ease and he can now visit the local shops and supermar-

ket, traveling along the potholed road with ease. The only problem is that sometime Jim goes a bit too fast. Therefore an orange flag has been stuck onto his wheelchair to warn others that he is coming.

## The first stone

The vocational school opened in Pattaya in 1984 and for the first three years it only offered short part time courses for people with disabilities. It was in 1987 that the school welcomed students who studied full time and also lived on site. As the school last year celebrated its twenty-fifth year the number of students who have graduated is almost two and a half thousand.

But as the school in Pattaya celebrated a milestone anniversary, across the country in the northern city of Nong Khai the foundation stone was being laid for a new vocational school for people with disabilities. This new school will accept residents from nearby provinces who are living with a disability and who find the move to a big city like Pattaya a big upheaval as many who enroll in Pattaya are away from family, friends and their communities for the very first time.

The school will also accept students from neighbouring Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam and give them the skills that will allow them to become independent members of society.



## Michael Phelps is in Pattaya

Well, not actually here in Pattaya, but one of his swimming caps is. We are very pleased to let you know that Michael Phelps, the greatest ever Olympian, winner of twenty two Olympic medals, eighteen of them gold, has sent us a signed swim cap and it can be yours if the price is right.



We are holding a silent auction and you can bid for the cap simply by visiting a special page on our website:

[www.fr-ray.org/michaelphelps](http://www.fr-ray.org/michaelphelps)

All you have to do is enter your personal information and the price you would pay for the cap. If your bid is the highest when the auction closes on April 13th, the start of the Thai New Year, the cap is yours.

All money raised will go towards providing swimming lessons and equipment for our children and students.

Many of our disabled students were regular swimmers before their ac-



cidents. Many lose limbs and they think they can no longer swim, so we need to provide life jackets and floats to them. We want all our children living at the Children's Home, Children's Village and the Drop-In Center to be able to swim; it could save their life one day.

Our blind students also need to be able to swim, not just because it could save their life one day, but it is also a lot of fun.

## We need more rice...

We are well aware that many of you reading this newsletter will have been affected by the financial recession that has hit many countries. Here in Thailand we have seen a

large increase in the cost of food, petrol, clothes and workers salaries and even the price of water, cooking gas and electricity has increased.

We are trying to do all we can to become more self sufficient. The ducks and chickens at the Father Ray Children's Home are producing eggs each day and the farm at the Father Ray Children's Village is producing fruit and vegetables. The mushroom houses, fish tanks and pig sties are all providing food, but it will be a long time before we are producing enough food to feed all our children and students. But we have to start somewhere, our work is growing and our efforts are paying off.

Last year our annual SOS Rice Appeal in December did not raise as much rice as we had hoped, we raised 21% less than in 2011. A total of 10,093 kgs was donated, it sounds a lot, but we need much more. In one year our children and students eat 75,000 kgs of rice and the price of this staple food is rising almost every month.

Therefore we are asking you to help feed all the children and students here at the Father Ray Foundation. We are asking you to make a donation to purchase one sack of rice. A 49kg sack of rice costs 1078 Thai Baht (€28, US\$35, £22), and each sack has enough rice to feed almost 500 people, which works out that we use about four large sacks each day.

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*we never turn a needy child away*