

NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2013

special edition



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FATHER RAY FOUNDATION

This month, August 2013, will be the 10 year anniversary of the death of our founder Father Ray Brennan. Those who were fortunate to meet Father Ray will remember a man of compassion, empathy and devotion to his faith, his work and his children. He gave a home to orphaned, abused, underprivileged, neglected and abandoned children. He gave hope to people living with a disability, to the blind and the elderly and for the twenty nine years he spent in Pattaya the number of people who came to him for help runs into the tens of thousands. Even though the final months of his life were spent in ill health, his passing on the morning of the 16th August 2003 sent shockwaves throughout Thailand and beyond.



His funeral was the biggest Pattaya has ever seen, or is ever likely to see. His Majesty the King of Thailand sent sacred royal soil to be buried with Father Ray; the highest honour a person can receive in Thailand. A tribute song, 'Unsung Hero', was written in his honour and sung by his children at the funeral. Family and friends flew in from all over the world and there were so many floral wreaths that the florists of Pattaya almost ran out of flowers. The funeral mass was relayed over loud speakers as there were far too many people to all enter the church at the same time. As

Father Ray's coffin was being lowered into his final resting place, the only sound to be heard was the sound of fun and laughter coming from the neighbouring kindergarden; we know Father Ray would have appreciated that.

But as we mourned the passing of Father Ray we also knew that life goes on. For the past ten years we at the Father Ray Foundation have continued his work in his vision. We have grown in size and we have started several new projects; the Father Ray Day Care Center, the Father Ray Children's Village and the Father Ray Drop-In Center. The Home for Street Kids became the Father Ray Children's Home and the Vocational School for People with Disabilities has almost doubled in size. But as we came nearer to the tenth anniversary we knew that there was one more thing we had to do, and that is to fulfill Father Ray's dream of helping the forgotten children of Pattaya. For all the children and students he helped there is one group in society that Father Ray never had time to help, one group in society that could be called the forgotten children. These are youngsters who are classified as having special needs.

If Father Ray had lived just a few years longer then his dream to create a facility for these unfortunate children would have come true. As far back as the late 1980's Father Ray was making plans to help these children. Unfortunately other work kept him busy. In 2013, on the 10th anniversary of his passing, we want to make Father Ray's final dream come true. To commemorate this anniversary we will be raising funds to build the Father Ray Center for Children with Special Needs and we need your help.

"There goes my kitty which I was saving to use for the special needs children"

- Father Ray writing in a newsletter in 1990 after spending all his savings on the School for the Blind -.

What is 'special needs' ?

When we talk about children with special needs we are referring to those who are living with autism, cerebral palsy, Down's syndrome and any other intellectual disability. Currently there are no facilities in the local area offering these youngsters the therapy, treatment and education they need to reach their full potential in life. Local schools have been designated as suitable places for these children to attend. Local head teachers are supposed to accept these children into their school, but they don't. There is always a list of excuses as to why they can not learn alongside other children; we don't have specialized teachers, the child makes funny noises, they look different, your child will scare the other children. The list of excuses goes on and on.

In 2007 a young mother arrived in our office with her young son. She needed help. She carried her son into our office, just as she carried him everywhere she went. He was suffering with cerebral palsy, but the mother did not know this, she did not know what was wrong with her son. She had no support, no one to help her take care of her son and she was desperate. But she came to the right place. She knew that we would help her and that is exactly what we did.



The numbers

According to government statistics there are 1.9 million people living with a disability in Thailand, 200,000 of these are deemed to have special needs. However, we think there are many more. We did our own research and compared the number of people with special needs in other countries in Asia. In Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong people with special needs make up 1% of the total population. Using this figure, 1% of the population, would mean the number of people in Thailand living with special needs is more likely to be closer to 700,000 than the official 200,000.

What is...?

Cerebral Palsy – affects body movement, muscle control, coordination, tone, posture and balance. It can also affect fine and gross motor skills and oral functioning. Caused by brain damage.

Autism – a mental condition resulting from a neurological disorder that has an effect on normal brain functions affecting development of a child's communication and social interaction skills.

Down's syndrome - a condition in which extra genetic material causes delays in the way a children develops, both mentally and physically.



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We now have more than eighty children with special needs registered with us, but we do not have the facilities to offer them what they need. Cramped conditions, lack of equipment and inadequate funds to pay for experienced and qualified staff means that we are limited in the services we can offer.

Our plan is to construct a center of excellence where these youngsters, and their families, can receive all the support they need to improve their standard of living. A young toddler with cerebral palsy needs physio- and occupational therapy sessions starting from a very early age. Therapy should be given every day, not just the one session a week we can currently offer. We want to provide these children with daily therapy sessions. A child



living with autism needs to be assessed so that we can give them the best available and appropriate education. We want to provide these children with qualified and experienced health professionals who know what is best for these children. A child with Down's syndrome needs an education, just like all children of their own age. We want to provide that education. As a child grows into a teenager we want to provide vocational training so these young people can learn new skills and knowledge that will help them become more independent. Many families



are unaware of the condition their child is living with. We want to change that. We want to teach parents and siblings what condition their child, brother or sister is living with. We want to offer support to the families of these children. Many children living with their families are unable to make the journey into our facility. So we will go to them. We will bring the therapy they need to their homes in the community and give the children what they need. Many people living in society do not know what cerebral palsy, autism or Down's syndrome is. We will teach them. We will invite schools, businesses and organizations to come and visit our center, see what we do and they will go away with a new view of what special needs means.

But we cannot do this alone. We can only do this with your help. Your support will give these children the opportunity to become worthwhile members of society.

"Nor was he (Father Ray) able to start a home for mentally disabled children. This was a dream that recurred for years, prompted in part by the presence of multi-disabled children at the School for the Blind for whom, he said, he could do little more than offer food, shelter and love. More than once he, and other members of his organization, looked into it, but the need for skilled caretakers and medical staff made it beyond his reach".

Quote from 'In the Name of the Boss Upstairs. The Father Ray Brennan Story'.



What can you do ?

You can help us to realize Father Ray's dream and provide a 'center of excellence' for these children. What we need to do, with your help, is raise enough money, not just to construct and furnish the Father Ray Center for Children with Special Needs, but also cover the overheads for the first five years. Father Ray once said that 'anyone can build a building, it is what you do with the building that matters'.

The Father Ray Center for Children with Special Needs will be four stories tall, with a total of almost forty rooms, each one designed and furnished for a specific task. There will be rooms for music therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, early intervention activities and a sensory room. There will also be space set aside for counseling and offering support to the children and their families. Classrooms will give the children the opportunity to learn as children of similar ages are learning in schools throughout the country. Vocational workshops will allow the older children to gain knowledge and learn new skills which will give them the best possible chance of becoming more independent and employable.

As we remember the life of Father Ray Brennan on this the tenth anniversary of his death, help us to fulfill his dreams and in his memory we will give these children the chance to improve their life and become worthwhile members of society. Here is how you can help.

- You can sponsor the construction of a classroom, therapy room or a workshop and this room will be dedicated in your name.
- We also need sponsors to furnish each room with the specialized equipment our children need.
- Any donation you can make will benefit the children at the new Father Ray Center for Children with Special Needs.

We have a new website for this new project and it is where you will find more information about why we need to construct the Father Ray Center for Children with Special Needs. It will also give you the costs of construction each room and equipment that is needed.

For more ideas on how you can help please visit our dedicated website
www.fr-ray-10anniversary.org or email us at 10anniversary@fr-ray.org

Message from Khun Sumet - Manager of the Father Ray Center for Children with Special Needs

I have been involved with the children with special needs since the very first child arrived here. Every week I meet with a new family who do not know what to do with their child. They know their child is different to the other children they know, but do not know what autism or cerebral palsy is. They do not know what their child is capable of or what their abilities are. Recently a young boy who came here in 2007 walked for the very first time. It was like a miracle had happened. Every week for almost five years he came to see us and for most of the time he slouched in his chair, unable to sit upright. But the physio and occupational therapy he received made his legs stronger and gave him confidence, and now he can walk. I will never forget watching him take his first step. While many of us watched with tears in our eyes he slowly moved one foot in front of the other with the most beautiful smile on his face. If we had been able to offer this young boy therapy every day then he would have walked a long time ago, so I hope that you can help our children with special needs here in Pattaya.

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