

Father Ray Foundation Newsletter



June 2014

Message from Father Michael

I was very fortunate to have worked with Father Ray many years ago when I was still a young priest, and when I arrived back in Pattaya four years ago I was pleasantly surprised to see that the work he started has almost doubled in size and is continuing to grow.

Each day I see our successes. Students with disabilities are learning new skills, graduating and finding employment, youngsters living at the Children's Home and Children's Village are enjoying their childhood and our blind children are gaining knowledge. It is a joy to see, but it is all down to you, our supporters, and I thank you for your continued support.

In August last year we remembered Father Ray on the tenth anniversary of his passing, and to commemorate his life we announced a fundraising campaign to help the one group of children he never had time to help during his lifetime, those children with special needs. Recently I heard from official government statistics that there are 300,000 children with special needs living in Thailand, but we believe there are many more and I am sure that the real figure is much higher. But even for the number of children who are recognised, there are hardly any facilities available to them. There are very few facilities for children with Down Syndrome in the country. In a large city like Pattaya there is nowhere where children with autism and cerebral palsy can re-

ceive the therapy and help they need, unless they pay for it. But most families of these children could never afford the costs and this is the reason why just a few weeks ago we held the ground breaking ceremony to start construction of the Father Ray Center for Children with Special Needs.

Many people have asked me why we would even think of starting such a difficult project at a time like this when money is scarce. My answer to this question is simple: we are doing it because there is an urgent need. You see, these children have nowhere else to go. They lead very lonely lives, many sitting at home with nothing to do, and if we don't do something for these children, no one else will. Today we have more than one hundred children with special needs, from 3 year old up to those in their late teens, and if you are ever lucky enough to meet them you will understand why we need to build this new facility for them.

I would like to thank everyone who responded when we announced our campaign last year. Your generosity means we can now start the construction, and while we do not have all the money we need, we can make a start.

It is still not too late to give your support and help us give our children the facility they need, thank you very much.



Ground breaking

Apart from the Buddhist monks, catholic priests, local dignitaries and supporters who attended the ground breaking ceremony for the new Father Ray Center for Children with Special Needs, more than one hundred children with special needs, together with their families also attended. Although there was nothing much to see, except a flat and empty piece of land, they came to see the site where the new Center will be built. The teenagers scrutinized and discussed the plans as if they had designed them themselves, and they could not understand why it was going to take so long to build. We explained that it takes time to construct a building with four floors, plus build all the classrooms, then all the painting needs to be done before the furniture can be moved in, then it will be ready.

No doubt when construction does start there will be daily inspections, discussions and opinions from our children as the work progresses and we are not sure how the workers will feel with a daily audience. We will keep you updated.

Back to the temple



While the majority of our children are enjoying the summer holidays, a small group of boys from the Children's Home and Children's Village decided once again to spend time at the local temple, take vows and become Buddhist Novice Monks. This is normal practice for most Thai boys and men who will take vows

and become ordained at some time during their lives.

At first, we were not too sure if your younger boys would gain from this experience, but we now see that they do, and when they have returned home in past years we have seen a change for the better in their attitude to life. They seem to be calmer, more tolerant and patient, and, much to the delight of the house mothers, more helpful around the house.

Congratulations



We are very proud of all our children, but there comes a day when we are a bit more proud of some than others. Four years ago, six residents from the Children's Home sat an entrance exam for a scholarship to what is known as the best school in the province. Every year since then, more children joined the same school and in the 2013-2014 school year we had seventeen residents attending that school. They all passed the examination and they leave for school at 6:00 each morning and arrive home twelve hours later, six days a week. They work hard and during the holidays they attend summer school and we have never heard a single complaint from any of them.

Four of the seventeen recently graduated from Grade 12, our first ever graduates from the school and we are very proud of them. When they reached home with their certificates, there was a collective sigh of relief, with one of the young men announcing that he is relieved that "all the hard work is over". We didn't want to spoil his day by reminding him that he starts his four year university course in May, that will be when the real hard work starts.

All four of them will be going off to university next term. One of the boys will study Economics, the other wants to become a sports teacher while the two young ladies will study International Travel. The most amazing thing about these four teenagers is that, like most of our children who have so far gone on to study at college or university, they are the first members from their own families to ever do so.

As four have graduated from the school, a further eight youngsters, including four from the Children's Village, have recently passed their entrance exams and have received their scholarships.

A Taste of Thailand



It is not everyday our children get invited to climb aboard one of the world's most luxurious cruise liners, but this did happen when the Queen Mary 2 arrived into Pattaya as part of its World Tour.

The ship would be in port for just twelve hours and while many guests disembarked to go shopping, many stayed on

board to watch our children perform in a show called, "A Taste of Thailand" with the aim of introducing the audience to the culture of Thailand.

We had a few disagreements even before we left Pattaya as our older girls from the Children's Home had been rehearsing a dance routine to a song by Beyonce, and they had planned to wear the shortest shorts imaginable. Definitely not we said, and it took a lot of persuasion before they understood that a song and dance routine from an American singer has nothing to do with Thailand. Eventually they agreed that we were right. When they walked onto the stage they looked beautiful in their traditional Thai costumes and they received a standing ovation when they finished their Traditional Thai dance routine.

Other performances included an exhibition of Muay Thai boxing from the boys at the Children's Home and our boys with special needs lived up to their self proclaimed "superstar" status. The toddlers from the Day Care Center were so excited at being on stage they forgot what they were supposed to do and instead of dancing they stood staring and pointing at the audience. But



they still received a standing ovation, just for looking cute. You can see all the performances on youtube.com by searching the "Fr. Ray Foundation" Channel.

In the last newsletter we sent to you there was a story about two little blind children who stole the show at the Christmas party when they sang a duet together. Well, the same thing happened when they performed the same song on the Queen Mary 2.



Not only did they receive a standing ovation, but calls of "bravo" and "more" could be heard from the audience. If you would like to see their wonderful performance, go to [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and type in the words "two blind children sing".



Sports



The National Games for the Disabled took place earlier this year and the province of Chonburi, where we are located, was represented by students from the Vocational School for People with Disabilities and the School for the Blind.

In the final medal standings, Chonburi came in third place, with our students bringing home a large haul of gold, silver and bronze medals. Medals were won in the athletics and other high profile sports, but our students won more medals in the fencing competition than any other sport. One former student, who now works at our electronic repair workshop, won several gold medals in the wheelchair fencing competition and is expected to be



selected to represent Thailand at the Asian Games for which he is now training hard.

At the Games two types of volleyball are played, the regular competition where the players stand, and another for those who have lower limb disabilities and they play sitting on the floor. Our players are some of the best in the country, and watching them play you may not think that you would be able to hit a ball hard while sitting on the floor. But these athletes train every day, their fingers are wrapped in tape and the palms of their hands are as tough as leather.

They hit the ball so hard that it is an unlucky opponent who does not get out of the way when the ball flies over the net.

And finally



By mid-April the temperature here in Pattaya is almost touching 40 degrees Celsius, or 104 for those who use Fahrenheit. Schools had broken up for the summer holidays, and until the sun goes down late afternoon, our children are too hot to do anything more strenuous than stay indoors close to a fan and try and stay as cool as possible.

Our local reservoir is almost empty,

people are complaining about water shortages and yet in the middle of all this comes a day that our children look forward to all year, Songkran. This is the Thai New Year festival and the one day when people are forgiven for wasting water. On one particular day all our children gathered at our main office, which just happens to be located along a very busy road, and from morning to evening they threw water over each other and over anyone who happened to be passing; the whole city turned into one big water fight. There is a traditional side to the festivities, when scented water is poured over the hands of elders and in return a blessing is given for the coming year, but once this was over the fun really begins. Everyone was wearing the brightest and most colourful shirts, and we even set up a kitchen on the side of the road to make sure they children don't forget to eat. No one is safe from our children when they are carrying a water pistol. We wish you a very Happy Thai New Year from everyone here at the Foundation.



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