



Message from Fr. Shea

This issue of Kate's news deals with our flourishing football team: work with kids beginning the new school term, a faithful volunteer and the death of Muay.

Fr. Ole began nurturing his ragged little band of would be soccer (football) players several years ago. He and Fr. Ghee run late afternoon drills, and at first, every game they played (usually against older players) they got drubbed. But despite the humiliating losses and initial disappointment, the coaches never gave up, and suddenly the players began running harder and faster (the lads are growing up fast!) and passing the ball with greater accuracy, and dribbling and shooting and they are now winning. Fr. Ole is the American disciple of Vince Lombardi and soon their team will be able to compete with Manchester United! Brother Keng is still a University student; studying at Khon Kaen (about 170 km south of here) and helping Kate with the Outreach Program, and he is helping all our children choose their schools and facilitating their room and board, and checking on their transformation from schooling from home, to living in dorms or rented rooms. Fr. Ghee is moving to Pai Si Tong to the rectory there, but he still helps translate children's' letters and also coaches with Fr. Ole and is the go-to-guy when we need videos filmed for showing our work to donors. Also in Kate's issue is a Thai lad who overcame huge physical drawbacks to become a really talented artist, a tribute to our Muay and an update on our lad who lost a foot in a motor bike accident.

God Bless, Fr. Mike

Half yearly updates

The end of school holidays are over and the new school term began in May. Almost a month in, and uniforms, shoes, books and bags have been purchased or handed down – depending on the condition they are in. Most of the children's sports shoes have been thrown out as they were worn through, the socks as well with big holes in the heel and toe despite darning them throughout the year. Stains have been scrubbed clean from white school shirts and old names unpicked and new names re-embroidered over them. This school year sees



eight little ones from 3-5 years old attending preschool or nursery school. At Rosario Witthayu School, Vienghuk there are 72 children studying in Grade 1 to Grade 9 and fourteen teenagers are studying in Grade 10 to Grade 12 at senior high schools. Nine teenagers are attending vocational schools around Nongkhai and are still living at Sarnelli House and being transported to and from school every day by a Sarnelli House van and driver. Seven students are studying in vocational schools outside Nongkhai and are living in town close to the schools. There are four students on work experience - some for as long as one year in Bangkok and Pattaya. Twelve students are studying at tertiary, college and university level all away from Nongkhai. To top those numbers off - this school year, twenty students have started new schools or colleges. This includes seven new children who have arrived at Sarnelli House in the last two months, seeking sanctuary and stability. A set of siblings whose father died from AIDS and whose family were unwilling to care for the 14-year-old girl and the 10-year-old brother have arrived. A 14-year-old girl who was sexually abused by her stepfather, a 7-year-old boy with HIV and learning disabilities and a 10-year old boy with no family who used to steal to feed himself are some of the new arrivals.



Br. Keng and a few of the office staff do a huge amount of work organizing the new children to attend school and managing the change of schools for twenty students. There is transporting students to entrance exams, filling in many enrolment forms, providing photos, coaching them for interviews, buying school supplies and settling many of them into outside accommodation. With years of experience however, the beginning of school term starts without too many mishaps.

Football mad

Football has been a welcome activity at Sarnelli House. It is helping to build team spirit and respect among the boys. Developing this spirit is one of the many roles Fr. Ole has taken on at Sarnelli House. As well as being pastor for 4 parishes, he is the go to man for everything and everyone. His skills in information and technology, in finances, in teaching office staff how to use the database and in supporting all with his kindness and empathy are just the tip of the iceberg in Fr. Ole's skill set. Perhaps what the boys in particular respect the most about Fr. Ole is his willingness to encourage them and engage with them every day after school. You will find him most afternoons out on the dry, hard football field with



whistle around his neck, team jerseys on his arm, movable goal posts in position and footballs in the back of his pick up truck.

The Sarnelli boys have always been eager to play football. However for the first few years of training, Fr. Ole would despair about their ability to become a team. Insults were thrown at the goal keeper if he let a ball through, fights happened on and off the field and every boy seemed to be in the team for himself alone. Fr. Ole would return despondent but not defeated from these afternoons. But his constancy, his fairness and his sense of humour eventually rubbed off on the boys and now they make a reasonable force to be reckoned with. Together with Fr. Ghee who is assistant priest to Fr. Ole, they have built up the Sarnelli House boys and the Pai Si Tong village boys into teams who are able to hold their own in a competition, and sometimes win.



At least once a month Fr Ole and Fr Ghee will transport the boys to a competition football match, usually at a parish in the area that is celebrating the feast day of their church. A football match is usually organised as part of the festivities and the boys in freshly donated boots and jerseys will be determined to bring home the trophy. There have been some successes amongst the losses, but the days always end in a van full of tired boys returning home, dirty, bruised, well fed and a little better at their football skills than last time. In the long school holiday break from mid March to mid May, Fr. Ole will take the boys to play football in Nongkhai in a local park with a field of astroturf. No longer kicking around in the hard, dry ground with dust swirling everywhere, the boys relish their time playing like professionals. The boys see in Fr. Ole a male role model who they can emulate and respect. Their behaviour has begun to mature and they are beginning to take losses without blaming someone else. On the football field their competitiveness comes alive yet they also can maintain their team spirit.

Sharing talents

There are other role models available for the children. Each year in the school holidays, volunteers arrive from countries all over the world. Even though they do not speak the same



language as the children, they find other just as effective ways to communicate. Sport is an example and joining in with basketball, football or swimming are all means of communication. The kids love having the companionship, the novelty and the fun of different volunteers come to join their lives. From the regular ones who faithfully come twice every year such as Ben and Angelique and Leon and Henriette from The Netherlands, Thor from Australia, Debbie from the United Kingdom and Jim from the USA, they all bring their special set of gifts and skills. A particular volunteer who not only is an amazing role model but also a fun and warm guy is Wang from Chiang Mai, Thailand. He has no trouble communicating as he is Thai and has never allowed his disabilities to get in the way of a happy, successful life. He is an acclaimed artist himself and comes and spends two to three weeks twice a year with the children teaching art and demonstrating to them that nothing is impossible. With his friend Thor from Australia they put on art classes and develop their friendships with the children of all ages.

Without these and other people who spend their own money to come and stay and use their holiday time to keep more than 120 children occupied, the school holidays would be an exhausting time for the staff and a stagnant time for the children.

Muay

Earlier this year one of the girls from Nazareth House unexpectedly died. Muay was just 16 years old and had already had a torrid life. She was born with Down Syndrome and abandoned by her mother at birth. She grew up with her grandmother and a group of elderly people living in poor and unhygienic circumstances. She never went to school, or had her birth registered, she had no health checks and she grew up wild and the butt and poor opinion of people's jokes. Her grandmother died and she lived in a shack with her grandmother's husband. She would describe in action to the old people living with her what the old man did to her every night. They thought she was crazy because of her Down Syndrome and paid no attention to her. Then, a female government worker came to the camp to assess the old people and to give them their government assistance of 500 baht a month. She took Muay and her actions describing

her nightly ordeal seriously, and immediately called the Thai welfare team. After questioning Muay and the old people, they removed Muay from the environment. That was in 2014 and Muay was 13 years old. She arrived at Sarnelli House with a mouth full of swear words, a tendency to hit people she liked and a curiosity and an energy that exhausted most people. But beneath it all was a vulnerability and an innocence that belied all that had happened to her. She was treated for TB and had to undergo health checks and eventually was enrolled in a special needs school in the next village. Muay lived first at Jan and Oscar House but she was moved from there to Nazareth House as she too easily terrorised the small ones at House of Hope. At Nazareth House the teenage girls looked after her, teased her and treated her like one of their own. They put up with her sleepless nights, her thieving ways, her stories told out of turn and made her life happy and familiar. Muay was everywhere – in the office stealing staplers and pens, riding her bike and then asking to be driven back home,



sitting in church with a painted white face staring innocently up at Fr. Ole causing him to break into giggles. Fr. Ole bought her a cheap version of an IPAD and she would spend hours



on it talking back at the photos. She mastered the telephone and would call Fr Ole and leave unintelligible messages for him, or shout his name constantly at his ID photo thinking he could hear her. After just three days in hospital in March this year, with an overwhelming tonsil infection Muay could fight no longer. Two girls from Nazareth House stayed with her the whole time during that sudden and frightening admission. They reassured her, talked with her, attended to all her physical needs and kept her fear at bay as she was treated with breathing tubes, needles and all the array of medical technology available at Nongkhai Hospital. But her heart was not able to fight against the overwhelming infection. At the last the girls were there, Fr. Mike had visited and she had settled when she saw Fr. Ole, Ms Kung, Nok and Dtim – those who had bought so much happiness and stability to her life. Her time at Sarnelli House was her happiest and the place where she was most loved and accepted. She is greatly missed.

A lucky escape

After finishing his diploma at vocational school in Nongkhai, Stoke was ready to embark on his one year work experience in Bangkok with other students from his school. Stoke had been abandoned on a rubbish dump as a child and was discovered and taken to a girls orphanage in Udon Thani. He started treatment for TB and HIV and eventually moved to Sarnelli House when he was seven years old. Now at 19 years old, one night in April, Stoke drove his motorbike home from a party, but he didn't make it home. A car crashed into him, but the driver of the car thankfully made sure he got to hospital. He had multiple broken bones as well as an almost severed artery in his leg. Surgery on the ruptured artery was performed, but a few days later gangrene set in to his toes and he had to have his foot amputated. He was then in traction in hospital with a fractured femur of the same leg and a nasty infected stump wound that took weeks to heal. Further surgery repaired the fractured thigh bone and with the wonderful help from the boys from Gary and Janet House on the farm, who took it in turns to stay with him 24 hours a day throughout his hospital stay, he was eventually discharged home. Staying in the clinic at Sarnelli House, Stoke has our volunteer nurse Svenja from APO in Germany, and our assistant physiotherapist Ben from The Netherlands helping him daily keep his wound clean and to improve his mobility. He is now ready for the next step in his rehabilitation.



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To protect the privacy of our children we have not used their real
names or identified them in photos.

Written by Kate Introna, June 2017