



## Message from Fr. Shea

In this issue of the Sarnelli House newsletter, Kate narrates the transformation of children getting an opportunity for education in any milieu they choose. Sarnelli House is home to smart kids; good in their studies and with high marks, who are destined for college and good jobs that follow. We also have kids, boys and girls, who take advantage of Thailand's vocational schools. Here they get good educations in a shorter time than college kids, and take courses in computers, in secretarial tasks, and many other subjects. Then we have some young people, who, through no fault of their own, are hard put to retain knowledge and even numbers. These are kids whose intellectual faculties were badly damaged by early anti-retroviral doses of AIDS medicine or brain infections. They are children whose parents or relatives were abusive and beat them or ignored their basic needs as they grew up. Babies were given Coke or other soft drinks instead of milk. Young girls under the age of ten years, raped or trafficked. We take them all in, and help and love them for who they are and for whatever they accomplish in their lives. Some of these kids have opted to stay with us, working on the farm or in the kitchen, as housemothers or cooks. We have some great success stories, and we have some sad stories of kids who left us and did not continue taking their medicine, or fell into the curse of drugs and/or prostitution. Like the father in Jesus' Prodigal Son story, we pray for their safe return and wait anxiously for news about them, and for the actual sighting of them coming toward us in the distance.

**May God Bless you all**  
**Fr Mike Shea C.Ss.R**

## New start for junior high girls

The new teenage girls home in Don Wai was completed by the end of July. This meant the girls from Vienghuk moved in over one weekend at the beginning of August. All the light fittings, power sockets, overhead fans were moved as well which meant a lot of rides to and from Vienghuk in the pickups. Luckily the rain held off that weekend. The security wall around the new building is almost finished, as is the renovation of the old wooden house in front of the new building. This will be used for Ms Dak one of the housemothers who has no other accommodation. Seven girls bypassed the new house completely and moved directly to Nazareth House (just next door). They are studying in a senior high school nearby. The other eleven girls attend Rosario School in Vienghuk. In the middle of August, eight younger girls moved from the Jan and Oscar House in Pai Si Tong to the new house bringing the total number of girls

to nineteen. All of them are studying Grade 7 to Grade 9 at Rosario School. There are four extra beds and wardrobes in the large, airy dormitory for four girls attending school at the Holy Redeemer School in Khon Kaen. They love to come home whenever there is a long weekend and in the holidays, and to know that there is still a space and a welcome for them. Usually moving the children from one house to another happens in May before school resumes. But with the big move from Vienghuk scheduled for July, it was held off until then. Thank you all so much for all the donations that helped complete the house and make it safe, bright and most of all a home for our teenage girls. It was tough to leave behind the old house in Vienghuk which was the starting point of Fr Mike's ministry for abandoned children. It holds so many memories and was a real symbol of what can be achieved through prayer, action and generosity.





# Giving back before taking off

The last few months have seen preparations and excitement mount, as some of our young adults start the walk towards higher level education, and the leap away from Sarnelli House. Regular school finished in March and most universities and colleges started in August, so for a handful of teenagers there was a four-month break, where they want to find a job and make a little money. Jobs are hard to find especially when you live 20 km/12 miles out of town. Most jobs for school leavers are waiting tables in restaurants and cafes. The hours are long and finish well into the evening. Some teenagers found jobs with friends who own motorbikes, and would get a lift to work from their friend. However, some pre university students living at Sarnelli House were offered jobs helping with homework, office work and general care of the smaller children at Sarnelli House. At Jan and Oscar House, St Patrick's Home and Sarnelli House,



homework time can be rowdy and chaotic. Before school resumed for the new school year, a meeting with all the staff of the houses, and a plan to improve homework time was made by the staff. Now the set time for homework at the Jan and Oscar House is 6-8pm. The 24 girls get home from school at 5pm, have a shower, eat supper and have play time until 6pm. Each girl has a desk, and each girl has to sit at the desk even if they have no homework. For those who do not have homework, the diligent Ms Noon had prepared



work sheets to complete. These included simple exercises for Math, Thai and English which the girls worked on together. The TV is turned off and quiet time is encouraged, but there have not been enough house mothers available to hear all the reading, and to help with the homework. Grandmother Wan sits at the back of the room, and, regular as clockwork, never missing a day, she hears a couple of the little girls with learning difficulties read. With one little seven year old girl, she sounds out all the Thai words while sliding her finger across the page under the words. Her little student peers over her arm and parrots every word she says, while looking around the room at anything but the book. Her attention span is so limited it is a great feat to get her to sit still for a few pages. Grandmother Wan has infinite patience. When she asks the little one to try and read what she has been listening to for 5 minutes, her student takes great pride in running her finger along the words at high speed, but making up an entirely different scenario in a high piping voice. Her brow is furrowed as she develops her story and her finger speeds along the page to the end, but the story continues. Usually it is about her mother's house, where she lives, how she goes to school every day, and helps her mother with cleaning the dishes before school. This picture would be delightful but knowing the little girl's history it is also heartbreaking. She came to Sarnelli House because her mother abused her so violently she broke her daughter's leg. Thankfully there are ladies like Grandmother Wan who can absorb the pain and confusion of a little girl's past and soothe her way to a better future.

Into this mix came two 19 years old girls who both grew up at Sarnelli House. One an orphan, born with HIV, who arrived when she was 5 years old. The other a victim of terrible sexual abuse at 8 years old. Both her parents did not want anything to do with her after she told of what had happened to her. Both girls have been friends for a long time and have lived at Nazareth House together, and lived together in Nongkhai when they were studying for their



Diploma. Their university enrollment was successful and they are now studying at Maha Sarakham University which is 260km / 160m from Nongkhai. One is studying computers and the other architecture.

Armed with enthusiasm and targeting a few of the girls who were having problems with Thai reading and Math, they sat down on the floor with their students and helped with homework, and also with the subject they were struggling with. The two girls stayed in the small rooms next to the Jan and Oscar House and had their



meals with the little girls. Getting the small girls ready for bed after homework, getting them up in the morning for breakfast, chores and dressed for the Sarnelli school truck which leaves at 7.15am were all part of the girls' jobs. Having extra help in the evenings with homework, an extra pair of ears to listen, and extra hands to play badminton against were all positive things for the little girls. They miss their big sisters now they have gone, but their improved understanding of basic math and feeling more confident with their reading has been a good outcome.

Another young 19-year old girl, who was accepted to study nursing

in a hospital in Bangkok, also had time on her hands. She came to Sarnelli House as a place of refuge and safety after she was brutally abused when she was 16 years old. She had to give evidence at the trial and her father is now in jail, but her mother does not accept her daughter's situation and wants no contact with her. This young lady is quiet and sweet, and keeps most things to herself, admitting that she is not one to talk about her feelings. There is no formal counselling available for her, but she has found strength in the friendships she has made at Nazareth House and the support she has received from the staff. Her school grades have been consistently above average and she was successful in applying for a 4 year degree in Nursing. For three months before starting her training she was assisting with nursing duties at Sarnelli House. She accompanied children on appointments to hospitals in Nongkhai and Khon Kaen. Her gentle presence allayed many a small child's fears. She went on outreach visits and observed the poor and needy conditions of many people in the area. A number of children needed to be hospitalized and she was the carer who stayed with the child in hospital. A 12 year old boy from Sarnelli House developed high fevers and flu like symptoms. During the rainy season dengue fever is much more common, so he was admitted to hospital for 2 nights to check his blood and monitor his fever. He recovered well with no sign of dengue fever. Another little boy from House of Hope was admitted for drainage of an abscess on his thigh. He had to stay in hospital for three nights. Our girl and a housemother from House of Hope stayed with him – his roars are only gradually fading from their ears. He also recovered well.

In July, a 14 year old girl from Viengkuk had her second bout of complex surgery. She had been incontinent of urine since she was 2 years old from a motorbike accident in Laos. After being admitted for 4 nights to Srinagarind Hospital in Khon Kaen, where the surgery was performed by a surgeon from Siriraj hospital in Bangkok, she was discharged home to the clinic at Sarnelli House. Our trainee nurse stayed with her 24 hours a day and learnt how to care for her catheter, take her temperature, measure her urine and give her tablets. It was a great opportunity for both the girls and they each gained respect for the other. The success of the surgery is still inconclusive, but the catheter was removed and rest has been prescribed.



A young man who came to live at Sarnelli House when he was 10 years old, was also employed by Sarnelli House before starting university. His is 19 years old now, was born with HIV and he is an orphan. His grandmother tried to care for him in her village but could not because of the neighbours' fear of infection and her poor circumstances. When he started school with the children at Sarnelli House, he excelled academically and when he graduated in Grade 9 from Rosario School, he decided he wanted to challenge himself at a more prestigious school. He was accepted into Holy Redeemer School, Khon Kaen and moved up there to live in a room one of the teachers was renting in her house. Here he also excelled and was captain of his year. He had chosen to go on to study business administration at Khon Kaen University.

Work was allocated to him in the office at Don Wai, and he helped the finance and sponsorship girls with filing and accounts and whatever work he was given. He also went over to St Patrick's Boys Home and targeted a few specific children who were having difficulties with reading and writing Thai. He worked out fun ways to teach them and keep them attentive, and he succeeded brilliantly. In the evenings,

once school had resumed, he helped the boys at Sarnelli House with their homework. The money earned from Sarnelli House he gave to his grandmother to help put a new roof on her little home. She is still working selling Thai sweets in the local market. When the van was loaded up with belongings to move him to Khon Kaen a few days before university started, Granny came along to see the accommodation and the university. It is a huge achievement for her as well.

The two girls in Maha Sarakham University have each other and have lived away from Sarnelli House before. The young man going to Khon Kaen has lived in Khon Kaen for three years and has friends there. But our girl studying nursing had never been to Bangkok and the adjustment for her was huge. She had no friends and everything was very different to provincial Nongkhai. The noise, the traffic, the number of people and most importantly – the food. She felt under a lot of pressure to succeed as her nursing course is not cheap for Sarnelli House, but with great courage and a sense of humour she has begun to enjoy her first weeks.

## Outreach news

People in need continue to reach out for help and assistance and are welcomed and helped by the Outreach Program. A baby in a local village was born with hydrocephalus to a teenage mother, who has since gone back to school. The father is not in the picture and the grandparents were trying to care for the little one, so he can gain enough weight to have a shunt inserted into his brain to drain the fluid away. He is a tiny, thin little baby and the grandparents could not afford the best formula milk for him while working to keep their daughter in school and working to survive. Hospital appointments for the baby include eye checks at Udon Thani Hospital, brain surgery at Srinagarind Hospital, Khon Kaen and admissions for lung infections at Nongkhai Hospital. They only have a motorbike to transport the baby - in the pelting rain and the harsh sun. The Outreach Program provided the formula milk as well as diapers, and transport to and from the hospitals in the Outreach Van. A living allowance for hospital visits and admissions was also given to tide the family over for their days lost working. The family has never asked for money but are grateful for whatever manner of practical help they can receive. Other families have been helped and it is becoming more common to see families with chronic health issues living in extreme circumstances. There is no adequate community or financial supports available for the bedbound or the disabled and their need is great and taxing for their families.



## Gratefully

A very big thank you to all the Cebo Riders, their generous supporters and the organizers of the big day which was held on 14 July in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. Without such events we couldn't continue the work we do at Sarnelli House.

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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, August 2018