



Message from Fr. Shea

In this letter, Kate writes about the comings and goings of the kids at Sarnelli House. This year, especially, we have had a big migration of teens who finished school and opted to leave for home or jobs, rather than continue studies at the university level.



That lowered the number of children, but we are now taking in more babies, and in the years to come, they will be filling up the other houses.

Other than that, we are desperate to see the last of Covid-19 and its variants. Almost half of our staff were infected since last December, together with babies and many of the children. Thank God everyone fought their way back to health, although some had complications that lasted for a while after they recovered.

We hope all our readers stay safe and healthy during these trying days.

God Bless you all.

Into the new school year

Last month saw the reopening of schools in Thailand for the new school year. With the ongoing restrictions around Covid-19, students and teachers are mandated to wear masks, and handwashing and safe distancing are in practice. Hopefully for this year, students all over Thailand will have a better experience than the previous two years, and online learning will only be a faint memory for them. The children were actually happy to head back to school as it meant seeing friends again and also represented the first tentative steps towards a return to some sort of normality.

College Graduates

This year, nine Sarnelli House students graduated from tertiary education. Five young women and one young man finished their vocational courses and now have diplomas in Hospitality, Computers, Logistics and Electronics. They were disappointed they could not have the usual big graduation ceremony, but they are excited to be joining the work force as they look for jobs. Of the five young woman, one is coming back to work at Sarnelli House, specifically at Charlene House, the guest house for visitors and volunteers. She is a young woman who was born with HIV and is an orphan. She came to Sarnelli House when she was 13 years old from a situation of grinding poverty and neglect, with no access to health care. Attending school has always been hard for her as she missed so much when she was younger. She has done very well for herself to have gained her diploma, despite having to repeat subjects in her final year. Like many of the children born with HIV growing up at Sarnelli House, she has low self-confidence, and she is extremely tentative and unsure of herself. Hopefully, earning a wage and meeting new people, all within the security of a familiar setting, will help to increase her feelings of self-worth. For her future, starting a life outside of Sarnelli House may then not seem so daunting. Often





Sarnelli House can be a transitional shelter for damaged young adults. After they finish school a few more years are needed where they can work in whatever capacity suits them, earn a wage, and gradually venture out of Sarnelli House on training days or on their days off. They need to feel confident in themselves and their ability to live independently, and this doesn't happen immediately upon graduation.

Another one of the girls graduating from vocational school, is also an orphan and was born with HIV. She has been reunited with her aunt and uncle after 18 years at Sarnelli House and has returned to live with them and find work closer to their home. The remaining three young women are living in Nongkhai and Udon Thani and are looking for work. Having graduated with a diploma in Electronics, the only young man in the group has had a blip appear in his plans. After his one-year work experience in a



good company, he was able to secure a job with the same firm and planned to start in May. However, fate intervened in the guise of the annual army conscription process. All Thai males who are aged 21 years old have to be available for two years military duty. The system is lottery based and if a red card is pulled then that man is conscripted. Having a diploma has an upside, and he will only have to do 12 months service, instead of the two years. He is very philosophical about his call up, as for many young men it is considered part of

their national duty to serve time in the Thai military.

Three college students completed their degrees this year. One young man has graduated with a business degree from Khon Kaen University and he wants to work in marketing. He is 23 years old and came to Sarnelli House when he was ten years old, an orphan and born with HIV. He has done remarkably well academically and has always been keen to take the educational opportunities offered to him. Even as a young boy he was curious and eager to learn. When he was 11 years old, an organization granting sick children wishes came to Sarnelli House and asked the group of children living with HIV, who were not expected to have long lives, where in their wildest dreams they would like to go in the world. Most of the kids blurted out Tesco Lotus, Nongkhai – the local mall. But this boy replied Versailles. The interviewer was taken aback and asked him to repeat himself, and he said again Versailles. When it was confirmed he really meant and even knew about Versailles in France, he explained that he had a picture book with descriptions of the city, and he decided that one day he wanted to go there. Now he is in Bangkok for a month studying an intensive English language course, thanks to generous sponsors who are funding his accommodation and school fees, while Sarnelli House funds his food expenses. Speaking English at a proficient level is essential for him to get a good paying job in the marketing department of a big hotel or company. One of his motivating factors aside from wanting to travel and see Versailles, is his grandmother, who he wants to be able to help as she gets older. She is now 65 years old, and he has visited her regularly in the school holidays, from Sarnelli House. He wants to ensure she doesn't have to go out to work every day as she gets older.

Another proud graduate completed her nursing degree at a private hospital in Bangkok. She came to Sarnelli

House seeking security and healing after a close relative brutally abused her at 16 years of age. While always quiet and shy, she was determined to be a nurse. The costs of studying at a private hospital were large but thankfully a US based foundation and several individual donors have covered her expenses of almost 200,000 Thai baht (approx. US\$6,000) annually. She struggled a little academically for the first two years and then was able to maintain good grades. Having survived in Bangkok for four years, she is now a local girl and plans to complete her license to practice as a registered nurse this month. She will then be qualified to find a job, and there are many currently available in the healthcare system in Thailand. It will be with great excitement and pride that she attends her graduation ceremony later in the year in Bangkok.

The final young college graduate came to Sarnelli House when he was seven years old. His mother had died from AIDS and his father had left her and the boy had nowhere to go. He lived at St Patrick's House and after showing a high degree of intelligence and artistic talent, he was chosen to complete his final two years of high school at a selective school in Bangkok. He then went on to university and worked part time to help fund his study. He has now completed his degree in Industrial Design and plans to continue to live in Bangkok and work.

When any of the young adults at Sarnelli House graduate



from school or college and find a job outside Sarnelli House, they obviously have the expense of rental costs, buying household as well as personal necessities, and also being able to survive until their first pay at the end of the month. Within Thailand there are many ways to borrow money using apps on mobile phones and they are often managed by unscrupulous people. Household debt in Thailand is rising and is a widespread problem. A huge interest fee accompanies these loans and very few people are aware of or understand the implications of this. When the loan cannot be repaid, the company is not slow to send debt collectors out on motorbikes to threaten all those involved. Sometimes there are additional expenses for the newly employed like transport costs. Public transport is poor in the provinces and often having a motorbike to get to and from work is essential. Waitressing or jobs in the hospitality industry can have odd working hours and relying on friends for transport is never fool proof. Aware of these expenses, Sarnelli House covers the first month of costs for the young adults

heading out into the workforce. A loan through Sarnelli House is sometimes given on a secondhand motorbike, and the interest fee is waived.

Education initiative

Thai literacy remains a challenge for many of the children at Sarnelli House, and with the last two years of interrupted schooling it has become more of an issue. This could severely impact upon future work prospects and even regular activities of daily living. A project has been funded by Stichting Vriendan van Sarnelli, The Netherlands to employ recently graduated teachers for up to six months to live and work at Sarnelli House. Two teachers will target the grade school children with their homework every evening, and on weekends they will provide catch up lessons for the children who need them. Accommodation will be at Charlene House and food and transport costs are covered. During the day when the children are at school, the teachers will help with the early childhood development for the House of Hope toddlers.



Going Green

Sarnelli House is trying to go green! Thanks to another generous grant from Stichting Vreindan van Sarnelli, The Netherlands, solar panels have been installed to reduce the cost of electricity at two pilot sites. At House of Hope nursery, at the height of the day, up to 75% of electricity is coming from solar power and in the office building 50% of the power comes from solar. On the different farms,

electric pumps are used to pump water from underground for the pig, rice, and vegetable farms. Further funding will be sought to install solar power on these sites.

Another green venture has been a simple project funded by Rotary Clubs Bega and Forbes in Australia, replacing plastic eating utensils with washable kitchenware. Normally, when local guests arrive to put on lunch for the children they come with disposable or Styrofoam bowls, cheap plastic cutlery, chopsticks, and cups in which the dish of day will be served to 150 hungry mouths. All these items are then discarded after use and are not recyclable. Washable bowls, cutlery, cups, plates and chopsticks will be bought and secured in new cupboards at the Mary and Joseph Hall ready for the next big activity. There will be plenty of hands ready for the washup after the eating is completed. During the last 10 months, the hall has been



used as a place of quarantine for groups of Covid-19 positive children and staff, hopefully the second half of this year will see this project completed.

Visitors at last

Volunteers have returned to Sarnelli House! Long term friends of Sarnelli House, Angelique and Ben Ummels help out where they can, partnering up with the maintenance team and providing essential physiotherapy to the disabled children at House of Hope. Two volunteers from Ev. Apostelkirchenemenide, Oberhausen, Germany, Sina and Mailin arrived in March and are proving to be fun big sisters to the excited children at Jan and Oscar and St Patrick's Houses. Leon and Henriette Castermans from Stichting Vriendan van Sarnelli, have also visited for a month to help with a variety of activities and to check on the progress of their projects.

Outreach Update

The Outreach Program continues to provide school scholarships to children affected by HIV and children from single and disadvantaged families. At the end of April, 30 students presented their grades and their receipts from last term. The small amount of scholarship money for their first term will go towards helping their families buy school uniforms, bags, and shoes for the beginning of the school year. For most of the families this can mean the difference between keeping a child at school or sending them to work to provide for the family.

Thank you to the International Community School in Udon Thani, whose students very kindly donated boxes and boxes of books for our children. Children's picture books in Thai and English as well as books for teenagers and large picture reference books on animals and the world have delighted and interested the children.

Donations in the USA can be made to:

Friends of Sarnelli House

Box 88234

Milwaukee

WI 53288-0234 USA

(The foundation gives tax cards).

For those outside of the USA Pay Pal is available at sarnellihouse.org



For Donations by Bank Transfer

Bank: Bangkok Bank, Thailand

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A/C No: . 575-0-46655-8

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A/C Name: Sarnelli House Foundation

Swift Code: BKKBTHBK

Bank address:

Bangkok Bank Public Company Limited

854/1 M.5 Mitraphab Road, T.Phochai,

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Tel. +66 42 413011 - 3 Fax +66 42 413014

If you make an international bank transfer, please let us know, so that we can notify you

of its safe arrival. Contact: contact@sarnellihouse.org

For more donation details see

sarnellihouse.org under Support

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PO Box 61, Nongkhai, Thailand 43000.

If you would prefer to receive this and future quarterly newsletters by email or be removed from the mailing list please email to contact@sarnellihouse.org

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

Written by Kate Introna, February 2022