

Message from Fr Shea

Kate, who does a superb job on the newsletter, snarled at me the other day to get writing the introduction! (She will be heading to work at fundraising in England and Ireland with the Thai Childrens Trust, and does not want any loose ends dragging along behind her before her departure!)

Except for college, all the kids are back in school, and the staff are taking a seminar on how to treat kids according to Thai law (and with love). Kids have graduated, and five new children have arrived. One of the newcomers is nicknamed "Nut" (that gives us three kids with that nickname), and is from the Bungkaen province. I served down there from 1967-75. His mother, who was a wee little lass in those days, died of AIDS two years ago. An aunt took him in and treated him like a slave. He is very happy to be with us, and P' Wan, the housemother, has him firmly under her wing, and is force feeding the little creature! The other two new kids are girls, going into the equivalent of seventh grade. They are very quiet and polite. Their parents had AIDS, and one girl's father is a drunk with AIDS, and the Welfare folks in that province did not trust him to leave the girl alone. Another little girl, Miss Pawn, was brought in by a Lao Lady of the Night. The Lao lady is headed back to ply her trade in Laos, but gave us this lovely little girl who is delighted to be with us. She is an orphan. The latest child is a four year old baby girl who is a tiny thing with AIDS, and she is crippled, blind and mute. She is exactly like Josie was, except this girl is always smiling when someone tends to her or holds her. She will be a blessing to Sarnelli House. Despite struggling with the grim economy, we are keeping our charges fed and watered, and in school!

God bless you!

Fr Mike Shea C.S.s.R

Building skills for the future

Since the New Year some of the older girls have been getting a taste of working life. Downtown Nongkhai has opened up a "walking street" - a market that runs along the promenade adjacent to the Mekhong river, and on a Saturday night it's open to tourists and locals alike who stroll along in the balmy evening, looking and buying from the stalls and enjoying the entertainments. Br Keng and Fr Ole secured 2 stalls on walking street, and every Saturday afternoon one of them loads up the pickup truck with tables and all the necessities for the night including - homemade candles, little purses and jewellery and drinks and sweets to sell. Six girls from Nazareth House and Our Lady of Refuge Home for Girls, with their makeup on and their hair done, pile in to the pickup as well. One stall is right at the beginning of walking street and the other right at the



end. Most of the goods on sale at the girls' stalls are usually sold to the Sarnelli House volunteers who venture out on a Saturday night. The outcome of the activity luckily isn't to make a profit, but to give the girls an opportunity to develop their communication skills, improve their math and use their organisational talents to set up and manage the stalls. The girls usually arrive back to their homes about 10pm, every Saturday night for almost 4 months and despite being exhausted they say they really enjoy the experience. In May the stall lease expired and so Br Keng and Fr Ole gratefully went back to teenage free Saturday nights.



Keeping the boys busy

During the school holidays the fertiliser pellet machine came into its own. The machine is located on Jomp's farm and the boys have been at work for months preparing the cow manure with organic matter ready to put into the machine. Now the pellets are shooting out fast and perfectly formed. The boys from the Jan and Oscar and St Patrick's homes can operate the machinery on their own and manage the process from start to finish, after lessons and trial runs. They have a real sense of ownership and can see the importance of developing the soil at Jomp's Farm with nutrients so it can yield a good harvest. The main focus now is for the heavens to open and for a good rainy season to fill the ponds, water reservoirs and the rice paddies. Together, the fertiliser and the rain will ensure a good crop of rice to feed the kids for the year ahead and to give the boys and the staff a wonderful result for all their hard work.

Same but different

A special addition to the six disabled children who live at Sarnelli House arrived in May. Little Nuna came from Khon Kaen, and the Thai Welfare department referred her to Sarnelli House. She is 4 years old and has HIV/AIDS. She looks like she is only 6 months old, she cannot walk

or talk and she is blind and possibly deaf as a result of a HIV infection in her brain. Nuna's mother died from HIV/AIDS and her father remarried and left his two daughters, to be with his new family. Nuna has an older sister who is 12 years old and who had been caring for her. They lived in a shack in the rice fields and her sister collected snails to sell to make some money to feed them. Nuna came to Sarnelli House to live and to ensure that she takes her AntiRetroViral (ARV) medicine correctly as her sister with no social supports and at 8 years old when Nuna first started her medicine, was unable to manage. Nuna's medicine was stopped and started again which is not a good way to fight HIV/AIDS. The Thai Welfare department are helping Nuna's sister go to school. Nuna can smile and she can suck on her bottle and most importantly she can



swallow her much needed ARV medicine, which is trying to suppress the large amount of HIV in Nuna's blood. At the House of Hope, Nuna has many new brothers and sisters who peer at her, talk to her and touch her while she smiles and turns her head trying to seek where the sound and touch is coming from. Nuna with all her vulnerabilities, will be loved and cared for at House of Hope, and she has already become a treasured part of the Sarnelli family.

As well as Nuna there are two other blind children living at Sarnelli House. Bank is 14 years old, his mother died from HIV/AIDS and his father remarried. Nut is sixteen but

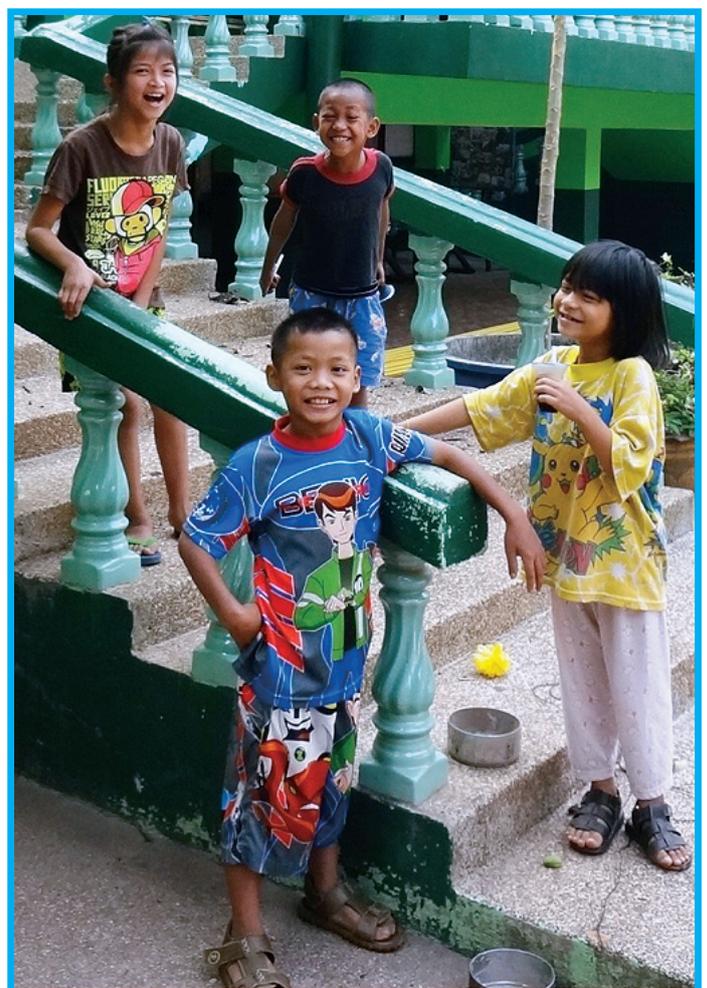
she looks like she is 12 years old, her mother died from HIV/AIDS also and her father remarried and went to live and work in the south of Thailand. Bank became blind at aged eight from a HIV infection and the school he went to



didn't have any resources to teach him. Nut went blind at aged 4 and she lived with her grandmother after her father left. Both Nut and Bank came to Sarnelli House in 2011. Nut's health became precarious in the last 12 months as she had become resistant to most of the ARV medications available in Thailand. She lost weight and was sick from fungal and bacterial infections. After purchasing one of the medicines that she needs from overseas, Nut's health has improved greatly.



Bank is healthy despite living with HIV/AIDS and he is taking his ARV medications well. Bank excels at sports and he won a gold and a silver medal in sprinting at a sports day for blind people in northeast Thailand. Nut and Bank have a great teacher whose name is Dap, he is blind from birth but not from HIV/AIDS. Dap teaches his two students Braille and how to get around independently, he takes both Nut and Bank to seminars and events for blind people that are held all over Thailand. Dap completed his university degree in Bangkok and swam for the National Thai Disabled team in various countries around the world. He gets around independently on public transport which in Thailand is a great accomplishment as it is not disable friendly. Many blind or disabled people in Thailand sell



lottery tickets on the streets to make money and Dap has done that as well. He has a love for jazz and Starbucks coffee, and a great sense of humour. He is a real role model for all the children.

Kiat, Manu, Soi and Baby Buffalo are 4 children who have walking disabilities from HIV/AIDS. They all had very difficult starts to their lives, fighting off infections in their brains that has left them with residual leg weakness and an

inability to walk properly. ManU at 9 years old is the worst affected and for him it is difficult to keep up with the other kids. His little legs are bowed outwards now and he can't get his heels on the ground. Soi and Kiat can run but their gait is awkward and the bones in Soi's feet are becoming deformed as she compensates for her ungainly walking by using different muscles and bones. Baby Buffalo after going through numerous surgical operations to correct her foot is now running like the rest of the kids but dragging her leg. Even though other children mock them and mimic their walk, they ignore it all and they never complain that they are slower, or call out for others to wait for them. All these kids show great fortitude in the acceptance of their differences.

Acknowledging our sponsors

At the end of this school year in March there were some very hopeful starts for some young lives. From Our Lady of Refuge Home for Girls, Da(ling) finished her one year Assistant Nurse certificate and has now got a job in a private hospital in Rayong (see photo with Fr Shea on page 1). Daling is an orphan and has grown up under Fr Shea's care for 9 years; she is now 21 years old. Tai is also an orphan, but she has 3 half sisters, all of whom grew up at Our Lady of Refuge Home for Girls, Tai is 20 years old and she has completed training by a Thai coffee franchise and is happily working in Udon Thani for them. Nong is 24 years old and also from Our Lady of Refuge, she graduated and is working in a teaching job in Bangkok, she had been under Fr Shea's care since she was 13 years old. From Jan and Oscar House, Palm is on probationary work for 6 months in a hotel in Hua Hin with the hope of a full time job at the end. Un also from Jan and Oscar and Shane from St Patrick's have enrolled in the vocational school in Nong Song Hong and have started their mechanics course. The

rest of the kids are slogging it out in school, but growing up quickly. For the first time in many years the House of Hope has only 2 little children at home during the week – Pong and Nuna, the rest of the noisy bunch are at school. Without the sacrifice, the support and the steadfastness of their sponsors those young adults mentioned would not be where they are now. The remaining children would be struggling to get an education and their futures would be grim. Many thanks and blessings to all the sponsors out there, you are truly valued and appreciated by your sponsored children and the staff at Sarnelli House



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To protect the privacy of our children we have not
used their names to identify them in photos.

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Written by Kate Introna, June 2013