

Sarnelli House

NEWSLETTER



www.sarnelliorphanage.org



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Message from Fr Shea

After I read Kate's latest newsletter, and before I began my introductory message, I went back to look at all the photos I had from 1999. I was 60 years old, and I had just begun to wrap up my 6 years as director of novices. I was already taking in children, with no house, no money, nor a clue as to what I was getting into. All those early photos of tiny children; many of them thin, malnourished and with skin infections, brought back many memories. Now, those wee wretched little creatures are big, boisterous, and clearly healthy and self confident. They nearly all have cell phones, it seems, and many have smart phones. The girls also have special clothes and make up. The boys have their hoods and special boots. They are no better nor worse than their peers. Namely, they are normal. Even the girls who came abandoned, molested, beaten and raped are new people, and confident and like any other girl. Young boys who were ravished by the AIDS virus, and even those who are mentally challenged from the AIDS, medicines or malnourishment feel safe and comfortable at Sarnelli. Others have graduated and found jobs and moved on. Others quit school to go home to work or to live with relatives who thought they were dead. Sometimes, I feel we are like a hotel or hostel, but the doors are always open, and children seem to be flowing in again.

I admit I am not a holy person. But I did make a prayer to the Lord that if I took care of all comers and had good health, God would have to find me money and support. Jesus kept his part of the bargain, by giving Sarnelli House folks like you. We thank you, and pray for you and yours every evening.

God bless you!

The last few months of 2014 saw twenty four new arrivals at Sarnelli House and 2015 is shaping up to be more of the same. In January, the Thai Welfare Service gave four new children to be cared for and educated at Sarnelli House. There are now 149 children living in the six houses. In order to study away at school and universities outside of the Nongkhai province, twelve young adults are also being supported financially. Within the six houses there are now more



girls than boys resulting in some overcrowding in the girls' houses. As a result houses have had to be re arranged and a new one opened on the farm to take in the extra numbers and keep the girls safe and their houses less crowded.

Late last year the Gary and Janet Smith House on Jomps' Farm was opened and boys living at the Jan and Oscar House moved out to live the country



life. Bicycles and a tuk tuk or a three wheeled vehicle (commonly called a sky lab in Isaan) are their modes of transport to and from the farm. A cook has been found, a homework room and a basketball court are being built, but a fulltime house mother has yet to be hired since Ms Jit departed for Germany. Ms Noo from Sarnelli House and Fr Ole are currently sharing the job.

After a few adjustments to the Jan and Oscar House, nine teenage girls from Nazareth House and Our Lady of Refuge Home for Girls now call it home. The girls' requests included doors on the bathrooms and the installation of shower cubicles. The girls living there are older and more responsible and are studying in Nongkhai. They have the run of the big dormitory upstairs and Ms Dtan who previously worked at the House of Hope is their housemother.



The House of Hope, St Patrick's Home and the Jan and Oscar House in Pi Si Tong are now female dominated zones. The squeals and shrieks, the constant changes of clothes and the new hairstyles are commonplace in what used to be a boys' haven. With all these girls around there is also a certain amount of whining, cajoling and little splinter groups forming and re-forming however the mood takes them, but the joy and laughter that a visit to St Patrick's brings is a real testament to Ms Wan's care of these little girls.

There have been a few instances of the girls not being on their best behaviour however. St Patrick's House



has two fish ponds and the fish in them supplied the houses. In the past, the boys would have dangled their homemade bamboo fishing rods, or descended into the muddy, brown water and trawled a heavy fishing net across the ponds to empty them of fish. As most of the fishing is now done at Jomp's Farm in the four big ponds, the two ponds at St Patrick's are not used as much. Occasionally the boys from Sarnelli House will come over and help Ms Wan fish the ponds and they will go swimming in them if the big boys are around to watch them. Now that the filtered swimming pool is opened behind the House of Hope there is less appeal to swim in the brown water of the fish ponds.

In the hot season after the children are limited to their one hour of supervised swimming in the pool, there is a lot of time spent waiting around for the next allocated hour. With two big masses of water nearby, those waiting find the temptation of the two fish ponds too great to resist. So five intrepid girls from St Patrick's had enough waiting and decided to test the waters. They failed to consider that the banks of the ponds are steep, muddy and slippery and once you are in, it can be difficult to get out (they also failed to ask for permission)! As nothing is secret in a home with 18 girls living together Ms Wan got word of their escapade very quickly. She decided against another lecture, instead she had them carry the orange dinghy that floated on one of the ponds around the house. The first few times it seemed easy but after the fifth or sixth round the girls were not smiling – they had to do a total of ten times around the house with the other girls laughing at them and volunteers arriving, watching them in bemusement and innocently taking photos of this new holiday activity. The girls now stick to waiting for their turn to swim in the pool.

Tuay

One of the new children who arrived at Sarnelli House last year is Tuay. She is possibly 11 years old but no one knows for sure as she has no birth papers. An



urgent call from a local government official had the Outreach team drive to a small village about 2 hours from Nongkhai. A group of old people squatted on mats in front of run down huts where skinny chickens scratched and pecked the dry earth, flies buzzed and empty bottles and cans littered the ground. Tuay had been living with her grandmother



there after her mother deserted her a few days after she was born in one of the huts. Her grandmother had died a few years previously and so she was bought up as communal property by the old people. Over the last few months she had described with accompanying actions to some of the old ladies what her grandfather did to her when he was drunk. It involved clamping his hand over her mouth so she would not scream, threatening to strangle her and raping her. The old ladies didn't take her seriously at first but finally one of them told a local government official who had come to visit and she spoke and spent time with Tuay. They removed her immediately to the Outreach team who took her to Sarnelli House and they are currently investigating Tuay's case. When Tuay arrived at Sarnelli House she had health problems from years of neglect. She had swollen, painful lymph glands in her neck, a constant cough, decayed teeth and skin infections. There was no record of any childhood vaccinations being given and no one from her village could recall if she had ever been to a doctor. She moved into Nazareth House and was then

taken on a round of doctor visits in Nongkhai and Khon Kaen. Eventually she was successfully treated for her infections, but she is still catching up on her childhood vaccinations and she needs a few more visits to the dentist ... but this is proving difficult – she doesn't like the dentist! Tuay has even started school for the first time in her life. There is a special needs school in the next village, which is amazing given the remoteness and the lack of many specialized services available in Nongkhai. Tuay loves it but occasionally she feels the need to boycott school for a day or two and no one can change her mind. She is loud and noisy, she loves a hug but dislikes having her photo taken and she can always cajole or demand a few baht from passing adults. Tuay has many older sisters now at Nazareth House and they tease and play with her and try their best to teach her to be polite and quietly spoken like all young Thai ladies. Tuay's absolute favourite thing to do is to dance. On the weekends if there are parties on in the Mary and Joseph Hall she is the first on stage dancing to whatever is being poured out of the speakers. She will dance with the little ones from House of Hope or the big girls from Viengkhuuk and she is completely indiscriminate in her choice of music. There is a joy and unselfconsciousness in her that is heartwarming and it is a privilege to have her live at Sarnelli House.



End of School Year

The month of March will see the end of the school year. A total of seventeen Grade 9 teenagers from Sarnelli House will graduate from Rosario Witthayu School in Viengkhuuk, the biggest group ever. After graduation they will have to decide what and where they want to study. It is a huge decision for these young people and as they have no clear idea where their interests lie, Br Keng and Fr Ole will be called on to assist and help them

in making their decisions. Some will go off to vocational school in Nongkhai others to senior high school out of the Nongkhai province depending on whether they pass the entrance exams.

Thirteen of the seventeen teenagers who will be graduating are living with HIV/AIDS. When they first came to Sarnelli House it was thought they would never even make it to school, now they are young adults graduating. Some of them have surpassed all the odds like one of the girls from Nazareth House who is 20 years old and only this year graduating from Grade 9. There will be much rejoicing for her success. Others will stay on in the Sarnelli House family, like some of the boys who have learning difficulties and behavioral problems. They will work on Jomp's Farm in whatever capacity they can.

Outreach Program

The Outreach Program continues to provide formula milk to babies and toddlers whose mothers and grandmothers cannot afford to buy it. There are 20 babies and toddlers enrolled in the program so far this year. The cost of a box of formula milk is from 500 baht upwards and this will last about 2 weeks. The minimum daily wage in Thailand has been set at 300 baht, but many untrained people relying on agricultural work and affected by HIV/AIDS barely make that amount a week. Adequately feeding children can be heartache for many families. The milk program makes life a little easier for some of them.

From the toddlers receiving milk to teenagers receiving an education, life at Sarnelli House moves along, but none of it is possible without the wonderful generosity of donors and supporters from around the world.



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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, March 2015