

# Sarnelli House

NEWSLETTER

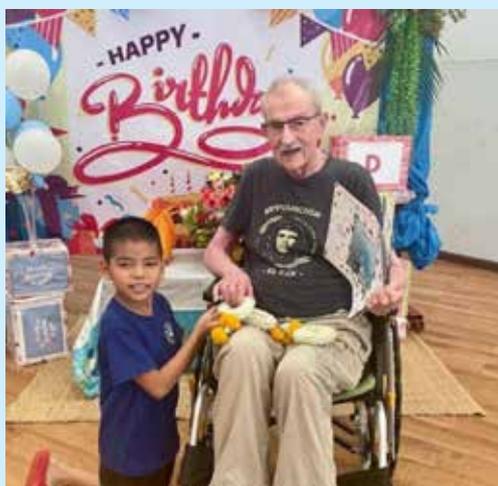
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## Message from Fr. Shea

In this issue, Kate tells us about the children and the horrible conditions that they face until they get to Sarnelli House. We have one delightful baby girl that we received a few months ago when she was one month old. Others are older. We have truckfuls of little boys, and not so many little girls.

Years ago, children would come to us a little older, angry, hurt and difficult to work with. The local hospital opened up a section to deal with disturbed or slow children. They do well but I think it is the housemothers who make the difference. It is unbelievable how patient and kind they are to children who run wild and often do not heed orders from the housemothers.

Kate gives us examples of children we receive. If there was not a Sarnelli House, I don't know what the government would have done, if anything, with these abandoned children.

God Bless you all

Fr Michael Shea C.Ss.R

Sarnelli House has received new additions to its family this year, including a four-week old baby and five other vulnerable children. Sometimes it is all about timing when children arrive to Sarnelli House. Normally school aged children come straight from their at risk situation to Sarnelli House if it is close to end of school term time. Sarnelli House is legalized as their formal guardian by the Child and Welfare Department. If it is in the



middle of a school term when children need shelter, they have to be placed somewhere else until the school holiday as local schools are not taking enrolments mid term. The four children who arrived in the school holidays in March this year came directly from two different government boarding schools which close in the school holiday. When schools reopened in May, they returned to their boarding schools and Sarnelli House remained their legal guardian. This situation highlights the coordinated care between the government departments and Non-Government Organisations (NGO) like Sarnelli House but it also raises questions about the lack of a smooth transition to a stable environment for vulnerable children. There have been discussions in Thailand and certainly there is a push towards closing or transitioning from children's homes to foster care in the community. International and NGOs have been promoting this alternate care option. Sarnelli House has been involved in meetings about the same issue and supports the need for safe, well-funded and improved regulatory care for vulnerable children. There are good intentions within the Thai





welfare system, but until more structured reforms and better coordination can take place, children will continue to need Fr Mike and the team at Sarnelli House.

Two brothers who had been living in the ruins of their burnt out house with their drug addicted parents arrived to Sarnelli House in March at the start of the school holidays. Their house had been burnt down by their father and they had not been going to school because they had to find money to support their father's drug habit. No other family members were available to care for the boys, so aged seven and ten years old they were placed in a large boarding school under the auspices of King Rama IX of



Thailand. The school specifically caters for poor and underprivileged children. Having spent their school holidays at Sarnelli House where they made friends, went on excursions, celebrated the Thai New Year and settled into a more stable life, they then had to return to their boarding school.

12 year old Miss Icecream lived with her mother and her stepfather. Her mother had drug problems and took her daughter out of school at random times and physically abused her. This behavior continued until her stepfather contacted the police as he was afraid

the girl would be sexually exploited as well as physical abused by her mother. The family were referred to the Child and Welfare Department for assessment and Miss Icecream was sent to a boarding school. Her school holidays at Sarnelli House living at Our Lady of Refuge House for Girls were exciting and fun, and she was sad to leave the new friends she had made.

Miss Kang used to live with her father, and since her parents separated when she was two years old, she has had no contact with her mother. Her father rarely worked and made very little money. She would often go to school hungry and unwashed. Her father is now in jail for the use and sale of illicit drugs. This nine year old girl also enjoyed the holidays at Jan and Oscar House and returned to her school in May. In July, the Outreach Team received a call that she was in hospital. She had an infected leg and needed bed rest, dressings and intravenous antibiotics. The hospital was close to her school which was about two hours from Sarnelli House. Fortunately, the school sent a senior student to care for Miss Kang. In most public hospitals in Thailand the sick person is cared for by a close relative. All their personal needs and feeding requirements have to be provided by them. The family member sleeps at the hospital, normally on the floor beside the bed or any spare space they can find. Drinking water has to be purchased as well as extra food. The Sarnelli House Outreach Team visited Miss Kang in hospital, and supplied her



with food and drinking water, medical papers were signed and after five days she recovered to return to her school again.

All four children will be welcomed back to Sarnelli House in October this year for the midterm holidays. Due to the stigma of HIV, a five year old girl was referred directly to Sarnelli House, as the government schools do not accept children with HIV. Her father had died from AIDS and she was born with HIV. Her mother left her with her grandmother when she was very small and has not had contact with her since. Her grandmother is only 52 years old but unwell and unable to manage her granddaughter's regimen of life long medications and hospital visits. She joins 12 sassy young girls aged from four to ten years old at Jan and Oscar House. Although she seems to have settled in, and she socializes well with the other children there is a sadness and seriousness about her that is a heavy burden for one so young.

Babies come to House of Hope at all ages, and the arrival of a one-month-old baby girl is not unusual. She came directly from a hospital in a different province, but still located in Northeast Thailand. The nurses in the hospital had cared for her since her birth. Her 20 year old mother has HIV and severe psychiatric and drug problems. There is no father documented on her birth certificate and no other relatives able to care for her. She has now finished her one month of preventative AntiRetroViral (ARV) medications and has to have regular HIV testing until she is two years old. So far she is healthy and galloping towards her physical and developmental milestones.

## Health Challenges

TenTen was born with HIV and before he could start ARV medications he developed an infection in his brain and was classified as having AIDS. His mother had died and his father was unable to care for him given his medical needs and he was placed in a government orphanage at two months of age. TenTen arrived at Sarnelli House when he was four years old and was unable to walk properly. Over the years he has had botox injections and orthopedic shoes to correct his gait, but his problem has continued to worsen. He is 10 years old this year, and in the last year his risk of falling has increased. He could only walk on the extreme edge of his toes, with no other part of his foot able to touch the ground. TenTen was referred to the rehabilitation team at Srinagarind Hospital in Khon Kaen which has undergone massive improvements in the last five years, notably with the addition of a physiotherapy and occupational



therapy department. After TenTen was assessed by the orthopaedic surgeon who was confident she could improve TenTen's mobility with surgery, he was prescribed regular passive and active exercises to be done at Sarnelli House. The volunteers as well as the house mothers at Sarnelli House worked on his exercises, sometimes having to go to great lengths to keep TenTen focused, while his friends played outside. Six weeks later he was admitted to hospital, and had two weeks of intensive exercises by the physiotherapy team before surgery. After the operation TenTen was left with both legs completely enclosed in plaster from his groin to his toes. He had to learn how to walk again and remained in hospital



for another four weeks. These were hard and painful times for TenTen but he was supported throughout his long hospital admission by a house mother who stayed with him 24 hours a day. She slept by his bed, fed him, encouraged him with his exercises and diverted him when he was in pain.

When TenTen returned to Sarnelli House he could not go back to live at St Patrick's House with the other boys as the sleeping dormitory is up two flights of stairs. Instead, he stayed in the new physiotherapy/snoozle room with his loyal and caring house mother. She and volunteers Ben and Angelique from the Netherlands developed functional exercises for him and used the pool for water therapy as well. During his long convalescence, he continued with school work that was provided and taught by the two teachers who live and work at Sarnelli House. TenTen eventually moved from using a walking frame to walking unaided. He is now living at St Patrick's House and he can climb the stairs without assistance, he has also started back at school. He is a bit physically slower than the other boys and needs to continue his exercise with his dedicated housemother, but hopefully he will continue to improve and have a much better quality of life.

## “Las Chicas”

Recently, Sarnelli House had the privilege of welcoming six vibrant young Spanish women. Half of them were from the Spanish Redemptorist NGO, the Association for Solidarity and the other half were from a major TV station in Madrid, who have partnered with the Redemptorists as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility program. They came laden with activities for the children – face paint, colouring books and pencils, jigsaws, games and balloons. This was

the first time five of them had come to Thailand. They threw themselves into Sarnelli life with gusto. The timing of their visit coincided with the celebration of the beginning of Buddhist Lent in Thailand, which meant six days off in the middle of the school term and more time with the kids. Sports, art, English classes, jewelry making, tie dying, and even flamenco dancing lessons were shared. Despite the high humidity of the rainy season the girls took every opportunity to interact actively with the children. A fun new initiative was trialed by the volunteers. Spaghetti Bolognese was made for the kids and staff of St Patrick's and Jan and Oscar Houses. The girls bought 10 kg of pork mince and despite running out of gas during cooking and having to transfer the cooked spaghetti sauce in large saucepans from one village to another in a van, it was a great success. A special batch of spaghetti sauce was made with plenty of chilli for the staff and everyone was happy. Add lots of garlic bread and the kids were coming up for second and third helpings. After two weeks there was plenty tears of tears and emotion at the goodbye party, and we thank these young women for their open hearts, enthusiasm and the love they shared with all.



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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 August 2023