



## Message from Fr Shea

After one long grim school vacation that seemed to last for eons, the children mounted their trucks and vans taking them to myriad schools, and as the surly occupants pulled out to start a new school year, the exhausted housemothers joined hands and sang the Thai version of "Oh what a friend we have in Jesus". Our six houses are nearly filled to capacity. The welfare department wants to give us three more babies, but unless we can recruit some women willing to be hired on, it will be virtually impossible for us to accept them. Four young mothers who were raped have now left their babies and gone on to continue high school. It is always hard to gauge their feelings about raising offspring spawned by rape, and none of them seemed broken hearted about abandoning their babies to Sarnelli house. Some of the babies are beginning to walk, but a goodly number are just too small. In the meantime, we have too many babies and not enough staff. Our search for workers has been unsuccessful.

Our housemothers, drivers, farm workers and staff do an incredible amount of work. Some of them are up in years, and kind of want to quit, but find that they would miss the companionship of their fellow workers, and the undying love of their little charges. One of our farm workers, a lady who raises our Brahmin cows, even though she has AIDS, still took in a one year old baby boy, and his 3 year old sister. The two older brothers were taken in by the Sarnelli House boys' unit. God has been so very good to us, and we know he will find a solution to our problems. We thank him for the wonderful individual donors, churches and foundations that help us with these children. We would not be here, without you. Children would never have the opportunities they have without our sponsors. May the Good Lord reward you all!

## Holiday Memories

It's that time again when the school year has started in Thailand and the kids at Sarnelli House have finished their long holidays in record breaking temperatures. For most of March, April and May, it has been an unrelenting 40° C (104°F) every day. Most of Thailand is in drought and the rains are badly needed to fill dams, rice paddies and give back a bit of green to the land. The 10 week school holidays were helped along by the steady stream of volunteers from the USA, UK, Germany, France, The Netherlands, Taiwan, Singapore and Thailand. Despite many children going home to extended families in the



holidays, there were still enough children left to entertain, teach, tease, play sport with, learn Thai from and hang out together. All the children love having volunteers come and be with them at holiday times – their days have more direction and excitement when they see the friendly faces walking or cycling down dusty roads towards them. This year as well as the regular hands who loyally turn up every holidays and bring their skills and time and deepen their relationships with the kids, there were two new groups who arrived from Singapore and France. One particular volunteer well deserving of a mention is Khun Wang. Wang lives and works in Chiang Mai, and is our remarkable volunteer artist, he has been volunteering for at least three years now at Sarnelli House. Although disabled from birth,





he does not let this stop him from participating and using his abundant artistic talents to the full. With his good friend Thor from Australia, they teach art and inspire the children of all ages to be creative. They have had the children create Christmas cards, bookmarks, learn about the fundamentals of drawing and generally show them that anything is possible if you are motivated and supported by friends.

## Preparations for School

The lead up to the school year involves a lot of preparation. New uniforms have to be fitted and bought, as well as new shoes, new bags and new books. Regulation hair cuts need to be given and the older boys learn how to give a short back and sides to the younger boys. Head lice have to be killed and removed from the grade school girls' hair and volunteers spend all day washing and combing and killing, in the hopes of eradicating the little pests and giving the girls some relief. For those teenagers who study and live in Nongkhai, there is accomodation to be found, rice cookers, linen and personal items to be bought. Enrollment papers and many



documents have to be signed, copied and signed again. School meetings are plentiful and the van, laden with kids and housemothers, drives into Nongkhai daily to complete the preparations. This year, there are nine young adults living and studying away from Sarnelli House for the first time. They are studying in vocational colleges in Nongkhai and Udon Thani. However, in 2016 there is a total of 26 young adults who have lived at Sarnelli House and are living and studying away. The full cost of their tuition fees, accomodation and food are supported by Sarnelli House for the duration of their studies.

As well as children from Sarnelli House children in surrounding villages need help to gain an education. The Outreach School Scholarship program helps children living with HIV, children cared for by a parent living with HIV and orphans. Also children from families too poor to pay for transport costs to and from school are assisted by the scholarship fund. Most of these children go to free local Government schools,



but there is still the expense of school shoes and uniforms at the beginning of the school year, as well as lunch and transport costs. All these seemingly small expenses can be insurmountable for some families. Working as day labourers or sorting trash for recycling is not permanent or well paid work but it is often all the work some families can find. There are 55 children on the Outreach School Scholarship program, studying from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

## New Arrivals

Children continue to be in need and this year is no exception. Since January 2016 we have received 6 new children. While none of these children has HIV they are still in need. One teenage girl was sexually abused by her father and although he is in jail, she has no safe place to go and was referred to



Sarnelli House. The other four are 2 sets of brothers. Gong and Gai are 7 and 13 years old and their mother Raja has HIV. She has been on treatment for HIV for the last seven years. The Anti RetroViral (ARV) medications have caused lipodystrophy which has created a large rounded lump on her back and around her middle. She is very self conscious about this and the state of the scarred skin on her face from skin infections. Last year she left her husband because of his drunkenness and domestic abuse. At times she was in fear of her life and the lives of her 2 boys. Raja then moved back to her home town, which is about 2 hours from Nongkhai. The family moved in with Raja's mother who was paralysed from



a stroke, and her older sister who provided her care. She found work tapping rubber trees and the boys attended a local school. Things weren't good at home as Raja tried to save the small amount of money she earned, but her sister gambled her money away. Raja attended the local hospital for treatment of her HIV, and to be prescribed her ARV medications. She had not told her family or anyone except the hospital staff of her illness. Despite this precaution, word spread around town that Raja had AIDS. Her boys were savagely teased and ostracised at school, because their mother had HIV. They were made to sit separately from the other boys for meals and ridiculed for being dirty. It became too much for the brothers and Raja's family were no support, so Raja sought refuge with the boys in a local Buddhist temple unsure of what to do next. They had only the clothes they wore and mats to sleep on at the temple. A welfare worker who had referred people with HIV to Sarnelli House contacted the Outreach Team. A meeting was set up at the temple and Raja cried and asked for her boys to be looked after and given a chance at an education where no one knew about their mother. After reassuring them that arrangements would be made to help the boys find a new school, provisions were given to Raja to stay at the temple for a short time with the boys. However a few days later a desperate call was made by Raja to the Outreach Team saying the local people had found them at the temple and had harassed them and forced them to leave the town. They quickly caught a bus to Nongkhai and are now living at Sarnelli House.

Paid work has been found for Raja at Sarnelli House where she helps to do the cleaning, and she has a room on site to live in. Her youngest son is living at Sarnelli House with the other grade school boys and the eldest boy lives at the Gary and Janet Smith House with the teenage boys. The reasons the family needed sanctuary and came to live and work at Sarnelli House will be kept confidential and the brothers are reassured that no one will tease them or chase them away because of their mother's illness. Like other new children they are settling in gradually. Starting the new school year with the other children has helped them feel part of Sarnelli House and be just like all their new friends.

## Departures

Sadly as well as arrivals we have had two departures in the last few months. One was a 20 year old girl who lived at Nazareth House in 2013 for one year. Lot was born with HIV and her parents both died from it, she lived her childhood and teenage years at different orphanages. The Outreach team ran into her at Nongkhai Hospital last year a few weeks after she had a baby girl. She was thin and looked sick. She needed help with buying formula milk for the baby as she couldn't breast feed, and her boyfriend had no work.



Lot developed terrible skin infections as she hadn't been taking her ARV medications. Over the course of the last year her health deteriorated, she stayed at the clinic at Sarnelli House frequently and she was taken to the hospital for many appointments and encouraged and taught to take her ARV medications. However Lot developed severe lung infections secondary to AIDS and spent the last 2 months of her life in hospital. She had no one to care for her as her boyfriend was working, but she was visited regularly by the Outreach Team and provided with extra food, snacks, company and support. Some of the older girls from Nazareth House were taken in to visit her as well. His mother was caring for the baby and the family were fearful of catching an infection from Lot and didn't want her around. She was terribly thin and weak and she died from AIDS in April leaving her boyfriend and her 15 month old little girl.

Nap came to Sarnelli House when he was six years old, after his parents and elder brother died from AIDS. He was sick and frightened and traumatised. Nap lived at Sarnelli House for 10 years completing his education up to Grade 9 and then a 9 month vocational training course in mechanical repairs. He also received treatment for his HIV. In 2013 when he was 17 he left Sarnelli House to work with his uncle at the family home. He became very sick after not continuing

his ARV medications at home, but in the last 6 months he realised they could save his life and started them again. He was getting well and turning his life around when he died from head injuries in a motorbike accident in May. He was not wearing a helmet. Our thoughts and prayers go out to Lot and Nap's families and friends at home and at Sarnelli House.



## Last words from a recent volunteer...

"We have been here nearly a month but it feels like we have been here much longer ...we've experienced a lot of things during this month, creating memories that we will never forget. Before leaving for Sarnelli House people would say I was courageous because some of the children have HIV. But the courageous people are the children not me, not my friends. We've seen how happy the children are and learning about some of their pasts, I think they definitely are the brave ones. Just being with them I could easily forget about anything else going on with my life. I try to describe how wonderful and special this place is to my friends, but I lack words. I think you really need to be here to understand how beautiful this place is. ..." Julie, France

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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, May 2016