

Sarnelli House

NEWSLETTER

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March 2026

Message from Fr. Shea



Throughout the years as Sarnelli House took in children with AIDS and others who didn't have AIDS but were abused and abandoned, we had no professional advice and training on how to deal with them, and it showed. It wasn't anybody's fault. Our housemothers struggled with the problems that sprung up, and other than our nurse Kate, there was no one to turn to or had the time or expertise to train them.

In this issue, Kate explains the wonderful help we have received from near and far. We shall always be grateful to these doctors, therapists and generous people who took time from their busy schedules to come to Sarnelli House. Their impact on abused little creatures was immediate, and the classes given to our housemoms give us great hope that no matter how flawed the wee ones may be, treatment can bring out their full potential and better their quality of life

We are blessed with wonderful people who visit us and work for us and share their talents.

*God Bless you all
Fr Michael Shea C.Ss.R*

Health improvements

2026 has started off well at Sarnelli House. The arrival of visitors with specific health expertise has been a great opportunity to improve the children's health and wellbeing. In January, Dr. Thijs van Muelenbroek from the Department of Rehabilitation, Maastricht University arrived from the Netherlands. He has a doctorate in rehabilitation, decades of clinical experience and a deep interest in cerebral palsy. Thijs spent time at the Sharon Houminer House, home to six disabled children. His colleague Ben Ummels, an Assistant Physiotherapist at Maastricht Hospital, introduced the children to Thijs, explaining the physical therapies that are currently employed by Ben and his wife Angelique. They focus on using music, touch,



and sensory therapy to improve the children's lives. Thijs also met with the rehabilitation and pediatric team at Nongkhai Hospital where the children attend for their regular physical therapy and medical care. This gave him a good understanding of what is available therapeutically for children with cerebral palsy in the province of Nongkhai. At the end of his two week visit, he provided a clear picture of their gross motor function stage and outlined a plan for improved physical therapy for the six children, to maintain the children's physical function.

Alongside Thijs's visit to Sarnelli House was the third visit of Madi Sass MD from Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Centre, USA. Back in 2019 she initiated the first step towards a collaboration with Sarnelli House. Part of her medical studies included a Global Health component, and in 2022 Madi and her colleague Rylee developed and implemented a hygiene curriculum at Sarnelli House. This visit Madi focused on the care of children with cerebral palsy. Previously, she had seen these children living at House of Hope and their subsequent move to their own house. Having a living space designed to meet their physical needs resulted in the housemothers being able to provide more individualized care and attention. Madi recognized a significant gap in the training and education of the housemothers, particularly regarding cerebral palsy. None of the housemothers had not received any formal education about the condition, including its causes, the various ways it can present in children, or the necessary medical and physical care required. Addressing this lack of knowledge became the central focus of her project, aiming to equip the housemothers with the information and skills needed to better support and care for the children affected by cerebral palsy. Before her arrival, she administered a staff survey to understand what the housemother's current level of knowledge about cerebral palsy was. During her visit, with the help of her talented Thai translator Gift, she administered a further study to identify what the house mothers wanted to learn to be able to improve the care they provide. With these results, and her firsthand experience of seeing how the care is delivered at the Sharon

Houminer House, Madi will develop the teaching curriculum. This will be a positive step forward to give the housemothers confidence in delivering appropriate care.



As was usual for Madi, she returned to House of Hope, Jan and Oscar House and St Patrick's House and assessed the basic health of all the children under 10 years of age. She provided effective treatment plans for various problems as well as advice on child behavioral issues. One of the babies at House of Hope was diagnosed with asthma, so Madi conducted two very relevant training sessions, with Gift translating, on the causes and treatment of asthma. Madi also continued developing her partnerships with the doctors from the pediatric and rehabilitation departments at Nongkhai Hospital. Sarnelli House is so grateful for the expertise and kindness professionals like Madi and Thijs bring to improve the children's lives.

Art Project

In late 2025, a kind and talented couple visited Sarnelli House again. Angela and Joop from AsianKidzSupport in the Netherlands have supported Sarnelli House in many ways for many years, in particular by sponsoring two students who grew up at Sarnelli House and who have graduated from university. Both are now living and working independently, which would not have been possible without the support of AsianKidzSupport. On this visit, they were invited to do an art project. Joop was able to use his talents to paint murals on the walls of the new Sharon Houminer House, both inside and out. He had painstakingly prepared the pictures and traced them on the walls. He then painted them, adding extra pictures as the scenes developed. Angela helped with the painting, and they invited the children to participate in their art project. That was an act of bravery! The children loved being included. They were encouraged to continue the jungle theme and complete the painting of flowers and birds, as well as to leave their painted handprints on the walls that were incorporated

as butterflies. The children really enjoyed these activities, although some of them went a bit wild, and started to paint over Joop's creations with rudimentary drawings of Santa Claus (it was close to Christmas after all) and with big black splashes of paint. Angela and Joop bore it all with humor and patience. When the children's contributions were finished and they were taken back to their houses, the real artistry began as big black blotches were discreetly painted over and the red Santa figures disguised. The art project brings color and joy to the house both inside and out. Thank you, AsianKidzSupport.



Music Therapy

Support and talent can sometimes be found closer by and this has been demonstrated in the friendship of Richard, a retired man from the USA living in Nongkhai. Over the years, he has bought the local expatriate community in Nongkhai to Sarnelli House for Saturday lunch parties. They bring many donations of goods such as clothes and shoes. He also often invites his fellow musicians along for jam sessions and sing-along. Richard has a passion for music, he knows how music can be a great companion and source of comfort and inspiration in people's lives and he wants to impart that to the children. Every Saturday since November 2025, he has come to Sarnelli House to teach the children to play the ukulele. Luckily there are ukuleles available and he has customized them with straps for the interested children. He also brings a drum kit along with another one found in the storeroom which the boys bash on for an hour or so. Usually there is a cacophony of noise surrounding him on these Saturdays, but Richard patiently adjusts finger positions and listens to off key notes while he plays and encourages the children to follow him. Currently, four dedicated girls attend lessons each Saturday and are making decent progress. Only one or two boys have been identified as having any actual talent at the drums but that hasn't stopped them all from having a go. Other kids wander over to listen and pick up a ukulele to see if they are interested in learning. Richard is committed to bringing music into the children's lives and Sarnelli House is very grateful for his dedication.

Peer Support

A senior high school student who attends an international school in Udon Thani heard about Sarnelli House through her school, as they had generously fundraised for the children in the past. As an end of year school project she wanted to target the girls who were entering puberty. For many girls who have

not had any education about puberty, their first experience of menstruation can be a startling and scary one. This young woman wanted to prevent girls from going through this unprepared and without the correct information. After visiting Sarnelli House with her parents and meeting the girls and housemothers at Our Lady of Refuge House, she proposed to research and develop a booklet to teach girls specifically about menstruation. After many months of hard work, she returned to Sarnelli House with the completed booklet. It was simple, factual, and well-illustrated. Along with distributing it, she ran a training session where some of the older teenagers contributed by sharing their experiences. There were a lot of questions and laughter that eased the shyness of some of the girls. The session was very well received by all the girls, and they enjoyed talking and sharing with their peers.



Teachers Project

The initiative to employ two newly qualified Thai teachers at Sarnelli House has now entered its fifth year. The young women are employed by Sarnelli House, and they receive a monthly salary, are provided with free accommodation in a house on the Sarnelli House campus in the village of DonWai, and receive free meals from the kitchen at the Charlene guest house which is close by. The current teachers have been at Sarnelli House for over a year. Their mornings from Monday to Friday are spent at House of Hope. There are currently 17 children under four years old living there and nine of them go to nursery school and kindergarten classes at Rosario School

in Vienghuk. They are a rambunctious, noisy, and often out of control little gang. There is constant competition between them for affection and toys. Some of them have delayed development, some are quiet and shy, and some think they are alpha males already. To bring order is quite a skill and the house mothers manage crowd control very well.



The teachers fill a gap at House of Hope by being able to give individual attention to the preschoolers who haven't yet gone to school. They can really focus on the little ones' emotional and intellectual development by targeting the children who have delayed speech, reduced attention, and poor social skills. The playroom at House of Hope was recently fitted out with donated classroom equipment and the teachers have a lot of practical resources available to them. Some of the activities they prepare focus on listening and following instructions, understanding rules and boundaries and vowel practice and memory training skills. Others are more formal where the children sit down with eyes closed and have quiet time. Even though the lessons are prepared, they can be organic and arise out of how the children are behaving and what they are interested in learning on the day.

After the House of Hope lessons, the teachers move onto home schooling three children. The local school has



requested that Sarnelli House home school two children as they have become too disruptive for the teachers. Both children come from backgrounds of abandonment and trauma. The little girl is six years old and throws herself on the floor, takes off her clothes all the while screaming. She has been under the medical care of the Child Development department at Nongkhai Hospital since she arrived at Sarnelli House with her brother last year. She experienced brutal domestic and drug abuse in her fractured family. Recently her mother remarried and had the opportunity under the Thai Welfare Service to be reunited with her daughter for a trial period. Unfortunately, her mother was unable to manage her and declined to have the little girl at home with her again. She lives at Jan and Oscar House and is gradually settling in, and on her good days she goes to House of Hope and participates in the preschoolers' activities with the teachers.

The boy who is home schooled is eight years old and was born with HIV, he has a little brother who is six years old. Their mother died not long after giving birth to the little brother and their father is in prison for drug offences. The boys were given to a lady who had four grandchildren to look after. He and his brother were neglected, dirty, and hungry. The boy kept getting sick and it was on a hospital visit that it was discovered he had HIV. Both brothers came to Sarnelli House five years ago. Although street smart, the big brother cannot follow instructions well, has practically no attention span and is unable to read. School has been fun for him as he asks to go to the toilet and spends most of his time there playing in water. The teachers have no time to continually go and retrieve him. He is good at math and he can add up his coins quickly (and the coins of the smaller kids at school who he scams out of their pocket money).

The third home schooler is a two year old boy who lives at the Sharon Houminer House and has lost the use of both legs because of spina bifida. He doesn't have an intellectual disability but as he lives with the five other children who are severely limited intellectually, he has poor social skills. To give him more social and educational support the teachers teach the two boys together and it seems to be a positive experience for both of them (as the younger one has no money on him).

In the evenings, the teachers have their lessons with the older children at Jan and Oscar House and St Patrick's House. When the children get home from school they have a shower, put their

school bags and shoes away and take their clean laundry into wardrobes. Mealtime follows and then it is time for the evening 90-minute Thai language, reading and math lesson that the teachers run.

The teachers teach the boys and girls on alternate nights. At St. Patrick's House, the boys are gathered in their classroom after their meal. Already four little boys under eight years old are being medically cared for by the Child Development Department in Nongkhai Hospital for behavioral issues and learning disabilities. The teachers have to be particularly adept at knowing just how limited some boys' attention spans are and to know what triggers them to fight and behave aggressively. Despite this, the boys seem to enjoy their evening lessons, while the teachers are always grateful to get home. On Saturday mornings, the older children from Sarnelli House and Our Lady of Refuge House come together in the outdoor sala. Their ages range from nine years old to 13 years old. Again, they are all at different levels of learning and have different abilities, but the teachers occupy and challenge them with reading quizzes, math puzzles and best of all show them interest and praise them for their successes.

All these amazing people are instrumental in helping improve the children's lives through expertise, talent, and time. If it takes a village to raise a child then at Sarnelli House that big village is filled with generous-hearted, smart, compassionate people and Sarnelli House is truly grateful for all their time and effort.



Donations in the USA can be made to:

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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 February 2026