

# Father Ray Foundation Newsletter

June 2017

## *The type of teachers we need*

I wrote last year of the retirement of the principal of the School for the Blind, Khun Aurora Sribuaphan. Khun Aurora is enjoying her retirement, though living close enough to give advice if and when it is needed.

Before the start of the summer holidays I was over at the school and had a chat with Mr. Chid, the new man in charge. I had always assumed that he had been a former student at our school here in Pattaya, and he progressed from student to teacher and now to principal.

But no, he grew up in the north east of the country, went completely blind following an accident at the age of eleven and as he told me, it was then that his life really started to get interesting.

You see, young Chid wanted to continue his education, but the local schools in his area would never have been able to provide him with what he needed, they just don't have the experience or the facilities.

So off he went to his nearest school for blind and visually impaired children and he remained there until he graduated from Grade 12.

His next step was to go to nearby Khon Kaen University to study sociology, something he had been interested in for many years.

But the university said no. They would not accept him, they would not interview him and they did not even want to discuss the matter with him.

However, they must have thought that a blind boy for the north east of the country would just walk away and forget all about going to university. They told him that they didn't want blind people at the school, as it was impossible for them to be taught! They must have thought that was the end of it. But no.

Chid, together with a school friend who had also been refused entry, was not going to just go home and forget about all his dreams for the future.

So he did two things. First he called every media organization in the country. He contacted radio stations, television networks and journalists from local and national newspapers and told them what had happened to him and his friend.

Then the two of them went on hunger strike, while sitting outside the gates of the university.

For three days they sat there, eating nothing, but taking sips of

water, until on day three the university relented and held a press conference to announce that the two blind men would be accepted into the university.

But Chid and his friend refused their offer. They didn't want to be accepted into the university as a special case, Chid felt that if he accepted their offer they could easily remove him from the school in a matter of days or weeks, using the excuse that he wasn't suitable. No, Chid wanted to sit the entrance examination, just like all potential students.

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## *Can you guess?*

What Superfood are we currently producing? No, it's not blueberries, bulgar wheat, Chia seeds or kale. But it is something that is full of protein, costs very little to produce and the children would eat it three meals a day, everyday if they could, though our readers may be a bit horrified. Answer on the back page

## *This is what we do*

Over the sixteen years that I have been working here in Pattaya it's impossible to remember the arrival of all the children and students who end up here at the Foundation. I remember Condo.

You may also remember Condo, the young boy who I have kept you updated with over the years, thrown on a bonfire at the age of three for making too much noise. Yes, you did read that right, he was thrown on a



bonfire for making too much noise! He is well, he became a teenager in mid-April and he is now a novice monk at a nearby Buddhist temple. I visited him recently, a few days after his 13th birthday and took him some of his favourite food; strawberries, pineapple and sticky rice with mango.

There was the young girl who arrived following the death of her mother. Eight years of age and the saddest looking child I think I have ever seen, and who is now in her third year at university.

There was the little boy who lived on Pattaya beach with his alcoholic, drug addicted mother and arrived at our Drop-In Center just before Christmas 2010. He cried for days as he missed his mum; no matter how bad a mother she may have been, she was all he ever knew and he missed her.

He is now living at the Children's Village and we recently spent several hours running up stairs and throwing ourselves down water slides at the local water park; I'm getting too old for this!

You will recall that in the September 2015 issue of our newsletter I

told you all about two little boys who I named the 'naughtiest boys in the world'.

Well, one of those boys, Tom, came to live with us as a five year old in 2002. His mother had died, he had six brothers and sisters, and his father was unemployed and just couldn't find any money to take care of his children, so he brought Tom to live with us; to this day Tom still doesn't know where his brothers and sisters are. Shortly afterwards in 2003 another young boy arrived, Nai, and I remember him as he was the complete opposite of Tom, I'm not saying Nai was an angel, but he was very polite, caused nobody any problems, did as he was told, went to school, didn't fight, never stole and was a really nice young boy.

Weeks later a little girl arrived, six years of age, named Kwan, and, well, she had the potential to become the title holder of naughtiest girl in the world, seriously, she had the potential to cause mayhem, and she regularly did.



But she also had a twinkle in her eye and as she was so small compared to the other children no one would ever believe that she could do anything wrong.

A few years ago, and much to everyone's surprise, all three of them received scholarships to attend one of the best private schools in the province.



Tom resigned after Grade 9 as he wanted to enroll at a local vocational college while Nai and Kwan both stayed at the school.

In March this year all three of them graduated.



On their final day at school both Nai and Kwan received several bouquets of flowers, armfuls of cuddly soft toys, envelopes containing cash and messages of good luck and support for the future, and a line of people wanting to write messages on their shirts; they were both very popular students.

A few days later Tom received his graduating certificate from the Director of the Thai-Austrian Vocational College.

The following day Tom, along with Nai and another young man from the Children's Home, Nuth, traveled up to Bangkok to enroll at university. Three young men who have known each other since they were young boys will soon leave Pattaya and live independently at university. Tom will study Industrial Mechanics, Nai is hoping to study Logistics. The third young man, Nuth, will be off to Bangkok University to study Food Science, he's currently working at Ray Bakery, our very own bakery and coffee shop.

Then it was Kwan's turn to enroll and she has been accepted on a course to study traditional Thai dancing. When Kwan performs a Thai dance you really don't need to see anyone else. She has grace, poise and she is just about perfect.

You may be asking yourself how do we do this, how do we get children

from the poorest backgrounds you can imagine, children who when they arrived into our care no one would ever have given them much hope for the future, including me, how did we get them from there to where they are today? Well, most of it is down to you.

We do great work here in Pattaya, there's no denying that, but none of us working here at the Father Ray Foundation can do what we do without the people who help us. The people who support our work, the people who sponsor our children, the people who drop off a bag of rice when they can afford it, you are the people who have made sure that Tom, Kwan, Nai and Nuth, and all our children still have a home, enough to eat, a pillow to rest their head at night and the opportunity to have a life that their own parents could never have imagined for themselves.



One of the most important ways anyone can help our children is by sponsoring them. Before coming to work here in Thailand I used to see adverts in newspapers from charities asking for people to sponsor the children in their care. I was always a bit skeptical, until I came here and saw our sponsorship programme.

Father Ray used to say that 'people give me money to help children, the more money they give the more children I can help'

People give us money all the time, but a lot of that money is what we call restricted, can only be used for specific items or projects, and while this is great, we still need money, hard cold cash, to pay the bills.

We need to pay the farmer who supplies food for the children. We need to pay for petrol to take the children to school, we pay salaries so that our children have people to look after them. We need to buy our children school uniforms, Scout and sports kits, shoes; you would not believe the amount of shoes we buy each year, I'm sure I never grew as quickly as our children do!

This is where sponsors come in. The money we receive each month, or each year, goes directly to the children. In fact, 91% of all the money we receive from a sponsor goes directly to the children; the other 9% goes on expenses for the two ladies who run our sponsorship department.

There is a family in the UK who has been sponsoring Tom since 2004. The money they have sent for Tom has not

gone into his own private bank account (though I am sure he wishes it had), it has gone into the account for the Children's Home so that it helps not only Tom, but also Kwan, Nai, Nuth and all the other children living at the Home.

Last year one of the family members, Georgia, visited us on her travels around Thailand and South East Asia. She had never met Tom before, but she wanted to after reading so much about him and when she was here I asked her why her family continues to sponsor Tom, her answer was simple 'Everyone deserves the opportunity for a better life'.

One of my former volunteers, Anne-Mette from Denmark, also visited recently, and since 2013 she has been sponsoring a brother and sister living at the Children's Village. Like Georgia, I asked Anne-Mette why she wants to sponsor these two children, and again I got a very simple answer, 'I'm just happy to know that I'm helping them to have a better life'. And they are.

## *Soaking wet, but great fun*

April was just as hot this year as it was last, which saw record temperatures. But of course we had Songkran to cool us down. For those who don't know, Songkran is the Thai New Year festival. The ceremony lasts for three days throughout the country, but here in Pattaya it lasts more than a week. The final day, is always great fun as all the children arrive to spend the day, about eight hours, standing on the side of the road throwing water over everyone and anything that passes. Great fun.



## *Cont'd The type of teachers we need*

So that is what he did, and he passed, and then there was no way he could be refused. He wanted to be treated the same as everyone else and he remained at the university for four years until successfully graduating with a BA in Sociology.

I don't know about you, but that is one of the most wonderful things I have ever heard. When I see Chid walking around the school, talking with the students, welcoming guests and visitors, it is hard to believe that this gentle man is the same person who went on a hunger strike.

Now he encourages his students to think about going to university, if he can do it then they can also do it.

I think we're very lucky to have a man like Chid in charge of our school, I'm sure you'll agree that this is the type of man who can only do good for our blind students.

## The new boy

Although Condo is living at a temple he is still one of our boys, he's still registered with us. But living at the temple is free, it doesn't cost us anything.

He had a few joint sponsors and I recently contacted one of them to ask if they would like to sponsor another child. They agreed and I asked if they would like to sponsor the newest arrival at the Children's Home,

who also happens to be the youngest resident.

Ice is his name. Ten years of age and he arrived with his elder brother

after their grandmother realised that she could no longer take care of them.

On his first day at the Home he was playing with his new friends, and they all jumped onto the dumper truck as it was slowly passing by, as they did everyday.

However, it was Ice's first time, he didn't hold on tight enough, he fell and the truck ran over his leg.

There was panic as everyone ran around screaming, until Ice was placed in the back of the pick-up truck and driven to hospital.

He returned with a leg covered with bandages and was ordered to rest, which during the school holidays is not fun.

I felt very sorry for him as not only was he injured, but he also missed out on Songkran, the Thai New Year, as he was told not to get the plaster wet, so this is why I recommend him.

The sponsors agreed and I went up to the Home with the two gifts they had sent for Condo, one for Christmas and the other for his birthday, but they were no use to him so we decided to give them to Ice.

There was an announcement over



the loud speaker for 'Ice to come to the office as Derek has a gift for you from your new sponsor'.

Well, considering his leg is in plaster, and he usually get carried by the

older boys, the speed he ran may just get him into the Thai Olympic Sprint Team.

He didn't know what a 'sponsor' is,

so we explained that his sponsor lives in the UK and she wants to help him.

He sat there for a few seconds, deep in thought, and then asked 'why?'

He couldn't really understand why someone all the way over in England would want to help him. There were two gifts, and the first contained a large towel with a picture of Ice's favourite superhero on the front, Superman,

The second gift was a soccer kit, shirt and shorts.

He was so excited he couldn't wait to try it on, and then his brother casually announced that this was the first time he's ever worn something new.

Imagine that, ten years of age and never worn brand new clothes.

Being a sponsor is not just about sending gifts over to a child here in Thailand, you can if you wish, but it is much more than that.

Being a sponsor means you care about someone you may never meet, who lives in a town you'll never visit and in a country whose language you can't speak.

Being a sponsor means you want change to happen.



## Superfood

So did you guess which superfood we are now producing? Did you guess crickets? No, not the game played between two teams, but the small animals, bugs.

The children love them, not raw, but deep fried in oil which also has pandanus leaves added to give some flavour.

Have I tried them? Of course I have. Do I like them? Well, they wouldn't be my first choice for a snack between meals, but they do taste a lot better than you think they're going to taste.



## Thank you



A huge thank you to everyone who made a donation to our school uniform appeal. I'm sure you'll agree, they do look very smart. Once again, thank you

## Father Ray Foundation

440 Moo 9, Sukhumvit Road,  
Km 145, Nongprue, Banglamung,  
Chonburi 20260, Thailand

Tel : +66 (0) 38 428717

Mobile : +66 (0) 91 717 9089

Fax : +66 (0) 38 420 340

[info@fr-ray.org](mailto:info@fr-ray.org) [www.fr-ray.org](http://www.fr-ray.org)

**Bank Account: Bangkok Bank Ltd.**

1. Banglamung Chonburi Branch  
Current Account: 342-3-04125-4

2. Seacon Square Bangkok Branch  
Current Account: 232-3-02275-2

Swift Code: **BKKBTHBK**