

Message from Fr. Shea



In this September newsletter, Kate gives us some examples of kids who came to us with their difficult backgrounds and problems. Trying

to help these kids overcome their basic hostility and distrust is a daunting task. Most children are happy and carefree, but it is the few who demand the most attention and care. Our housemothers are angels. And we do not take babies and kids and abandon the old and poor who have been raising them.

Our Outreach program, which is run by Kate, continues to visit those old folks who are poor and destitute with food, medicine and other aid, such as blankets and clothes.

God has certainly blessed Sarnelli House with good workers, happy children, fantastic donors and enthusiastic volunteers.



God Bless you all

Fr Michael Shea C.Ss.R

This and That

The monsoon season has arrived and we are halfway through what we hope will be many months of heavy rains. Already cement paths and driveways are slick with green mold and clothes still feel damp after days of waiting for some sun to shine. In the children's houses, the electric clothes driers that stand idle all year get a good work out as school uniforms, clothes and bedding are completely dried.



After the good stretch of rain in July, the farm staff led by the redoubtable Ms. Peh have worked hard preparing the rice seeds for planting. Already rice paddies on the 12 rai farm and Jomp's Farm (70 rai) have paddies full of rice seedlings. Not all the land on the farm is taken up with rice growing. Some of it is used for growing crops to feed the farm animals - pigs, cows, chicken and geese - and to reduce the cost of buying ever more expensive animal feed.

Instead of the traditional way of planting rice which required the back breaking effort of sinking shin deep into mud and then elbow deep while embedding the seedlings' roots deep into the rice paddy, the current casting method is much less labor intensive. Casting requires farm workers to stand on the side of the rice paddy and fling or throw the seedlings into the mud relying on gravity to cause them to land root ball down and anchor themselves. Gone are the neat tidy rows of rice but it is surprisingly successful.

Despite all the hard work on the farm, last year's rice harvest was not sufficient to feed all the children and their housemothers for the whole year. This year, an El Nino weather effect has been forecast for Thailand. It is expected to include dry conditions from August with an increasing risk of drought, and also more intense storm like typhoons resulting in flash flooding. Given this forecast, the decision was made to buy rice to store for the coming year. Thanks to benefactors in the USA, this will be possible and will be a huge relief in balancing the food budget for the year ahead.

Educational opportunities



Providing educational opportunities for children of all ages is a central part of the Sarnelli House Outreach Program's focus. YaYa has been known to the Outreach Program since she was four years old. Her mother died from AIDS when she was six months old and she has never known her father, who ran off with another woman soon after YaYa was born. YaYa's grandparents took up the task of raising her. Her grandfather was a poor subsistence farmer, but he had a garden where he grew vegetables and fruit for the family and YaYa's grandmother made Thai sweets to sell at the local market every day. Their home was a very basic wooden house where the walls didn't meet the ceiling, the floors were hard pressed dirt and the kitchen centered on a fire outdoors. It was located in a rural area and YaYa grew up with lots of love and just enough to eat. Her grandmother started taking YaYa to the local hospital and when she was three years old she was started on her AntiRetroViral (ARV) drugs. YaYa's grandmother, while not educated herself,



really understood the importance of her little granddaughter taking her medicine every day and together they never missed a hospital appointment all through her school years. When YaYa had to start at her local government school, her grandparents couldn't afford to pay for her school uniform, school bag and school shoes that was the initial expense every year for students, even though there were no term fees. They had heard of Fr. Shea and his work helping

poor children attend school and they approached him seeking the same help. YaYa was immediately enrolled on the Outreach School Scholarship Program. Visits by the Outreach team to YaYa's home also started in order to support her grandmother in managing YaYa's medicines and health. At hard times, when food was low due to sickness or failure of crops, the Outreach Food Program stepped in and rice, eggs, tinned fish and milk were delivered monthly until life improved. She and her grandmother would receive YaYa's scholarship money from the office in Donwai twice a year before each school term. YaYa arrived neat as a pin in her school uniform, with school grades in hand and her grandmother by her side. Fr. Shea would be delighted to see them, and he always made a fuss over YaYa's impressive grades and gave her a little extra money as a reward. YaYa sailed through grade school and before graduating from Grade 9 in 2020, her teachers recommended a different senior



high school which might provide a more reliable path to enter university. The school was in Udon Thani, the province next to Nongkhai province, about two hours away. It was a wrench for YaYa to leave her grandparents, but they fully supported her move, even though they could not support her financially. The Outreach School Scholarship Program assisted her in securing a boarding room close to school and paid for rent and food expenses. YaYa completed her final three years of senior high school exceptionally well with a grade of 3.71 out of 4.

During YaYa's school holidays, she would visit her grandmother for a week or so. Even though her grandmother's eyesight was deteriorating and her arthritis getting worse she was still independent. YaYa's grandfather had died in the second year of her studies. Fortunately, there were relatives who moved in with YaYa's grandmother to help her. For the remaining weeks of the long school break YaYa would travel by bus for eight hours to Bangkok and spend her holidays working as a waitress, in a small local restaurant some relatives ran. She earned less than 300 baht/day, but she did not have any expenses as she shared a room in the relative's



house and they supplied her food. She would return home in time for the new school term and have some extra money to send to her grandmother.

When it came to applying for university, YaYa was accepted in the first round to study Teaching in a university in Udon Thani. Her four-year degree's expenses were covered by Sarnelli House's University Fund. Costs such as term fees, food, living allowance, and rent were all included. Finally, in March this year YaYa graduated with a strong grade of 3.32 (out of 4). She received an A grade in six subjects over the final two years of her course. As YaYa's marks were so good she was encouraged by her teachers to enroll in a Master's Degree in Education Policy at the same university. YaYa attended a meeting at Sarnelli House to apply for further funds to support her studying for another two years. She was of course successful, and she is now enrolled in a two-year, part-time Master's Program. She is also working part time as a Thai language tutor for children, so that she can continue to earn money to help her grandmother and



to meet some of her university costs. She was only the second student who has applied for support to study a Master's Program through the Sarnelli House University Fund. With Thailand's competitive job market often pushing graduates into lower-paid work outside their field, earning a Master's degree is a worthwhile investment. YaYa's story is not yet finished of course, but she is on the right track to finding a good and stable job in public education that will give her health insurance and a pension for her old age. YaYa was able to take the educational opportunities available to her and with focus she worked hard to succeed. Despite having been born into poverty, as an orphan girl and with HIV, she continues to grow and succeed academically in a society that is not always kind to young women.

New arrivals

In April of this year, Sarnelli House welcomed three little boys. Two of the boys are siblings aged three and six years old. Their mother is in jail for drug related offences and their father disappeared when she was arrested. They were missing school, and were undernourished. The younger boy is living at House of Hope and the older boy at St Patrick's House. Their mother hopes to be reunited with them when she gets out of jail. The other little boy is 3 years old, and his mother is in jail for theft. She was convinced to sell goods that were already stolen so she could have money to buy food for her boy. The boy was left with his father who neglected him, was violent and used drugs around him. This little boy is underweight and has been assessed as slow in meeting his physical milestones. He is now living at House of Hope. In the last four months, it has been remarkable to see the difference in these boys' physical health as well as their emotional status. They have put on weight and have started school with the rest of the children living at House of Hope and St Patrick's House. Their social skills are slowly improving as they adapt to a new routine and new surroundings. They are energetic and curious and love going to school with their new friends. In September there are more children in need arriving - a one-month-old baby boy, and two seven-year-old boys. They will be welcomed with open arms. Across the Pai Si Tong campus where three children's houses are located, there will be 32 boys and 20 girls all under nine years of age. Hopefully in the future some of these children will be able to benefit from the same educational opportunities that were available to YaYa.

Short Term Volunteers

The Association for Solidarity, a Spanish Non-Government-Organisation(NGO) connected to The Redemptorists Catholic Missionary order that Fr. Shea is part of, sent six young people to volunteer at Sarnelli House for one month in July. This is the third group that has come through this organization, and they are always energetic and passionate about their experience.

Sarnelli House

Sarnelli House has had no long-term volunteers from their usual volunteer partners the Evangelical Apostolic Church Oberhausen Tackenberg, (APO) and the Redemptorist Volunteer Ministries (RVM) Bonn, Germany this year, so the arrival of the group from Spain was most welcome. The three young men and three young women were from Madrid and Seville and had already started on their university life. They arrived on the eve of the Football World Cup final between Spain and Argentina. Despite jet lag, they stayed up to watch the match at 2am Thai time and were still celebrating the Spanish victory when the locals of Donwai were heading to their places of work. It was an auspicious start to their month at Sarnelli House. The children loved their energy and the genuine interest they showed while doing simple activities with them, like colouring in, bracelet making, jigsaws and building structures with blocks and magnetic tiles. Pompoms were painstakingly hand made with the children and there was football and badminton games played at competitive levels. The boys from Sarnelli House were delighted they were playing against real Spanish people. A very successful still life art class was taught to two artistic boys, and a dance routine was practised and then the special performance was received with plenty of applause at Fr Shea's 88th birthday party. The volunteers were also tasked with cleaning jobs. The playroom at House of Hope, a storeroom at the office and the sensory room at Sharon Houminer House were all emptied out, scrubbed and everything put back in shining order. Another activity they did to help the farm staff was casting the rice seedlings at the 12 rai farm. The disabled children in the Sharon Houminer House were not neglected either and were taken on walks in the wheelchairs and volunteers found out that music and dancing was a great way to connect with them. Games played outside when it wasn't raining, were devised by the volunteers, and despite the language barrier everyone seemed to know what to do. During the week when the children were at school the volunteers taught English at a local government school and blew the students' minds with their enthusiastic singing and dancing.

For one week during this time another group arrived at



Sarnelli House. The leader of the group has been a great supporter of Sarnelli House for many years, and he and another teacher led the four younger students who were all from an international school in Taipei, Taiwan. They spent their time and energy in sporting activities, card games, drawing, building blocks and just hanging out with the kids which the children loved.

For the children at Sarnelli House these visits were a huge burst of activity in the middle of the school year that lifted their spirits and bolstered their confidence. A big thankyou to all the young people who shared their time and talents. The children are always amazed and grateful that young people from across the oceans arrive to connect with them and show their love – what a gift!

Donations in the USA
can be made to:

Friends of Sarnelli House

Box 88234

Milwaukee

WI 53288-0234 USA

(The foundation gives tax cards).

For those outside of the
USA Pay Pal is available at
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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 2026