



## HAPPY TO HELP THE LITTLE ONES

According to a Thai government survey last year, among an estimated eight million children at primary or secondary school, about 3.6 million have parents who earn less than 40,000 Bt per year.

Our normal point-of-entry into the education system is junior high school and we don't usually support children at primary school unless we receive donations specifically for the purpose. Happily, late last year we received one for 50,000 Bt which the donor wanted used to help younger children with their bus fares, lunch and other daily expenses. We were happy to oblige and gave grants of 1,000 Bt to 50 children at an inner-city school in Nakhon Sawan.

While there we told the children that after finishing their primary studies they can apply for a high school scholarship in our Inner-City Program and then, after finishing M3 (grade 9), for a new scholarship to study at vocational college.

This year we will increase the scholarship quota for our Nakhon Sawan Inner-City Program from 200 to 250. The scholarships have a value of 3,000 Bt per semester. That doesn't seem much but for children whose parents often can't even afford bus fares, it can make a significant difference.

## More than 600 qualify!

At the end of the present academic year, 602 SET scholarship students will finish their studies at high schools, vocational colleges or universities. Many of the school and college students will continue in the new academic year to the next level of their education, with higher-value SET scholarships.

This year, not only will we be replenishing the fixed scholarship quotas at all our centers, we also hope to give around 100 additional scholarships to bring our 2015 total to more than 1,500. One aim is to get our newest vocational center from its present 50 scholarships to a full quota of 100. Whether we can do that is entirely up to you, our generous supporters!

**1.94%** We try to keep our non-program costs to a minimum, but last year we did particularly well. Our pre-audit accounts show that administration costs fell from 2.93% in 2013 to just 1.94% in 2014 - and they fell not only as a percentage, but in real terms too. Our audited accounts will be available after March.

All figures in the magazine are shown in Thai Baht. The exchange rates for major currencies are shown on the back page.

## Student letters

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All letters are written by the students. Some are received in English and others are written in Thai and are then translated by teachers. Spelling is corrected and letters may be 'tidied up' but otherwise they are printed without alteration, even if the English is a little odd sometimes. Some 'letters' may be taken from student interviews.

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We really enjoy watching our long-term scholarship students grow and develop.

Many of our current university students were first supported through six years of study at Nakhon Sawan High School, where we award a constant 100 scholarships. When they finish school - if their grades are good enough - they can apply for new scholarships for their university studies. Being supported for ten or more years, we get to know some of them very well.

The school claims that around 80% of its students go on to university, though our students probably wouldn't be able to without our support. We take a great interest in these youngsters and make regular checks on them. On this page and the next are recent interviews with two such students: Chutima and Yuttakorn.



**Chutima with her citation for making six parachute jumps.**

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### Facing my fear

When you are ordered to jump out of an airplane at thousands of feet, you very quickly have to face and overcome your fear.

I had to make six parachute jumps as part of my course in Law and Public Administration at the National Police Academy. It may seem that parachuting is not very useful for someone wanting to be a police officer, but after we graduate and start work we might be faced with dangerous and life-threatening situations. Difficult decisions may have to be made quickly and confidently and that's really what the parachuting is about; to help build self-confidence. I am very confident and that's partly because of the support and encouragement I've had from SET for ten years.

I received your scholarship from

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**Left, Chutima when she was a high school student. To raise money, she helped her granny grow jasmine flowers and made garlands to sell.**

my first year at Nakhon Sawan School. My life was difficult then because my parents had split up, leaving me with my grandmother. She made a basic living growing jasmine flowers and making them into garlands for wholesalers. I helped in the evenings and at weekends but we were paid only 5 Bt for ten. That wasn't a lot even then and granny earned only about 100 Bt a day. Despite our struggles, we were happy and with SET's generous help I survived those early years.

My first scholarship was extended to cover my university studies. Even when I was in my first year at school I knew I wanted to be a police officer. Now I am in my final year at the Police Academy and will graduate in 2015.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my ideas about achievement and what I have learned from being a SET student. I think if we have strong will-power and determination we can achieve anything we set out to do, whether it's passing our high school tests or jumping out of an airplane. When you develop concentration, will-power and pride in yourself and your own ability, you can solve any problem.

Thank you for my scholarship. If I didn't have that, I'm not sure I would have achieved what I have already, or what I might achieve in the future. I promise that I will be an honest and ethical law officer and serve the people to help create a peaceful society.

*Chutima Bunchongpru, scholarship 1989*

Another of our ex-Nakhon Sawan School students is Yuttakorn, now 23. We chatted with him when we presented scholarships at his university last year. This is what he had to say:

### **The best thing that ever happened to me**

I had my scholarship when I was in my first year at school. That was in 2006 and I was confused then about how my future might turn out. I know young boys don't think very far ahead but I always have done because my background is a poor one and I wanted my future to be better. I only knew I had to study as high as I could but I didn't know how to do that without enough money. I also have a problem because I'm deaf in one ear and my eyesight is quite bad, so I thought that would be a big disadvantage to my future. The SET people told me that didn't matter, so I followed their advice and stopped worrying about it.

My parents divorced when I was very young so I had to live with my grandparents. My father helped about my expenses as much as he could but I only got 100 Bt each



**Above, Yuttakorn at university last year and right, when we first met him at high school nearly ten years ago.**

month for bus fares and lunch. That wasn't enough so that's why my school recommended me for a scholarship. There were many students at my school who were just as poor as me, so I feel I was lucky to get it. It made all the difference to my life then and does now, and it will continue to do so into the future.

When I finished high school and got my SET university scholarship, I remember what one of the trustees told me. He said that SET would always be there to support and encourage me and to give help when I needed it. That gave

me a good feeling in my heart because I knew someone cared about me. It made me want to study as hard as I could, as a way to repay SET's kindness.

Since 2012 I have been studying General Science but I especially like Biology and Agricultural Research. I think that will be my career when I finish my Bachelor degree in 2016 but I would like to study even higher if possible.

The main thing I want to tell you is that SET's kindness is the best thing that ever happened to me in all my life. I will never forget that.

*Yuttakorn Thipchat, scholarship 2008*



### **I feel privileged to have your support**

I want to thank you for the privilege that I was awarded your scholarship. I am studying for a degree in Engineering and I will finish this year. After I graduate I hope I can get a good job because I need to help my younger brothers who never had the same opportunity for a good education. When you are from a poor family, sometimes only the oldest child can have education so I feel responsible for my brothers and want to help them have a better future. I hope that one day I can be the provider more than the recipient. In that way, you have helped not only me but also my whole family. Thank you.

*Opas Phuttiorn, scholarship 4568*



## Student letters



### You gave us hope for a better future

I am Nantaphong, one of your 30 students in Uttaradit Province. We come from three villages around but we meet up twice every year in one village when you visit to give us our scholarship money. Most of us study at vocational colleges but a few are at school or university. I am at university.

I want to tell you how proud you have made everybody in my family. My grandparents only studied at primary school, then they had to leave to work in the rice fields. That was the usual thing for their generation. My parents had a better education. They could go to high school till M3 (grade 9) but then they also had to leave to work on the farm. I thought I would be able to study to M6 (grade 12) and then I would have to look for some ordinary job. I didn't want to work in the rice paddies and be poor all my life, same as my parents and grandparents.

Because we are a poor family we don't have much opportunity in life, not the same as rich people. Usually we have to follow our parents and grandparents. Then you started giving scholarships to children in my village and around, and I was one

of the first. You have helped me for seven years already. But you didn't only give us money, you gave us hope for a better future.

I went to vocational college and studied three years about Machine Shop. No one in my family ever studied so high but then you helped me two more years to get a higher qualification about Industrial Technology. After that you sent me to university to study Industrial Management. When I finish I hope will get a good job so my own future family will not be poor the same as my parents and grandparents.

All your students are very proud that you help us so much. Our parents are also proud of their children, because we are changing the future for everybody in our families. We could not do that without SET, so we all want to say 'thank you' for taking care of us.

*Nantaphong Choontoo, scholarship 3348*

*The Uttaradit Program (in the lower northern region) is one of our two 'Village Groups'. The other is in Sisaket Province in the northeast. Although each program is centered on one village, each draws youngsters from several surrounding communities. There are currently a total of 80 students in the two programs studying at 21 high schools, vocational colleges or universities.*

### My mum worried about me

I am studying about Mechanics at college but I don't have your scholarship. I asked last term but the welfare lady said there wasn't enough for everybody. I was sad about that but I know there are some students who are more poor than me.

Later in the term I had a big problem about my bus fares. My mum had a bad accident and could not work. She had to pay so much for her medicine and she had no money to give me. She was very worried because I have no one else to help me. I do not have a father. I work at the weekend to get some money to help my mum but I can't get enough to pay for everything.



I told the welfare lady and she said she would ask you about it, so then I got some special money 3,000 Bt to pay my bus fares. Now my mum does not worry. The welfare lady at my college told me that next term I will have a scholarship, so thank you very much.

*Surachet Sanamtong*

Regular readers of 'SET News' will have noticed the common factors that run through many of our students' letters and stories.

Divorce and one-parent families are recurring themes, but the most common factor (besides poverty) is that the

majority of our students were brought up by their grandparents. That's especially true of those from rural backgrounds. Our city-born students are also from poor families but they often have more stable backgrounds, with parents who have low-paid but regular work in factories, offices or shops, or who make a basic living as market traders, sell food from roadside stalls or have their own small 'shop-house' retail outlets.

Our students from rural backgrounds often face greater difficulties. Most have parents who are landless farmers who rent small areas to grow crops, or work as laborers in wealthier neighbors' fields. Even if they own

### Around 65% of our students were brought up by their grandparents

land, in the periods between one harvest and the next the family may be left without cash income. Drought or flood and the consequent loss of crops also causes unexpected hardship. With these pressures, parents often move to the big cities to work as casual laborers on building sites, or in similar jobs. Most of our rural students' parents are from a generation that was under-educated, so they have few decent job opportunities. When they leave their villages to seek work, they may have no choice but to leave their children in the care of grandparents. It sounds cold-hearted but it's simple economic necessity. The separation can become very long-term; in fact the child may never see his or her parents again. Many of our students have no memory at all of their parents.

Again through economic necessity, the mother and father may have to take any jobs they can find but may sometimes have to temporarily separate to work in different regions of the country. Based on our students' stories, it often seems to happen that one of the parents – or both - then meet new partners who perhaps offer more stable or comfortable lives, so the parents permanently split-up. They may never return to their original village. Some will send money home regularly for the support of their children but others do not, or cannot.

We've never undertaken a formal survey but SET director Peter has read the basic background history of every one of our past and present 5,591 scholarship students. He estimates that around 65% of them were brought up by their grandparents. But considering how well many of our students turn out and what they eventually achieve, maybe being brought up by granny wasn't such a bad thing?

### Living with granny ... a common theme



## Our former students tell us about their lives

### A struggle to support myself

Hello everyone at SET. I am Punnapit. I graduated with a BEd degree in Mathematics in 2011 after five years of study. Throughout my studies I had your generous scholarship and I know that without it I wouldn't now be a teacher. Because of my family circumstances I had nobody to support me since I was in M5 (grade 11), so I had to struggle to look after myself in my final year till I finished high school. It wasn't easy but I was always determined to persevere and to make something of myself.

Now I am a Maths teacher in a rural school. I love my work and my students and I am very happy with what I have achieved. I am grateful to everybody at SET for the help you gave me. *Punnapit Taotong, scholarship 1998*



### Exactly where I want to be

I studied for a degree in Public Administration at a university in Sisaket, in the northeastern region. Sisaket is the poorest province in Thailand and many young people have the big problem about money for study, especially if they want to go to university. Most of the youth

come from poor farming families, so we don't usually have the chance for the higher education.

Even when I studied at school I worked to save money for my university expenses, but I didn't know they would be so high. I was alright for the first semester but then I knew I had a big problem coming up. Lucky for me I applied for your scholarship and got it, so I joined the other 99 students at my university who have your great support. If I didn't have that, I think I would not finish my studies. I graduated in 2009.

When I was at my university, I knew I wanted to work there after I finished my degree. Most students in my major go to the big cities to look for government work after they graduate, but I didn't want to leave Sisaket. I like it very much because the people are so friendly and my family is there. Also, my university is very well organized and I thought I would

have the chance of a good career there for all my life.

I got a job in my university Administration Department. I do not have a high position yet but if I work hard I will rise each year and get the better pay grade.

I am very happy because my life has turned out exactly how I hoped. That's because of the support SET gave me. I always try to remember that because now every year I help the senior staff interview students who apply for a SET scholarship. I understand the problems the students have because I had the same problems, so that makes me want to help them as much as I can.

Thank you from my heart for the help you gave me and all the other students at my university. Without you some of the youth will never have the good chance to study to the high level. We appreciate everything you do.

*Eakajak Sulawit, scholarship 2236*

### What more could I want?

I can trace every good thing in my life back to when I first had your help.

When I finished school I didn't have much chance to progress because my parents were poor. I thought I would have to make charcoal to sell, like my parents and grandparents. I knew if I did that I would always be poor.

I decided to study about Public Administration at university. I worked to save money for the first semester but I soon got into problems. That's when SET started to help me. If I didn't have your scholarship, I know I would have dropped out and maybe now I

would be making charcoal.



I finished my degree in 2009 but because my grades were good I got a special short

scholarship from HM The King to study Local Administration. I couldn't have got that without my first degree. When I finished studying I got a job with a major bank, but that was only because of my good education. I am a liaison officer between all the branches in one city and go round helping to sort out problems. Because of my job I met the lady who is now my wife. Last year we had a baby daughter.

My life is good! I have an excellent education, a lovely family and a good future. What more could a poor boy want? Thank you everybody for giving me my good life.

*Suwit Ratchawongsa, scholarship 3298*



### My students know that education is the key

I am Teacher Janwit and I had your scholarship when I studied at university. I was very lucky. I studied for five years to be a Maths teacher but in my second year my family had bad financial problems after their rice crop was lost in the flood. They couldn't support me anymore but your scholarship saved me from having to quit my study.

I'm 27 now and I love my job. I can't think of anything better than helping to educate children. I teach at a rural high school in Sisaket and although some of my students are from very poor families, most are very diligent in their studies. They understand that education is the key which will give them a better future. I try to teach them that because I know it was true for me too.

You may think our school uniform is unusual. The children are wearing shirts hand-made from locally-grown cotton, dyed with locally-grown indigo. They only wear them when we have special activities at school but we try to keep local traditions alive in the northeast region. I think they look very smart!

*Janwit Kansri, scholarship 1997*



CONGRATULATIONS to our former student Somphorn, who was recently married. With scholarship number 1541 he finished his degree in Law in 2007 and later joined the Royal Thai Police. Now 30, he has the rank of Sergeant Major.



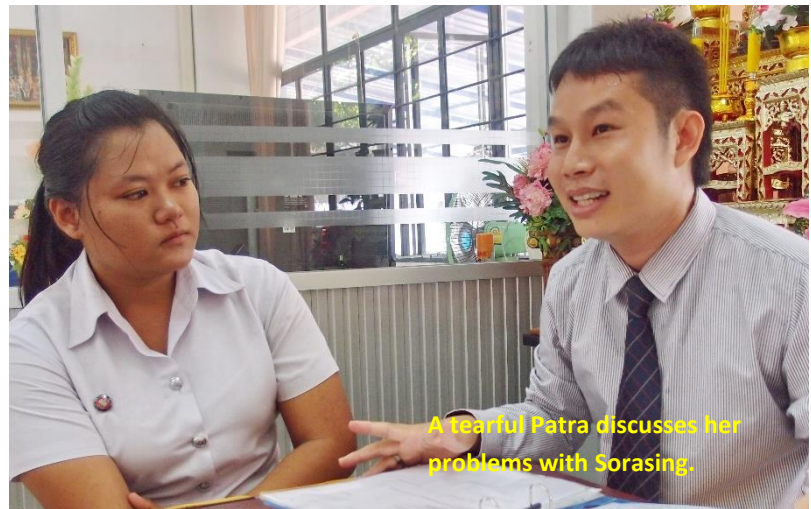
## Changing the way we work

One of the nicest aspects of our work has always been that we get to meet all our students twice every year, when we personally present them with their scholarship money. Sadly, from this year that has to change.

At the end of 2015 the Association of South East Nations will be formally launched. To bring Thailand into line with other member countries, the opening and closing dates of its two university semesters have been moved forward by about two months. High school and vocational college dates haven't changed yet, but they might.

With the old semester dates, we were able to pay our university scholarships for both semesters within one financial/calendar year, which kept our account ledgers nicely 'bookended'. That's no longer possible. This year the first semester opens in August and the second in February of 2016. To keep our annual accounts tidy, we will now be paying university scholarships for both semesters at the same time, at the opening of the first semester.

We don't like the new arrangement but it's actually more convenient for our centers. We have at least 100 scholarship students and 100 more receiving welfare grants at each center. They are drawn from all faculties and the department heads attend the presentations. That can be quite disruptive to the normal working day. Hopefully, our university students are sensible enough to budget their scholarship money, but we'll be keeping an eye on the situation.



## Saved - in the nick of time

We're always willing to give extra scholarships whenever we learn of students with unexpected financial difficulties.

All our centers have fixed scholarship quotas; usually a constant 100. They're topped back up to that level at the opening of each academic year, depending on how many students finished their studies the previous year. But sometimes students who didn't apply for a scholarship find themselves with an unexpected problem part-way through a semester, after student assessments have finished for the year. That's when we quickly step in.

When we visited a vocational college last year to pay scholarships we learned from welfare staff that a student (who didn't have a scholarship) had just told them she had no choice but to drop out – the very next day. We set up an immediate interview with her.

Patra has never met her parents and was brought-up by her grandparents. Grandfather was the only breadwinner but he earned just about enough to support the family. He had recently passed away, leaving Patra and her grandmother in a desperate situation. Patra had reluctantly decided she would have to quit her studies in Accountancy and find a job. That would have been a great waste. She had already studied for three years for a vocational certificate and for one year towards a higher diploma. She had only one year to go before she qualified.

The college staff asked us if Patra could be given a welfare grant of 5,000 Bt but after a long and tearful interview with our admin assistant, Sorasing, we awarded her an immediate emergency scholarship of 10,000 Bt per semester. Sorasing will be keeping in touch with Patra, to make sure she is coping.



## Determined to make music

Our Inner-City Scholarship Program makes a major difference to the lives of hundreds of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

For eight years, the program has supported a constant 200 children from eight municipal schools in Nakhon Sawan. This year we hope to increase the quota to 250.

After they finish their junior high school studies, many of our students go on to study at vocational colleges with new higher-value scholarships. Sadly, others drop out of the education system entirely because they come under great pressure from their impoverished parents to find work. Although many continue their studies at vocational colleges, only rarely do we have a youngster from the program determined to gain a university degree.

Chonthica is a former student in the Inner-City Program. She is now in her first year of study to become a music teacher. She has a



SET scholarship of 10,000 Bt per semester to take her all the way through her five years at university.



**Heading for the classroom:** amongst our 602 students who qualified at the end of the academic year are 110 new teachers, helping to fill an urgent need in Thailand. Above, some of our new teachers who have just graduated from Rajabhat University in Nakhon Sawan, after five years of study.

## From 'buffalo boy' to PhD

**It's taken nearly 15 years, but we've been with him every step of the way.**

Phisarn Khrusang, now 35, was one of the novices featured in the 2001 book 'Little Angels', about the lives of novice monks. Then, he had just finished studying at a monastic high school but was very unsure about his future. After he disrobed he planned to return to his village but we suggested he study for a Bachelor degree in Public Administration and since then there's been no holding him back. He went on to gain a Masters in Political Science and finally a PhD. He completed his doctorate in January this year and is now aiming for the honorary title 'Associate Professor'.

Phisarn said: "For nearly 15 years, I've had constant support and mentoring from SET. Without that, I might not have achieved anything worthwhile in my life at all and could still be an uneducated buffalo boy in my village. I am so grateful to SET and its supporters worldwide. Thank you all. I will never forget your kindness".



*"When I was about ten years old, the only thing I wanted to be was a buffalo boy for the rest of my life. I thought there could be nothing better than that. I was happy working in the rice fields and I thought that would be my life."*

*From 'Little Angels', 2001*

## Student welfare

Although we now give a total of 950 fixed-value welfare grants each year, we are always prepared to give more if the need arises. Experience has proven how necessary that is and the difference it can make to a student in desperate need.

Late last year at Rajabhat University in Nakhon Sawan, a lecturer found a new student sobbing in an empty classroom. He asked what was wrong: she said she hadn't eaten for two days and had no money to buy food.

Duangporn's story is a sad one. Her father died in a road accident when she was a child and within a year or so her mother remarried and moved far away with her new husband. He didn't want Duangporn to live with them so she had to move in with her 80-year-old grandmother. The mother has never returned to see Duangporn, though for a while she sent 1,000 Bt each month to help support her. She now has cancer and is no longer able to send any money at all. Duangporn's step-father died several years ago.

Duangporn's grandmother is too

### Just 10 Baht a day for food

old to work and has almost no income of her own. She is able to give Duangporn only 50 Bt a day, but that includes 40 Bt for bus fares, leaving Duangporn with just 10 Bt for food and all the other education-related expenses that students sometimes need to pay.

Duangporn supplements her meagre allowance by working at weekends in a restaurant. She also helps neighbors with cleaning, gardening or whatever she can do, though she usually gets paid in food instead of money.

Luckily for Duangporn, the lecturer who found her crying is an ex-SET student from many years ago. He immediately contacted SET and we asked for



an investigation, wanting to know why the student hadn't been awarded a scholarship; she said she simply hadn't heard the university announcement that applications were open.

As always in these situations, once we were sure of the background we took quick action. Within 24 hours we gave Duangporn an emergency grant of 5,000 Bt and a full scholarship of 10,000 Bt per semester to take her all the way through her four years of study. University welfare staff will now monitor Duangporn and keep us informed of her progress.



### A major problem - but a simple solution

A 17-year-old vocational college student received immediate help from the Welfare Program when he faced what was for him a major disaster: a stolen bicycle.

Siwat has a scholarship of 5,000 Bt per semester while studying Retail Management. He is still very poor but he made ends meet by cycling to college, saving 40 Bt a day for fares. His bike was an old one but essential to him. The bike was stolen and Siwat was faced with the expense of 200 Bt a week to get to college. He had no money to replace the bike, nor for bus fares, so he had to walk 10 kilometers to college each day. He was often late,

to the point where he was interviewed by welfare staff. They told us.

We gave Siwat a grant of 3,280 Bt to buy a new bicycle – with a padlock. He said: "It's stupid that the loss of my old bike should affect me so much, but it did. My parents earn only 6,000 Bt a month and can't help me, so I have to budget very carefully. Even a small increase in my expenses is a real problem. SET solved my problem. I am grateful and promise I will take good care of my new bike. Thank you".

*Siwat Sakitkosen, scholarship 5207*



## Where next for the welfare program?

More than 1,000 youngsters benefitted last year from our Welfare Program. This year we're hoping to extend the program to help even more students in need.

Most of our scholarship centers also have an annual quota of 100 fixed value welfare grants. They usually go to students who didn't quite qualify for a full scholarship but have a proven 'one off' financial need. Fixed value grants are 2,000 Bt for school children, 3,000 Bt for vocational students and 5,000 Bt for those at university. We also give emergency grants without fixed values, depending on proven need.

We have three vocational scholarship centers which don't yet have grants programs. In 2014 two reached their full quotas of 100 scholarships and we hope the third will by the end of this year. We very much want to introduce welfare programs at the two established centers this year and perhaps at the third in 2016. This year's two new programs would help 200 more youngsters annually at a cost of 600,000 Bt. Whether we can manage that depends on our supporters.



Above, this bright-eyed little lad is a student at a rural school in Sisaket, in the northeast of the country. Last year he and 49 other students at the school received grants of 2,000 Bt, presented by trustee Dr Teeppipat Suntawan.

## Mahachula Buddhist University - a special case for grants

Nakhon Sawan Mahachula Buddhist University is SET's only center with a Welfare Grants Program but not a Scholarship Program. The university is mainly for monks but also allows lay-people to study. Mahachula has been open for five years and has only about 150 lay-students, though the number increases each year. Most of the lay-students originate from hilltribes and many are from very impoverished backgrounds. They study at Mahachula because the fees are about half those of 'normal' universities: about 4,500 Bt per semester. Because the fees are low, instead of full scholarships SET gives standard-value university welfare grants of 5,000 Bt to 50 lay-students each semester. Few of them can afford to pay dormitory rent and instead live free at local monasteries, either as 'dek wat' (temple boys) or 'mai chee' (8-precept nuns).





## Weird and wonderful daytrip

Uthai Thani is an ordinary little provincial Thai city, but its surrounding mountains hide many ancient secrets.

The city lies in Thailand's Central Plains region and the surrounding forests and mountains form part of a national park. That was the destination of last year's daytrip for 80 Kiriwong novices.

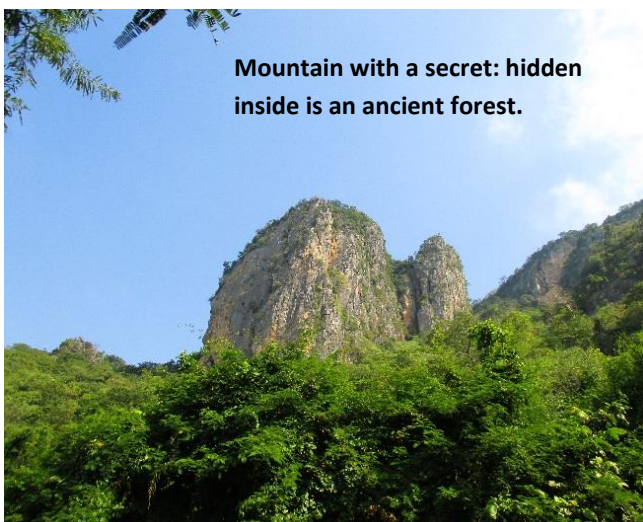
Many of the mountains are honeycombed with caves but one in particular – known locally as 'Jurassic Park' - hides a quite extraordinary sight. According to local folk-lore, many years ago a wandering monk was looking for a place to meditate when he spotted a narrow fissure quite high up on the mountainside. He climbed up to it and was able to crawl inside on all fours for several meters. The narrow tunnel then suddenly opened up into a much larger one which passed right through the mountainside before emerging into a huge, untouched primeval forest. The mountain was open at the top, letting sunlight, birds, bats and insects



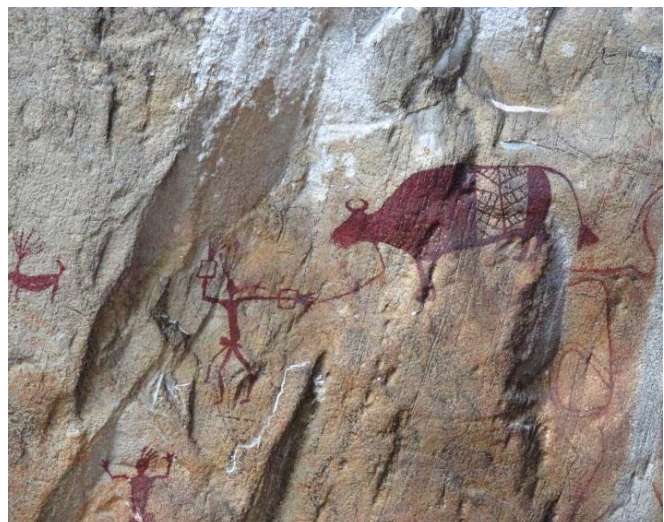
Inside 'Jurassic Park': a narrow tunnel leads first into a wider one, which then suddenly opens up into a huge cavity in the mountain top, revealing the hidden forest.

into the enormous cavity, allowing the plants to survive and flourish. Locals say the monk may have been the first person to have seen it for thousands of years. Naturally, since it was discovered, the entrance to the cave has been enlarged and the strange forest – now greatly reduced in beauty – is a tourist attraction, but it's still an amazing and totally unexpected sight.

Following the visit to the cave forest, the novices made an exhausting two-hour-long scramble up another mountain to explore more caves (next page)



Mountain with a secret: hidden inside is an ancient forest.





(continued) festooned with stalagmites, stalactites and strange, wave-like rock formations. The caves were once inhabited and on one wall are paintings of animals and humans, believed to be about 6,000 years old. Many artifacts have been found there, including shards of pottery, primitive tools, jewelry and human bones.



We try to get the novices out of the confines of the monastery as often as we can, taking them to places they wouldn't ordinarily have an opportunity to see or experience. But these trips are not just an

excuse to get out of school for a day. On the cave trip, every novice carried a pad and pencil and afterwards had to write an essay on what he saw. The trips are very worthwhile, as well as cost-effective. SET's sponsorship for this trip was 20,000 Bt, most of which was for coach hire.

### **Bigger and better than ever!**

At the end of February, our two British volunteer teachers will hold Kiriwong's annual SET-sponsored English camp. Lorna and Rhiannon have organized the camp themselves but have invited a dozen other young British volunteer teachers from other provinces to help out with the games and activities. They plan that the camp will be bigger and better than any before. The day is always great fun for the 120 novices who take part, giving them the opportunity to use the English they learned during the semester. Pictures next time!



**With mid-term exams over**, we sent the 12 senior Kiriwong novices on a day-trip to Bangkok in December to visit some of the capitol's most important museums. Included were the National Museum, the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, the former Royal Palace and the Forensic Science Museum. It was a very interesting and informative day, but because monks and novices don't have to pay entrance fees, our sponsorship was just 3,000 Bt for bus fares from Nakhon Sawan.

The novices are about to graduate from M6 (grade 12) and can now decide whether they want to disrobe and go on to study at vocational college or university, with guaranteed SET scholarships.





## Saengsawan Orphanage

### Educational - but fun too

Bueng Boraphet in Nakhon Sawan is Thailand's largest lake, covering an area of 224 square kilometers. The lake is famous as a home for migrating birdlife and, at this time of year, for a spectacular display of lotus blossoms and water lilies, covering almost the entire area.

Visitors can tour the lake in large, safe, flat-bottomed boats, so in January we hired four boats and took the Saengsawan orphans for a daytrip on the lake and surrounding waterpark. None had been on a boat before, but we ensured they all wore life jackets.

Besides a two-hour trip on the boats, the day included a visit to an aquarium, shaped like a traditional Thai rice barge. The aquarium features a 25-meter-long underwater glass tunnel. Walking through it was a little scary for some of the younger children, but they were soon captivated by the sight of sharks, rays and giant fish swimming all around and above them. They also had a very close up view of a massive live crocodile and were entertained by the park's lively monkeys. The visit was followed by a special lunch at a pizza restaurant. Not all the children like pizza but we ensured there was Thai food as well. It was an interesting day out and the children thoroughly enjoyed it.

We've often taken the children to the seaside, but the nearest coast is a long coach journey and necessitates a 4am start, as well as a late return. Safety is also a concern, since Thai roads can be dangerous, so now we've decided to find destinations closer to home.







### “SET is like a father to us”

20-year-old Nattaphon has lived at Saengsawan Orphanage all his life. Five years ago we gave him a scholarship to study at vocational college and he’s just finished with a diploma in Electrical Power. He now hopes to get a job with the

electricity authority of Thailand.

All Saengsawan children are guaranteed a SET scholarship when they’re old enough. Over the years, dozens have earned certificates or diplomas in various skills and trades and a few have studied at university.

Saengsawan has no upper age limit for its residents and in fact prefers the older boys and girls to continue living there for as long as possible so they can help care for their younger ‘brothers and sisters’.

Nattaphon told us: “I’ve never known any home other than Saengsawan and would like to stay there with my ‘family’ all my life. I know that’s not possible and I’ll have to leave when I get a job, but I will never forget my happy life there. I also won’t forget the great opportunity that SET gives all us orphans. The carers at Saengsawan are like our mother, but SET is like our father. Thank you”.

**A VERY WELCOME GUEST:** We were joined on the orphans’ trip to Bueng Boraphet by Ellen McArthur, 19, the daughter of one of our SET-UK trustees. Ellen is in her ‘gap year’ before starting university and stopped off in Thailand on her way home from Australia, where she had been working on a project with hump-back whales.



### Another great day for the kids

The Saengsawan kids had another great day out when we held a bike rally for them in Nakhon Sawan’s park.

Forty of the older children took part, cared for by SET scholarship students from Nakhon Sawan School. We hired fifty bikes of various sizes so the children could cycle around the park’s 3-kilometer perimeter, stopping at various points for pre-arranged fun activities. The smaller children rode on two-seater bikes, each sitting behind one of the older students. When they completed the activities and two-hour circuit of the park, they had a lakeside picnic lunch. But the day didn’t end there.

In the evening we took the children to one of their favorite destinations; a barbecue restaurant. They can help themselves to a wide range of meats, fish and vegetables and then cook the food themselves at their table. That’s always great fun because usually they eat all their meals in the orphanage canteen, so it’s a real treat for the children to eat outside for a change. It was another memorable day and our thanks to the ‘Little Bangkok’ chain of Thai restaurants in Dubai for sponsoring the event.



## Volunteer teachers

### “We’re teachers, not tourists!”

Our two current volunteers from the UK have thrown themselves entirely into their one-year teaching project in Thailand, working many more hours than they are expected to.

Lorna and Rhiannon, both 18, are determined to get as much experience as possible from their project. Although they’re in Thailand to teach at two inner-city high schools, they’ve also volunteered to teach at an elementary school, a primary school, a vocational college, a university and at Kiriwong Novice School.

Lorna said: “We absolutely love our job and our students, whether they’re five years old or twenty, and we want to do as much as we can for as many as we can. We’re only expected to teach about 20 lessons each week, but that’s not enough for us. We don’t want time off to aimlessly wander around like tourists visiting the sights; we can do that during the long summer school break. Every minute we spend in a classroom makes us feel we’re making a difference, and that’s what we’re here to do”.

Rhiannon added: “We look forward to going to school every day, knowing we’re going to be greeted by such delightful youngsters and so many lovely smiles. Teaching them is an amazing and fulfilling job.



All Thai youngsters are very shy, but we persevere and when a student finds the confidence to ask a question, or gives a reply in English, it gives us a great sense of satisfaction and of a job well done. We love it. We’re already more than halfway through our year in Thailand and must return to the UK in August to take up our university places, but we’d both happily stay here at least another year”.

Lorna and Rhiannon arrived in Nakhon Sawan last August, immediately after our previous volunteers returned home. After a couple of weeks living with a host family, the girls moved into their own secure apartment, courtesy of Nakhon Sawan municipality, which is the host for the project.



Before taking up their teaching positions, Lorna and Rhiannon had an intensive orientation course so they could find their way around the city. They also received plenty of advice about the *dos*’ and *don*’*ts* of living in Thailand – and there are many. The girls are very sensitive to the differences between British and

**First day:** Lorna and Rhiannon were met at Nakhon Sawan railway station by their Thai host family. They lived with the family for only two weeks but can always turn to their surrogate ‘mum and dad’ or three ‘sisters’ for advice if they have any problems.



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**“We love our job and our students, whether they’re five years old or twenty. We want to do as much as we can for as many as we can”.**

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Thai culture and arrived determined to fit in as much as they could. Lorna said: “When we first arrived we were worried about interacting with Thai people, in case we made some offensive remark or gesture, but we got over that quickly and now feel very relaxed in the country. Even if we do make some silly cultural mistake, we’ve found that Thai people are very forgiving and are more likely to laugh it off than to get annoyed”. Rhiannon added: “We’ve made some good friends amongst our Thai teacher colleagues, our students and with our host family. I think that like all the previous volunteers, we’ve fallen in love with Thai people, the culture and our students and we’re both sure we’ll be back”.



Our volunteers are chosen for us by the UK’s Project Trust organization. Every year, Project Trust sends about 200 British ‘gap year’ students to 20 developing countries, mainly to teach English in high schools. This year, 18 volunteers are teaching in nine Thai provinces. Our two volunteers are sponsored by an annual grant to SET from the British Chamber of Commerce in Bangkok.

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Besides their normal teaching duties at an inner city high school, Lorna and Rhiannon are teaching for one day a week at a Buddhist University in Nakhon Sawan. Most of their students – like those below right - originate from the Karen hilltribe. The girls also spend an afternoon teaching novice monks at Kiriwong School and also teach at a vocational college.



## Even a small donation will help give our youngsters the opportunities they need

### Donating from the UK/Europe

There are now even more options to donate from the UK and Europe. Our sister charity SET-UK now has its own website and its own direct PayPal account. The charity can accept donations by credit card, by cheque, by electronic bank transfer, by standing order, by Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) vouchers, through the Payroll Giving Scheme or as a gift in your will. As an added bonus, donations from UK taxpayers can be increased by a hefty 25%, through the Gift Aid program. Donations should be made out to **The Students' Education Trust**. Please see the 'Contact us' column or visit the SET-UK website for more details.

### Donating from the USA

SET-USA can accept donations by cheque or electronic transfer. Donors can also set up a standing order to make monthly donations. Cheques should be made out to **Friends of SET-USA**. Please see the 'Contact us' column for details.

### Donating from any country

SET in Thailand can accept credit card donations via PayPal on its website, by international bank transfer, by cheque or bank draft. If making an international bank transfer, please be sure to give your bank the full SWIFT code shown in the 'Contact us' column. Cheques and bank drafts should be made payable to **The SET Foundation**.

### Donating from within Thailand

You can donate by credit card on our website or transfer donations to The SET Foundation from any bank in Thailand. See our account details in the 'Contact us' column. Donations can also be made by cheque sent to our PO Box, made out to **The SET Foundation**.

## CONTACT US

### Thailand

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### SET-UK

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### SET-USA

**Friends of SET-USA**

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## It costs so little to make a difference ...

**Whatever the value of your donation, you will make an immediate and lasting difference to a needy youngster.**

There are two semesters in the Thai academic year. Our 2015 per-semester scholarship values are:

High school students: 3,000 Bt.

Vocational students in the basic certificate course: 5,000 Bt.

Vocational students in the higher diploma course: 10,000 Bt.

University students: 10,000 Bt.

Besides long-term scholarships, we also give standard value 'one-off' welfare grants of 2,000 - 5,000 Bt.

## EXCHANGE RATES

The magazine shows figures in Thai Baht. Approximate exchange rates are: £1 = 50 Bt. €1 = 39 Bt.

1 USD = 33 Bt. 1 AUD = 27 Bt.

1 SGD = 25 Bt. 1 CAD = 27 Bt.

However you make your donation, a letter of thanks will be sent to you.

**Thank you for your support of our needy youngsters.**