

## Look at that cheeky grin!

You can tell just by looking at him that this 12-year-old with a broken arm was once every bit as naughty and undisciplined as his teachers said. But the boy – now a young man – is quickly becoming one of our ‘star’ students. *Page 5*



## 20 years!



Student number 0001.

SET will be 20 years old next year. We’re not planning any sort of celebration, but it’s still a major landmark for a charity originally established to support just one student. In 2014 we will also be awarding scholarship number 5,000; another landmark that coincides nicely with our 20<sup>th</sup> birthday!

## Plenty to smile about!

Our income will probably fall dramatically in 2013, partly because this year the Baht has been at its strongest for 16 years. Despite that, there’s still plenty to smile about.

Income was good in 2012, so we’ve been able to increase our scholarship number to near 1,400 this year; our highest ever. We’ve opened two new college programs, giving more youngsters the opportunity to study for vocational or technical skills. With a rapidly rising shortage of skilled workers in Thailand, those youngsters should be able to find worthwhile employment after they gain their diplomas.

We’re also helping more youngsters this year with welfare grants, especially those who find themselves with unexpected financial problems. We expect to give close to 1,000 grants, the highest number ever. Novices at Kiriwong and the kids at Saengsawan will also be receiving more support.

2013 may not be a great year financially but there’s still plenty to smile about!



Plenty to smile about! An orphan from Saengsawan enjoys his first-ever visit to the seaside. *Page 10*

Please donate to help our needy youngsters.

See the back page for safe and easy ways to do it.

Thank you!



**Lovely smiles!** Children at an international school in Bangkok held their annual ‘Ring of Friendship’ fundraiser to help less privileged children of their own age. This year they collected more than 27,000 Baht – most of it in small coins. *Page 8*



## Student letters and interviews

All letters are written by the students. Some are received in English and others are written in Thai and translated by teachers or SET trustees. Spelling is corrected and letters may be 'tidied up' but otherwise they are printed without alteration. Some 'letters' may be taken from personal student interviews.

### Please say yes!

I would like to ask your kindness. I was lucky to have your scholarship all the way through six years of high school in Nakhon Sawan. My father lives and works in Nakhon Sawan but he earns only about 6,000 Bt a month as a janitor. My mother left our family many years ago so my father must work alone to support me and my two sisters. He tries very hard because he wants us to have good futures.

When I finished my high school studies you gave me a new scholarship to study Public Administration at a university in Bangkok. I am in my second year. Bangkok is a very expensive place



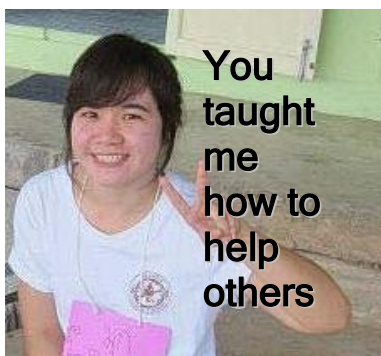
to live and my daily costs are too much, especially for my dormitory rent. My father helps me as much as he can but

I am causing him many financial problems. I know that sometimes he goes without enough food, just so he can send me more money.

I would like to return to Nakhon Sawan and continue my studies in Public Administration at the Rajabhat University there. Now I worry that will cause a problem for you and maybe you must cancel my scholarship. I would like to ask you to be kind to me and let me continue my scholarship and my studies. I hope you can say yes.

*Namfon Luadtaharn, scholarship 2400*

**Yes.**



Hello to all the SET people. My name is Phimonporn. I'm a SET student and had your scholarship first when I was at high school. Now I am at university with a new scholarship. Do you remember me? I'm studying about Public Health and I am in my final year.

I apologize for not contacting you before because I must study very hard at university and never seem to have much time. But sometimes I have the opportunity to do some social project with the other students at my university.

Last year we went on a project about helping rural schools to develop and to give more opportunities to poor country students (the same as SET did for me). We created a playground at the school and helped the children read books. I was very happy to be able to help, but that's also because of SET. After I had the great opportunity from SET for my own studies I understood how important it is to try to help other unfortunate people in society, so SET taught me how to give something for others. I think that feeling will last all my lifetime.

I was so fortunate to receive a scholarship from SET and I thank you for your support. I truly appreciate your kindness.

*Phimonporn Thichakorn, scholarship 1229*

*Phimonporn's special long-term Memorial Scholarship supported her through high school, then to university for a Bachelor degree and later, if she wants, for a Masters and all the way to a PhD.*

### Duk's unexpected return

Dear Mr Peter: I know that some of the SET people were sad that I left Kiriwong this year, so I would like you to tell them my story and to say that I am sorry ....

Readers may remember Novice Duk, who left his little village in Sisaket three years ago to study at Kiriwong School.

Duk wanted to follow in his Uncle Phisarn's footsteps. Phisarn was a novice and studied at Kiriwong and later, with SET scholarships, went on to study for a Bachelor, a Masters and currently for a PhD in Political Science.

In recent issues of SET News we'd been following Duk's progress and hoped to do so through his six years of high school and then



perhaps through university. He settled into novice life quite easily and did well in his studies at Kiriwong

but, disappointingly, he disrobed at the end of his third year, last March. He said at the time that he had to 'follow his heart' and wanted to return to his village to live with his aging grandmother and little brother, both of whom he missed greatly, and to help granny in the rice paddies.

Duk's parents split up a couple of years ago (without bothering to let Duk know). His mother went to Bangkok and remarried while his alcoholic father moved to another village, abandoning Duk's younger brother with Duk's grandmother. The father has never taken any great interest in the welfare of his two children and neither has ever wanted to be with him.

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After Duk returned to his village in March, his father decided that the boy should live with him and that they would move to Bangkok. He wanted Duk to get a job on a building site, probably with the idea that Duk would support him and his drinking habit. Granny disagreed, which led to considerable conflict in the family and great unhappiness for Duk.

In June, Duk (now 15) decided to take matters into his own hands - he ran away - but the only place he knew to run to was Nakhon Sawan and his uncle. After an 18-hour bus journey, he arrived unexpectedly at Phisarn's house late at night, distraught and asking for help and to be allowed to continue his studies, but in an ordinary school.

Unfortunately, all schools in Nakhon Sawan had already opened for the new academic year and were full. We don't usually do it, but we pulled some strings and found Duk a place. We award 200 scholarships at the city schools and have given one to Duk, to pay for his uniform, bus fares, lunch and other necessities.

Duk is now living with Phisarn, who is determined that the lad will settle down into a more stable environment and get on with his studies. So maybe Duk's story will continue after all ....

## With help from SET, my life has turned out well

I am Anothai, one of your old scholarship students. I graduated in 2011 after four years of university study.

My parents divorced when I was very young and I went to live with an aunt in Ayutthaya. She was poor and couldn't afford to send me to a government school, so I studied at a monastic school in Ayutthaya, though I wasn't a novice monk. Wat Sakaew is famous because it has a very large orphanage and takes care of hundreds of young children.

While I was at the school, SET started a scholarship program there for students who wanted to continue to college or university. I was one of the lucky ones to be chosen.

I always hoped to go to university but that would have meant borrowing a lot of money and getting into debt that I might never have been able to repay. Many of my friends at university were in that position and some had to drop out of their studies before they finished. But my SET scholarship meant that I could study without so much financial worry, though I still worked part-time to cover some of my education costs.

I studied for a combined Japanese/English language degree. I loved studying and tried hard to get good grades because I wanted to make SET proud of me. Getting good grades was my way of saying 'thank you' for the foundation's help. I finished my studies with a score of 680 in the TOEIC test. That was good enough to get me an excellent job.

Now I work as a translator for a Japanese company that makes car parts for Toyota and Honda. Sometimes I have to translate Thai to English to Japanese in the same conversation, so I have to think fast! But I enjoy it very much and I believe I have a good future. Perhaps one day I will even be able to work in Japan! Thank you SET for helping to make my life turn out so well.



Anothai started his university studies as a boy but now prefers to present himself as a girl.

*Anothai Thammora, scholarship 2130*



## Thank you for our day of fun and happiness

All the children at Saengsawan Orphanage want to say 'thank you' for the fun and happiness we had on our special daytrip to the zoo and the seaside. At the zoo we went round on an electric bus but stopped to see wild animals like tigers and hippos and also to feed deer and baby penguins. We liked them very much because they were friendly and didn't try to bite us or eat us for lunch. After the zoo we went to the seaside. Some of the little ones were scared to go in the water, but us older boys went in first and then they weren't scared anymore. The children enjoyed floating on the rubber rings and splashing water over us. Everybody was laughing all the time! Thank you for taking care of us and giving us happiness.

*Nattaporn, Anuwat and Tirachart*

*We take the children only to 'open' zoos where the animals can roam freely. We also do not now take them to zoos which feature performing animal 'shows'.*

## Student letters and interviews

### Your help made all the difference

Hello everybody at SET. We are Puttaporn and Nuttawut. We are 20 and 21 years old and we have both had your scholarships for a long time. Without your help, our lives might be very different now.

We had our first scholarships when we studied at high school. There were many students who came from families with financial problems or other difficulties. Both our families were like that, so we were very lucky to be chosen for scholarships when we first started studying at the school.

Because we finished school with good grades, we were given new SET scholarships to study at university. We both wanted to study for BNS degrees at Nursing College. Now we are in our third year and will finish in 2015.

We love our studies and we're determined to succeed. We also share the same dream, which is to help other people when they are sick. We think there can be no better way to help our society.

We would like to tell you our stories ....

#### Puttaporn:

I'm the youngest of three children. My parents separated when I was three years old. My father left home and went away, taking my eldest sister with him. I don't know where they went and I haven't heard from my father or my big sister since then. I hardly remember my sister now but I hope she is happy, wherever she is. I sometimes wonder if she thinks about me.

After my parents split, my mother went to Bangkok to look for a job. She left me and my other sister with a friend, saying she would send for us later and that we would all live together in the city.

We never heard from my mother again. I have never understood why she abandoned us.

My mother's friend was an art teacher in a private primary school. She didn't earn much money and had two young children of her own to care for, so it was a problem when my mother didn't come back from Bangkok.

**"We've achieved our dream because of other peoples' kindness to us"**

Despite the financial difficulties we caused, that lady – her name is Mrs Orapin – continued to look after us and gave my sister and I

as much love as she gave to her own daughters. Now we think of her as our real mum and we love her very much.

Because the school was a private one, fees had to be paid. Our new mum didn't have enough money for that but the school director was very sorry for my sister and me and allowed us to study free. We have always been grateful and will never forget that kindness.

After we finished our primary studies both my sister and I were able to get into good high schools in Nakhon Sawan. My school is one of SET's scholarship centers and a hundred students there have



scholarships, but my sister's school wasn't a SET center. When I was interviewed by welfare officers at my school, I had to tell them my story. When the SET people heard about that, they decided to make an exception and also give a scholarship to my sister. That was wonderful news for us and made life so much easier for our mum.

My sister finished high school before me but then SET gave her a new scholarship to study Nursing. She has finished studying now and works as a nurse. She loves her job very much.

I wanted to be a nurse too, so now I also have a SET scholarship to study at Nursing College. I am very much looking forward to finishing my studies so I can start looking after people who are sick.

My sister and I have achieved our dream because of people's kindness to us; our new mum who took us in and cared for us, the school director who let us study free and everybody at SET who gave us such a good opportunity to make something of ourselves. We will never, ever, forget that.

*Puttaporn Phachaiyapoom, scholarship 1995*

#### Nuttawut:

When I first started studying at high school, all the students in my class visited Saengsawan Orphanage, which is close by. When I was there, I was reminded of my father because he was an orphan and lived at Saengsawan for many years when he was little. He told me that after he left the

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orphanage he became a bad boy. He started drinking and staying out all night. By the time he was 20 he had no job and no future, so he decided to be a monk to try and improve his behavior. He stayed at the temple for eight years, but then left and married my mother.

My father got a job as a truck driver. When I was five he took my mother and me on one of his trips, but the truck was in a big crash. I wasn't hurt too much but my parents had bad injuries to their legs. My father still has a problem walking. I was only in hospital for a short time but the nurses took care of me so well. That was when I knew I wanted to be a nurse.

After the accident, my father couldn't get a job and started drinking again. Things got bad for me then. We never had enough money and my life didn't seem to be going anywhere. I gave up on my dream to be a nurse.

Although I passed the test to get into a good high school, my parents thought they wouldn't be able to pay the expenses. I was depressed because I wanted very much to study, but then I was lucky. I was chosen for a SET scholarship. That changed not only my life but also my father's life.

My parents had a long talk with the welfare people at the school about my education and future. I think my father realized I had a good opportunity, especially with a scholarship, but he also knew he had to try harder to support me. He did try. He stopped drinking and although he can't work much – because of his bad legs – he does what he can to be a good father, so I do what I can to be a good son. Now I am at Nursing College making my dream come true and I am happy and proud to be one of SET's students. Thank you.

*Nuttawut Poonsombat, scholarship 2399*

## 'Naughty boy' becomes a SET star student

When we asked welfare officers at a high school to assess a new first-year student for a very special open-ended Memorial Scholarship, they suggested a boy who met our criteria, but they had some doubts about his overall suitability.

"He's a likeable boy, but very naughty", they said of 12-year-old Wachirichai. "He's always up to mischief and doesn't always put his mind to his school work. We're worried that he may turn out to be a disappointment for SET". We took a chance and awarded him the scholarship anyway. We're now very glad we did.

Although welfare officers were right about Wachirichai being a 'naughty boy' (he often had an arm or leg in plaster after falling off 'borrowed' motorbikes), he has developed into a very sensible young man - and a brilliant student.

In 2011, after completing high school, Wachirichai chose to study Chemistry at a northern university. Even after his first year, his overall grade average was so high that he was awarded a gold medal by another university (Chulalongkorn, Thailand's most prestigious) for perfect grades in specific Science-

related subjects. He has accumulated other honors too and will likely receive many more.

Now 20, Wachirichai will finish his Bachelor degree studies in 2015, but his tutors are already convinced that he has a great future ahead. This year, the university awarded him a special scholarship to study at a language school in Australia, to develop his English. The scholarship was only for a month but it shows that his long-term potential is already being recognized.

This young man's progress is very encouraging and reaffirms our belief that long-term support is essential. Without such support, Wachirichai might have quit high school after his third year and could now be working in some dead-end job. Instead, knowing he has our on-going support, he is achieving great things and will, no doubt, continue to do so.

Wachirichai readily agrees that it was SET's support that encouraged him in his studies. He says: "When I was at school, the SET people gave me a pep talk every time I received my scholarship. I slowly realized what a great opportunity I had and I became determined to make the most of it. I still am".

**Wachirichai was abandoned by his parents and was brought up in a monastery by his grandmother, who was a nun.**

**The 'naughty boy' has recently received a gold medal from a university for the excellence of his grades.**





## Two new college programs opened

**Our emphasis now is on helping more youngsters train for vocational skills rather than university degrees**

Thailand has an urgent need for youngsters with vocational and technical skills. To help fill that need, from this year we'll be awarding more college scholarships and fewer at universities.

That doesn't mean we'll be ignoring needy students at university; we will still be awarding around 450 university scholarships annually, but we aim to increase our college scholarships from last year's 476 to 700 by 2015.

We've opened two new college centers this year, both part of the Garnacheep network. Garnacheep colleges are usually in rural areas, have a smaller student enrolment and a better teacher/student ratio than the big city colleges. The Garnacheep colleges were established specifically to give local youngsters the opportunity to acquire skills other than farming, but without having to leave their own communities and move to the cities. Garnacheep colleges offer a limited curriculum of subjects and only those which are most likely to lead to worthwhile employment, including Electronics, Auto Mechanics, Electrical Power, Accounting and Secretarial Skills. All students also

study Computer Skills, Thai, English and Maths.

We already have a well-established program at a Garnacheep college just outside Nakhon Sawan City (SET's base). That campus is unusually large, with nearly 4,000 students. We award 100 scholarships there. One of our new colleges is also in Nakhon Sawan Province - but far from the city - and has only about 400 students. The other is in Kamphaengphet Province and has around 800 students.

As usual, we've started the new programs with just 25 scholarships at each college. Numbers will be built up in this year's second semester to 50 each and by 2015 will reach a maximum quota of 100 each. All the present 50 students have already studied for three years for an Ordinary Vocational Certificate (OVC) and are now in their first year of a two-year advanced course for a Higher Vocational Diploma (HVD). Students with the diploma are much more likely to find immediate employment without needing further training, but few would have been able to study to the higher level without our support. The next batch of new scholarships will include students studying in the OVC course.

We increase numbers slowly because we rely totally on the voluntary help of welfare officers at the colleges. Assessing students for scholarships is a very time-consuming process, so we like to ease our volunteers into it over a period of time.

Besides opening the two new programs, this year we've also increased the scholarship number at Chiang Mai Technical College from 75 to its full quota of 100.



### Alarming news

In June, the Bangkok Post newspaper reported that the Education Minister "has expressed alarm at the shortage of vocational college students. He cited the overwhelming demand for qualified and proficient technical staff and estimated the shortfall at 50%".

This year we have more than 500 youngsters studying in vocational courses, including this group in one of our new Garnacheep College programs. We're aiming to increase the number of vocational scholarships to 700 by 2015 – more if we have the funds.

## Inner-city kids tell us why they need our help

In our Inner-City Scholarship Program in Nakhon Sawan we support 200 children, studying at eight municipal schools.

In this academic year we've awarded 70 new scholarships to bring the program back to its full quota. The 70 children are all aged 11 or 12 and their families have an average annual income of just 40,303 Bt. During their assessment, the children complete an application form, part of which asks them to explain why they need a scholarship. The forms are completed in English, usually by a teacher. Here are a few of their answers, exactly as they appeared on the forms:

**Wanwisa:** "My parents are divorced. My mother has a new husband. My mother is an alcoholic, so is my new father. I get 20 Bt per day for my school expenses. I want to be an athlete in the future. I do my homework every day because I like to study but I don't have enough money to attend college".

**Phatsarawari:** "I live with my mother at my uncle's house. My parents are divorced. My father doesn't love me but I love him. I was a twin but I regret that my brother died. I help my mother to sell food but the income isn't enough. I have a little money. My mother gives me 40 Bt per day. She is very tired. I want to get the SET scholarship because I want to study in university".

**Wathana:** "I live with my grandmother and grandfather. My parents were divorced since I was a child. Mom works in another place. I don't know where my father is. Mom sometimes sends me a little money. My grandpa is old and works alone but he is often sick. I know that he is tired and I pity him. Grandma is sick and can't work. I work in the vacation to help my family. Please help me".

**Orawan:** "I live with my mum. She has three children. She gets 5,000 Bt per month. She is divorced from my dad. My aunt lives with us and my mum must take care of everybody. We don't have a house. We rent a room for 2,500 Bt per month. If I get the scholarship I will help my mum buy food for the family".

**Kanit:** "My family has endured hair loss worry about money for such as school uniform and supplies. If I had your venture capital I would intend to study in Moscow and beyond".



## Support for village youngsters

We currently have scholarship programs at 12 major centers. The centers are a mix of schools, colleges and universities (SCUs) and each has a quota of at least 100 scholarships per year. We also have a couple of much smaller programs: the Village Groups.

The Village Groups are in remote areas and each has less than 30 youngsters studying at local SCUs. It wouldn't normally be administratively logical or economically viable for us to run such small programs, but each is close to a main center, which we have to visit to pay scholarships twice a year anyway. One program – with students pictured above – is in a village in Uttaradit, which we pass through on our way to Chiang Mai in the north, where we award scholarships at a technical college.



Our inner-city scholarship kids are a happy bunch, despite their often difficult backgrounds.



## Student welfare

# A little school with a big heart

With only 180 students, Rasami International School in Bangkok is very small. The students are all from privileged backgrounds but, besides receiving a first-class education, they're also taught the importance of helping other children who are less fortunate than themselves.

Every year, on Valentine's Day, the students hold a 'Ring of Friendship' fundraiser for SET. The children save their coins throughout the year and then, on the day, lay them around the school playground. They sometimes create touching messages and beautiful heart designs with their coins.

The students have held their fundraiser since 2005, specifically to help needy children of their own age at a tiny village primary school in Sisaket Province, in the far northeast. We have a small scholarship program in Nong Rung village but each year we also give welfare grants of 2,000 Bt to 50 children at the village school. The Rasami donation goes towards those grants, which are usually used to buy school shoes or pay for canteen lunch. Presenting the grants is always a happy occasion for us, as well as for the kids.

This year's Ring of Friendship raised 17,000 Bt with another 10,000 Bt added by the school itself. Thanks and well done to all at Rasami!

**Pictured: a Rasami student lays down his coins in this year's Ring of Friendship. SET president Sievert Larsson later collected a cheque for 27,000 Bt from Rasami's head-boy.**



## So much joy ...

SET trustees enjoy their visits to tiny Nong Rung Village in Sisaket. We award welfare grants to children at the village school, partly from the funds raised by Rasami students. Although it's a ten-hour car trip from our Nakhon Sawan base, the journey is always worthwhile. We have to go to Sisaket anyway to pay scholarships at the local Rajabhat University campus, so calling in at the village doesn't take us far out of the way.

Nong Rung is a poor village, with most of the families just about scraping a living from their rice harvest. Unlike in some other provinces, the soil in Sisaket is not good and can't usually provide more than a single rice crop each year. Despite their poverty, Sisaket people are reputed to be amongst the friendliest and most hard-working in Thailand. And their kids are an absolute delight; full of fun - and with great smiles!



## More help with financial problems

**This year we expect to give more welfare grants than ever before.**

Although our grants are not as valuable as our scholarships, they can still make the difference between a needy student being able to continue studying or dropping out.

An example this year is of a first-year university student who has a glandular problem, making her very overweight. Thai universities have a strict dress code but this 18-year-old cannot buy readymade and university-approved uniform; nothing fits her. She is also very poor and couldn't afford to have her skirts and blouses made-to-measure. After only two weeks into her first semester, she was considering dropping out of her studies. We gave her a grant of 5,000 Bt to have her uniform made, after which she broke down in tears of gratitude.

In 2012 we gave 886 grants totaling 3.18 million Bt. This year we expect the number to be closer to 1,000 and have set a budget of 3.4 million Bt. Our major centers (where we award 100 or more scholarships) also have an annual budget for grants. Universities have 50 grants of 5,000 Bt per semester, colleges have 50 of 3,000 Bt, and high schools have 50 of 2,000 Bt.

These grants are given at the opening of each semester, after students have been interviewed by welfare officers. Many who receive grants are those who didn't quite qualify for a full scholarship but who still have proven financial need.

Besides the fixed budget, we also keep an emergency fund for students who face unexpected problems part-way through the semester. In some cases, these can lead a student to quit his or her studies. An emergency grant can often immediately solve the problem, allowing the student to continue studying without worries.



## Getting the reading habit

According to published figures from the Thai National Statistics Office, Thai children are simply not in the habit of reading books, either for pleasure or to gain knowledge.

Research shows that Thai children under 12 years old read only two - five books each year, while those in Singapore, Vietnam and Malaysia read 40-70 books annually.

One organization trying to improve the situation is Rotary Club Bangkok South. The Club has a great program to distribute books to rural primary school libraries, to help get children interested in reading at an early age.

Club members are encouraged to donate 12,000 Bt to buy a 'Library Starter Kit' of books through the Club, which is then presented to a rural school. There are 130 books in each kit and they are all new and up-to-date; not the tatty cast-offs that small rural schools usually receive from wealthier city schools. Our own Kiriwong Library and the book corner at Saengsawan Orphanage have also received kits.

SET trustee Adrian Topham is also a committee member of Rotary Bangkok South. He asked us to present a Library Starter Kit on Rotary's behalf on our recent visit to tiny Nong Rung Village, in Sisaket province in the far northeast.

We visit Sisaket twice each year to pay scholarships at the Rajabhat University campus and in our Village Scholarship Program, which is centered on Nong Rung and surrounding villages. We also give welfare grants of 2,000 Bt to 50 very needy children at the village school each year (see previous story about Rasami). We were more than happy to deliver the books on Rotary's behalf and the kids were delighted to receive them. When we left the village an hour or so after the presentation, many children were sitting under shady trees in the school yard avidly reading. An excellent program from those nice people at Rotary!



## Saengsawan

Every year, we ask the kids at Saengsawan Orphanage where they would like to go for their next annual daytrip. The answer is usually the same: *the seaside!*

Unfortunately, the nearest coast to Nakhon Sawan is many hours drive away, so a seaside trip means starting out at 4am. That doesn't matter because the children are so excited few get any sleep the night before anyway. The hired coach doesn't get back to Nakhon Sawan until about 9pm, so it's a long, exhausting but fun-packed day.

This year's trip was in April with first a visit to an open zoo in Chonburi to feed deer, baby penguins and other animals, then onwards to the beach for a few hours splashing around in the sea. For the youngest children, this was their first daytrip and they had never seen the sea before. It was great fun to watch them as they took their first cautious steps into the water!

After their dip, the 50 children were treated to something else none had ever had before: a real seafood lunch on the beach. For some, the giant prawns were just a bit too scary!

These daytrips usually cost around 50,000 Bt, but that's money well spent when the kids get so much happiness from them.



## Best day of the year!

We've known some of the now teenage boys and girls at Saengsawan since they were toddlers. Several are now studying at local colleges with SET scholarships. It's been great watching them grow up, but also to see the obvious love they have for the smaller children and how responsibly they take care of them. On our daytrips, they're constantly counting heads to make sure nobody has wandered off, or escorting the little ones to the bathroom, or helping them at lunch time.

The children's safety on these trips is always our main concern. This year on the beach the older boys and girls waded into the sea to form a protective semi-circle, so the little ones couldn't drift out of the shallows on their rubber rings.

One 16-year-old told us: "We don't have mothers or fathers but we're like a big family at Saengsawan. I'm lucky because I have dozens of little brothers and sisters and I love them all. I'm proud and happy to be their big brother, so it's my duty to take care of them".





## Long-term support - guaranteed

We don't only support the children at Saengsawan with gifts, food and daytrips; we also try to take care of their longer-term futures and needs.

Every child is *guaranteed* a SET college scholarship if he or she can pass the entrance exam. Saengsawan is only a few minutes' walk from Nakhon Sawan's main vocational college and a short bus ride from the technical college, so most youngsters who take college courses continue to live at the orphanage until they finish their studies.

Saengsawan has no upper age limit for its residents and in fact prefers the older boys and girls to continue living there so they can help care for the little ones. Most do - and very willingly. For some of the older residents, Saengsawan may have been the only home and family they have ever known and they are often reluctant to leave.

Over the years, dozens of Saengsawan youngsters have studied with SET scholarships for vocational qualifications and a few have even gone on to university. Currently six are at college, studying Electronics, Auto Mechanics, Electrical Power and Accounting.



### Cool, clean water on tap!

We occasionally help Saengsawan with gifts of equipment, or carry out much-needed repairs. We've presented washing machines, a fridge, cooking equipment and established a library corner, as well as renovating the dormitories, the kitchen and the canteen. Earlier this year, we replaced an aging and broken water cooler; in fact, we gave two new machines, with filters. One was installed in the children's canteen and one in the activities hall.

## A very welcome visitor

Most of our UK supporters are aware of the tremendous help we get from our sister charity there. Registered in our old name of The Students' Education Trust, SET-UK (as it's informally known) accumulates donations from our supporters and transfers funds periodically to Thailand. That not only saves supporters hefty individual bank charges, but SET-UK is also able to increase the value of donations from UK tax payers by 25%, through the government's Gift Aid scheme.

The help we get from SET-UK is very important so we were delighted to welcome one of the three trustees when she made a lightning visit to Nakhon Sawan. Janet Sparks and husband Andrew took a day and a night out from their holiday touring SE Asia to visit us and to see something of our activities. There wasn't time to do much, but Janet was especially pleased to visit Saengsawan. She helped give a special dinner to the children, as well as gifts of underwear and t-shirts.



## Kiriwong Novice School

### Going to the next level

Novices at Kiriwong High School are guaranteed a SET scholarship if they want to continue their studies at college or university.

The novices usually disrobe after finishing their high school studies but others stay in the robes so they can study at Buddhist universities. Fees are about half those of secular universities, so for some impoverished youngsters it makes economic sense, especially as they can continue living free in a monastery and don't have to pay for uniform, or even food.

Currently 12 ex-novices are studying at government colleges or universities with SET scholarships, while another seven have remained in the robes to study at a Buddhist university. The novices return to Kiriwong at the opening of each semester to receive their scholarship money from a SET trustee.



### Speaking English can be fun!

More than a hundred novices took part in Kiriwong's SET-sponsored English Camp earlier this year. The camp was organized by our volunteer teachers, Beth and Holly.

The annual camp is a very useful and fun way to get the usually shy youngsters speaking English and it's something the boys look forward to for months in advance.

The idea is that the novices can get to use the English vocabulary they learned during the previous semester. The boys are split into five teams and rotate through the classrooms for simple games or quizzes, each of which earns points for the team. At the end of the day, each member of the winning team receives a small prize. The games can be very noisy and energetic but the usually strict monastic discipline is set aside for the day, so the boys can enjoy themselves as much as possible.

Besides Beth and Holly, a dozen other Project Trust volunteers took part in the camp, some travelling hundreds of miles from their own provinces. They make a weekend of it, because the camp is held the day before the main street parade for Chinese New Year, which is celebrated with great enthusiasm in Nakhon Sawan. The camp involved a huge amount of work and planning for Beth and Holly and they even produced a printed guide book for each novice, explaining the games and hinting at the vocabulary that might be needed. It was another great camp, so well done Beth and Holly!



**Our daytrips, camps and other fun activities give the Kiriwong novices the opportunity to relax and just be 'little boys'.**

**But because they are novice monks, they must also practice the discipline expected of all who wear the orange robes.**

As much as possible, part of that discipline is to follow the life of the original forest monks of 2,500 years ago. That's very different from life in a big city monastery like Wat Kiriwong.

Every year, we sponsor a week-long meditation retreat for about 60 of the older novices. The retreat is held in a remote forest monastery, far from the distractions of the city. The younger novices aren't usually able to follow the strict discipline required and like to play too much, so they don't attend the retreat.

At 5am, the novices walk about four kilometers on alms-round to nearby villages. They walk slowly and silently, with heads bowed and with their concentration fixed on their alms bowls and on the generosity of the laity. Back at the monastery, alms food is eaten from the bowl in silence - Buddhists say 'mindfully' - while thinking of the meaning of food only as fuel for the body. Food not eaten at breakfast is kept for the midday meal, which is the last of the day.

Much of the day is spent in walking and sitting meditation, under the watchful eye of a meditation master. At other times, the novices listen to talks about the Buddha's teaching, or practice chanting the teaching in the ancient Pali language.

At night, the novices sleep in tent-like structures known as *krot*. If you've ever visited Thailand, you may have seen monks walking in the countryside with what look like large, brown, rolled-up umbrellas over their shoulders. That's a *krot*. At night, the *krot* is tied to a tree branch and opened. A rolled-up mosquito net packed inside unfurls to the ground, while the sleeve of the umbrella becomes a waterproof cover for the tent. Camping – monk style!





# Our amazing year

**Our 2012/13 volunteers – Beth and Holly - write about their experiences of teaching English in Thailand**

**Challenging, exciting, frustrating, rewarding, bizarre, worthwhile ... there aren't enough adjectives to describe our amazing year!**

We and 16 other 'gap year' teenagers from the UK were in Thailand for a year as teachers. We were chosen by the UK's Project Trust organization, which sends around 200 young volunteers each year to developing countries, usually to teach English.

We were based in SET's home city of Nakhon Sawan. Other volunteers were spread around in pairs in other provinces, but we were the only pair sponsored by SET.

Our first month in Thailand was often very confusing, with one bizarre culture shock after another. But in Thailand you just have to be accepting and relaxed about some

of the strange things you see, or the ways you are expected to behave socially. We soon found that a big smile got us through most difficulties – and a smile to a Thai person always gets one in return.

In our first few weeks in Nakhon Sawan we lived with a host family. Our host parents were both teachers, so they were able to give us good advice about teaching methods. They were wonderful people and took great care of us, not only while we stayed with them, but throughout the year. They became good friends and we could always turn to them if we had problems or needed advice.

After a few weeks living with our host family we moved into our own apartment in a block owned by the local municipality. The Municipal Education Department was actually

the host for our project and the staff did everything they could to ensure our stay in Nakhon Sawan was a happy one.

Our main job was to teach at inner-city municipal high schools. There are eight schools in the city but it was impractical to teach at them all, so we rotated between three. Future volunteers will have different rotations, so that all the children will eventually have the opportunity to learn English from native speakers. As a secondary project, we also taught for a few hours each week at Kiriwong Novice School, which is supported by SET.

All our students at the inner-city schools had theoretically learned some basic English at primary school, but few really had much understanding of the language. Their reading skills were sometimes surprisingly good but we soon realized they often didn't have a clue about what they were actually reading. Even amongst the children who could speak a little, there was an obvious reluctance to do so. Thai youngsters are very shy and are easily embarrassed – lose face - if they make a mistake in front of their friends, so they often prefer not to say anything at all. That was frustrating for us, but it was our job to increase their confidence and to improve their conversation skills.

Right from the start, it seemed that making our teaching as much fun as possible was the best way to get through to the children, so all our lessons involved simple and sometimes very silly English-based games, which they responded to with terrific enthusiasm.

Teaching English is challenging work, especially when starting



**Beth and Holly joined SET trustees when we paid scholarships to 200 students in our Inner-City Program.**



almost from scratch, but every small success seemed like a major breakthrough. When a child who had never spoken before in class plucked up the courage to ask a question, or responded to one, there was always a real sense of achievement, both for the student and for us. The student's sense of achievement was something we tried to build on. Each small breakthrough usually led naturally to another, so that made our job increasingly worthwhile.

Although our students were sometimes desperately shy in the classroom, once out of that environment they were great fun. That was especially so when we organized English camps, which were often off-campus and out of uniform. The children were relaxed and ready to have a good time and learned more quickly and with greater enthusiasm. We lost count of the number of camps we attended. Besides organizing our own, we also helped out at those organized by volunteers in other provinces, and they helped out at ours. All of us enjoyed the camps and seeing our students have so much fun using English, though the camps could be exhausting work.

At the novice school, class sizes were small and the students had a greater sense of discipline than at the inner-city schools; obviously a reflection of the stricter monastic environment they live in. Many were from extremely poor backgrounds; some had been



**"When a child who had never spoken in class before unexpectedly asked a question in English, it seemed like such a breakthrough. It made our job feel totally worthwhile."**

abused and others had been abandoned or are orphans. The majority of the boys came from remote villages, often in border provinces. Their spoken language in the village may have been Laos, Khmer or a very local dialect. Some could hardly speak, read or write Central Thai, let alone English. Despite that, many were very keen to learn and did surprisingly well.

There doesn't seem to be a great awareness amongst young Thais of the importance of being able to speak English. The Association of South East Asian Nations will come into formal existence in 2015, and the common language of ASEAN will be English. Although Thailand has

the highest standard of living amongst neighboring countries like Burma, Laos and Cambodia, and spends more of its national budget on education, it lags way behind those other countries in English speaking skills. That could be a real problem in a few years time, when workers will be able to cross borders more easily to find employment and there will be a greater need for English speakers.

Like all the previous SET volunteers, we've done our best in a short time to improve our students' speaking confidence and to give them the enthusiasm to learn more. Even if only a minority of them have benefitted and continue with their language studies, that will have made our year in Thailand very worthwhile.

As you read this, we're about to leave for the UK, our year done, and we'll soon be taking up our university places. But we're carrying with us some great memories of an amazing country and a delightful people; memories that will stay with us for the rest of our lives.

## But it wasn't all work ...

Our teaching schedule was a busy one but we also had the long summer school holiday to enjoy. We were determined to make every minute count, so we packed in as much as possible during the almost two-months' break.

Besides visiting many of Thailand's major cities and enjoying local festivals, we also made trips to Burma, Laos and Cambodia. Despite that hectic travelling schedule, we also found time to relax on some of Thailand's beautiful southern beaches. It was the perfect holiday!

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### Donating from the UK/Europe

**By cheque:** please send your cheque to the UK address shown in the panel, made out to the **Students' Education Trust**. Please include a note with your name and address or download the donation form from our website. Cheques must be for Sterling or Euro.

**By bank transfer:** instruct your bank to make a Standard Bank Transfer to the **Students' Education Trust** account in the UK. (Contact trustee Mrs Lesley Blood for bank details).

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The value of donations from UK tax payers can be increased by a hefty 25% through the Gift Aid Scheme. We need you to fill in a simple one-off Declaration form so we can reclaim the tax. The form can be downloaded from our website or sent to you by request to the Students' Education Trust.

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### From the USA

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**By post:** send your cheque to our PO box, made out to **The SET Foundation**. Please do not send cash through the post.