

Duang Prateep Foundation Monthly News for April 2009

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News from the Duang Prateep Foundation

Celebration for 10 years of Flame of Hope Foundation

Last month was the 10th anniversary of the founding of the Flame of Hope Foundation, the Duang Prateep Foundation's registered support organisation in the USA. To celebrate the occasion, the founder and organiser of Flame of Hope, Karen Dahl visited Thailand with a group including two other Flame of Hope trustees – Patricia Heim and Barton Denechaud.

Karen Dahl founded Flame of Hope after visiting the Duang Prateep Foundation early in 1998, on a trip organized by the Wisconsin Rural Leadership Program. After returning to the USA, an exchange of emails between Karen and the Duang Prateep Foundation led to the Flame of Hope Foundation being registered in March 1999.

During the 10th anniversary trip to Thailand, Karen and her friends were accompanied by DPF chairperson Prateep Ungsongtham Hata on a journey to the New Life project at Chumphon and the Baan Tharn Namchai orphanage for tsunami victims at Phang-nga. Karen and friends also made a one-day trip to the New Life Project at Kanchanaburi. In Bangkok a party to celebrate ten years of Flame of Hope took place at the Duang Prateep Foundation and Karen and her friends hosted a dinner for DPF international section staff and volunteers.

The Flame of Hope Foundation was the first officially registered Duang Prateep Foundation support organisation. However, later the same year the Freunde der Duang Prateep Foundation e.V was also registered in Germany. More recently Hands Across the Water (Australia) Hands Across the Water (UK) and Willie's Orphans Fund (also UK) have all been registered to support the tsunami relief work of the DPF.



From left in photo: Dr. Vithavas Khongkhakul (DPF trustee), Prateep Ungsongtham Hata, Jo Heim, Karen Dahl, Patricia Heim, Robert Wilson, Somsong Kopek, Walter Kopek, Barton Denechaud and Jacqueline Maidana celebrate 10 years of Flame of Hope.

Kindergarten students graduate

March saw the end of the academic year for students throughout Thailand, with the long vacation continuing till mid-May for school students and June for university students.

At the Duang Prateep Kindergarten, the year end was celebrated with a camp for students who will move on to primary school in May and a graduation ceremony.

For the camp, the 55 departing students had two days of activities organised by teachers, teaching assistants and helpers.

As well as providing a fun time, the camp helped the students become more independent and self-confident, while developing their problem-solving skills. During the camp the students were learning about their local community, as well as cooking food, taking part in fitness activities and team games. There was a late night party before students and teachers settled down to sleep at the school. There was also an outing to the National Science Museum at Ekamai (photo above), where there was plenty of opportunities for hands-on activities.



Two days after the camp, the departing students were back at the kindergarten for one last time to attend their graduation ceremony. The students were able to don graduation robes and receive certificates from DPF deputy chairperson Mingporn Ungsongtham.

The photo shows Duang Prateep Foundation Deputy Chairperson Mingporn Ungsongtham (centre) with one of the graduating classes and their teacher.

Earlier in the month a group from Japanese cosmetics company Elserine visited the Duang Prateep Kindergarten. The visitors were led by Executive Director Ms. Itotami and Manager Mr. Iwami, with them were 44 Elserine members who act as sales agents. Each visitor was from a different prefecture in Japan. The visiting group were welcomed by DPF Chairperson Prateep Ungsongtham Hata.



The photo shows Prateep front left, with Ms. Itotami next to her and other Japanese visitors with kindergarten dancers.

Tsunami orphanage children raise funds for Australian fire victims

The strong ties between the Baan Tharn Namchai orphanage for tsunami victims and donors in Australia, took on a new dimension last month with children at the orphanage raising funds to help victims of the recent forest fires in Australia.

News that an Australian donor had lost his home in the forest fires, prompted the children to raise funds through making bakery items for sale at the children's schools in the last week of the school year and at the orphanage.

The bake sales as well as donations of pocket money from the children and money from staff will be sent to Hands Across the Water (Australia).



The photo shows the children busy baking

In January the Hands Across the Water building was opened at the orphanage. The building eased the over-crowding in the Baan Tharn Namchai building, which was opened in August 2006, and gives more space for activities. The primary sponsor for the Hands Across the Water building was the National Associated Retail Traders of Australia (NARTA).

With the school year finished and long holidays till the middle of May, staff are busy organising activities for the children at the orphanage and children in the local community.

Staff were helped by three visitors from Japan who came to lead art activities over a three-day programme. The Japanese taught drawing techniques and guided the children as they created art from wood (see photo right).

The event was attended by eighty children, thirty from Baan iTV and other local communities and the remainder from the orphanage.

The Japanese are organising an art exhibition, 'Andaman Smiles' which will take place in Japan next month.



Twelve girls from the orphanage are taking part in a three week Thai classical dance course. Each day the children are practising dance for two hours (see photo below). Another group of seventeen orphanage children are practising Angkalung music for two hours a day over a two week period.



Children have also been busy outside. Every day since the end of the school year they have been planting banana plants and many other different kinds of fruit trees and putting fertiliser around rubber trees. The venue for the horticultural work has been the 12.8 hectare rubber plantation not far from the orphanage, which was purchased for the Duang Prateep Foundation with funds provided by Hands Across the Water (Australia) near the end of last year.

Twenty-five children from the orphanage and different local schools also attended a course in disaster preparation. The course was taught by a staff member who attended a course organised by the Phang-nga provincial administration the previous month.

A highlight in March was the visit of the Flame of Hope group led by Karen Dahl (see lead story) who were accompanied on their visit to the orphanage by DPF chairperson Prateep. The visitors were welcomed by three dance performances from the children and a special meal was served. The visitors also toured the local area, where Karen last visited in April 2005, just four months after the disaster.

Other visitors included a local chopper group made up of both Thai and foreign bike enthusiasts. Twenty visitors arrived on their motorcycles. The children at the orphanage performed dances for them and the chopper group gave the children rides through the local village.

Aids Control project expands role

During March the staff at the Duang Prateep Foundation's Aids Control Project have been increasing their activities in provinces around Bangkok, as part of the programme for the central region of Thailand supported by the Global Fund to Fight Aids Tuberculosis and Malaria.

Aids Control Project staff have been busy arranging workshops in the provinces of Samut Prakan, Nakhon Nayok and Ayutthaya as well as Bangkok. Staff have been leading workshops for health centre workers, community leaders and volunteers on community level care of people with Aids. Staff have also been training youth and community leaders in Aids awareness work. In Bangkok representatives of twenty-five communities in six Bangkok districts came together to review activities and report on future plans.

An important event in March was a review of Aids awareness work in the central region of Thailand over the last six months. Forty people from six different organisations came together to review progress during two days of discussions. The Duang Prateep Foundation is coordinating the work of the six NGOs working on Aids awareness activities in the 14 provinces which make up the central region of Thailand.

Another meeting was hosted by Aids activists in Ayutthaya Province and brought together 70 community leaders and youth group leaders from four provinces for an exchange of experiences under the guidance of DPF Aids Control Project staff (see photo below).



New Life Project youngsters learn screen-printing

Last month youngsters at the New Life Project at Chumphon were able to learn screen printing techniques on a project taught by local non-formal education centre in Lamae district.

The representatives of the Flame of Hope Foundation (see lead story) were able to see the youngsters practising their screen-printing work and were presented with t-shirts especially made for them (see photo right).



Also last month the project was visited by teachers from Maejo University Chumphon campus, who came to teach fish tank construction to youngsters at the project. In addition, at the end of the course, twenty students and eight staff went to the university to see the fish tanks which had been made there and other interesting items on display at the university.

Meanwhile the New Life Project at Kanchanaburi was visited by Ms. Ayari Oku from Japan, who in recent years has been making twice-yearly visits to the project to teach baking techniques to the project.



Ms. Ayari's most recent visit was for three days, during which time she taught how to bake scones as well as make puddings and jams from local fruits such as mangoes and papaya.

A group of 9 students and a professor from Kyushu in Japan were also visiting the New Life Project at the same time and eagerly purchased all the freshly made food. *The photo shows Ms. Ayari teaching the youngsters at the project.*

Also last month the Kanchanaburi project was visited by soldiers stationed in the province. The soldiers organised games and activities for twenty youngsters living at the project and twenty-nine youngsters from nearby villages. The programme strengthened relationships with the local community and gave the opportunity for the youngsters to carry out stimulating activities together. The soldiers organised the activities as part of an anti-drugs and anti-crime programme.

Outing for families

Recently the teachers at the Special Education project took their hearing-impaired and special needs students, along with their parents and guardians on a one-day trip to visit nine temples in Sing Buri Province.

The opportunity to visit nine temples in a single day is considered particularly auspicious in Thai Buddhist beliefs. The trip also



provided an opportunity to strengthen relationships within families and amongst guardians and teachers. In total eighteen children and twenty-eight adults made the trip.

More recently the teachers took students on a special outing to Safari World Open Zoo near Bangkok. Fifteen children and 5 teachers made the trip, which gave an opportunity for the children to develop their love of nature and their understanding for animals.

Senior citizens get free health check

Last month nursing staff from Bang Na 1 Hospital visited the DPF to carry out free health checks on 120 senior citizens (photo right).

The seniors had their eyes tested for cataracts and other sight problems. Blood pressure, diabetes and general health checks were also carried out. In addition the hospital offered to arrange free surgery for any of the senior citizens who needed cataracts removed.



Youth group members organise art outing



Last month Khlong Toei youth group members organised a one-day art trip for twenty-five children. The outing was to Suan Luang park in the Bangkok suburbs (photo left).

Also Khlong Toei youth group members have recently been able to join in regional and local activities with young people from other organisations.

Three youths from Khlong Toei attended a meeting seminar for youth group members from all over central Thailand. The seminar was on grant writing and concluded with the opportunity to write a proposal for 10,000 baht

of government support for youth activities.

Two Khlong Toei youngsters joined twenty-five other young people from Bangkok at a one-day workshop on Aids activities hosted by the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration.

Also six Khlong Toei youth group members attended the meeting in Ayuthaya province for Aids activists from four provinces, see above for details.

Visiting artist leads workshops

The art outing to Suan Luang (see above) was not the only special activity for art club members last month.

For one week the Duang Prateep Foundation welcomed artist Sandra Hansen from the USA for a programme of art activities for children and adults at the Duang Prateep Foundation.



In the mornings Sandra was leading art activities for children at the Duang Prateep Kindergarten. In the afternoon Sandra was leading a session for teachers followed by a session for children's art club members.

The photo on the previous page shows Sandra at the back with some of the children after a portrait painting session.

Also one day art club members were filmed by a tv crew from Thai television Channel Five as they made note books from used paper in an activity led by the Paper Ranger organisation, which promotes paper reuse and recycling.

Japanese visitors entertain sponsored students

Last month 10 Japanese visitors from the *Khawb Khun Maak* group from Japan visited the Duang Prateep Foundation to lead Saturday activities for eighty sponsored students. The students were taught Japanese songs and had fun with ball-skill and creative team games. Some of the Japanese also visited the homes of students that they sponsor.

Also last month 100 children, both sponsored students and students from the Special Education project were invited to a special showing of the Thai animation film *Khan Kluay II*. The outing was sponsored by AIS and the Duang Prateep Foundation was among several organisations invited to bring children to watch the film.

Among visitors last month was Christian Dangl who has been sponsoring the education of ten-year-old Kannika Toopsawad for the last few years. Kannika lives with her grandmother and uncle in Locks 1-3 community of Khlong Toei and has just completed primary school level 3.



The photo shows Christian at the back and Kannika on the right with her grandmother and uncle.

Democracy development course

Fifty DPF staff have joined with thirty community leaders on a grassroots democracy development course. The programme is taking place over ten days at weekends and is being led by volunteer lecturers from the academic community. The course is aimed at raising awareness about grassroots democracy.

Grassroots empowerment was also the topic of a two-day course for 30 women residents of Prawet District, who came together from six squatter communities. The group attended a course on money management, organised by the Duang Prateep Foundation, led by staff of the Kenan Institute Asia and sponsored by Citi Group.

The 'Citibank At-Risk Women Financial Literacy Training' is designed to teach financial literacy to at-risk women, the segment of the population most likely to borrow from loan sharks and other informal lenders.

Kenan Institute staff prepared an interactive training programme which helped participants deal with issues such as reducing household expenses and debts, understanding wants against needs, saving for a rainy day and the real cost of borrowing money.



The photo shows some of the course participants making financial plans

At the end of the course participants were presented with a certificate by a representative of Citi Group.

The university vacation has given 9 students from Northeast Thailand the opportunity to have two months work experience with the Duang Prateep Foundation. Three of the students are at the Kanchanaburi New Life Project, with the remainder of the students working at the foundation headquarters in Bangkok.

Nithan Caravan performs in Bangkok

Last month Nithan Caravan was performing at 16 children's centres in different parts of Bangkok. The puppeteers were telling stories using their puppets and story aprons and encouraging the children to develop a love of books.

Visitors learn from foundation experience

Visitors in March included a group attending a workshop on development hosted by the Tomorrow People Organisation. On another day Vladimir Mladjenovic the director of Tomorrow People Organisation visited to discuss opportunities for tertiary level education abroad for disadvantaged Thai youngsters.

A group from Habitat for Humanity visited the DPF to see the housing situation in the Khlong Toei communities. The group visited the foundation as part of a three-day training course about Housing and Human Settlements. The visitors were accompanied by the head of the Seventy Rai community as they walked through his community, they also visited Locks 1-3.

Student groups from the University of Utah and Stanford University were among other groups to visit the Duang Prateep Foundation.

News from Thailand

Khlong Toei market dispute leads to deaths

The dispute between Khlong Toei market vendors and the new management company for the market escalated during March, resulting in the deaths of two guards who were working for the vendors. Later in the month, a female vendor and a security guard were attacked and injured by about 30 thugs.

Since last November, troubled vendors have continued to protest at the Rama IV intersection, on the edge of the market, demanding that the Port Authority of Thailand (PAT), which owns the land, revoke Legal Profession's lease over the market.

Legal Professional won a concession from the PAT to run the market after the previous concession ended last year. Vendors have been protesting at the deal, saying the firm won the contract unfairly and daily fees imposed by the new concessionaire are too high. The vendors claim they are fighting against "dark influences" after some people were evicted from the market by men who showed up in large groups to force the vendors out.

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva has said the vendors at Khlong Toei market and the contractual owner must settle their differences. The prime minister said the problem originated with the PAT and the contract for the operation of Khlong Toei market, so it was essential that the PAT listened to the vendors' grievances in order to work out a solution.

More younger people getting addicted

The age of youths at risk of methamphetamine addiction has dropped according to the Public Health Ministry, due mainly to a failure in control measures that has made drugs available on the black market at a cheaper price. The ministry reported that addicts could be as young as ten.

A ministry representative blamed the failure of strict controls and lax punishments for drug dealers as the main cause of the widespread usage and the rising number of new, younger addicts. He said the situation was getting worse and more people were getting addicted, especially women and teenagers, because the narcotics were now available at a cheap price.

Drugs war to focus on prevention

Last month the government announced a revival of the war on drugs, with a focus on preventive measures after an increase in the number of addicts over the past five years.

The new six-month campaign was launched by the Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva at Government House. Mr Abhisit told 500 anti-drugs officials and community representatives that the new campaign will focus on prevention to bring the drug situation under control. It will be evaluated after six months.

According to the Office of the Narcotics Control Board (ONCB), the number of drug users has increased by 30% from 460,000 in 2003 to 605,000 last year. One of the new campaign's targets is to get at least 120,000 drug users into rehabilitation programmes.

Young at risk in Bangkok

It was reported last month that Bangkok is seen as the country's most dangerous city for children from low-income families.

As many as 101 children died of preventable causes in Bangkok last year, a seminar was told. Children from families struggling to make ends meet are exposed to so many dangers due to an unsafe environment according to the head of the Child Safety Promotion and Injury Prevention Research Centre.

More than 3,000 children countrywide died last year of preventable causes, mainly because of their dangerous environment and the negligence of adults.

Bangkok recorded the most fatalities. Those in the provinces are regarded as being better off as they have more options for recreation space provided by local communities.

HIV on rise among low-paid workers

New HIV infections among low-paid workers is on the rise as overtime cuts due to the economic recession have left some unable to afford condoms, the Public Health Ministry reported last month.

However, the overall HIV situation in Thailand has improved, according to the deputy director-general of the ministry's Disease Control Department.

Because of the economic downturn, many low-paid workers are experiencing a difficult period as employers have slashed the overtime which they depend on, according to the ministry.

Workers are living on a pittance but still must save money. As a result, they cannot afford to visit a doctor or pay medical bills. And in some cases, they cannot even afford to buy condoms.

Data released by the Public Health Ministry showed that in 2007, Ranong and Samut Prakan ranked first and second in the country for HIV infections. In Samut Prakan's case, it was because the province was home to large numbers of migrant workers, many of whom were single and therefore at a greater risk of contracting HIV.

The Labour Ministry has drawn up a set of guidelines to ensure employers respect the rights of HIV-infected workers and do not discriminate against them. At present, about 8,000 companies and factories across the country have agreed to comply with the ministry's guidelines and promised they would not violate workers' rights nor discriminate against or pressure HIV-infected workers to quit their jobs.

Help wanted for jobless HIV sufferers

Aids campaigners are calling on the government to prepare health care support for about 10,000 HIV-positive people who are expected to lose their job and not be eligible for Social Security Office payments.

HIV-positive people's access to drugs and other health services under the social security scheme would be terminated after six months of unemployment. However, people living with HIV/Aids need to take essential anti-Aids drugs on a daily basis.