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Sunshine Laos

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Welcome to the sixth edition of Sunshine Laos Newsletter. In this newsletter we would like to share with you the latest happenings in our Sunshine School community. We would appreciate any comment or suggestion you might have in order to make the newsletter better.

News from Sunshine School

January – March 2011

Open House

Aside from normal academic activities our main focus during these past couple of months has been practising and preparing for our annual Open House. On March 26th we held the Open House programme with performances by all the grades and also exhibits and games. Below are excerpts from Didi's speech and pictures of some of the programmes.

"This year our theme is "The School – Our Home and Life". This is my 10th year as the director of Sunshine School. For me truly the school, the Lao staff and the students have become 'my home and my life'. In these years I have seen many of the students grow from toddlers into young adults. I feel tremendous love and pride when I see them grow up.

Didi with M4 & M3 girls after their dance performance

I hope that in the future they will remember Sunshine School as the 'home away from home' where they learned so many things to help them on their lifes' journeys. As well as knowledge about the world I hope that our students continue to learn how to be believe in themselves – in their own talents and strengths, how to have self-initiative and be creative, how to have good values, how to love and look after the environment, and how to live a life that will be of benefit to the whole world."

M1 & M3 boys break dancing

Grade 2 yoga performance

Volunteers

In March we saw our long term volunteer, Suprabha, return to her home in the Philippines. A'baci' (Lao ceremony with tying of 'blessed' strings around the wrists) was held for her to wish her well.

We also said farewell to Erin from Canada who had been with us for 3 months and Jerre from the US. At the same time we were joined by 2 more groups of short term volunteers. Jon and

Kristen also from Canada who have recorded some of their adventures at the school (March 16 – 23) in their travel blog (very amusing) - http://jonathanandkristen.blogspot.com.

Here are some excerpts:

"While our time here was meant to benefit the kids at the school, we feel that perhaps we are the ones who are gaining the most from this experience. The kids and staff are absolutely fantastic and we have very much enjoyed our time at the school with them thus far. Over the week we were welcomed into the happy rhythm of the school by all the teachers, both English and Lao, made to feel like we were really a part of Sunshine School. The kids have taken an especially exuberant liking to `Teacher Jon. Like being the understatement of the week. It was only our second day at the School and we had not yet been introduced to all the classes. That didn`t matter. Jonathan wandered into one of the classrooms to see if he could be of assistance to At, one of the friendly English Teachers and ended up completely disturbing the class as the kids erupted into loud cheers as soon as he stepped through the door. Chaos reigned. They were jumping up and down, throwing their arms in the air and waving their `thumbs up`in approval. Teacher Jon!``Teacher Jon!`They started chanting. Hearing the commotion, and thinking that perhaps Elvis had just appeared into the next room, I went to take a look. I half expected (and hoped) to find my husband at the bottom of a Grade Three goose pile. Wouldn`t that make a great picture? Thankfully he`s significantly taller than the mob of seven year olds and seemed to manage the attack ok. Surprisingly, his head (and ego) still fit back out the door after the class had ended. Not before being asked by every single kid for his autograph, of course. Later that day, in a grade five class it came time to mark their homework. Poor Teacher At was left standing alone, red pen poised to mark, while every single kid lined up so Teacher Jon could mark their work. They would lift up the notebook he was currently marking and not-so-sneakily slide theirs into the pile. While they awaited their homework`s fate, they all crowded around Teacher Jon, petting his unruly beard."

The other group of volunteer 'super stars' were three 17 year old youth (all from Asian families) from the United World College of South East Asia in Singapore. They came on a one week volunteering stint as part of their school's experiential out-reach syllabus. They were a favourite (as you can imagine) with the M3 & M4 girls (13 – 14 year olds) during English classes; they also participated in a small singing group and performed with our kids at the Open House.

Francis, Khasa and Ken from UWCSEA (Singapore)

Farm Development

We have started the construction of the "children's activities centre" at our Veuntaen farm. It will have two storeys with a hall downstairs and upstairs with smaller rooms for sleeping in or storage at the end of each hall. The upstairs will mostly be made from recycled wood which has been purchased from the local villagers who are 'upgrading' to concrete houses. Donations from friends have made this construction possible. Two young girls from Veuntaen village are currently helping as 'assistants' in our Vientiane kindergarten and next September we hope to be able to employ them for regular children's activities at the farm. We also hope to have youth and adult classes and also it'll be a place for our Vientiane kids and other groups to have ecological activities.

A group of river bank erosion experts from JICA (Japanese NGO) and the Waterways Department came to give advice about erosion prevention on our 'island' slopes. They came up with some good ideas which we hope we can implement.

Sunshine Family News

One of our old volunteers, Travis Lear (who often sends thanks and comments upon receiving our newsletters), was caught in the earthquake in Sendai, Japan. He was teaching English at the time on the 6th storey of a building. Luckily he escaped with his life and the lives of the children he was teaching, but he had to spend the next week struggling to survive while at the same time trying to help others worse off than he. Our thoughts are with you Travis in your time of adversity.

On March 18th some staff members and friends held a special 1.5 hour chanting and meditation session to send good vibes to those suffering in Japan.

For comments and suggestions please write to:

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