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Sunshine Laos

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Welcome to the seventh 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

April – mid July 2011

From April – mid-June is the last part of the formal school year in Laos with year-end exams happening in May and June.
In April, which is the hottest season of the year, we celebrate the Lao New Year with blessings and water fights. This year we held our first Kaoshiki (energetic yogic dance) competition as part of our Lao New Year festivities.

Kaoshiki competition

And Prizes

'Pimai' New Year's blessings between staff and students

After Lao New Year we took all the kids from Kindergarten 3 to Matayom 4 (grade 9) on excursions outside the school. Kindergarten went to see a French cartoon at the National Cultural Hall during an International Film Festival. Grades 1, 2, 3 & 4 went to various temples in Vientiane and grades 5 – 7 went to the zoo.

Outing to Lao Zoo

The oldest kids went in two groups to enjoy an overnight village/nature camp at our farm. The girls played beach volley ball by the river as well as enjoying boat rides, swimming, mud-packs and cooking on charcoal stoves. They had an evening event of sharing dance and songs with musicians and story tellers from the village and helped to clean up the village temple area. The boys enjoyed a football game with the village youth and also became thoroughly immersed in water sport activities.

Beach Volleyball

Collective mud packs

Having fun in the river

Our primary graduating grade 5 class excelled in state-set exams in May this year with 16 out of 34 receiving recognition for excellent results.
On June 4th summer school for the primary students began. This year's activities include exercise mornings at the recently opened park by the Mekong River, swimming instruction at local pools, cooking, arts and dance, drama and various projects in English and Lao. The 2nd session of summer school continued in July with students from junior high school also joining in.

Volunteers

Anfernee, a Lao/Australian volunteer who was with us for 6 weeks during April and May, introduced and helped to facilitate the M3 & 4 kids activities as they participated in the global Design for Change (DFC) challenge.

The DFC World Updates for June 2011 notes:

DFC LAOS – Our first story this year came to us from The Sunshine School, Vientiane, for a Cleaner Market – view their inspiring story – Thanks to DFC partners Didi and Anfernee!

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBgUnDSKdTI&feature=player_embedded

Below are quotes from an article that appeared in the Vientiane Times about the project:

More than 20 students and teachers from M4 class of Vientiane's Sunshine School collected litter at Nong Chan market while advising vendors about proper waste disposal.

This year the students are members of the Design for Change Project which encourages children to visit local areas, identify problems that concern them, and to work with communities to find positive solutions. Sunshine School is the first school in Laos to participate in the DFC which currently has member schools in 31 countries.

The DFC challenge helps students to develop leadership, critical thinking and problem solving skills. It is worldwide initiative which started in India in 2009 and encourages school children to develop solutions to local and also global problems. In India the programme expanded from one school to 500 in a single year and currently there are over 60,000 school children involved. The plan in Laos is to expand the programme to other schools as well.

Cleaning up the market garbage

June and the beginning of July saw a sudden influx of talented and enthusiastic volunteers for our summer school activities. First came 20 year old Malika who grew up with Didi A. Devamala in Baan Unrak Children's Home on the Thai/Burmese border area of Sangkhlaburi. Malika, a recent graduate from an international high school in Bangkok, has been helping with summer school English projects and kids' reading. Sara from Portugal arrived in July and has joined Malika in helping our Lao teachers with the English projects. She's also taken up teaching English to our staff.

Kanika and Madhu (from Australia and Ivory Coast) also arrived in July with their young daughter Rashmi. Madhu has been a big hit with the junior high school boys because of his football coaching and dancing skills. Kanika is enchanting kids and teachers alike by getting them involved in creative dramas and enjoyable sing-a-longs.

Didi Jyoti also arrived in July and has applied her many skills to guiding and training the kindergarten teachers, starting a school garden with the kindergarten kids and also re-starting our intermittent, though popular, staff yoga classes.

Didi Jyoti writes: *The kindergarten teachers had two teachers' trainings sessions combined with creative activity - one about the Circle of Love and the other on Brahmacarya: seeing Love in everything. The sessions included visualization and breathing exercises which culminated in expressing through arts and crafts – the teachers imagined they were the creator and modelled their world with play-doh and they drew colorful mandalas while placing Love/Cosmic mind in color at the center .*

Creating the cosmos

All our current volunteers, who plan to stay with us for 3 – 6 months, have plunged whole-heartedly into learning Lao language from our equally enthusiastic Lao teachers.

Farm Development

The children's activities building at the farm is in its final stages now and the opening programme is schedule for early August. Around the building Phoutsavanh has been developing the garden and also has constructed an animal pen where currently we have a few chickens.

Rice has been planted for the 3rd year. This year we are experimenting with part of the field as a no-till plantation.

Kanika and Madhu have taken a great interest in the farm and may be spending part of their volunteering time out there to help develop eco-tour and health retreat activities. Some of our dreams are to also develop an orchid farm and butterfly garden to help preserve the local species (which are still abundant in Laos compared to neighbouring countries) and to educate people about the great natural bounty of Laos.

Phoutsavanh and Thong outside the new activities building

Sunshine Family News

Our school accountant of 3 years, Ms. Chakachan and computer teacher of one year, Mr. Ti tied the knot at Ti's family house on July 10th. We wish them all the best for their future together.

Ti and Chakachan with volunteers Sara, Malika, Rashmi, Kanika and Bharati also with Didi and teachers Butsaba and Phoutsavanh

This summer Chanphut, our sports teacher of 3 years, has taken time-out to do the second part of a 3 year in-service training for obtaining a Bachelor's Degree in Sport's Education.

Krpa, our Filipino English teacher of 6 years, who has been living in the old wooden caretaker's residence on the primary school grounds, is moving into a newly built caretaker's residence this week. The old wooden building (the last of the original wooden and bamboo buildings which made up the school when we took over the premises in 1996) is to be taken down and the school playground will be raised up to prevent the rainy season flooding which we have been prone to over the past 10 years.

For comments and suggestions please write to:

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