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Welcome to the eighth 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.

1. News from Sunshine School

Mid-July – October 2011

July saw the end of summer school with cultural program and graduation ceremony for grades 5 and M4.



End-of-summer program - African Zumba dance with volunteer Madhu



Grade 5 graduation

THE PLAYGROUND MIRACLE

Phase 1 – Resolving the drainage problem:

In the middle of August there was a gaping hole full of rubble and prone to become a flooded pool where the old wooden residential building had been pulled down. In the 2 weeks before school started a major miracle occurred – on opening day, we had a wide and DRY playground which included a badminton court and a beautifully mosaiced and landscaped school entrance.

How did such a transformation take place? After we pushed workers in a season of heavy rains to finish off cementing the badminton area (covering up the gaping hole), Kate and Madhu together with help from Jenny from Australia, Didi Jyoti and our school staff worked round-the-clock to landscape and decorate the school entrance.

Two days before the start of school, Jenny's husband, Dean, who is an expert on drainage systems, showed up. After a short survey he came up with a plan for draining excess rain water from the school grounds which for the past 10 years have been subject to flash flooding after any heavy downpour. Then on Sunday, the day before school opening, the school grounds were turned upside down while excavators broke through subterranean old concrete floors and foundations and dug canals; Dean and Madhu laid 100 metres of pvc pipes after which we brought in 15 truck loads of sand and had a leveller work till 10.00 p.m. to cover up and smooth out the grounds.

We held our breaths that night waiting for heavy rains to test the results of our super-human efforts, but the night was dry and parents and kids expressed surprise and delight the opening day to have such a beautifully transformed school grounds.

Since then we have had many days of heavy rains with half of Vientiane flooded, but our Sunshine School stayed DRY!!! After 10 years of flooding-phobia and early morning mop-ups, we are able to sleep in peace with a new drainage system that works like a charm.

Thanks to all those super-folk who made it happen.



The playground on the day before school opening!!



First assembly seen from our mosaiced and landscaped school entrance.



Bird's eye view of the badminton court area (no lines yet) which used to be the old wooden house and its swampy environs.

Phase 2: Designing and building the new playground:

“What kind of playground would you like to have?” Kate asked each of the classes. After seeing exciting examples from the internet, the kids started to design their ‘Dream Garden’. Kate told them that anything is possible and so we had drawings of treehouses, tunnels, hills, pools, flying foxes, stepping stones, swings, slides, see-saws, cubby houses and more.



Making and displaying designs

Kate writes: The children started drawing their own designs which then became part of a collage display for Teachers’ Day. The display was mounted and set outside in a bamboo framed tunnel that was planted to sprout! In two months it will be a living tunnel which the children helped to plant.

In the meantime, the children were asked how their class would reach the playground, and ideas were circulated of paths with stepping stones, mosaics, tunnels and bridges to be built from each classroom to their favourite place.

They were able to show on a map of the school, where their path would go, and then, the building began...Stepping stones were rolled, bricks layed, and mosaics planned in chalk. A mural wall has begun next to a classroom that has cement outside. The plan is to paint both the wall and concrete path!

The children’s dream drawings are coming to life, as more raw playground equipment appears at school, and they take ownership of it! Bamboo poles, tires, wooden blocks, piles of dirt and sand were delivered, the children helped to create a new piece of equipment.



School magicians designing their paths – Hogwarts? No! Sunshine? Yes!!

Kate: The feedback from teachers so far has been that the school is a safer place to play, that the children are happy, and they are getting involved as it evolves.

It is a community garden and playground in the making, and a wonderful place to play, thanks to a team of teachers, administration, children and volunteers.



Now the garden is being planted with trees brought from home, and the children are asking for fruit and vegetable garden beds to plant and care for. The whole area is also being planted with varieties of trees which in a few years time will provide shade cover for the whole area.

Visit of teachers from other schools

One of our good friends, Mme Xuyen from Don Koi Children's Development Center brought several groups of teachers for study tours at our school over the past few months. The first group of about 10 teachers visited from Donsangphai School in Pak Nguem District and Nahay School Saysetha District, Vientiane Province. Next came Mr. Kongkham, the principal of Huoi Hang School, a small but creative village school in Nam Back District, Luang Prabang Province. They especially liked the values program and morning circle and also the many diverse classroom displays and corners that we have for the primary and kindergarten classes.



Teacher Bee with visiting teachers.

Don Koi football

Madhu's pet project has been to start a Youth Football Training Centre at our school land in Don Koi village. This has been done in cooperation with Mme Xuyen and Mr. Khamvanh and the Don Koi Children's Development Centre (DCDC).



Xuyen writes: **DONKOI Village 's Dream -**

Don koi sports team was born with a wonderful coach trainer Mr. Madhu from Australia . He is originally from Africa. He is professional sport coach and offered his service for the community.

Mr. Khamvanh the former manager of DCDC and now the village chief mobilized the Donkoi youth to come to this training. Xuyen came to watch this training only one time and was so impressed and inspired that she supported the team with the 10 footballs. With the ten balls the boys are able to practice vigorously.

Madhu employs many techniques – jogging, aerobics, yoga, ballet balancing, push ups, chin ups, speed ladder, obstacle cones and hurdles. They train hard for 40 – 50 minutes before they can play. These often boistrous youth who are anxious to show themselves off in a ‘real game’ like his techniques so much that they follow his instruction like sheep with no complaints.

There are now two teams. The big boys ages are from 16 to 23 and the little ones are 12- 14 years old. There are about 20 in each team. Teams from other villages are also anxious to train with Madhu, including girls teams. Last week 15 boys from Sunshine School also joined in the after school training.

Madhu has many plans using sport for community harmony and for providing youths with healthy activities for life.

For Khamvanh and the parents and me, we think this regular sport with a professional and compassionate trainer coach as role model will help prevent the youth from drug abuse and apathy which is a big problem in this area.

Teachers Day – October 7, 2011

Another highlight in October was this year’s Teachers’ Day. From nursery up to the upper grades the children performed dances and songs in a morning show. The teachers enjoyed an afternoon of badminton and rattan ball matches and were served a very nice vegetarian meal, cooked by Madhu, Sara and Malika.

See the Teachers’ Day Waka Waka Dance by M2 boys on <http://youtu.be/q4V0IXJpS>



Matayom students chanting a poem of appreciation to their teachers on Teachers’ Day.

2. Volunteers

We had to say good bye to Sara from Portugal and Malika from Thailand who during September did a wonderful job in the library, facilitating art/crafts classes for children of the different grades for playground space design for the school.

Anfernee, our Lao/Australian volunteer who returned again to work with us this term has set up the computer lab where we now have internet access for staff and students. He’s also working with M3/M4 English class and M2 geography class

to help students and teachers to learn new ways to learn through research, social entrepreneurship, internet exploration and practical implementation of knowledge in projects .

Anfernee has also set up a new Sunshine School Blog and Facebook page. Have a look at:

blog/website for sunshine school: <http://sunshineschool.tumblr.com/>

facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/SunshineLaos>

Jay, a Lao/Hawaiian volunteer has been also been helping set up the computer lab and teaching English to the kids.

We had three volunteers visiting from Japan Yuki, Shinya and Aya , who were here for a week. They helped translate Japanese story books and participate in the garden project with the kids. They also helped in the farm garden for a day and painted the school room on the farm.



Volunteers from Japan, Saba, Didis Jyoti & Gaorii, Noi and Dorkmai and Phoutsavanh with Veuntaen kindergarten kids in their beautifully painted classroom.

During the last week Aurelien from France and Teresa from Portugal have joined our volunteer team, helping with the garden project and English classes. Aurelien also knows some juggling and partner acrobatic skills which he's sharing with the kids and sports staff.

Kate (Kanika) and Madhu have been an amazing team, as you can read above, contributing so much time and energy and skills to develop the school, Don Koi and also the farm.

3. Farm Development

After 2 years of planning and construction, in August we opened a kindergaten class at our Veuntaen farm. The supervising of teachers and classroom management is done by Saba and Didi Jyoti; Noi and Dorkmai are the teachers – they come from the village and have done 2 months in-service training in our Vientiane school.

There are currently 30 kids attending. The parents and children are very pleased to have such a beautiful environment for learning with many materials for the kids to manipulate and a curriculum which balances health, play, self-discovery, creativity and intellectual learning.



Art with Didi Jyoti



First day of school

We also have a one hour English course for local youth which runs four times weekly with 21 students enrolled. Last week we had our first yoga class in the village with many of our English students attending.

On October 12th had a beautiful river celebration which marked the beginning of autumn . A floating offering made from flowers and banana leaves were crafted by the village girls and on the full moon night we lit them with candles and sent them floating out on the river.

Now that the rainy season has ended we have been able to plant cabbages, chinese cabbages, morning glory greens (pak bong), sweet potatoes, cucumbers, carrots, pumpkin, coriander and papaya trees at the farm. We already have a good crop of different kinds of beans. On the island we have begun to plant the slopes with green beans. Most of the rice in our rice field was sadly drowned in the floods which came three times this year. Many of the fruit trees and edible plants on the lower parts of the island were also drowned this year in the heavy flooding.

Sunshine Family News

Those who remember one of our old English teachers, Baikham, will be happy to know that she's given birth to her second child, a daughter named Emma Louise. We have a few more babies on the way at the school with Souk (office), Jock (English) and Jagajan (office) all pregnant.