

ASCT NEWS

Caring for children in the Philippines since 1975

May 2008
Issue 33

Welcome to this Newsletter celebrating the end of the school year in Philippines and the successes of some of our students. In February we saw first hand the progress and some of the issues being faced in Manila and my story of this is inside. As always the contrast is remarkable between our lives and those we serve in Manila, and the global financial turmoil is just as real there as here impacting on our running costs and reserves. I hope you will enjoy reading this newsletter and if you want to know more, please do contact us.

David Cox Hon chairman,

Congratulations to all our graduates!

Congratulations to all our students who have recently graduated . We have had many success stories this year.

Ninety of our Cashew Tree School



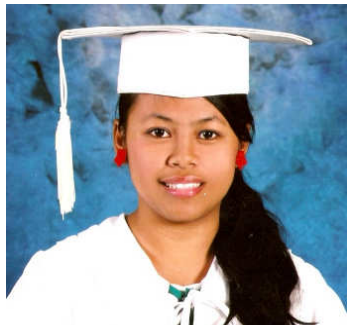
students have completed the first stage of their education and now move on to pastures new.

Michael-Jordan, Angela, Mark-Anthony and Danilo have graduated from Elementary School and will be starting at High School next month.

Noel, Analu and Christiline have completed their High School education and are choosing courses for the next stage in their education.

Mark Alas has achieved a Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education and Nidanny Arca has worked extremely hard to achieve a Batchelor of Science in Nursing.

We wish Mark and Nidanny all the very best as they leave the care of ASCT.



Christiline's proud day.

David's visit to Manila

This is Jovi, who lives in the Payatas scavenger township. She has just achieved the highest mark out of over 100 children in a school entrance exam. She has been taught at our own Cashew Tree school and was in open competition for the limited places at the local Dutch charity foundation, Papaya school.

This is a true testament to the standard of teaching at Cashew, the dedication of both her teachers and her parents and of course all her hard work.

Meeting Jovi was one of the most memorable highlights of my recent visit with my wife Margaret. It is perhaps worth mentioning at this stage that such visits by Trustees have no financial cost to ASCT.

So what did we see and what are our memories? It is always a culture shock when stepping off the plane into hot tropical air, the frenetic buzz that is always in the city, the traffic and the roadside traders, the different signs and shops that are so typically Far Eastern. Our welcome at Mango Tree House was as warm as ever, bright handwritten signs on the door, lots of hugs from children and staff.

Mango Tree House

I am pleased to report that our work is in good shape. Mango Tree House is currently home to 32 children and young people who are ably supported by house parents, teacher, social workers, cook and laundry lady. The children aged from 6 to 21 attend a variety of schools and colleges and we have had successes in graduations at all levels.



The daily routine is very different from our UK lifestyle as many of the staff and children have to get up around 4.30am for breakfast, washing, and then getting to school which starts at 6.30am. A second shift of students attend school in the afternoon and some have evening sessions, particularly our college students.

There is time for play and relaxation especially at the weekend when visits to the park are very popular. All the young

people have a locker in which they keep their own things. In comparison with what we have in the west, it is almost inconceivable that such a small space holds all they have.

All the residents at Mango Tree House have been abandoned, abused, been rescued from appalling social conditions, or just found and referred to us. Their lives have been transformed and most of them have adjusted to a new life, a place that is theirs, and the opportunity to learn, play and be part of a large caring family.

Cashew Tree School

Cashew Tree school is a remarkable project now approaching its tenth year. Headed by an ex student from Mango Tree House, the team of ten provide a



good balanced curriculum for the 182 young students aged between 5 and 7. There is strong support from local parents who volunteer for duties at the school and have formed a weekly Bible study too.

There are two daily sessions, morning and afternoon and all the children are on our feeding programme. They look so well turned out in their uniforms, which were initiated by a request from parents, and a local mothers' cooperative are now starting to make them for us. The homes of most of these children are very poor, a collection of shacks and huts made from scrap, scavenged materials with some breeze block walls and the pathways squelch underfoot. It does not pay to examine too closely what you are walking on.

All those who pass through Cashew Tree House are well equipped for the next stage of their education and invariably start at or near the top of the classes. In fact, so well regarded is this school that there is a waiting list and we are oversubscribed. It costs around £18,000 a year to run this school – yes that is everything, salaries, supplies, food, utilities, so we provide excellent value for

money. Our costs are rising due to exchange rate and world inflation pressures so if you can assist financially please do get in touch with us.

We were most impressed with what we saw, the gentle and caring approach of teachers, the standard of education, the desire to learn by the children and the results that are achieved. We have calculated that over 1,000 children have benefitted through Cashew Tree School and this visit has confirmed that the work is continuing at a very good standard.

Grapevine project

The visit to the Grapevine project on a hot Saturday morning was most rewarding. The students sponsored in this scheme all live with their own close or extended family and attend state local schools. The financial support we provide ensures they can go to school without the pressure to have to work to keep the family solvent. Most of them live in a resettlement township of breezeblock homes . As part of the project we ask that the students attend Saturday school as well to supplement their learning and the ages range from 8 to 18. The teaching is provided voluntarily by our own staff and some of the most able



senior students like Rashelle and Omega, son of Neria, our teaching coordinator. The standard of instruction is very good covering a wide range of subjects and given in English and Tagalog, the native language.

Rashelle is a particularly gifted and articulate young lady who is planning to qualify as a social worker and join the our team in Manila. We wish her every success.

The visit was a whirlwind eight days in which we visited homes, children, projects and had many meetings with local people, some Filipino and some British, who we hope will be able to build on and provide further local backing and support in Manila. The site of our proposed new home was visited and detailed meetings were held with planners and prospective builders. As ever a huge thank you to all our friends, supporters, schools, churches and individuals who help us make this possible.



The Seedling project

Our vision is to build a new children's home so that we can; increase capacity with more children, reduce our costs by bring parts of our work together geographically and offer a better, less polluted rural environment for children and staff alike. The vision is progressing at a pace, and we now have the design and building plans completed with costs tendered by local builders. The next stage is to firm up on the construction specification, legal and planning details, and contracts. There is real excitement as these plans are examined but tempered by the escalating costs of steel which has increased by over 25% in the past few months and also the global economic instability.

Our anticipated building costs are now totaling around £165,000 which does not include the purchase of the land which at £35,000 was purchased from reserves.

You have generously sent us gifts of £35,000 and offered loans to see us through the period when we have to pay the builders but have not at that time sold the current Mango Tree House which has a current value of £58,000.

At current exchange rates which have dropped in the past few months, we are still short of £43,000 and as responsible trustees it was unanimously agreed at our recent meeting that we will push ahead with further fund raising but not commence building until we have at least 80% of the total costs to hand.

Thanks to everyone who has supported us so far and with your help we will work to achieve our vision..

David Cox , hon. chairman of trustees.

Escalating costs

'Rice prices are set to keep rising as demand for the staple is outstripping production, the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) has said.

The price of rice has risen by as much as 70% during the past year, with increases accelerating in recent weeks.' This report from the BBC highlights one of the problems currently being faced by ASCT.

Together with increased costs in many areas of expenditure we have also been adversely affected by a down turn in the exchange rate. Just six months ago we were able to get 95 Filipino peso to the pound, this has recently dipped as low as 75 peso to the pound. In effect this means that donations

have been devalued by almost 20%.

We have asked our staff in the Philippines to make the most of local fundraising and look at all areas of expenditure. Because of this no new students will be accepted in either Mango Tree House or the Grapevine Project until there is an upturn in finances. Likewise all UK costs are constantly reviewed and kept to a minimum.

We are committed to working with our young people and building a future for them. It now costs us around £45 a month to keep a child at Mango Tree house, a rise over the past year.

Please consider fund raising or increasing your giving to ASCT .

Timothy's Story



Asked to write this article I had no idea whatsoever what to write. How can I amalgamate everything I experienced during my time in this suburb of Manila into one page of text? There is no big story I can tell but thousands of

memories of everyday life still float around my head. This family of thirty five children and their twelve parents was my own family for nearly three months last monsoon season. Memories galore. Wherever you look there is a smiling face, wherever you sit someone jumps on you, wherever you stretch out your hand a child's body is just waiting to be tickled. Writing a poem on the week's math topics every Friday evening with Catherine or laughing tears with Christeline. Being big brother to so many children is not always a picnic but I had at least as much fun as the elementary boys playing king kong (my nickname by some of the younger ones was Baboon Kuya Tim as the children were so fascinated by my hairy legs...) or ghosts in their bedroom, skipping and playing a wealth of games with the elementary girls. How many hours of talks did Marlon translate so expertly for me so that I could understand what was going on. It was not always easy communicating with the smallest ones, some having no grasp of English at all, but I loved to communicate without talking, playing, chasing and just being there. Also incredibly rewarding was the individual attention I was able to give to the school work of some and the amazing progress they made. I felt so much a part of life there, it felt right to be there and I felt really bonded to these wonderful children.

The longer I stayed the more I realised what an oasis this place is,

how privileged the children were to be there. Visiting the street children of Manila and also taking two weeks out to teach drama at Papaya Academy Elementary School I witnessed what life is like on the streets or in the slums of Payatas, how vicious the circle of poverty is and how lucky Mango Tree's fruits are to be given a chance to build their own more secure future.

I arrived in the Philippines expecting to come back a different person, to be moved and to learn such a lot. I will be honest. I left feeling pretty much the same as a few months earlier, but the time since then has shown that although I thought I did not learn anything per se, having experienced all these things has changed me subtly but deeply. The amount I talk about my experiences there, the number of anecdotes I tell from that time bear witness to the spell cast on me, how much I really miss them and how much I would give to just lie on the sofa there and be covered with screaming children attacking me in revenge for a previous tickling crusade. My time in the Philippines was very special to me. Thank you to all who helped organize my trip, also very much to those who donated money towards my expenses and above all thank you to all of you in Manila for welcoming me into your family.



And Finally

The response to our appeal for fundraising has been excellent. You have been very imaginative with *Pampered Chief* parties, sponsored runs, items sold on e-bay and coffee and cake mornings. Lyndhurst school, in Camberley, got children to fill smartie tubes with money and raised £450. Thank you to everyone and please keep up the good work.

Here are details for events being planned in the near future.

- ◆ **BARN DANCE** - *17th May at High Cross Church Camberley starting at 7.00pm. Tickets are £8 which includes a ploughman's supper. Tickets on sale from the ASCT office or directly from High Cross Church.*
- ◆ **PHILIPPINE CHARITY BALL IN AID OF ASCT** - *Organised by the Berkshire Filipino - British Association. Held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel Reading. 24th May 7.00pm to 1.00am tickets are £35. No tickets will be sold on the door. Contact Alison for further details.*
- ◆ **70'S TO NOW EVENING** - *An evening of LIVE music with Clive Buckingham and his band, the group that played at our 30th Celebration. Saturday 25th October at Heatherside Community Centre Camberley. Full details to follow.*

There are also plans to organise a Garden open day and a fund raising evening at a Camberley Garden centre, full details will be published when possible.

Please let us know if you are organising an event which you would like publicised or you need a fund raising pack which includes sponsorship forms and ASCT literature. Don't forget we are always happy to visit churches or group to talk about our work.

Please do not hesitate to contact Alison in the ASCT office if you have any queries on any aspect of our work.

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