

## Netherhall Social Project 2009

Every summer since 2002, Netherhall House has run a social project abroad to help poor communities. Between 2002 to 2006. We ran a work camp in Nicaragua. In 2007 we went to South Africa and in 2008 we organised a project in northern Thailand. Here we built a nursery classroom and two toilet blocks at a school for Burmese refugee children.

This summer, we will go back to northern Thailand to build a nursery for another school for Burmese refugee children. The children at the school are split into four different grades. The school, however, only has two classrooms at present. As a result, the older students have to share a classroom with the much louder nursery students. This hinders their learning. Building a separate building for the nursery students would solve the problem of space restriction in the school and improve the learning environment.

I think that it is important at this stage to give a quick explanation of the difficulties which the Burmese refugee children and their families find themselves in. Ever since the Burmese military gained total control over the nation in 1962, many Burmese people have been marginalised and denied basic rights such as access to education and healthcare. This is regardless of their race, religion or ethnicity. As a result, Burmese people are starting to cross its border into neighbouring countries such as Thailand. Most of the migrant children have to work as child labourers. Only a few enjoy the opportunity of attending specially set up schools for migrants.

I took part in the 2008 Social Project. Even though I was a little bit apprehensive at first, I have absolutely no regrets. Based on my experiences from last year, here are a few reasons why I would highly recommend taking part in the 2009 Social Project:

**1** – You will leave Thailand feeling that you have done something which will have a great and positive impact on deprived Burmese children. Seeing the smiles on the faces of the children and staff at the school when they see their new nursery building will make the hours of digging in very sticky mud worthwhile. It will also make the time that you spent fundraising in the UK very worthwhile.

**2** – You will make many new good friends. Enduring difficult conditions together and working towards a common goal helps to know people very well and form close bonds. Last year, the group of eleven work camp volunteers got on very well and they are now friends for life!

**3** – You will hopefully enjoy the spiritual side of the project. Fr Joe, the resident priest at Netherhall, accompanied us on the project. We celebrated Mass everyday as well as saying the Rosary and the Angelus. Fr Joe gave us daily meditations and was available for confessions. We did also some scripture and spiritual reading. While no activity is obligatory, one chooses this project and not others, aware that there are spiritual activities included.

4 – You will get to experience a completely different culture to what we are used to in the UK. You will hopefully become a fan of Thai food. We kept as busy in our free time as we were when we were working. We visited a UN refugee camp, played football against a team of Burmese emigrants and spent a weekend in the jungle where we did some rafting and elephant riding and saw the largest waterfall in Southeast Asia, the Umphang Thee Lor Sue Waterfall.

If you want to get in contact with me to ask questions about my experiences of last year's Social Project, don't hesitate to e-mail me at [ciaranpage@hotmail.com](mailto:ciaranpage@hotmail.com) .

Thanks for reading,

Ciaran Page