

Dear Bamboo Schoolers,

since the last newsletter I was able to slowly recover from my dengue experience and am feeling much better again.

For Brianna, our nurse from America, it was an interesting first week since she was able to savor the first taste of what it means to volunteer in Laos.

She patiently sat through her introduction days with all the local authorities.

-->Side note: All volunteers need to be personally presented to the local authorities' offices such as: social welfare, Lao youth office, ministry of education, the police department and even need to personally get the governor's written approval that they are able to volunteer with us.

Strangely enough, in the past we were required to settle a "safety deposit" of 200.000 kip (about 20EURO) per volunteer per month with the police. This suddenly has changed since the police has (finally?) understood how much work we do in the region and have therefore decided that we don't need to pay them for the volunteer's "safety deposit" anymore, unless there is an emergency, where the police would be required to step in. I hope never to witness that.

Furthermore, Brianna's boyfriend Peter Ranger from New Zealand- who has a PhD in Neuroscience, has brilliantly elaborated a public health proposal for our foundation, focusing on emphasizing the importance of hand washing in order to prevent diarrhea in the villages that we work with.

What would appear as something completely normal in the western world (like washing one's hands with soap and water) has a different reality in Laos. Villagers barely wash their hands and if they do, they just do this with a little bit of water in a bowl that has been used by many before in order to just quickly soak their hands. Afterwards they dry their still dirty hands (that have touched animals, feces, dirt and food - often in that sequence) with a dirty towel which can move on its own and then proceed to eat most of the (shared among all) food - with their hands (especially the sticky rice).

It is due to these customs (or lack of customs and education) that the annual mortality rate from diarrhea in Laos is one of the worst in Asia.

"Shockingly, the mortality rate from diarrhea for children aged 1-4 is 46 times higher in Laos than in its neighbor country, Thailand" (Source: WHO).

This week we therefore proposed to the hospital in Nong Khiaw to establish an awareness program in our partner villages in September (start of school after the summer holidays). The director of the hospital happily accepted our proposal and was more than thankful for proposing and considering it.

We finally seem to be lucky with an old idea: trying to bring a dentist to Laos (equipped with a mobile dentist station- donated by us) who will be going around the villages treating people in need. The principle is the same as with Dr. Lung (the eye doctor) and we are

hoping to be able to establish this project and be equally successful with it as we are always with Dr. Lung.

Furthermore, the board has decided to keep supporting our sponsorship students at the technical college in Luang Prabang. Therefore, I am required to visit these and also settle the payment for the upcoming semester.

We hope that your start into the week will be a happy one:)

Kind regards,

Isabel Montano

Laos General Manager