



Fourth Meeting

FreeSchools World Literacy Australia

DATE commencing: Friday 7th September 2007 TIME: 9 am
DATE completion: Sunday 9th September 2007 TIME: 9 pm

INTERNET VENUE: FreeSchools Literacy Australia email network
fswl-australia@googlegroups.com

Minutes of the Meeting

1. Rollcall of members present and apologies.

There were 8 participants in attendance
Robert Coenraads (President)
Ben Bowler (Vice President)
Ian Esmore (Public Officer)
Delphine Swadling (Secretary)
Merindi Swadling (Treasurer)
Yvonne Hirt (Committee Member)
Donna Cervantes (Committee Member)
Jildou Brower

2. Acceptance of the Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the August 3-5, 2007 Third Meeting were sent to each member of the committee and accepted by the committee
Moved by Ian Esmore and Seconded by Delphine Swadling

3. Reports from the Committee.

President's Report was accepted by the committee
Moved by Ian Esmore and Seconded by Delphine Swadling

4. Progress in Thailand.

A copy of Ben and Jildou's August 2007 reports from Thailand were sent out to all participants. The report was accepted by the committee.
Moved by Robert Coenraads and Seconded by Ian Esmore.

5. Progress in India

No report

6. General Business.

The following discussion took place during the meeting and is recorded here for completeness under the following headings:

1. Progress in Thailand
2. FSWL business plan
2. The FSWL registration process in Australia
3. Continuation of open discussion topics

Progress in Thailand

Ben: "Just to clarify to situation here. As we know quite recently the education policy from the central government in Bangkok changed to a position which, in principle, allows educations for all. Children are no longer supposed to be turned away from schools because they have no I.D. card.

However there are a dozen other obstacles preventing children attending school, primarily of an economic nature.

As I understand it is is a similar scenario to India. The Indian government does not prevent certain groups from attending school, - it is just that the poorer families cannot afford even the modest price-tag of the most basic education. I am not comparing the standards of living, just pointing out that the reasons why children (Shan people and Hill Tribe) do not go to schools in Thailand are very much the same.

So yes it is very good that the government policy has changed and indeed among the Hill Tribe people in this region we are finding that the average child of the average family is starting to go to school.

What this leaves is the poorest of the poor, - people like Darin from this months newsletter. People who just cannot afford the books, fees, lunches, uniforms, ect to go to school. In Nong Tau we are sponsoring 6 children this year that otherwise would never have gone to school. These are six normally bright kids who largely through family disintegration just cannot manage to pay. Father was a Thai soldier who had intercourse with the mother, never to be seen of again. Mother has run away to Bangkok when the child was less that 2 years old leaving the child to be reared by some gentle old lady from the village. Older sibilings do go to school but the family purse just doesn't stretch any further so it's just bad luck for the younger children who will toil in the fields from the age of 8 instead of going to school with their brothers and sisters. These stories are very common among the Hill Tribe people.

It is just not a black and white situation here. The Shan people in particular <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shan> seem to still be very much disadvantaged. Unlike the Hill Tribes many Shan are refugees fleeing the regime in Burma and are not settled in villages but are often on the move. This makes it impossible for the children to go to a normal school. We have 2 Shan schools and they are proving to be outstanding examples of Free Schools. Ban's school regularly has between 55-60 students and she runs it with a high degree of skill. Also many of these students are children of illegal immigrants who do not attend school because of the fear of being caught and sent back to Burma.

So the issues here are complex and not straightforward. The changed government attitude does not suggest that Free Schools does not have a role to play here and in many cases a desperately important one.

The challenge is, together with Sue and the Canadian team, to make good choices about how best to develop the project in response to the changing conditions."

Robert: "Thanks for your clarification of the changing situation in Thailand. How are your discussions with the Mirror Foundation progressing, with regard to their potential role in running the schools in the future? Individual scholarships are clearly going to be an important aspect. Perhaps you should list what you see to be the key steps, Ben, that should be taken in the development of the project from this point."

Ben: "I agree that the natural progression is towards scholarships allowing underprivileged children to get a 'real school' education. We have been of the attitude, in conjunction with Sue, that at this stage it is not wise to expand the village/evening FreeSchool model here.

Attending the regular school has many advantages, social and academic over what we can offer children for 2 hours in a village classroom. This is not to say that these village schools are not hugely valuable for the children, mainly by giving them extra opportunity to improve their Thai language. Without Thai then no amount of government school education will help them much and remember all our FreeSchool children have Thai as their second language.

If my 12 year old nephew went to a Chinese school I don't think he would learn much about anything. It's exactly the same here.

So I think we should keep the handful of evening schools we still have. We might gently reassess the situation regarding the day/government school teachers.

And we should really look at expanding the scholarship program.

The Mirror Group have their own scholarship program for older children. They offer children with potential the chance to go on and complete their secondary education, which is a lot more expensive than primary school. Their experience in this area should prove very valuable and I can see that the two programs could work complementary to each other.

The FreeSchools Scholarships would offer primary education to financially disadvantaged Hill Tribe and Shan people.

The pilot policy for this at Moung Choum School with Darin and her 5 Lahu friends is going wonderfully. We could get great testimonials about their stories and the new life FSWL is offering them to assist in fundraising efforts.

If this is the direction FSWL wants to move in we will have to devise a series of criteria ready to select the new students for the start of the school year next April."

Donna: "Despite the Thai Gov. Policy...I also consider we need to support the Scholarship Program in Thailand and Tribal Village Free Schools Education.

I have seen this area of Thailand first hand and it is a totally different world to the normal Thailand one and very needy in many ways especially Education wise"

Ian: "Can secretary/president draft letter of thank you acknowledgement for excellent work undertaken and progress to date, Thailand team?"

Robert: "Yes, Ian, I strongly agree, a letter of thanks for Ben and Jidou is most appropriate. I would also unhesitatingly provide a glowing reference for either for whatever future position they may care to apply for."

The FSWL Business/Strategic Plan

Donna: "In developing a Plan, it is necessary to clearly identify the current status of our charity, its objectives and strategies. Correctly defined, these can be used as the basis for a critical examination to probe existing or perceived Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Also forming part of a Strategic Plan are the following requirements:

- * Vision
- * Mission
- * Strategic themes
- * Strategic Objectives * Measures or Key Performance Indicators
- * Targets or Goals
- * Initiatives or Action Plans

I am sure that Ian and myself could come up with our plan

Ian: recommends "that a sub_committee liase to draft business plan for presentation at next meeting."

Donna: "Can help with the Strategic Plan if you like"

The FSWL Charity Bank Account

Donna: "Positive results from meeting with Westpac Bank...they have no monthly fees and no transaction fees for non profit organisations such as ours...they will be sending you the booklet and details for you to read etc...I will investigate further with other Banks if this is not what you may be looking for. Amnesty International Bank with the Commonwealth Bank..but because they are a long standing Charity and a big organisation they have a deal with them...so there you have it..see how it goes"

7. Set date and time for COM meeting. Close meeting

Meetings of the Committee of FSWL Australia will be the held on the first Friday of each month. The next official meeting will be brought forward to coincide with the Melbourne Urantia conference from Saturday 29th to Sunday 30th of September, 2007.

The business of the meeting concluded on Sunday 9th September 2007

The Committee is thanked for its involvement

END OF MINUTES

Appendix 1

The FSWL Committee - Australian Contact Details

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