

# IJ Beacon – A call to serve

Some 50 Secondary Three students from CHIJ Secondary school had the opportunity to experience meaningful community service when they travelled to Thailand and Vietnam for mission work. These two trips were organised as part of the school's IJ BEACON (Be Emphatisers And Champions Of the Needy) programme.

The two trips in Chiang Mai and Ho Chin Minh City from Nov 3-8 enabled the students to experience not only adventure but also a chance for leadership and character development. Through them, the girls had the opportunity to interact with children from less privileged backgrounds, thereby strengthening their sense of global responsibility.

## THAILAND TRIP

For the 24 Secondary Three students and four teachers who went on the Thailand mission, it was a first for the school. The trip proved to be an eye-opener for many of them as they had the chance to experience something very different. During the six days, the team lived in a local village, interacted with the students of a village school and even helped to spruce up the school environment.

The team learnt how the Thai villagers live in harmony with their environment, using only what they needed so that they can ensure the sustainability of the environment.

The girls learnt about animal conservation and more about Thai culture. The trip also brought about a deeper understanding of the Catholic Social Teaching Principle of Stewardship.

### Here's a look at the reflections of the students:

"Initially, we were overjoyed to see that even in a remote community, there exists an awareness of animal conservation. However, we later saw an elephant-riding tour which surprisingly was conducted by the elephant centre where we attended our conservation talk. While it was a disappointing realisation, this contradiction is not completely illogical

as the centre would require a large sum of money to maintain its business, and elephant-riding services are more economically viable than animal conservation talks. This contradiction only served to highlight the need to educate members of the community so that these businesses would not have to resort to earning money at the animals' expense."

– Group 1, St Francis

"This mission trip to Thailand was one of the most eye-opening and humbling experiences we have ever had. During recess, all the children would play together in a large sheltered area regardless of age or gender, encouraging and inviting one another to join in. Cliques were not evident and everyone played with one another without hesitation. In class, they would always care for the person sitting next to them, to ensure that he or she is on task."

– Group 2, St Therese

"We saw figures of animals made from straw. This made us realise that there are many different ways to use the resources we are blessed with. Even the things that we think are useless can be re-purposed into beautiful objects like the gorilla figures which were made to attract tourists. We learnt that we should delve deeper into understanding how versatile our resources can be. We also learnt to appreciate the things we own. The world will be a better place only if we care about how we lead our lives meaningfully with the things that we possess."

– Group 3, St Kateri

"In the evening, we had our home visits where we gave some basic necessities to a number of disadvantaged families. The long journey up and down the hills which took more than an hour for the local children to get to school and home daily made us realise that we should not complain about every little inconvenience that we sometimes encounter back home. The dedication of the local children to learn and their determination to be educated were what touched us most."

– Group 4, Blessed Cecilia



The students and the children at the mission centre in Vietnam.

## VIETNAM TRIP

During the trip, the 25 girls and four teachers had the chance to give the mission centre there a fresh coat of paint. The girls painted the walls of the school with lovely murals that reflected the Vietnamese tradition and the school's learning culture. The girls also taught the children English through games, as well as art and craft activities.

Through the daily reflections and sharings, the girls had the opportunity to think about their actions as they listened to their peers share about the trip. The girls also learnt the Catholic Social Teaching Principle of Human Dignity.

CHIJ Secondary Principal Mrs Rachel Lee shared that the IJ BEACON trips "have enabled our girls to develop a greater sensitivity to the world around them and to learn to use their gifts to bless others".

### Here's a look at the reflections of the students:

"The days spent in Vietnam were extremely meaningful because we witnessed the interactions between the older and younger students at the mission centre and we learnt what love and caring for someone truly means. We experienced the beauty of giving and receiving, and the friendships forged are precious keepsakes."

– Group 1, St. Agnes

"We embarked on this mission trip with great uncertainty. However, we can now say that we have grown immensely. From giving the children high-fives and hugs to being covered in paint, every second spent in Vietnam has been fruitful. We have learnt to put others before ourselves, to care for one another even when our friendships were not yet deep and to appreciate the little things that we are

blessed with. We have seen this world in a different light and are thankful for what we have – safe homes, supportive families and amazing friends who journeyed with us."

– Group 2, St Jane

"We had an enriching and fulfilling experience as we learnt how to live out the IJ mission and appreciate what we have. We also forged friendships and understood the blessing of being able to receive high standards of formal education and be able to attend school every day without any hiccups. The children whom we met might not come from privileged backgrounds yet they go to school with smiles on their faces, ready to be loved and to share their love with others. Mother Teresa once said, "Spread love everywhere you go. Let no one ever come to you without leaving happier". We are very thankful for this experience and we hope to return to serve again."

– Group 3, St Katherine

"This mission trip made us realise the importance of love and patience in all that we do. We also had the opportunity to understand what it means to undertake the challenges of life in our own stride and to communicate effectively, even if others do not speak the same language as us. Over the six days, we have created beautiful memories together as a school and we hope that the IJ Spirit will continue to inspire and touch the lives of many, far and wide."

– Group 4, St Mary

The diverse interactions on the trips likewise brought to light the significance of human relations regardless of faith, race and culture, and it is with this connection that we are reminded that ultimately, we are in fact, ONE. □  
Submitted by CHIJ SECONDARY SCHOOL



Students all smiles during the Thailand trip. Photos: CHIJ SECONDARY SCHOOL