

For residents of Phuket the island is more than an idyllic vacation paradise, it's a land of opportunity and potential. Over the years Phuket has attracted a large community of expats – people who come from foreign soil to put down roots, build homes and start businesses – and many of these expats have done quite well for themselves, living a lifestyle difficult to find anywhere else in the world.

Tom McNamara and Fleur Birch-Atkinson are two such expats. Mr McNamara, the owner of the successful Ban Rim Pa Restaurant Group, and his daughter Fleur have called Phuket home for the last 13 years. This island has treated them well and it was out of a desire to return this kindness that they created the Phuket Has Been Good to Us Foundation. Says Mr McNamara: "We felt it was a social responsibility to put something back into Phuket."

Phuket is, first and foremost, a tourist destination. Currently 12 percent of Thailand's hotel rooms are on the island and that figure is expected to rise to as much as 18 percent in coming years. People come to Phuket from every corner of the globe and, with so many nationalities present, the need

furnishing them with dedicated teachers and materials that are focused on the unique needs of learners in Phuket.

The foundation is currently implementing its pilot program at Kalim School, located near the McNamaras' family business and is a school the family has worked closely with since their arrival in Phuket. The programme's budget of five million baht for three years came in the form of donations from private individuals in the US, the UK, China, France, Australia and Thailand; people to whom Phuket

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for a common language is keenly apparent. English has become the *lingua franca* of Phuket and strong English language skills are essential to secure the best-paying jobs on the island. The goal of the foundation is to provide those vital language skills to Phuket's next generation of community leaders by getting involved with local schools and

has been good, who also wished to give something back to the community. The concept is to get away from traditional rote memorization learning methods and European-focused textbooks and utilize a more dynamic approach to learning using Phuket-focused materials. Of course, there aren't any Phuket-focused textbooks currently

มูลนิธิได้สร้างเครื่องมือในการสอนแบบใหม่ ที่ตรงกับ ความต้องการของผู้เรียนในภูเก็ตมากขึ้น (ภาพขวา) เคท โคป ใช้ประสบการณ์อันกว้างขวางมาสร้างแรงบันดาลใจในชั้นเรียน (บน) ความสุขของนักเรียน โรงเรียนกะหลิม โรงเรียนในโครงการนำร่องของมูลนิธิ (ภาพบนขวา)

The foundation is creating new teaching materials more relevant to the needs of Phuket's learners (right). Kate Cope brings extensive experience and great enthusiasm to the classroom (top). Happy students at Kalim school, site of the foundation's pilot program (bottom right)



Behind the Scenes:

The Phuket Has Been Good To Us Foundation

By Logan Hesse

on the market and creating one is one of the foundation's primary goals and possibly the biggest task faced by Kate Cope, the foundation's head teacher.

Kate comes to Phuket with a strong educational background in English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching and community development, along with a great deal of practical ESL experience in Taiwan. She is charged with turning the foundation's investments into tangible improvements in student performance. At the beginning of the school year the foundation conducted benchmark testing that will later be compared with test results at the end of the year to provide quantifiable evidence of the programme's success. It is hoped that by showing positive results the foundation will be able to attract more donors to help it achieve its goals for the long term. The foundation is in this for the long haul and Mr McNamara expects that "You won't see results in two or three years;



the results will be apparent down the road in six to eight years."

Improving the standard of English language education will have numerous and wide-reaching benefits for the island as a whole. One of the most significant benefits will be helping to maintain the family unit. The best jobs on the island require strong language skills and those without such skills are often

forced to leave home to find work; by improving those skills, the foundation hopes to create more opportunities at home for native Phuketians and allow them to remain close to their families. For Thais, higher levels of English proficiency will mean less inflation caused by businesses competing for the limited number of workers with good skills. It will also mean more jobs for locals and less reliance on workers from places like Bangkok. For visitors it will mean more efficient service, and a generally easier time communicating as the language barrier becomes less imposing.

As the world becomes a much smaller place multi-lingualism becomes more and more apparent. By instilling strong language skills from an early age the Phuket Has Been Good to Us Foundation is helping to give Phuket's children a great advantage that will make this island a better place for all of us in the years to come. Phuket has been good to us and it's our duty to return the favour.

Photos courtesy of the Phuket Has Been Good to Us Foundation.



The "Phuket Has Been Good to Us" Foundation is a long name for a long-term project. By investing in English language education, the foundation hopes to keep Phuket's Thais in control of their own destiny by preparing them for a global island.

