

Every child loves a book

By Aparna Raut Desai

Pics: Tanisa Bunyasiwa

THAT THE ECONOMY on Phuket is one greatly dependent on tourism is no secret. The industry drives the island, from development to facilities, investment to opportunities. Tourism has created a myriad jobs for the locals.

Perhaps one of the biggest impediments for the locals in their prospects for employment in the tourism industry, is the lack of English language skills.

While languages like Japanese and Russian are gaining importance with the advent of tourists from these countries, English remains the lingua franca for tourism in the region.

Without a doubt, the few Thais with a higher standard of communication in English have a distinct advantage over others, and have little difficulty in snapping up the most coveted industry jobs.

The future is likely to be similar, those with lesser communication skills will find it hard to compete with those proficient in English.

"Phuket Has Been Good To Us Foundation" has been committed to bridging this ever-widening gap, by striving to provide those children who would, in normal circumstances, have little or no exposure to the English language, with just that.

"Phuket Has Been Good To Us Foundation" was launched as an educational charity little more than a year ago by long time Phuket resident, Tom McNamara.

The Foundation funds and delivers a high quality, interactive English language programme in government schools.

The aim is to create the opportunity for the underprivileged children of Phuket to learn English and give them greater prospects for their future. Its ultimate aim is to run the programme in all sixty-five of the island's government-run schools.

The Foundation has made remarkable progress in such a short time, having brought about a 17% increase in the children's English scores in the first year.

The *Phuket Post* met with Kate Cope, Director of Education for the foundation. "We are delighted with this progress," Kate told us. "It's absolutely crucial that these children receive all the support they can get, so they may look forward to a secure future."



Phuket's Vice Governor, Khun Smith Palawatvichai inaugurates Kamala School's new library

"A lot of these children come from families that are struggling to make their ends meet, they have no means of investing in their children's future. Some of them are orphans, being cared for by the schools' programmes. Once they reach the end of their schooling period, it's imperative that these children leave equipped with skills that will guarantee jobs and a future.

"Otherwise, we are likely to face a situation that is rampant in growing cities the world over," she warns, "young adults with no prospects having to leave their home base, desperation and unemployment leading to rising crime levels and suicide rates.

"So it's important that these underprivileged children are given the opportunity to cultivate the skills they need to eventually compete with the children from more prosperous backgrounds, whose families can afford to provide them with a higher grade of education and more exposure to a wide variety of skills."

In May of this year, after receiving an injection of funding from donations, "Phuket Has Been Good To Us" program expanded into its second school, Rachaprachanoukhror in Kamala, which is supported by the King's Foundation.

And as the latest achievement in their continued efforts to provide these children with quality education and exposure, the foundation has now managed to secure



The children at Kamala School love the books in their new library



The Vice Governor looks on as Kate Cope shows him some of the learning aids used at the school.

a truly phenomenal number of 800 English language books that will now be a part of the Kamala School library.

It all started when in February of this year, Tom McNamara was visited by old friends Ali Cabral and his brothers.

He introduced the Cabral brothers to the children and staff in the Foundation's English programme

at Kalim School, where the brothers fell in love with the children, and were so inspired by the Foundation's educational program, that they resolved that on their return home they would begin a book drive to bring US\$10,000 worth of English books to Phuket to enrich the children's lives.

The book drive, known as "Books4Phuket" - <http://www.books4phuket.com> began with a fund-raising event called "Songs 4 Phuket: An Afternoon of Opera, String Quartets, and Beer," at a famous New York restaurant in May.

It was followed up soon after by an alliance with Simon and Schuster publishers, who were



A view of a section of the new library from the Books4Phuket drive

so impressed by what the brothers were doing, that they decided to donate a significant number of books to create libraries for Books4Phuket.

Simon & Schuster, Inc, founded in New York in 1924, is one of the four largest English-language publishers in the world alongside Random House, Doubleday, and Harper Collins. Along with this came the support of Activair/Sea, in the form of free shipping of the books to Phuket.

Jennifer Nicholson (first from left in photo at the top of page), senior analyst at Simon Schuster volunteered to come to Thailand to set up the libraries for the books, alongside Kate.

COMMUNITY

a book

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Kate, overwhelmed by the generosity of the people of New York, said: "I'm very excited at the book collection activities. The children in Baan Kalim School already love the few books that we have in the classroom."

The *Phuket Post* itself, was delighted and honoured to be informed of our association with this initiative.

Our readers and supporters will be thrilled to know that the donation of Baht 16,000 collected at the charity raffle at the Post's 50th Issue celebration party, since handed over to the foundation, has gone into the purchase of smart new shelves and desks for the library, which will



books in

A view of a section of the new library housing books collected as a result of the Books4Phuket drive

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host the collection of new books.

"The libraries will make a huge difference in Baan Kalim School and Kamala School that we have expanded into," says a delighted Kate. "Kamala School has 750 students. This is an opportunity of a life-time for these children and with continued support from local and international donations we hope that this program will become a major addition to the Thai educational system and the future of Thailand."

For more information or inquiries on how to support the foundation, contact Kate Cope Tel: 076-341 932 or visit www.phukethasbeen-goodthous.org