Antipodeans Abroad expedition to Northern Thailand and Laos over January 2015

Over the January holidays 39 Year 11 and 12 students, along with six staff headed to Northern Thailand and Laos as part of the College’s social justice immersion program. The members were divided into three groups and travelled separated throughout their 19 days of travel. However the teams worked on a common community service project of renovating one large building containing four classrooms for the Pak Xeng High school located 60km outside of Luang Prabang, Laos.

Classrooms in Jan 2014

Classrooms in January 2015 – not yet finished

Prior to us sending over the much needed $4,000 to renovate the classrooms the walls were made of wood. See picture of before and after.

The project involved carrying many 60kg of cement along with sifting sand and collecting water from the river which took 80 students in a water line to retrieve. Then came the many lessons on how to mix the cement, sand and water in the correct quantities to render the exterior walls of the newly bricked classrooms. Thankfully we had a qualified renderer on hand to repair our inexperienced work.

As well as providing the much needed labour to render the walls and help with the instillation of the ceilings, the girls taught English to primary school students, an experience they will never forget.
As students and teachers we were so grateful for what we have in Australia. This one classroom contained 78 students, and each classroom I looked into contained a similar amount of students with basic writing utensils and exercise books. A stark contrast to what we have at Brigidine.

The three groups also were fortunate to donate all the required textbooks for years 10, 11 and 12 and English and Maths textbooks for all of Year 10. A big thankyou must go out to those members of the wider Brigidine community that donated to the appeal of ‘Sponsor a child a Textbook Pack for Christmas’.

However the new experienced did not stop there. Our accommodation was in homestays where the Red group was extremely fortunate to stay in a village who had only one a small university group stay with them 3 years earlier. So out arrival to the village was new for all of us and for the Khmu villagers. We stayed a wonderful 6 days in this community where we learnt local customs such as basket weaving lessons, looming scarfs and a local cooking lesson.

Jo Baker  for the Brigidine Antipodeans Abroad Immersion program