

ONF

Ono Niha Foundation

Newsletter – September 2017



Apologies for the recent silence – not because there is no progress.....!

My wife Jillian has been struggling with Ross River Fever this year, so our usual two-month stay in Nias will shrink to myself visiting for about two weeks in late September/early October. I will be travelling with my sister Tania who came with us last year.

Last year we met Olly, an Indonesian lady from Java who is passionate to help the poor communities in South Nias. She and Matt have very similar ideas on how to do this, and we excitedly look forward to agreeing how we can work together.

In the meantime, things have not been standing still for the ONF.

Local employment

Regular coconut oil orders from Lush, and better coconut harvests made factory operation easier and more profitable this year compared with last year. This provided fairly regular employment for Matt's team at Ono Niha Oil.

We continually look for additional uses for the coconut by-products. One of Olly's team trained several local women to make doormats from the fibrous husk of the coconut. Matt will use several samples to determine the demand and potential sale price, and increase production if there is a solid business case. Lush are eager for ONF to produce other by-products from the husk fibre. Combined, these may justify low-level mechanisation for fibre manufacture.

Lush are also eager for Matt to supply cleaned coconut shell halves. We are investigating ways of cutting and preparing the shell to meet Lush requirements. Matt's initial trials suggest that some machines will be required



Preparing the coconut fibre to make doormats using the frames leaning against the house (left)



Trying to cut shells to make neat halves for Lush

because the shell is quite hard. We aim to develop suitable procedures during my visit, then we can estimate the sale price, which Lush can hopefully find attractive.

If successful, these businesses will provide additional local employment, and the profits will help fund the ONF's community development programs.

Education

The scholarships program is going well. Several students have either stopped going to school, moved elsewhere, or the family income has increased sufficiently that sponsorship is no longer required. We currently have about 15 students sponsored, but have another seven needy students on the books waiting for sponsorship.

English classes for the primary and secondary students continue twice-weekly in the ONF community centre.

Olly organises several national and international educators to run training programs in Nias at least once a year. The educators ran a small training course in the ONF community centre in June, which was very well received. Olly and Matt plan to run regular training courses at the centre from now on, hopefully every six months.

Disabilities

About eight children with disabilities, with their parents/carers, continue to meet 1-2 times per week with Mimi at the community centre. Mimi also takes them to a community pool in the nearby town every 2-4 weeks for aqua therapy and lots of fun. ONF pays the transportation and pool costs.

The children were very fortunate to have several specialists visit last year, and their expertise made a significant difference for a number of them. We have not managed to organise similar visits this year. We will explore options for ONF to fund occupational therapists from Sumatra to visit the centre, and at the same time provide training for Mimi.

I will be taking another specialised wheelchair with me in September, as well as leg and arm braces donated by Laura Drysdale from Tasmania. These braces would really help several of the children with cerebral palsy, but we will need specialists to help fit these braces.

Berkat has severe osteogenesis imperfecta, which significantly reduces bone growth and strength. He had his third 6 month checkup and injections in Medan in May to strengthen his bones. He is walking a lot better



English classes in the centre



Teacher training in the ONF community centre



Berkat at the Hospital in Medan



Berkat with his mum after his treatment – walking!

now, but still has to be very careful to avoid bumps and falls.

On a sadder note, Iwan continues to “find” struggling children. For example, Ricar is 4 years old. He had fever twice before his first birthday. He can now walk but has bad leg pains and falls over every day. Alden is 2 years old. He had 13 bouts of fever and now he cannot sit, hold anything or speak. We will try to help them where we can.

During our visit last year, we met Wendi, a very sick 12-year-old boy who fell badly several years ago and was struggling to eat. We were very saddened to hear that he died late last year. I have no doubt he would still be alive today if he had access to Australian medical care. We are so “lucky” in Australia.

Community health

Iwan continues to run dental hygiene clinics about 2 days per week. He charges \$1 for those who can afford it, but it is free for those who cannot. These funds help support Iwan’s salary and operating costs. Some of the equipment that has served us so well is starting to fade. We purchased a replacement ultrasonic scaler for Iwan so the hygiene clinics could continue.

I am sure the locals will miss the dental clinics that Jill ran every year. However, Pinta finished her dental nurse degree this year. She has been helping Jill in previous years and we will explore whether she can continue the dental clinics in Jill’s absence. This may be a tall ask for her, however it will be an answer to Jill’s dream of training locals to take over.

Tania has been busy making reusable sanitary pads with a “Days for Girls” (<https://www.daysforgirls.org>) group in Geelong. She will take about 100 kits and, with help from Olly and Mimi, will distribute these to needy girls. She will also investigate whether they can be produced locally, but the correct raw materials and production quality will be important.

By the way, Iwan continues to “mend” following his bad accident in 2015. He is now able to walk without crutches, but still needs them for stairs. Recent x-rays indicated that the breaks in the shin bones in both his legs have healed. His thigh bone continues to “grow” but is still not mended because of the very bad break. He is very thankful for his on-going healing.

HWP

There have been no volunteer visits since our stay in August-September last year.



Wendi receiving intravenous drip and high energy food supplements in 2016



Pinta doing scale and cleans in 2016. Hopefully she will have the skills and confidence to do full dental clinics.

Other

Matt continues to show his community passion! His factory team replaced the walls, and transformed the mud floor to concrete, for the family of two of our sponsor students. Matt donated half the cost and provided a loan to the father for the remainder. He gave the father a job in the oil factory, the mother is learning how to make doormats, and the children help around the factory on Saturday when needed. Matt is a strong example of compassion at work, and we learn lots from him.



Matt and his team re-cladding and installing a concrete floor in the home of two of the scholarships students



The finished product – a big difference for the family



Peter Hofman

Project manager