

THAILAND

Managing Schools for the Disabled and Cooperation with Social Resource in the Community in Thailand

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1. Background of Special Education Programs in Thailand

Thailand, one of five Southeast Asian countries, covers an area of approximately 200,234 square miles with a population of 62,88,706. Education is compulsory for all children from grade 1 through 9. Education for children with all types of disabilities has been provided to a limited number of students since 1941 and today 13,495 disabled Thai children are receiving educational services provided by 43 special education schools located throughout the Kingdom. Among these are 2 schools for the visually impaired, 20 schools for the hearing impaired, 19 schools for children and young adults with intellectual disabilities and 2 schools for persons with physical and health related disabilities. There are also 76 special education centers throughout the country with early intervention programs whose goal is to integrate disabled children into mainstream schools where possible. Residential facilities for rural disabled children for whom the distance from home to the facility represents an obstacle also exist.

Out of a total of 421,147 disabled Thai children attending school, 223,211 are enrolled in mainstream schools with the remainder attending schools geared to their own particular disability.

2. Cooperation between management of schools for the disabled, the community and government

(1) Government

On the national level the Ministry of Education oversees all schools in Thailand both public and private as well as schools for the disabled.

(2) School Boards

On a local level, every school district has a school board which is comprised of district government representatives, parents, teachers, Buddhist Monks, alumni, and advisors. As a footnote, the rights of private citizens to participate and have a voice in their local schools was ensured by the enactment of the National Education and School Act of 1999.

a. Parents and Teachers

The school board meets at least twice a year and provides management an opportunity hear feedback on the quality of educational programs, discuss and approve curriculum and review programs relating to the welfare of students. Parents are free to voice concerns over any matter relating

to the schools their children attend. Teachers give valuable input as to the relevance and quality of textbooks, what needs they might have for additional teaching materials and equipment and offer suggestions based on personal experience on ways to improve the quality of educational services their schools provide.

b. District Representatives

Local district representatives funnel information from the MOE to local schools. At meetings the agenda includes the coordination of health services to students such as vaccinations, yearly physical check-ups and the provision of emergency dental care,

In a specific example where pro-active management of the part of schools for the disabled leads to direct benefits for students, when budgetary limitations cut funding for the provision of batteries for hearing aids management of schools for the deaf communicated their need to the National Lottery Commission. As a result of this, the proceeds of one lottery per year are used to buy hearing aid batteries which are then distributed to deaf students on a first come first serve basis.

c. Buddhist Monks

Buddhist Monks come to schools one day a week to speak about Buddhist doctrine and students frequently go to Temples. In this reciprocal relationship, students give rice and food to monks on festival days and students frequently visit the Temples to learn about Buddhist customs, painting and other traditional Thai arts and crafts. On Mothers' Day, Monks go to schools to teach students about childbirth.

(3) Cooperation between schools for children with special needs and social resources (community based service providers, public and private sector donors and other interested individuals)

In the most successfully run schools for the disabled, raising funds to supplement gaps in yearly governmental allowances is done through both cooperation with social resources and creating fund-raising activities throughout the year. It's axiomatic that funds never go looking for schools and that when budgetary restrictions threaten the continuance of existing programs or hamper the creation of new ones, their management must take a pro-active role in seeking viable funding alternatives

(4) Fundraising Events

To supplement shortfalls schools hold fairs on a yearly basis. Television and radio advertising is donated by station owners and print media donate space in newspapers and other publications. The school rents booths to vendors who sell products and donate proceeds to the schools. Another result of the cooperation between schools and community in this once a year event, is that optometrists come to the fair, give eye examinations and distribute glasses free of charge to disabled students.

Management sometimes holds drawings when lacking funds for the purchase of high ticket items. When a new van was needed by a school for the deaf in Bangkok, management sold raffle tickets to

members of the community, to businesses and alumni, and from the proceeds bought a much needed new van for the school.

(5) Local Benevolent Organizations

When funding was cut for distribution of hearing aids, school management sent proposals to various organizations. Rotary of Thailand saw the importance of this and donates the funds to provide BTE hearing aids to students.

Schools for the blind and physically disabled also benefit directly from contacts with local charitable organizations.

(6) Alumni and Alumni Association

As some alumni have been successful in life they often make valuable financial contributions to the schools for the disabled they themselves attended. The alumni association provides leadership training, counseling and helps develop employment opportunities for graduate students. In addition, they visit schools often, attend social events, and provide life skills mentoring.

(7) Celebrities

The popularity of nationally known celebrities puts them in a unique position to help raise funds for causes such as schools for the disabled. Because of Buddhist beliefs, this custom has become so popular that during special holidays such as Christmas, Buddhist Lent and New Years it is almost impossible to find an orphanage or home for the physically handicapped that does not have a fund raising event going on headed by a well known celebrity.

(8) International Disability Related NGOs

As an example of the great potential benefit deriving from close cooperation between schools for the disabled and all available social resources, in Thailand, where once sign language served as the exclusive medium of instruction in all schools for the hearing impaired, today, the total communication approach with an ever increasing component of oral functionality, is being integrated into the curriculum due to cooperative efforts between publicly run schools and national and international donors.

Citing a few specific examples should give an idea of the positive benefits where cooperation between schools for the disabled and social resources has resulted in a direct improvement in the quality of lives of disabled students.

Through the generosity and vision of JICA special rooms for speech therapy have been created and equipped in many schools for the deaf throughout the country.

In addition, JICA has, for the previous three years, provided the resources to support junior volunteers (majors in Speech Pathology) who come to Thailand to train teachers in techniques for Speech Training on an ongoing basis. They remain for up to three years in both an active and advisory capacity. The same organization also sponsors senior volunteers who work at schools for the deaf teaching clay modeling, ceramics and arts and crafts.

Rotary Club Japan (Tokyo Kokobunji) in cooperation with Rotary Thailand (Bangkapi) fund a program that selects two Thai teachers of the deaf every year to travel to Japan where they receive an intensive one month course in Speech Training. This valuable program has been ongoing for the last 15 years and provides training difficult to obtain within the country.

Japan based NPO Asia Mind funds a program that allows Japanese experts in Speech Pathology to conduct once yearly seminars in Speech Training in Bangkok. The Thai government covers all of the expenses for 40 Thai teachers of the deaf to attend. These teachers also learn to do audiological testing and fit hearing aids.

The Post Office Foundation of Japan provides valuable support as well.

Student Exchange programs for up to 6 deaf students and two teachers have been ongoing for the last ten years as a result of personal cooperation between management of schools for the deaf in Thailand and management of NPOs in Japan. These programs provide deaf students from Japan and Thailand the opportunity to learn second sign languages, study in a foreign country, experience different cultures and make new deaf friends.

In another example of disabled students benefiting from cooperation between school management and NPOs, a project jointly funded by Rotary Lumpini of Thailand and Rotary Singapore is providing hearing aids free of charge to approximately 100 hard of hearing students.

Every year for the past ten Gallaudet University of Washington D.C. has sent graduate students to schools for the hearing impaired to do their practicum as well as leadership training in schools for the deaf in and around Bangkok. Gallaudet also sends deaf graduate students who teach American Sign Language and written English for three month periods every year.

(9) Local Community Service Providers

(10) Vocational Training

Schools for the disabled cooperate with vocational training centers for sense intact / able bodied students where disabled students can learn employment skills.

Ratchamonkun Pranakorn Technological Institute, a vocational training facility provides training free of charge to disabled students who are able to study a wide variety of occupational skills courses including fashion design, batik, tie-dying, silk screen, flower arrangement, computer skills, jewelry making, package design, dressmaking, picture framing, and stained glass making.

Don Bosco School teaches disabled students computer based printing skills one day a week.

Salapatchan Nakorn Luang College teaches deaf students hair dressing, confectionary, pastry making and auto body repair.

(11) Health Insurance

In addition to the National Health Care Plan some schools for the disabled are able to provide private medical care through health insurance schemes with for students with minimal premium costs. These plans cover emergency room treatment as well as other services.

3. Conclusion

Generally speaking it can be said that providing quality educational services to disabled students requires more peripheral support than for the education of able bodied students. Fortunately, there are many organizations and programs available able to lend support in the form of technical, financial and human resources. In many, but unfortunately, not all instances, the fault of resource deficits for the expansion of programs for students of schools for the disabled lies more with inertia on the part of management as opposed to a real lack of available resources which often can be found with persistence.

<Questions and Answers after Country Report>

Q.1

Prejudices or Cultural barriers which impede collaboration ?

A.1

Buddhists believe in supporting and helping children with special needs

Q.2

Are the programs for hearing impaired population only?

A.2

Programs are also for other children with special needs.

Q.3

Monks and their contribution in teaching children with Special Needs ?

A.3

The teaching is only conducted during Mothers Day

The focus of the teaching is on Child-birth: Note that the aim of the teaching is to make the children aware of the sufferings that their mothers had to go through to give them life.

They wish to improve the insight of deaf children on human life.

The whole concept is anchored on the very essence of Buddhists' idea on human development. Thus they get support from the monks in the temples.