

BALI 2011 (HANKIES AT THE READY)

Following, our three previous successful trips to Bali little did we expect that this years trip would give us some of our most difficult moments to date. As well as meeting old friends, visiting Bali Kids and hearing about the progress that had been made by the people we had assisted in previous years. We were to meet a father of six, a fourteen year old girl and a four year old boy whose stories were going to stretch our emotions to breaking point. More about this later, first lets bring you up to date with this years fund raising.

We leave for Bali with with just over £5,000 but by the time our trip has finished this will have increased to £5,600 thanks to the generosity of some of our fellow holiday makers. This year's figure is considerably more than we have raised in the past and this is in no small part due to the sterling efforts of the staff of Careers Scotland in Kilmarnock who, in around six months, raised over £3,000. If you helped in any way to boost our overall figure we would like to thank you for your generosity. Your contribution whatever the size will make a difference to somone's life.

Although the cost of living on Bali is not high in comparison to Scotland the downturn in the global economy means that the pound has dropped in value by around one third since our first visit in 2008. However, we still have 75,000,000 rupiah to distribute which is a not an insignificant sum. We plan to use some of this money to try and fund something that will produce long term benefits for as many people as possible.

After a few days to recuperate from the long journey from Scotland we contact Brenton, the Director of Bali Kids, and arrange for him to visit us . We hope he can bring us up to date on the current situation with the orphanage and also give us first hand information about the family we have been supporting in Northern Bali. When Brenton visits he has nothing but good news. The family in the north are now in a situation that they are more or less self sufficient following the purchase of the cows and pigs last year. They now have 12 piglets which they will be able to sell to raise money for food. The funding we left last year will also pay for the children's school fees for this year and we agree that going forward the charity's contribution would only be for school fees, if required.

With regard to Bali Kids we are informed that the new Orphanage and Care Centre building is now under construction and will be ready by March 2012. The new building will provide more orphanage spaces and a self contained medical and dental units. The funding for the building came from Australia, Holland and a very successful fund raising event on Bali. The difference it will make to the work of Bali Kids will undoubtedly further improve it's standing on the island. Before leaving Brenton tells us about a family in the Tabanan area of the island which he would like to support but does not have the funds. We arrange to visit the family with him to hear their story and to consider giving them some support.

When Brenton arrived he was not alone. He is accompanied by an English couple who had seen the Bali Kids UK website and were interested in it's work. They had contacted Brenton with a view to possibly supporting the orphanage through the U.K. charity. This couple were not the only surprise acquaintances we made.

On our first night we were introduced to Barry and Joyce Walsha husband and wife dental team from Australia. From Australia that is, in as much as they now live there. Barry is Irish and Joyce is Dutch. Both qualified dentists they visit Bali regularly to provide peripatetic dental services for the Care Centre. They were staying in our hotel and although leaving early the next day were keen to thank us personally for the dental equipment the charity purchased in 2010.

It is two days after our first meeting with Brenton and we are waiting to be picked up at the hotel. We are off to buy raincoats for the orphanage children. Why raincoats you may ask? Is Bali not a tropical paradise? Well, although Bali is near the equator it has a rainy season which starts in November and lasts until early January. Having experienced a couple of showers on our visits to Bali be assured that this is real rain not the slight dampness which passes for rain in Scotland.

Two bicycles are also on our shopping list. They will allow two new children at the orphanage to get to school more easily. There are no parents with people carriers here. Children either cycle or have to walk to the school which tends not to be just round the corner. After shopping we will head to Tabanan to visit the family, but first we will stop in at the care centre and orphanage to drop off our purchases.



At the care centre we are introduced to Komang. His mother and father are dead and he was in the care of his grand parents until four days previously when he came to the care centre. Komang is four years of age. Komang has Tuberculosis. Komang is HIV positive. Komang is malnourished Komang weighs nine kilos. Komang is too weak to walk. Komangs eyes look at you but there is no sparkle in these eyes just a blank stare into the distance. Komang just sits his head hanging to one side. If he speaks it is to ask to go home.



It is very difficult to put into words the effect a sight like this has on you. All I can say is that you will have seen many reports, news items and major charity updates about malnourished children but nothing prepares you for seeing it face to face. It really is much worse than you can ever imagine. On the positive side for Komang he is now receiving care and medication twenty four hours a day and hopefully he will make progress.

We leave Komang and the other sick children behind and head for Tabanan. The family we are going to see live in a family compound. The compound is home to several branches of the same family. Each family has its own house built around a central courtyard and they have shared cooking facilities. The key family member Brenton wants us to help is a fourteen year old school girl. On the half hour journey to the village he tells us why she and her family need help.

Widi Asih's father had one asset. He owned a half share in a cow. His intention was to sell the cow and to use some of the funds to pay for his daughter's school fees. However, the school fees became due before the cow could be sold. To ensure that his daughter could attend school the man borrowed money to pay the fees. He was obviously keen to see that his daughter was educated. A short time after getting the loan and paying the fees the cow died. This meant the man had no means with which to repay the loan. He was obviously very worried about what he could do. The pressure obviously became too much and early one morning when Widi went to the kitchen she discovered her father's body. He had taken his own life.



This had taken place only two or three weeks before we arrived. Once again we were going through the emotional ringer. The story in itself was very sad but now we were also going to be faced with a family trying to come to terms with the loss of a father. Some moral support was at hand however. Brenton had only just finished the story when our car was brought to halt by a large procession. Lead by a traditional Balinese orchestra a parade of happy, smiling and brightly clothed men, women and children started to make their way past our car. In the middle of the procession there was an ornately decorated wooden tower supported on a bamboo framework by around a dozen men. The platform in the centre of the tower contained a body. The procession was heading to the local temple for a cremation ceremony. There

was not a sad face in sight. This was a celebration of a life lived and of the Hindu belief in reincarnation. As we moved off the upcoming meeting with the family began to feel less difficult.

We arrive in Tabanan and are greeted by members of the extended family and escorted to through the compound to the passing other family members and homes on the way to the family's house. We are introduced to the family. Our immediate impression is that the mother is still coming to terms with the loss of her husband. The 14 year old Wayan Widi Asih is a little reserved but that is hardly surprising given the circumstances. We discuss through interpreters the family's predicament. The underlying issue for the family is that there are no male heirs. In Bali all estates are given to the surviving male family member. At present the family have a home in the compound but it is possible that they could be evicted by another family member in the future. The charity in conjunction with Brenton are unwilling to undertake the major remedial works that need done to the family home because of this. It should, however, be possible to improve their living conditions somewhat.



We arrange for new beds and bedding to be provided once the house has been made properly watertight and out of bounds to the local rats. Once this has been done the family will have a clean and dry environment to live in. We also agree to fund the daughters education for this year. Shortly before we left the daughter very proudly showed us a large photo of her late father. This was obviously a prized possession for a family which had very little.



On the journey back to the hotel we reflect on the living conditions of the family. It is sobering to think that these conditions are the norm for many Balinese. And yet you cannot but marvel at their constant cheerfulness and helpfulness. In the developed world we could learn a lot from the Balinese.

Poor housing conditions were also to play a part in our next charitable endeavour. Once we had assessed the cash we had available we felt that we could take a slightly different approach to spending the charity's funds. We asked the staff at Melia Bali to identify a project which would not normally be undertaken but would make a big difference to the people concerned. This request was to result in the most difficult meeting we had ever had on the island.

The project that was proposed to us was to help one of the hotel gardeners. He earns \$150 a month and has six children ranging in age from eighteen to three. Whilst the cost of living in Bali is relatively cheap he is unable to pay for his children's education. We arrange to meet Bapak Sadra with Wetny from the hotel's HR department. Wetny explains that we want to help pay for his children's education and improve his living conditions. Imagine our surprise when he point blank refuses our help. The man's pride was almost touchable.

It appears that he had had some assistance before. That as far as he was concerned was as much as any family could expect he would take no more. He then enquired about our jobs and family and explained to us that we should keep our money and use it to support our children and grandchildren. At this point speechless does not do the situation justice. Speechlessness brought about by the pride, humility and concern for others from a man who barely earns enough to feed his family.

Bapak Sadra deserves help even if he is unwilling to take it. How do we talk him round? It turns out it is all in the presentation. We ask Wetny to explain again what we are trying to do and that the money we have is not our money but is coming from our charity. This appears to make all the difference and after a rather fraught 30 minutes we reach an agreement. We will visit his home the following day to meet his wife and children. The charity will pay the family's outstanding school fees and will look at doing some much needed home improvements.

Another day another trip. We are off to the gardener's family today. He stays quite near the hotel for him it is a 45 minute bicycle ride each morning. However, we are not going directly to the house we are going to visit the children's schools on the way. Because of their ages this means stopping at four different schools in the Nusa Dua area. Anyone turning up at a Balinese school with a camera is in for a treat. The children need no persuading to smile, pose and jostle to be included in the picture. At one point we have 200 primary children racing across a dusty playground to get into the group photo . The photographer with us was eventually able to take pictures once the dust had settled and the coughing had stopped. These children are so much fun to be around.



After the schools, we make our way the short distance to Bapak Sadra's home. We travel through an area of large modern villas, very Mediterranean in colour and obviously meant for the tourist or ex pat market. Turning left we leave the tarmac road and the villas and head off road for about half a mile to a collection of breeze block homes. The conditions are very similar to the compound in Tabanan. We look round the three room house. The mother and the five girls sleep in one room the father in another and the 17 year old son in another.

The sons room contains a single bed, a filthy mattress, a table , a few clothes, two posters and a hook for his school bag. Apart from that it is bare breeze block and concrete. The other rooms are no better. The family have a kitchen area away from the house. This has a dirt floor an open fire and two or three pots. The toilet consists, three concrete walls, a frame for a door and a hole. The toilet area also seems to double up as a place to wash clothes.



Fortunately, the charity is in a position to improve this family's conditions. We agree that funds will be available to lay a concrete floor in the kitchen and to provide new cooking utensils and storage. The toilet will also be improved as far as is possible given the remoteness of the location. The family will also be given advice on the need for cleanliness in and around the kitchen and toilet. Another interesting visit over we head back to our hotel.



We have one last trip before we leave. No trip to Bali would be complete without visiting the local supermarket to get supplies for Bali Kids. We are joined on our trip by Agung a local driver and Brenton from Bali Kids. Brenton arrives with a list. First stop printer cartridges for the care centre and USB sticks for three of the older children. Brenton picks up one print cartridge and three USB sticks. We put another two cartridges and the only USB stick left on the shelf into the basket. Then we get a microwave oven, some cork notice boards, distilled water for the iron and Brenton wants tins of Pediaisure. Pediaisure is an expensive powdered milk product which is given to sick and malnourished children to assist in their recovery. Brenton wanted two tins but we pack the five we can see into the trolley. We are then stopped in our tracks by an idiosyncrasy of language. Brenton tells us he needs to buy “thongs” for all the children. We were surprised as most of the children are very young. On enquiring we learn that these are Australian thongs or as we would know them flip flops. Panic over we head to the shoe aisle. We are nearly finished only some fruit to buy. Have you ever spent twenty minutes buying oranges? We have. Brenton weighs every orange by hand if they are not heavy and full of juice they go back on the shelf. Eventually we have the required quantity of heavy oranges and we head to the tills with three trolleys full of supplies. Once the beeping has stopped the final bill is £300 of which nearly £100 is for the five tins of Pediaisure.



Leaving the supermarket we head to Anak Anak Bali to drop off the supplies and then we go to the Care Centre. Before going to the Care Centre we travel the short distance to the site of the new orphanage and Care Centre which is in the process of construction and due for completion in March 2012. This is going to be a fantastic purpose built facility which will benefit many of the poor children of Bali. In discussion we discover that some funding is still required so we agree to pay for the fitting out of the kitchen area in the new building.

It is over a week since we had last visited the Care Centre and the difference in Komang is amazing. He can now walk and whilst his face still has a haunted look we can see progress. Before we leave we agree with Brenton what other funds we can make available. Cases like Komang's, where children are mistreated or bullied are not uncommon on Bali. Bali Kids has a booklet about this subject ready to be printed but no funding to pay for the printing. The charity has enough funds left to pay for the printing of 5,000 booklets and we are happy to support this endeavour.

It is now time to leave the children for another year. As we prepare to leave Shona tells Brenton that she would have loved to have seen Komang smile. Brenton tells her that that is unlikely for some time yet. He has hardly finished speaking when Komang appears at the door waves weakly and then a faint smile comes across his face. This proves to be one emotional scene too far and as we leave in the car there is a steady stream of wet paper hankies emanating from Shona's direction.



Another successful and rewarding trip over we assess what the charity has been able to do. Bali Kids UK is currently supporting the education of thirteen children. It has paid for the publication of a booklet about child abuse and bullying. It is paying for the fitting out of the large kitchen in the new Bali Kids Orphanage and Care Centre and we are funding living condition improvements for two families.

We would like to dedicate our work this year to the memory of Kenny Mellor, a local man, who died earlier this year. Without his original small act of generosity, four years ago, none of the work we have undertaken would have happened.



The children of Bali thank you



www.balikids.org.uk