



Children enjoying some picture books. Books have been bought with money raised, and many have also been donated.

GRASSROOTS AMBASSADOR >>> Japanese Individuals Contributing Worldwide

A Sparkling Joy for Little Bookworms in Thailand



A blind Japanese woman has started a foundation that runs libraries and childhood literacy centers in rural Thailand. The projects promote the joy of reading and learning among children and adults, regardless of whether or not they have any disabilities.

The Bookworm Foundation (BWF), which runs libraries and childhood literacy centers in the Phrao District of Chiang Mai Province in north Thailand, is an organization that was founded in 2010 by HORIUCHI Yoshimi. Horiuchi, having studied abroad at a university in Thailand, noticed the lack of libraries in rural areas and the high price of books. “It’s a bonus if you can help people through doing something you love,” says Horiuchi,

who continues to provide people in rural areas with enjoyment from reading and opportunities to learn through her work.

Horiuchi herself has been a bookworm since she was a child. As she was blind, her parents and others around her read books aloud to her, and that is how she became immersed in the world of stories. While studying abroad at a high school in the United States, she became close to someone from

Thailand, and met refugees and other classmates who had been abused and had become disabled when they were young. It was from meeting those people that she became aware of the very real problems of poverty and inequality. That encounter while studying abroad was the starting point that inspired Horiuchi to help others internationally, saying, “Everyone has been born into this world, so I want to make it a place for all people.”

The Rang Mai Library run by BWF in Thailand has about 8,000 books, 400 DVDs, and offers free internet. Children as well as adults use the library. One of the library users has told Horiuchi that reading inspirational memoirs and biographies at the library helped carry her through her most trying time, saying “It really helped me, because I realized it wasn’t just me having a difficult time,” she said.

A total of about 20 children are educated at two childhood literacy centers for ethnic minorities living in northern Thailand. Basic literacy is taught and incorporated into the play of the children, whose native language is not Thai. Seven years after starting the center, Horiuchi delights in saying, “The first children to come into the center are now already lower secondary school students. Seeing the children who had once been wearing diapers now being able to read and write English as well as Thai, not to mention

fitting well into school, makes me feel glad I did this.”

Wanting to reach out to children in Thailand and the world with disabilities like her own, Horiuchi has been working since 2018 on a creative picture book project incorporating larger fonts, braille and tactile illustrations into books that can be enjoyed by children, both with or without disabilities. The next goal for Horiuchi is to keep BWF as an independent organization in Thailand, explaining, “I have to work so that local people think of the BWF libraries and childhood literacy centers as something of their own, not some organization that has been created by a blind Japanese woman, but as a place where Thai people are at the center.”

Horiuchi, who has gone out into the communities, always trying to approach those most in need, goes on to say, “Society is unfair, but there are opportunities out there to be had, so it’s important



Horiuchi continues to visit and deliver books to children who can’t go to school because of their disabilities, also reading them the books.

to create an environment where people are empowered to grasp those opportunities.” She continues, “I want to bridge the divide between the services provided to society and the marginalized people who have been forgotten by these services.” With those thoughts and her persistent efforts, she is working to achieve a world where no one is left behind, as set out by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). *



HORIUCHI Yoshimi

Born in 1983 in Kochi Prefecture, Japan. After graduating from university, she worked for a private company, then learned about what was needed to bring about social change from a program in India that cultivates social entrepreneurs. She moved to Thailand in 2010, where she founded the Always Reading Caravan Association (ARC), the forerunner to BWF.

The Rang Mai Library containing a lot of books and DVDs. According to Horiuchi, children make friends with other bookworms through the library.



“Children are so innocent. When I bring them a book, they enjoy it so much,” says Horiuchi. There are also many regular visitors to the library.

