

It's marvellous what a difference A TEACHER makes...



>>Matthew & Nathan

I have read countless times that the main reason missionary families return home early is concern about their children's education. As the leader of an organisation that makes known the needs of mission agencies, I was aware that there is a wide variety of mission agencies, both generalist and specialist (Bible translation, medical mission, radio ministry, etc), but all agencies need teachers. So I decided that I would do a simple count of the teacher needs of the 30 agencies that we partner with.

456

That's right — four hundred and fifty six!

Primary, secondary and "other" (special needs, curriculum development, etc). In large schools, small schools and in individual families. Paid and unpaid. Long term and short term. On all continents. Many wore a label: "Urgent". One school, in Chiang Mai, Thailand, has let potential applicant families know that they can't take any more students until they have more teachers.

What does this mean to the families who feel that God is calling them and yet know that they have to count the cost before they undertake the enterprise? What if Mum (who is usually the one who ends up organising the educational needs of the kids) just isn't a teacher and the only option seems to be home schooling? (She may be a great artist, physiotherapist, nurse, mother, but *not* a teacher.) If the option of attending an international school *is* available, then they need to raise considerably more support (hard \$\$) every year.

Meet Jeff and Belinda.

Jeff: husband, dad, church planter, previously an electronics/software engineer

Belinda: wife, mum, home schooler, ministry partner, previously a physiotherapist

Family: Nathan, oldest son, 9 ½; older brother to Matt, 6 ½, and Rowan, 3 ½.

Location: Remote area of South Thailand

Organisation: OMF International

Jeff and Belinda and their boys are fairly representative of many missionary families. They joined OMF with 1 very young child and have added Matthew & Rowan since joining.

They investigated schooling options before leaving Australia and connected with their state Distance Education program, not knowing precisely where

they would be located or what educational facilities would be available.

They planned for home schooling for the primary years and boarding school for the secondary ones.

Belinda has taken on the role of teacher and although she gets good support from the Distance Education staff she keenly feels the lack of professional training and understanding. Jeff shared the teaching for the first three years, but eventually Belinda and Jeff felt their sons needed one of them to be more focussed on the home schooling.

Towards the end of their second term in Thailand the kids were a bit behind with some school units. Jeff and Belinda had discovered that they had two boys with vastly different learning styles and personal performance expectations. They had also discovered how difficult it was to be both "teacher" and "parent" to the same child, how hard it was to teach an Australian curriculum in a different cultural environment lacking the normal cultural cues that support education (songs, jokes, playground games), and how teaching had sapped their energy away from the ministry they knew they had come to Thailand for.

And by now Belinda knew how hard it was to have a preschooler who needed time and attention concurrently with the older two needing lessons. They were running out of emotional and physical energy!

At this point they received a great blessing. Her name was Caroline*.

Caroline was a teacher and she came to join them for 4 months to help with the home schooling. Jeff said "In just two months they went from being one month behind in their lessons to being one month ahead. She focused primarily on the kids' education and was able to do that without personal issues getting in the way. It was great having another adult who became part of our team – someone to talk to, pray with, bounce ideas off, share the ministry. She was never just 'the teacher'; she became a part of our team."

Belinda rejoiced to see the kids building a personal relationship with Caroline. "We had so much in common. It was great to have another Aussie around. Caroline even laughed at our Aussie jokes! She was an excellent Auntie to the boys and a good friend and team-mate for us. She could also communicate professionally with the Distance Education staff back in Australia and sort out issues that I couldn't. She knew how to put in place educational strategies that benefited the kids.

And I started to have more energy and time so I could get involved in ministry. Jeff and I were even able to have a little quality time together."

And the boys just loved having fun with her, doing different activities, having a different person to interact with – and she enjoyed it all too.

So Caroline has come ... and gone.
Hers was a short term commitment but greatly valued.

Nathan, Matt and Rowan are going to have a new face to get used to – a new Aunty - soon. Lisa is coming to join Jeff and Belinda and expand the team. Her role will be to help with home schooling although she is not a professionally trained teacher. This will still be a great help and the family are looking forward to her arrival and contribution.

Lisa came to visit them last year as part of a short term team from a Bible College and decided then that she would return for a longer period to help with home schooling. She will work with Belinda and the boys and has the advantage of not being "Mum", which will release Belinda to be more involved with Rowan and in ministry activities, especially with the local women. Jeff is looking forward to the synergy created by having another person on their team and the effect on the ministry.

Many other missionary families will know that Jeff and Belinda are greatly blessed to have this support, for most have to survive without it. However, this serves as an example of some of the difficulties of home schooling in a missionary environment and what a marvellous difference a teacher makes to a family like this. With the right support the primary years of a child's education could be provided without great difficulty and stress. Where there are special needs someone more objective than parents can help to identify and address them. Full-time support is great but even periodic support such as Caroline was able to provide, helps Mum and Dad to



>>Belinda & Matt

learn some new strategies and have some professional input - and not to feel quite so alone in the task.

Home schooling is only one of the ways missionary couples find to educate their kids. There are many other ways that teachers can contribute – through small local schools for clusters of families, by joining the staff of larger International Schools, by giving short term assistance to individual families, by bringing a specialist skill such as special education training or being a travelling home school consultant to an organisation.

Young teaching graduates might like to give a year after graduation to work with a mission agency and older teachers, who have experience and some long service leave due, could use that with a mission agency. There are needs on every continent and in every stream of education.

>FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please contact Second Wind Network info@secondwind.net.au or any mission agency which is of interest to you.

>READ CAROLINE'S STORY

"My Thai Diary"

www.secondwind.net.au/documents/My_Thai_Diary.pdf
or in the OMF International publication:
East Asia's Millions, April-June 2008, pg., www.omf.org

>AUTHOR

Barbara Fell, Joint CEO, Second Wind Network

If you could fill every teacher need you have what difference would it make to your organisation?

If we could fill every teaching position we have it would have a huge impact - experienced church planters could stay for years longer, sharing the gospel, discipling people, planting churches. I estimate that for every teacher we get to our schools, it keeps five families on the field, and that means 10 adults staying longer in ministry. If each of those adults share the gospel with 50 people a year (one a week) and they are able to stay another five years because of their children's education needs are met, the another 2500 people will hear the gospel that would not have heard. If we were to fill the 30 plus positions that we currently have then 75,000 least reached peoples in the world will have the opportunity to hear the gospel in the next five years. Another major impact it would have is to give missionary parents peace of mind. So rather than worrying every year whether their school will be able to continue it would help give stability and continuity to families, ministries and new church plants.

Dion Bremner, Australian National Leadership Team, WEC