

## **Initial information on service to the Baha'i community in Yasothon, Thailand**

**By: Auxiliary Board Members,  
Ms.Sulee Keawprasert and Ms.Golbang Jafari**

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### **THAILAND:**

Thailand is a beautiful country in which to serve. Generally, Thai people are very open-minded, friendly, hospitable and tolerant. They are very interested to meet and share experiences with friends from other countries.

The Baha'i community in Thailand is composed of about eight communities in various regions throughout the country where we have several ongoing activities. There are many service opportunities in Thailand. We encourage you to examine the different communities since it is important for you to decide where you can serve best according to your capabilities and preferences. Thailand is still in great need of assistance from volunteers and we appreciate your sacrifices in coming to serve here.

### **YASOTHON:**

Yasothon is a small province in North East Thailand with a population of about 500,000. People are especially friendly and very outgoing since Yasothon town is small and not as materialistic as big cities.

### **BAHAI COMMUNITY:**

The Baha'i faith has been present in Yasothon since 1964. Mrs. Shirin Fozdar, a very prominent Baha'i, brought the faith here and helped to establish a Baha'i school named Santitham Wittayakom School. Mrs. Fozdar has left a wonderful impression of the faith in Yasothon. Often when we mention that we are Baha'is to an adult in town, they will say, "Oh...yes, I know Baha'i. That lady was a very good Baha'!"

At present, there is a small Baha'i community with one active Local Spiritual Assembly. There used to be mass teaching in this area and at one point there were more than 60 Local Spiritual Assemblies. However, like many other parts of the world, we were not able to sustain the growth. At the moment, The National Spiritual Assembly of Thailand has selected Yasothon as one of the priority clusters of Thailand. Yasothon Cluster is a B status and we are aiming to be an A cluster soon.

Today, the Santitham Wittayakom School, which is owned by the Baha'i Foundation of Thailand, has won numerous awards, including national level awards. Having this successful school in town adds to the prestige of the Faith and the receptivity of Yasothon people towards it.

Most Baha'i activities are held in Yasothon town but we also have regular activities in Tungtae village, about 12 kilometres from Yasothon town. Here we have a few active Baha'i youth who have taken the leading role in organising and taking ownership of Baha'i activities.

One Auxiliary Board Member, Ms. Golbang Jafari, currently works full time for the faith in Yasothon. Auxiliary Board Member, Ms. Sulee Kaewprasert, who is based in Bangkok and works with the Institute Board of Thailand, also focuses on Yasothon and spends about two to three weeks in the Yasothon cluster each month.

#### PRAISEWORTHY CHARACTERISTICS OF BAHAI YOUTH VOLUNTEERS:

We are looking for youth who are energetic, friendly, outgoing, service-oriented, self motivated and have a high level of individual initiative.

We have found it especially helpful when youth have studied at least a series of courses of the Ruhi institute, since the Baha'i Institute of Thailand has adopted these as the main sequence of courses in training our human resources. Therefore, we ask that youth who would like to serve the Yasothon Baha'i community to have at least been trained in the first three books of the Ruhi Institute. This is especially important for the purpose of teaching children's classes, since we use the same material, but in Thai. This way, volunteers will know what is going on in the classes, what techniques are being used, and for example, what games are being played. This allows an ever increasing opportunity to join along and integrate with the activities in the class.

It is also very useful if volunteers have had some experience in holding children's classes and devotional meetings or have organized or taken part in youth groups and activities.

#### SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES:

##### **Children's Classes:**

As we know, children's classes are one of the core activities which the Universal House of Justice has guided us to focus our efforts on. Therefore, in Yasothon we have also put much emphasis on the importance of these classes. There are currently four Baha'i classes for children. Two classes are in Yasothon town, and the other two are in Tungtae village. Altogether, we have about 40 children involved. Three of these classes are the direct result of a few youth who recently completed sutydyng Ruhi book 3 and immediately started classes in their homes.

##### *What you can do:*

Most volunteers who have been in Yasothon have found interaction with the children and having part in the classes a very rewarding experience. Since language may be a bit of a barrier, in some cases, you may not be teaching the children directly, but rather assisting the youth who conduct the classes with your ideas and being a helping hand in the preparation of:

- Simple songs, which can either be Baha'i or other meaningful songs, in English or other languages. Action songs come in very handy.
- Nice stories to tell the children and artistic ways of presenting the stories.
- Co-operative games to play.
- Interesting art work.

During the class, you can sing and play these games with the children and/or do art work with them. The children are very eager to participate in such activities and even with the language barrier, they interact well with non-Thai speakers. The most important thing is that the local youth who arise to serve in this capacity are

encouraged and assisted in this weighty responsibility. It may be helpful to bring a few books on games, children's song books or other materials, if possible.

### **Devotional Meetings**

This too is of great importance. In Yasothon we have seen how devotional meetings can be an effective tool in reaching out to people, especially youth. Many of these people, who, having been touched by the power of the Word of God and are impressed with the Baha'i spirit, become interested in joining study circles and other Baha'i activities.

At the moment, there are a few devotional meetings going on regularly in Yasothon, such as the one at Santitham School which is open to the public, every Wednesday at 4.30 p.m. There is also one at Golbang's house every Saturday at 5.00 p.m. and at other Baha'i friends' homes which cover almost every day of the week.

*What you can do:*

- The most important thing you can do is to simply make friends in town and invite them to attend the devotional meetings. Making friends is easy in Thailand, since people are so friendly and are always interested to meet people from other countries.
- The Baha'i youth, both locals and volunteer youth from abroad, have a great part in the preparation for the devotional meetings in Golbang's house. They help prepare the theme and program, select the quotations and prayers, make beautiful leaflets with writings and prayers, prepare refreshments and arrange the physical appearance of the house.
- Music uplifts our souls when we pray and the youth here love to sing so if you know chants in various languages, you are most welcome to share and teach them. You may also like to learn the Thai chants so you can join along with us.
- Those of you who have computer skills or artistic skills can help with making materials for our devotional meetings, such as devotional booklets, sets of materials for themed devotionals or invitation cards for people to come to these meetings, so that we can reach out to an ever increasing amount of people.
- You could also help encourage and assist those who haven't opened their homes for devotionals to do so.

### **Study Circles**

We have a few study circles going on at the moment. A few youth are interested in starting book 1, a few have completed book 1 and are going to start book 2, some are completing book 3 and another group of youth are planning to study book 4 during their school break in March. March to Mid May is a good time to launch new groups since that's when the youth will be mostly free to join study circles. At the moment, the LSA members are studying books 7. The staff at the Santitham Wittayakom School also study Ruhi courses.

*What you can do:*

There is an opportunity for volunteer youth who have been trained as tutors of Ruhi books to tutor these courses for English speakers in Yasothon. This can help us

greatly, since bi-lingual tutors can then focus on study circles with Thai speaking groups.

When volunteer youth come as a group, it is very good to have at least one who is a tutor and can tutor the group in one of the courses. It is important that as each of us serve, we continue to learn and grow ourselves, in order to enrich our capabilities in rendering service. It also helps to keep us focused on the importance and urgency of the work at hand. However, if the group or individual has no tutor or group to study with, we will provide a tutor for you.

### **Junior Youth Groups**

At the moment, we have a group of about 10 junior youth in Tungtae village who have started to study 'Breezes of Confirmation', which is the first book in a series of courses for junior youth. For one year, they will be studying this book along with doing other activities such as singing songs, games, and artwork. Then they will go on to the next book which is 'Walking the Straight Path' which they will study for another year. Finally they will study 'Drawing on the Power of the Word'. Altogether, this will be a three year process in the empowerment of junior youth in Yasothon.

In Yasothon town, a few groups of junior youth have recently shown interest in studying 'Breezes of Confirmation' and we hope to have a few groups in town starting soon.

*What you can do:*

Similar to the children's classes, you will help the facilitators of the junior youth groups. Since there is a lot of space for creativity, you will be able to help with preparing interesting activities that will go along with the main text of the book. Many co-operative games and songs with good meaning are needed. Since the students study English at school, singing English songs is not only enjoyable for them, but they also gain more knowledge and skills in English.

In the future, when we have more man-power, we plan to offer these courses for junior youth in the main high school in town, where we have good relations with teachers and students.

### **Visiting Families**

We often try to arrange evenings where we visit our friends, both Baha'is and those who are friends of the Baha'is, at their homes in order to build good relationships with them and their families. These visits are always wonderful experiences of the beauty of Thai hospitality. There are a few villages that have Baha'is and the best way to keep contact with them is through visiting and praying with them.

### **Baha'i Youth Workshop**

Many of those involved in the institute process in Yasothon are youth, and many of the adults have children and children of their relatives, for this reason we have a small group of youth who are interested in using the arts. Therefore, one opportunity is to pass on your talents to these youth who may find the performing arts useful! It is definitely a good way to get a group of youth who share the same interests to get together, do fun activities and make use of the power of performing arts!

WHAT YOU NEED TO PREPARE:

There is one department store in town and one seven eleven store where you can buy most of the necessary things you may need. Thai people, especially adults in small cities like Yasothon, are quite conservative, so it is important to know that wearing sleeveless shirts, singlets (tank tops) or shorts is not appropriate. Since the weather is hot, you may like to bring light clothes such as those made of cotton. From October to January it can get quite cool, therefore we recommend that you bring or buy a jacket. It rains quite a bit from June to August, so it would be a good idea to bring some rain gear for these months.

#### CONCLUSION:

Overall, there are many things you can do in Yasothon. You can experience the feeling of assisting a community to start standing on its own feet and also in reaching out to others in the community at large. We do hope you will consider Yasothon as a place you may choose to serve.

#### CONTACT US:

Those who are interested to serve in Yasothon, please contact Mr.Vaughan Smith, the National Co-ordinator for Youth Volunteers.

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