

Manx Linksa series in which Cheryl Cousins from the One World Centre talks to local people, who have lived or worked in the developing world, about remarkable people they have met!

Statistics from a recent survey in the UK say that 2 out of 3 people now identify the Fairtrade mark, the result of a long campaign of raising awareness by the Fairtrade Foundation. But the foundation for the Fairtrade movement here on the Isle of Man has been mainly laid through the work and commitment of just one lady, Margaret Newton from Cooil, Braddan.

After teaching in Tanzania for 4 years, Margaret came back to the Island in the 1982, committed to do something positive and practical to help fight the poverty she had witnessed in the developing world. Her initial contact with Fairtrade products was through Traidcraft, buying coffee from Tanzania and selling it to her friends. And, some 25 years later, the coffee has got better, the range of products have broadened and her house seems taken over with goods she still buys and sells, supplying the Island's schools, churches, Women's Institutes, Mothers Unions, fetes and fairs with Traidcraft and Tearcraft items. Margaret still teaches, but in and around her work and her family she spends countless hours dedicated to ordering and supplying the goods that enable people to work their way out of poverty.

Three years ago Margaret joined a trip to Thailand, organized by Tearfund for people who had been working to promote Fairtrade. She saw at source the items that she had been selling for all those years and met the skilled artisans and producers, people who had nothing except the work of their hands as employment. The sheer skill of these people amazed her, working without patterns they completed complex embroidery and carving. But one man stood out from the many people they visited: Oun Wongwiang, a 60 year old wood carver and now an employer of eighty local people. For Margaret the life of this one man epitomizes the values of Fairtrade.

When Oun was 8 years old he was put into a small hut at the back of his Bangkok home. No one came to visit him other than to leave food outside his door. He had leprosy, and his family shunned him. Leprosy today is easily diagnosed and treated. Most endemic countries are working to bring leprosy services into existing general health services, but those most at risk are the poor, the illiterate and marginalized people of the world. The most effective way of preventing disabilities in leprosy, lies in early diagnosis and treatment with multidrug therapy (MDT)

It is estimated that there are between one and two million people visibly and irreversibly disabled due to past and present leprosy who need to be cared for by the community in which they live. According to official reports the number of new cases detected globally has fallen by a 27% during 2005. Over the past four years, the global number of new cases detected has continued to decrease dramatically, by about 20% per year. Most previously high endemic countries have now reached elimination, but, there are still some

high leprosy areas in some parts of Angola, Brazil, Central Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo, India, Madagascar, Mozambique, Nepal, and the United Republic of Tanzania.

Oun was fortunate, his brother learned of the McKean Rehabilitation Centre just outside Chiang Mai, a Centre that had previously been a Leprosy Mission and now works for the rehabilitation of those with major injuries from accidents, those with disability, special needs or alcoholism. Although treatment for his leprosy came too late to prevent his hands and feet from being disfigured by the disease, during the 6 years that he spent there Oun received education and learnt new skills that would change the pattern of his life.

Oun is a determined man, from what could have so easily been a wasted life he now has a wife and children; from the humble beginnings of selling food to his village to make enough money to buy wood for carving, he now works with crafts people from across 15 different villages in the Chiang Mai area. He operates from a large barn, some artisans are based in workshops where up to 20 people can be involved in different stages of production; others work from home, sitting in the shade underneath their stilted bamboo houses. Oun has a regular community round collecting new items that will be sold through the Tearcraft catalogue, and delivering fresh wood and new orders. The artisans work in mango and rubber wood, both species need regular cutting and so are sustainable sources ... and they make a range of items from candle holders, fruit bowls, wooden trivets, bread and vegetable cutting boards to household furniture! Their local market is rapidly developing freeing them from a dependency upon the whims of the export market.

Margaret believes that Oun is typical of Fairtrade policy in action; starting from extreme deprivation and poverty, he has been enabled to rise out of it, first through education and learning of skills, and then through the payment of a fair price for his work. He has been able to save to buy better equipment and machinery and to expand... and with that expansion he has been committed to ensuring that he will alleviate the poverty he sees around him. In Thailand both education and health care are paid for privately.

Oun carries a deep concern for his workers. A few years ago when the market for his laquerware started drying up he was troubled that he would have to scale down his business. He was helped by Tearcraft's small business consultant who gave him new ideas and designs for kitchen items. This assistance and the help he receives from a local lady who works with him on the trading of goods, has supported both him and the crafts people and their families who depend upon him for their livelihoods.

If you would like more information about Tearcraft and the work of the Fairtrade Foundation and Tearfund please contact Margaret Newton on : (01624) 628995