

## **Rose Virginie Good Shepherd Centre**

### **Malaysia**

#### **A Journey of Adaption, Change and Learning**

It was the stories of a couple of women experiencing domestic violence that prompted the Sisters to reach out and establish Rose Virginie Good Shepherd Centre in 1987. Since then RVGSC has been offering temporary shelter and a safe haven to women and girls in crisis. The target group includes

- Women, mothers and girls who are experiencing domestic / family violence
- Teenage girls and women in pregnancy crisis
- Survivors of rape or assault and other forms of exploitation.

#### **Adapting to new needs**

During the past few years we Good Shepherd Mission Partners (sisters and lay) have once again listened to stories – this time stories of human trafficking and migration. We have asked ourselves how we might be involved, imagined the plight of these women and children, and been challenged to make a response. We opened our shelter to accept unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs) in 2012. The unaccompanied refugee minors have been our best teachers. They have challenged us to live out our Good Shepherd values and belief that, “one person is of more value than the whole world.”

#### **‘Row for Freedom’**

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2014 the URMs were invited to take part in the programme “Row for Freedom.” They were told what some other young women from the United Kingdom were doing to raise awareness about the issue of human trafficking. They watched the video of what Julia Immonen and her friends were doing (<http://www.rowforfreedom.com/>). They also watched a documentary on human trafficking.

#### **New personal awareness**

Having experienced the horrors of trafficking themselves, was there something they would like to say to the world? This triggered many things in their hearts and minds – the pain of having been taken from home and family when they were as young as five or six, the memories of loved ones, the way their parents were deceived into giving them over to the “Aunty” (trafficker) and how they themselves in some cases, were eager to follow the trafficker with dreams of going to school and having more than enough to eat. For some it opened up old wounds and for others it was the beginning of disclosing who they actually were and what they had experienced – stories so crucial to making a best interest determination for their future. They reflected on where they had been and where they had come to, they thought about their future and verbalised their hopes, fears and dreams.

## **New thirst for learning**

The programmes at the Centre include home school, training in living skills, individual and group counselling, social skills, dancing and just anything that will return to the child her rights and dignity as a person. Promoting gender equality and kindling a thirst for learning has brought to the children a new awareness of who they are and what they can be in the future.

## **The Challenges**

As a staff team our challenge is to keep hope alive and burning in the hearts of the children as they go through the stage of establishing their identity as persons. It is hard to do that when they can barely remember who their parents and siblings are, when they have only faint memories of their village and its surroundings, when they do not know when or where they were born, when they have been groomed not to trust anyone and when even the name they have been called by is not their real name.

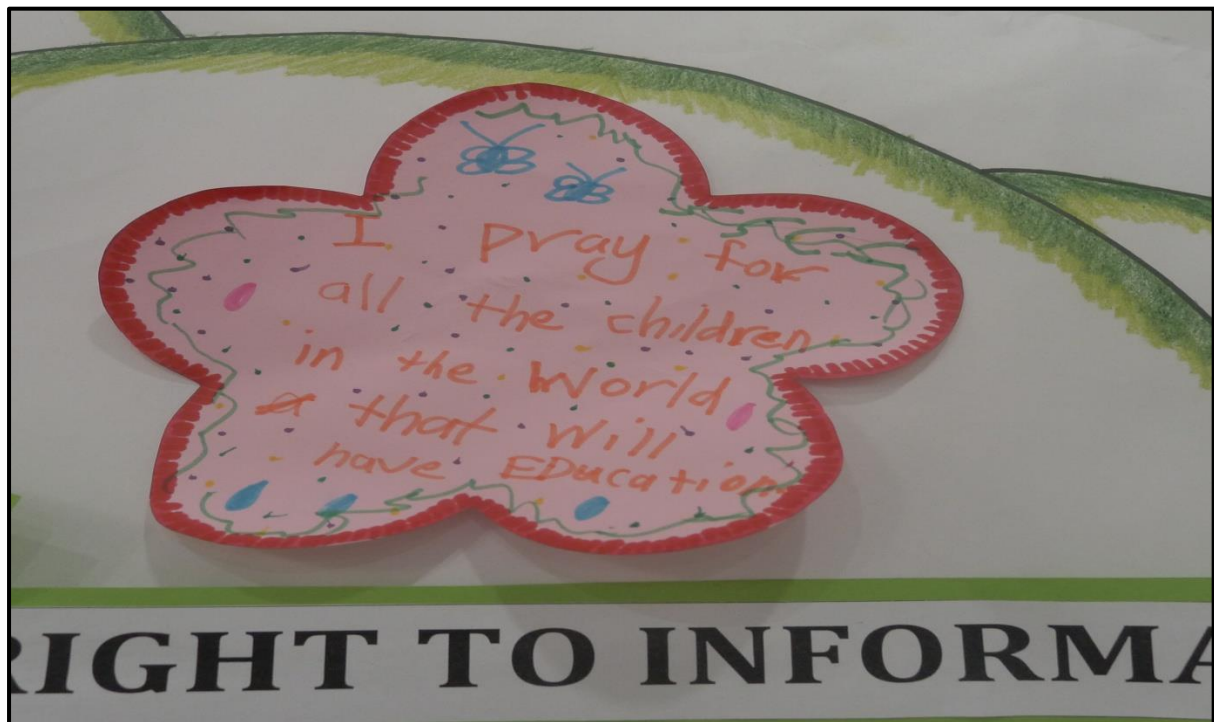
Challenges are part of life but for the team at RVGSC as well as for the children it is a daily adventure of learning and change.



**Group discussion among the children and teachers regarding child rights**



The children mark International Day of the Girl Child by putting up their prayers or wishes for girls across the world



Prayer of a 10 year old girl



Children speak from their own experience of violence

## **A Song of Hope**

We were surprised when as a group they composed some verses about what they would like to say to the world, and astounded, when they asked for help to compose their own music. We share here the lyrics of their song

### **MY LIFE**

She told me she loved me so much.  
She told me she would send me to school.  
But she manipulated me.  
I trusted her and I followed her.  
She hurt my heart.  
When she asked me to beg.  
They were smiling, I was crying.

I was so sad,  
I was so scared,  
Please let me go from your hold.

I go here someone try to rape me.  
I go there someone try to use me.  
My life will be spoilt.  
I did not do anything; I did not know any thing

I am still a child.  
I am so good  
Please let me go from you all.

God heard my prayer.  
He sent help to get me out of this darkness and gave me a bright future.

All in the past,  
Let it go, let it go.  
Now my NEW LIFE is beginning.  
I am happy because  
Now I am SOMEBODY  
Now I have a NAME.

**The Journey continues.....**