



Langkawi Life – November 2011

‘TIS THE SEASON FOR GIVING!

By Teviot Fairservis

Imagine you are a child and tomorrow is the first day of school. You were born on the island of Langkawi and are growing up in a small village surrounded by jungle far from a main road. Your home may have no windows, no electricity, only a shack out back for a toilet. You are excited because now you are old enough to go to school but your mother says she does not have the money to buy two uniforms. So your twin brother gets to go to school on the first day. You will get to wear the uniform tomorrow and your brother will stay home that day to help your mother.

1 SPONSOR A SCHOOLCHILD is the Charity Club Langkawi's current appeal. Can you help?

Education is clearly the key to ending poverty but for far too many of our planet's seven billion, it is an impossible dream. If you are reading this, chances are you did *not* grow up too poor to afford a school uniform. The story you just read is 'true' -- an adaptation of the tales of the surprising number of families who are struggling on this island. If you did have a similarly difficult childhood, then someone at some time must have offered you a helping hand. That's what the **Charity Club Langkawi** is offering – a helping hand to those in need on this beautiful island.



2 This little boy's mother died and his father is raising him alone. A generous donor gave the family this 'pre-loved' crib.

The holiday season is almost upon us. Please think about helping island kids get a good education by making an end-of-the-year donation to the Charity Club Langkawi. Their priority right now is **SPONSOR A SCHOOLCHILD**. You will find the moving stories of about 30 children who hope for a Sponsor to help them get a good education when you visit the charity's website at www.langkawicharity.com (the link is in the upper right hand corner of the website). January 3rd marks the start of the new school term and uniforms are usually purchased in December. Sponsor a schoolchild for as little as 300 RM; you can email now to langkawicharity@gmail.com for more information.

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The first time you come to the island of Langkawi, you will be amazed by its tropical beauty. Swaying palms, dense jungle with monkeys peering out between the leaves, hornbills and eagles swooping overhead. You curl your toes in the clean, warm sands and gaze in awe at the spectacle of ancient rocky outcrops as the iridescent blue waters roll by. Unless you rent a car or motorcycle and poke around the dusty roads leading off through the vast rice paddies, you might miss the tumbledown shacks that dot the landscape. If you come from a city of high-rises, you might not understand that this is where and how people live. It may take years of living here to begin to understand the forces that influence the local culture and society. But if you look now, you will see that there are people on this island who are facing really difficult situations and need help.



3 Island children learn about the special ecology here thanks to Dev's Adventure Tours which donated guided tours for students and teachers from Tunku Putra School.

**“Give a man a fish and he’ll eat for a day.
Teach a man to fish and he’ll eat for a lifetime.”**



4 Langkawi's Children are its Future

Education in Malaysia is not completely free. The government eases the burden but every school must levy additional fees to cover their expenses. The Malaysian government has just announced some exciting new initiatives to help children attend school including waiver of school fees for 2012 and a gift of 100 RM for each school child. **Charity Club** secretary Sheila Allum told me, “Given that our children come from very poor families, we have not taken this sum into account when we have calculated sponsorship costs – as, if they receive a windfall of RM 100, it will be most welcome to the family budget.”

But as every parent of a school-aged child knows, it’s not just the cost of fees or uniforms; there are also expenses for school supplies, field trips, lunches, sports kits, transportation, extra tuition for exams, exam fees -and so much more. And what parent wants to have to refuse their child’s wish for a Miss Kitty pen or a Superman lunchbox?



5 Adult Education -- To support her family, this woman is learning to sew with the help of a CCL volunteer and the donation of a new sewing machine.

For a number of children on Langkawi, the costs of education put a real burden on their families. Many families have three or as many as seven children to support. For the youngest starting out, just getting to the school can be difficult. For the oldest and brightest that make it into high school or a university, it’s a term-by-term issue whether or not they are going to be able to afford to continue their studies. Some of the best students are forced to drop out. Their parents may be getting paid as little as 3 ringgit (\$1.00 US) per hour and only work part-time -- and some of Langkawi’s families may have no income at all.

The **Charity Club Langkawi** has founded a new **EDUCATION FUND** and has a **SPONSOR A SCHOOLCHILD** program in place to address this crucial need for more funds for the education of island children. Think of the satisfaction you would feel knowing you made it possible for a child to regularly attend school!



6 Sponsor a Schoolchild or Adopt a Family – like this expat couple who are regular visitors to the island.

Under the club’s **Sponsor a Schoolchild** program, sponsors are encouraged to become involved with the families and are welcome to meet the child they are providing for. Sponsors have come from all over the world - UK, New Zealand, Australia and Europe. The children are monitored for attendance and share photographs and letters with their sponsors.

The cost to sponsor a child is very modest – about 300 to 900 RM per year – and the **Charity Club** ensures that every penny goes to meet the child’s needs and maintains exact records of expenses. The organization will return excess funds to the sponsor at years-end – unless of course, authorized to direct the funds to the general **Education Fund** or to re-sponsor the child for another year!

“Bringing Charity Straight to the Home”

Last fall, the **Charity Club** organized visits for me to introduce English through storytelling at the Tamil School near the Hindu temple just outside Kuah. The children there are so bright, quick, discerning -- voicing the colors of the rainbow and the comparatives and superlatives as they designed a dress for Cinderella.



*One day, the principal bundled me and several of the **Charity Club** members into a car to drive a short distance to the site of a former rubber plantation. One little girl I had met at the school reached out and took my hand shyly to lead me along a muddy trail. It was littered with garbage, briars and vines. We came to a set of cement dormitories formerly housing the plantation workers. The little girl led me to a cement shack with no front door and a very thin but lovely woman emerged dressed in a brown sarong. This was her mother.*



7 Update a year later -- this bright little girl received the award for best attendance in her class!

Wordlessly -- as she spoke no English and I no Tamil -- the mother invited me into the house which she had obviously made an effort to keep tidy (if impossible to keep clean). The front window was boarded up and a door was barred to a room to one side. After our tour of the living room where the family slept on mats and the kitchen with its coal barbecue, I asked what was kept in the side room. Our translator whispered that there was a mentally defective child kept locked up in the room where it felt safest. We gave the family some bags of groceries, then walked back pensively through the muddy track to the car. My heart ached for this family.

Members of the Charity Club Langkawi regularly see a side of this beautiful island that I had never imagined.

With a trunk full of groceries, the team – Hani, Sheila, and Lyn – with me tagging along, parked at the edge of a mangrove forest. We shouldered bags of food to carry to families living in the tidal swamp. Dogs barked as we gingerly made our way along wooden boards that had been placed over the mucky path.



8 Food, clothing, education, medical bills, transport and more place huge burdens on island families -- and the Charity Club has made a difference.

*We came to a house raised up on stilts with a set of cement steps leading to a door which was opened by a small woman with a baby on her hip. We followed her into a bare room, unfurnished except for two tables that held sewing machines that the **Charity Club** had given her previously – to help her and her neighbors establish a micro-business doing sewing. I stepped into the room and immediately felt the floor give way under my weight. I backed up to the cement stair platform.*

*The **Charity Club** members were there to discuss some badly needed repairs to the house and arrange for carpenters and building supplies, many of which were donated.*



9 Families that live in the tidal swamps contend with deterioration of their homes. Volunteers helped put in a secure new foundation, repaired holes in the floor and put up a new wall (seen here).

This community living in the swamps manages to live a fairly comfortable life. Sanitation is better here than living deeper in the jungle because the tide acts as a flush toilet, sweeping the garbage and human wastes out to sea. The only big problem the family we met was facing was that the floors of the house remain constantly wet and deteriorate. Recently the baby had fallen through a hole in the floor but was rescued and a crude patch put in place.

By the time we left the house, the tide had come in. We had to literally ‘walk the plank,’ teetering on a board in order to get from the steps that were by now covered with water to dry land. Garbage floated around us as the waves swept in and around the pilings under the house.

The third family we visited that memorable day was missing its father. He had left the pregnant mother with four children and the fifth on the way. The reasons do not matter – whether because he has gone to look for work elsewhere, fallen for another woman, disappeared into a haze of drugs and alcohol, or died because of an accident or illness. The consequences are the same – and they are severe without a breadwinner to support the family.



We drove into a fairly prosperous looking village, passing some handsome houses but parked in front of a yard with a somewhat dilapidated cottage tucked back from the street. A school age girl in a ragged dress stood on the steps – I thought to myself, “Why isn’t she in school?” Two big-eyed boys peeked out the front door as we carried groceries in. Their mother appeared, looking weary and a bit suspicious of the strangers entering her house. I remember someone whispered to me that she has virtually no work skills and stays home because her five children need to be looked after.

This is the story I opened this article with. I met them -- the boy twins. They do attend school but school requires uniforms. The family can only afford one uniform so the boys go to school on alternating days. They look just alike – who is to know? Luckily, the principal got wind of the situation and informed the **Charity Club**. Now both boys are neatly dressed for their school days. But I still wonder about their sister...

Volunteers make all the difference!

I sat down with two of the most active volunteers for the Charity Club Langkawi – *Sheila Allum* and *Lyn Jarvis* to learn more about the club and its activities. Sheila has taken on the more-than-full-time tasks of secretary while Lyn keeps careful accounts as treasurer. *Belinda Koh* serves as chair with *Rosmiza bt Shuib* as deputy chairman. *Hanifah bt A. Aziz* has done wonders in creating trust between the families in need and the charity, serving as translator and liaison officer.

This multi-ethnic, multi-faceted organization reflects Malaysian society: “Hani” (short form of *Hanifah*) and Rosmiza are Malay Malaysian, Belinda comes from a Chinese Malaysian background, Sheila hails from England while Lyn came to Langkawi from New Zealand. All office bearers and committee members have been approved by the Malaysian Registrar of Societies (ROS) and the charity has been approved as a non-governmental organization (NGO 1556-10-KDH).



11 High school sports is an afterschool activity – so the CCL funded hostel stays at the school so the players can live on campus. Here Lyn presents funds.

Lyn immediately mentioned the need for more volunteers, whether local or expat, short-term tourist or long-term resident. There are many ways volunteers can get involved with charity work on the island – and the commitment can be as small as an afternoon helping out a booth at one of the festivals. Volunteers can also help with gathering donations of clothing and furnishings or by helping to organize the items which are now housed in a storage / work room thanks to the generosity of the Langkawi Fair mall. One reluctant volunteer told her, *“I won’t be very good at this because I want to help everybody...”* Lyn’s wise answer, *“It may be just a drop in the ocean, but all the drops together make one mighty ocean.”*



10 Lyn (far left) and Sheila (far right) deliver food hampers regularly to island families. This family was delighted to receive gifts to celebrate the tradition of Hari Raya.

“Why do you do what you do?” I asked them. Somewhat bashfully, both Lyn and Sheila explained they had come to Malaysia for the lifestyle they could have here under the “Malaysia My Second Home” program. After retiring, they and their husbands moved to Langkawi where they soon developed a circle of friends. At social gatherings, people began to mention family crises they had heard about. Over several years, a small group of concerned residents realized that a more formal structure was needed in order to address the issues directly and to be eligible to raise funds to meet the needs. These two exceptional women joined several others across cultural and social lines to do whatever they can to help – as good citizens of the planet and as responsible members of the local community.



12 Hani and Afandi devote many hours to helping their neighbours.

Another extraordinary couple, who have lived on Langkawi for many years and raised their children here, see the needs of others less fortunate on the island. The **Charity Club’s** Liaison Officer *Hanifah bt A. Aziz* and her husband *Afandi b Abu* described to me the year-long process it took to sort out and understand the requirements for legal status as a non-governmental organization (NGO). Mr. Afandi spent many hours online and translating back-and-forth between Bahasa Melayu and English to write a formal constitution and articles of incorporation to meet the government’s requirements. Formal NGO status was granted in June 2010.

The Chrysalis Programme Helps Adults Become Financially Independent

The **Charity Club** also assists adults to get the education and skills they need to improve their situations. Volunteers are now teaching mothers to sew so they can start their own “micro-businesses;” in the future, volunteer mentors could help teach skills of all kinds.



13 There are many ways you can help! These volunteers pitched in to help paint a house!

Recently, club members were introduced to “Darisah.” This single mother’s husband died, leaving her with five children to care for. A self-starter, she dreamed of opening a nursery but needed to take a course to receive certification. The **Club** introduced a sponsor who funded her studies in Alor Setar which she completed successfully and has provided funds to help her realize her dream. Darisah’s “Taska” (nursery) will open soon!

A group of “yachties” moored at Rebak Island heard about her efforts through the club and are getting together to paint and fix up a building so that she will soon be able to open her nursery in her own neighbourhood. Thanks to an anonymous family who donated a considerable sum towards the start-up, this “microbusiness” will allow her to care for her own children at home, become self-supporting, and help out her neighbours by caring for their kids as well.

How Can I Help?

Even occasional visitors to the island can help underprivileged families by spreading the good word: follow, share and/or post to the charity’s website at www.langkawicharity.com and the Facebook page: [Charity Club Langkawi](#). There’s a “Donate” button available on the website – and that’s the quickest way to help (and you can charge your donation to your credit card).



14 Eggs and other items are delivered at least every 4 weeks to needy families.

One important way volunteers can get involved is to help deliver food parcels to needy families – a kind of “Meals on Wheels.” If you have a car or truck that could be used, or are willing to drive once or more a month for the food distribution service that would be a real help. Sheila points out that these deliveries are more than just handouts of food; they are also a chance for the charity to listen to the needs of the families and to check on their situations. A translator (usually Hani) goes along. One of the difficulties the **Charity Club** faces is the number of languages spoken on the island – Malay, Chinese, Tamil, English. Those able to translate would be most welcome on the “food runs.”

A team of volunteers (mostly the officers of the club) have gone out to neighborhoods to deliver food parcels to 20 families every 4 weeks. Eggs, fresh vegetables, baby milk and nappies for the infants are the main items. Some of the families are so poor that club members make an extra effort to deliver a smaller parcel at two-week intervals.

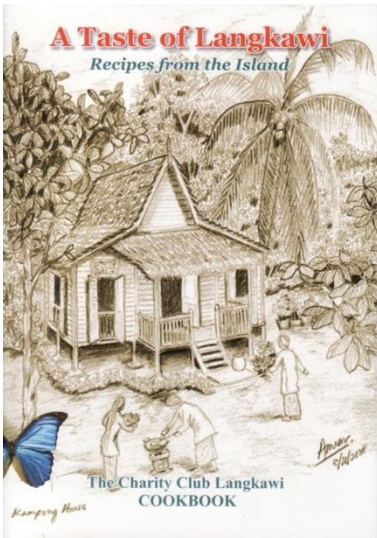
For a small outlay each month, the club also offers you the opportunity to **Adopt A Family** by paying for or contributing to the costs of food – only around RM 100 for a basic parcel which includes fresh vegetables.



15 Adopt a Family! You can make a difference!

Funding the Dreams

Funding comes from a variety of sources as the organization faces the never-ending tasks of finding the money to support the programs. The club was recently honoured by a grant from the *Yayasan Sultanah Bahiyah* foundation which was presented by a princess of the royal family of Kedah province. This grant will cover all administrative costs for the coming year. The all-volunteer organization has no paid employees and all funds go directly to help “improve the day-to-day lives of underprivileged families on Langkawi.”



Both private individuals and island businesses have gotten involved in supporting the charity. The *Malaysian Association of Hotels (MAH), Kedah and Perlis branch*, has sponsored charity events in the past and made major donations in support. Restaurants, tour groups, cruises and other businesses have donated gift certificates and items for raffles and auctions. Private individuals too have hosted garden parties and other special gatherings to help; one young couple invited the guests to their Langkawi wedding to donate to the charity rather than to give them gifts. In Australia some months earlier, this generous couple held a “table sale” (moving sale) to clear unwanted items before going traveling, then donated all proceeds to the charity.

At public events throughout the year, organizers have reached out to offer the **Charity Club** space to run a booth. Volunteers are always needed to help display the charity’s activities and sell donated ‘pre-loved’ items and edible goodies supplied by island chefs. The organizers of the **ONE EARTH MUSIC**

FESTIVAL at the Frangipani Resort offered both a booth and a percentage of vendor profits to be donated to the charity designated for the new **Education Fund**.

Some of the best island recipes have been collected in a cookery book titled “**A Taste of Langkawi**” which is on sale for 15 RM at all the public events as well as at hotels, restaurants and other venues throughout the island. A lovely souvenir to bring back for friends and family, all proceeds from the book purchases go directly to support the charity’s projects.

Success Stories

This relatively new, all-volunteer organization has embarked on ambitious programs of assistance to those in need locally. Visiting the website or Facebook, you will see photographs of food and clothing deliveries, renovations and repairs to homes, and you can read the sometimes tragic stories of families in desperate straits.

On a happier note, you can also see pictures of a young boy, Aqmal, standing next to a ‘Firefly’ airplane. This past year, the **Charity Club** launched a Special Appeal to fly Aqmal to Penang and to pay for two operations to correct a severe deformity to his ear. Close to a hundred private donors and businesses – including the consulting doctors – donated funds and came together to make a big difference in this little boy’s life. A gift of 6400 RM was raised recently by island lovers on the other side of the planet – the funds were donated by passengers of the alternative airline, Sylt Air, which



flies to the northernmost point in Germany, tiny Sylt island.

16 The Special Appeal to help Aqmal get much needed operations was a real success in 2011!



17 Students at the Tamil School in Kisap are among those who benefit from the support of the CCL for their education. Sponsor a Schoolchild is the club’s main priority to help these kids get back to school in fresh new uniforms come January 2012.

Education is the Priority

The top priority for the **Charity Club** as the year comes to a close is raising funds in time to help 31 schoolchildren from the neediest families head “back to school” in January. Sheila began to list the other expenses which families must shoulder beyond the much-needed government support: transport to and from school, lunches, and hostel accommodations for those high school students who must live at their school.

Modelled after the “*Adopt a Child*” projects by larger NGO’s

and non-profits, the club has established a **Sponsor a Schoolchild** program. Sponsors are asked to develop a personal relationship with ‘their’ child. The club assists by providing letters, photographs and news about the child. Unlike larger organizations, the club takes no money for administrative fees out of the donations by sponsors and all expenses are carefully recorded and shared with the sponsor.

I asked about how they identify the children in need and these two hard-working volunteers sang the praises of the headmasters, teachers, and welfare officers who monitor the island’s children. The most serious cases are referred to the **Charity Club** which sends a team of members out to personally visit each child and their family. Each family is carefully assessed so that the children are confirmed as truly in need. Some of the children are in tragic and critical situations – in need of the very basics of food, shelter, and clothing.

It Takes a Village



As Hillary Clinton is fond of saying, *“It takes a village to raise a child,”* meaning that everyone who resides within a community has a responsibility to look out for the welfare of their neighbour, especially the children – and also that it takes many people to care to raise that child to be a good citizen. With the creation of the **Charity Club** in recent years, the island has a new resource to provide direct help for families in desperate need.

“What goes wrong?” I ask Sheila and Lyn. *“How is it possible that families should be struggling in such a beautiful place?”* They cite a pattern – typically one of the parents is absent; in most of the cases they hear about it is the breadwinner of the family -- the father -- who disappears. There are many reasons – drugs, alcohol, injury, illness or death. The single parent situations seem most critical. Too often they see mothers left alone with five or six young children to care for and no source of income. Sometimes it’s something as simple as the breakdown of a motorcycle which can throw a low-income family into crisis.



18 It takes a village to raise a child...

Among the most recent cases that have come to the attention of the charity include that of a family with five children who are living in an office. The husband left, the wife earns 250 RM from cleaning but rents a disused office which costs 350 RM. Every month she falls short and may one day will be evicted if she cannot meet the rent.



*Another family lives in a “warung” behind what used to be a café. They are no longer running it as a café because there’s now too much competition in their neighbourhood. The family lives in the back in a lean-to. Dad left 7 years ago, leaving the mother with 2 daughters who are now ages 8 and 13, as well as the rest of her family to support. Grandma has gone to Alor Setar to find work, grandpa lives there but is deaf and unable to work. There are 3 uncles living there as well - mum’s brothers – all over the age 18 and able to work but they have no transport so they cannot get jobs. They live down a long road far from any town. They had a motorbike but it broke. Because they have no income, they cannot afford to get it fixed – and therefore cannot get jobs. The high school welfare officer (a senior member of the school management team) counsels students and helps them to find jobs. She heard about this family and contacted the **Charity Club** for help. The*

19 Neighbours helping neighbours to live better lives -- that’s what charity is all about!

organization will provide funds to get the motorbike repaired – which will make a huge difference for this large family.

Celebrate 2011 with a Charitable Gift at Year's End!

Langkawi seems to attract special people from all over the world. As a microcosm of the larger picture of intermingling of cultures, races, and religions in new ways taking place in all over the world, this small island offers some interesting perspectives. The **Charity Club Langkawi** brings together a small (but growing) group of concerned people from many different backgrounds who love this island – and does what it can to directly address the issues faced by underprivileged island families.

Sponsor a Schoolchild or Adopt a Family!



Because the new school term begins in January, distribution of school supplies and uniforms to the children takes place around *Christmas* each year. Last year, the club fully sponsored 41 children and provided 45 uniforms and gifts of pencil boxes filled with assorted school supplies. Christmas to Christians is a time of giving but here on Langkawi, that tradition has been taken up by people of many faiths.

For this article, I interviewed members of the **Charity Club Langkawi** who are providing food, shelter, medical care, education, and other support to those in need on this island. For those of you who enjoy Christmas and the New Year's festivities (no matter your religion), the holiday season is almost upon us!

As we celebrate the holidays with friends and family, it is also important to remember the spirit of the season. It is the season of giving – and it's a time to remember there are those who need a helping hand.

20 Langkawi's children need your help!
Please donate and/or volunteer today!

I hope these stories may inspire you to reach out a helping hand to those here on Langkawi facing hardship by supporting the good works of the **Charity Club Langkawi**. Even a small donation or the gift of your time as a volunteer can make a real difference. To donate or volunteer, go to www.langkawicharity.com or email langkawicharity@gmail.com and be sure to visit the Facebook page: [Charity Club Langkawi](#) to see the latest news about how your contributions make a difference!

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