



Sun, sea, surf - and school

BY Amy Fallon

SOME Australian kids find school a drag. But for children in countries such as Bangladesh, education is not an option.

More than four million children aged six to 10 – almost one-quarter of primary school students in the Asian country – don't go to school. And, unbelievably, two million have never been, UNICEF says.

Many kids from poor families have to work to help support their families. And for girls it is even harder. Many desperate parents make them get married, sometimes when they are as young as 12.

WORKING, NOT PLAYING, AT THE BEACH

But a project in Bangladesh is encouraging children to hang out with their friends in the classroom as they learn – and hang out in the waves in their spare time.

About four years ago Rashed Alam, 27, a surfer in Cox's Bazar, a very poor part of Bangladesh, noticed a lot of children spending their days on the beach working.

Rifa Aktar sold jewellery to tourists to help her mother and father, a chef who didn't make enough money to support his six children.

"I didn't like it very much but I had to do it to support my family," says Rifa.

"I was upset because my friends were going to school and I could not do that."

BOARD IN CLASS

Mr Alam, who trained in lifesaving in Britain, started tutoring kids like Rifa at what is now the Cox's Bazar Lifesaving and Surf Club. And when they had any spare time, he taught them how to swim and surf.

It was a big challenge because Bangladesh is a mostly Muslim country and some people don't like women or girls playing sport.

Parents want their kids to work and most people can't swim even though they are surrounded by water.

But once Mr Alam talked to parents about how important education is for their children, they slowly came on board, and the kids became more confident in the water.

READING, WRITING, SWIMMING

Today the club has 35 members, all of them in school.

Mohammed Mozahid once worked on the beach to help his mother and three siblings.

"The first time I went swimming a year ago it was really scary," said the club's youngest member, now 10.

Now he's a "strong, talented" surfer, says Mr Alam – and he goes to school.

"Everybody needs to study," says Mohammed. "One day I can get a good job."

Mr Alam wants to encourage youth from all over Bangladesh to go to school and learn surfing, whether for a hobby or future career.

"We say to parents: 'Let children go to school, and do surfing, and they can have a nice future,'" he says.

Top left, Mohammed Mozahid, 10, is the youngest member of the surf club. Above, other club members. Below, Rifa Aktar, left, 13, and Aysha Aktar, 11. PHOTOS Amy Fallon



WHEN THE SUN BEATS DOWN ...

Each week *Crinkling News* has brought you a little piece of Europe by featuring photographs from Australian photojournalist Dallas Kilponen as he travels around the continent.

Dallas is heading home now, so these are the final photos from his big European adventure. This week he is back in the summer sun at the popular beach Plage du Port-Vieux, in Biarritz, France.

