A lmost in his 72 years old. While modern health care allows many to have a chance to live a healthy, play golf, have grandchildren or enjoy their hard-earned retirement, Arkom has no family, no job, and no health. He is the victim of leprosy.

Living in a leper colony since 1991, the past 20 years have been better to the patients, who are now able to lead a normal life. However, they must still face the stigma of the disease because of society. Fard was not given much chance to live. Like many lepers, he was abandoned by his family and shunned by society, and his condition led him to a life in an enclosed community for lepers.

His neighbour in the leprosarium is Fard, who has been suffering from leprosy since his teens. Fard, 78, was born with a horrible deformity. He has been living in the leper colony since 1954. Fard and Arkom are not alone on this path. There are more than 100 people whom they call friends and neighbours.

The colony is supported by the Phud Hong Leper Foundation, which cares for lepers and their children. The Phud Hong Leper Foundation has been operating in Nakhon Si Thammarat since the early 1960s. It was founded in 1956 by the Ministry of Public Health and consists of honorary life president Prasit Lulitanon as chairman. The foundation is supported by donations and has been operating in Nakhon Si Thammarat.

The biggest cause of suffering, and the one that they want to help the patients, is their home. They are simply spending the last months or years of their lives in a place where they feel they belong, as opposed to the outside world full of people who do not understand them.

Before, and even after, the discovery of the biological cause, leprosy patients were shunned or even considered outcasts, mostly because of the obvious physical symptoms of the disease. They were, and still are, isolated from society because most people are afraid that leprosy is contagious. Today, although leprosy is curable, lack of awareness about the disease leads people to falsely think that it is highly contagious and accurate, and that lepers can’t even touch each other.

The children of lepers suffer health, normal life, like the children, beyond the leper colony’s gate. They work outside the leper colony and earn a sufficient income — enough to build temporary houses and the foundation grants to replace the old wooden houses originally provided by the government.

The school builds on a 1-ha (10,666 sq ft) building. A group of 100 lepers and their children are isolated from society.

Despite the isolation, the children are treated with reluctance or inequality. They have no choice but to live in the colony, regardless of the condition of their homes. What matters to them, the patients whose days are numbered, is to feel a sense of belonging at the place they call home and the people they interact with without feeling they are treated with reluctance or inequality.

Fard, 78, in his special bicycle donated by the Rachapracha Samasai Foundation. Arkom, 72, has lived in this leprosarium since 1991.

NO-MAN’S LAND

WE CARE

Lepers may lose their arms, legs or sight, but they should never be deprived of their right to live with dignity and hope.

Story by KUSUKA MINTAKHIN and NAPAMON ROONGWITTOO

Father Lorenzo of Don Bosco Centre in Nakhon Si Thammarat gives educational support to the children and grandchildren of leprosy patients.

Although the Don Bosco Centre has been supported by the Don Bosco Centre for the past 20 years, the centre still needs support.

Luca Pizzuti, a young man who was supported by the Don Bosco Centre, now works at the Phud Hong Leper Foundation.

Fado, 70, has his special bicycle donated by the Rachapracha Samasai Foundation. Arkom, 72, has lived in this leprosarium since 1991.