



NEWSLETTER

Development Society

February 17, 2011

Hello Everyone

For those of you who are new to our updates, three years ago in north East Cambodia we built Srey Poh Free School in a village behind the Strung Treng Women's Development Center (SWDC) (a project that we also support). Conditions here are tough for both adults and children. There are few if any adults with an education. Their only source of income is virtual enslavement, breaking rocks and reducing it to gravel, with hand held hammers, in a local quarry for very low wages. Family incomes are extremely poor and most families cannot not afford the 25 cents a day to send a child to a government school. With few options for daycare this results in most children having to go to the quarry with their parents and at a very early age they end up swinging a hammer as well. To try to spare the children from this fate we built the school in the heart of the village. The program provides supervision, education, a daily hot meal, a bathing facility and a clothing bank; to supplement their torn and ragged clothing. This trip we bought six hundred pieces of used clothes in a 100 kilo bale for eighty dollars, getting it into the back seat of the car...another story. Daily the three teachers help the 50 children to shower, brush teeth, comb hair, wash clothes and prepare and serve the daily meal, only then do they begin to teach.

We met with Chan (SWDC co director and manager of the school) and the three teachers to assess the operation of the school and identified a few issues. Some children, due to the closeness to home, come to school then dine and dash...their idea, instead of dine and math...our idea, their coming and going throughout the day was disrupting the teaching process. We decided to call a meeting with the parents to see if we could solve this and a few other minor glitches. The next morning with the teachers and about 30 parents and an interpreter we held our meeting.

Things were going smoothly as we asked the parents to first voice their concerns , one of which was that a few of the older kids seemed to be picking on the younger ones when the teachers were busy scrubbing, brushing or chopping food. Things became a little heated with blame being placed on the teachers and some parents taking sides against them or with them and against each other. We stepped in telling them that as a community of friends and donors we combine to raise the funds to provide for the school and in turn they must work with their community to help support the teachers by rounding up strays whose parents are at work and sending them back to school as well as reinforcing in the children kindness and respect for each other. One villager, a woman sitting in the corner listening intently, stunned us when she stood up, eyes brimming with tears and began to thank us in English for bringing the school to the village. She told us that now there is hope for the children to escape their parent's lot in life. She reinforced our points to the parents on working together. Striking while the iron was hot and seizing the moment we quickly recruited four

mothers to be on an education committee to liaise between parents and teachers and help solve future problems while they are small. Everyone agreed and the meeting ended with a roaring round of applause and lots of hope and positive feelings.

Back at SWDC, KIDS again sponsored the two teacher's salaries at the onsite daycare and school that allows the women weaver's children to access safe daycare and education while they work just a few meters away. Between Srey Poh School and SWDC Kindergarten there are close to 100 children benefiting from your kind contributions.

The co directors of SWDC Chan and Chantha always amaze us with their commitment, dedication and amazing contribution to improve the lives of women and their people. Their list of job related tasks is long including problem solving issues that affect the women who work at SWDC, their commitment and work defines the word compassion. SWDC employs 74 previously vulnerable women who now receive a good living wage and can proudly support their children and families. Our time visiting SWDC and Stung Treng is always a rewarding experience and one of our favourite places to visit. KIDS was also pleased to be able to fund the training of ten more women weavers.

After leaving Stung Treng we travelled to Tak Kmau (just outside Phnom Penh) to visit the children and young adults that KIDS sponsors for different levels of education. This past year Sen, a lovely young woman, graduated from university and now has a job teaching English and earning a good wage. For Sen, who was orphaned at the age of seven and spent many years living in a refugee camp, this was a dream come true, she sends her appreciation. Sinat, the man who helps us identify and assist motivated children and youth, introduced us to two more first year university level students who had no hope to attend further studies. Vesna, a 20 year old male wanting to study information technology and Bopa, a 19 year old young woman wanting to study accounting. They were both overjoyed with the chance to better their lives and together with Sen will act a tutors and mentors for the 9 younger children. This year we noticed a huge increase in their ability to communicate in English and with the help of the computer we purchased for them last year they are getting more computer skills as well. We feel very positive about assisting these children and youth with education and supporting them to stay with their families or guardians while learning.

After a month on the road we are now back in Siem Reap a little weary, worn and looking forward to settling in one place for a few weeks to finish up the rest of our projects before heading home.

Wishing You And Yours All The Best

Rick and Adrienne