

Free education for children in rural Cambodia

SAVONG SCHOOL NEWSLETTER

Savong School Newsletter: Number 13: August 2012



Exam season is coming.



Education is at the very heart of Savong's project at the school, the SOC orphanage (we take pains to point out that most children there are not strictly orphans) and at the Student Center in town. All children in each of these places are there to get greater educational opportunities. Coming up next month are the examinations which provide motivation for the students to attend to their schoolwork, and also the opportunity for older students to win a prized scholarship to university.

Savong has support from an academic at one of the local Universities to help set the examinations and right now teachers are very focused on making sure the students are motivated.

We are currently seeking a couple more sponsors to help cover the scholarships—and these provide a laptop, university fees as well as a monthly living allowance in order to remove all barriers between a bright student and their potential.

Falling over is half the fun

Rollerblading is one of those dazzling activities that make the eyes of our rural children light up. Recently sponsors shouted the older children of the SOC to the local skating rink and of the billion photos we've seen (thanks Galina) it appears that these students spent as much time *on* the rink as gliding above it.

We do encourage day-trip events such as these because we want the orphanage students to enjoy as good a childhood as we can make it.

However the SOC children got a stern talking-to from Savong recently about not expecting these perks as of right. Our tip to visitors: ask first about bringing gifts. We don't want to create a culture where visitors are merely seen as *bringers of goodies*.



Letter from Duncan. A very fine line



As supporters and sponsors of children we face a number of small but important dilemmas in our relationships with these children.

There's a very fine line between our status as supporters, and our status as something a little bit closer—as friends or aunts and uncles for these children. Many readers will have discovered the Cambodian words for friendship—whereby you are brother or sister, or—if you are in your 50s like me—you are Dad or Mum.

So what kind of relationship does that signify? Is it appropriate, for example, to visit Siem Reap and to bring a gift for the child we sponsor? Or, as I did when I was last there, is it appropriate to take (with a local adult present) some of the children to Rolous market to buy some t-shirts and school bags?

We've tried to keep a fair balance, and so far over the past 8 years the good judgement of supporters and of Savong has enabled us to operate without unnecessary rules and conditions.

But over recent months there's been a changing mood amongst the children in Siem Reap. A few supporters have noticed more children approaching them with a wish list of things they want—and meanwhile Savong has noticed how children without sponsors are upset about their status: which to them reads "no gifts for you."

This changing outlook has no one reason for its occurrence. Rather, there are several factors. The biggest is the changing wealth of Cambodia and, compared to even five years ago, a conspicuous gap between rich and poor. Compared to our rural-based children, their town counterparts sport smart new clothes, and teens are likely to brandish a glitzy mobile phone, or an iPod through which they listen to their frenetic mix of today's pop hits. This is conspicuous consumption at its most conspicuous. Cambodians are not shy when it comes to flaunting their freshly purchased possessions. For the poor, this creates a real yearning. What about me?

I learned only much later that I created a flourish of jealousy and upset after my simple shopping expedition to Rolous market in which we purchased a few low price items. Oops.

Recently Savong contacted me and said he was laying down new "rules" about this—new guidelines. Now these guidelines are not intended as a criticism of any of our past actions.

1) Please, no gifting without notifying Savong first. A good guideline if you wish to bring something special to a child you particularly support, is to bring them a card, a letter, but to consider a democratic approach to gift. Something for everybody.

2) Children are not to approach visitors or sponsors with requests for money or for items. You and I know they are each heart-meltingly deserving—but we want to ensure that if they need something, the person to go to is Savong. Otherwise we'll get situations where a reasonable request is met, but then this leads to a jealous reaction from others and social frictions amongst the children. (My market experience ended this way!)

Now these rules put extra heat on Savong as well. He needs to be more easily approachable for the children (one factor this year has been his sheer busy-ness—leading some children to approach sponsors directly,) and he has to be a stronger conduit of information also: issues we have discussed.

Another implication. We need to ensure that every child knows who their sponsor is, and to let them know more about them. For children without sponsors? We need to ensure that they do not feel excluded. I was reminded of this when I saw a Russian art-house movie recently about a boy in an orphanage seeking his mother. The wonderful movie: *The Italian* reminds me that the children in our care need to know exactly how the system works for them.



Sponsors sought



Life at SOC continues with its daily rhythm whereby children get up at dawn, get dressed, have breakfast, enjoy an hour of English and then walk or cycle to their local primary or high school for more education. At lunchtime they return for a full meal and a nap, while older children then go to Savong's School for a third daily dose of education.

The Savong Orphan Center has a few children who are, as yet, unsponsored, so if you have a commitment to helping children from poor rural families to get the care, support and education they would otherwise lack—then you will be welcome to take part. The sponsorship including schooling is budgeted at \$US50 per month.

News briefs from Savong's projects

A few of the recent happenings at the school, the SOC and the student center

A few weeks back Cambodia celebrated International Childrens Day, and in Siem Reap the local television station organised a big party and concert to include children from many Siem Reap NGOs. More than 1500 attended—a big day for everyone—and the SOC children were included—a group of them performing a hip-hop dance routine to a Bruno Mars song. (A few years ago this degree of globalisation in local culture would have been undreamed of.) The number was led by Kadang who clearly enjoyed his role. The day finished with a big dinner for the children.



A road trip sponsored by good supporter Jonathan Kornberg took many children to the Thai border—



namely the Preah Vihear temple which 16 months ago was the scene of conflict between Thailand and Cambodia. The military confrontation is over and the temple remains resolutely part of Cambodia. But one consequence is that Cambodians visit the temple in greater numbers as if to stake their claim and assert their growing national pride. The journey was a big success and greatly enjoyed by the children who wandered the temple in misty conditions .

The new manager is working out well at the school. 8 weeks ago Savong appointed a new general manager at the school to replace Phay Sopheak who has moved on to a new teaching role. The new manager, Vinh, is in daily contact with Savong, but provides full-time supervision at the school and had license to make decisions with the teachers over resources and day to day needs.



At the school scholarship exams are coming up in the next few weeks—and Savong has assistance from one of his university lecturers to set and administer these.



Poverty is still a serious problem in the rural areas around Siem Reap, and recently—with the support of visitors — Savong donated bags of rice and other food supplies to needy villagers.



Bookmark these sister websites and spread the word!

SAVONG FOUNDATION- www.savongfoundation.org This website is beautifully designed and provides supporters with news

SAVONG SCHOOL - www.savong.com This one has a focus on the school, but includes news, links to visitors and is one of the fund raising channels with a PayPal button.

SAVONG ORPHANAGE— www.savongorphanage.com This one is managed by Savong and he posts news and events in the life of SOC.

And [Savong_School](https://twitter.com/Savong_School) is on Twitter too.

Senior students are doing well

At the Student Center in town (and also staying at Savong's guest house) there is an expanding number of students who are engaged in advanced education either at the well regarded New York International School, or at University. These are besides the scholarship students we also collectively sponsor to university.

The Student Center acts as a transition zone for older students who flat together, share duties, and share their study as well. The idea of sending these students to a city High School originated with a thoughtful Australian supporter who had been contemplating how to give our rural students the boost they need to succeed when they enter university. The program is running successfully, with the students doing well in examinations (a few find accountancy particularly tough) and appreciative of the support they are getting. Last week Savong approached the students and asked them if they wanted to renew their enrolments for the coming year ahead. The answer: a unanimous "yes please!" Relative to the main Savong School this carries a higher cost per student but provides a strong headstart for those SOC students that we have pledged to support as far as possible.

Number	Name	Sex	Age	School/University	Grade
1	Oum Seang Hai	Male	19/07/1995	New York	11
2	Mong Leak	Male	20/05/1995	New York	12
3	Cha Senh	Male	24/11/1995	New York	11
4	Dom Kdeb	Male	20/05/1998	New York	10
5	Vann Veasna	Male	05/03/1997	New York	10
6	Bun Toth	Male	22/05/1999	New York	07
7	Deth Chab	Male	25/10/1998	New York	07
8	Bun Khav	Male	05/06/1996	New York	09
9	Kim San	Female	03/02/1994	New York	08
10	Veourn Chomrong	Male	19/09/1987	University	Year 3
11	Svay Orong	Male		University	Year 2
12	Svay Pomsen	Male		University	Year 2
13	Reourn Seyha	Male	29/05/1988	University	Year 2



Above: Bun Khav a bright student in now in Grade 9.

News Briefs. New computers for classroom

There have been a few health scares in Cambodia this year, and one in particular had a lot of people worried: a mystery virus that had cost the lives of several dozen young children.



This appears to have been an isolated case, but came—worryingly—during the arrival of the wet season in Siem Reap just when 8 of our SOC children went down with flu. They were treated at the local hospital immediately and their illness was nothing to do with the mystery virus found in another province.

Meanwhile Savong has suffered quite a severe bout of sickness this month. Thanks to anti-biotics and advice from doctors (local and from among our supporter base) he appears to be on the mend, but one issue is exhaustion.

New computers are being set up this month for the classroom at Savong's School. This has involved reconfiguration of the computer classroom and additional security locks!



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Every two or three months - sent to our fairly exclusive mailing list of around 200 people!

- Email us at duncan@kudos-dynamics.com
- And follow us on Twitter: [Savong_School](https://twitter.com/Savong_School)
- Telephone +64 9 366 0620 or Telephone Savong (Skype: Savong6) or +855 12 531 037
- To remove your name from our mailing list, please let us know.
- And if you have spare money looking for a good home, you can always link to Secure PayPal site via the www.savong.com website. On the left down the bottom of each page is a button: PLEASE DONATE. Email us if you'd like more details.