



Free education for children in rural Cambodia



SAVONG SCHOOL AND SAVONG ORPHAN CENTRE

Savong School Newsletter : Number 3

Ministry of Education acknowledges role of donor sector

This last month in a Phnom Penh education conference organised by Save The Children (Norway) the Minister of Education, Im Sethy openly acknowledged the role of the donor sector in assisting Cambodia's objectives of making quality education accessible to all children, "regardless of gender or class" by year 2015.

In his speech he laid on the table the challenge of providing quality education outside the comparatively wealthy Phnom Penh province, and in providing sufficient schools and teachers to meet surging demand.

The speech implicitly indicates a long term role for schools supported from overseas. "We are encouraged by the fact that many countries are coming to help us...because we lost nearly everything during the Khmer Rouge regime."

Report: <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/>

Computer Classroom nears completion.

A fundraising effort by students, teachers and parents involved with the international Tenby School, Setia Eco Park, Malaysia has resulted in a dedicated computer classroom being completed adjacent to the library at Savong's School. The support from Tenby School reflects the involvement in Savong's project by Alan Crombie, Deputy Head at Tenby. We'll report on this visit in the next issue.

November—December 2009



Recent visitor Greg Jackman and his friend Carley visited the orphanage last month and they spent three happy days teaching, playing and er...lugging bricks as part of the construction of the new study room at the orphanage. Greg took this picture. He's started a Facebook page to spread the word.

The newsletter

If you know any friend who ought to be on our newsletter mailing list email us at duncan@kudos-dynamics.com You can also find Savong School group on Facebook.

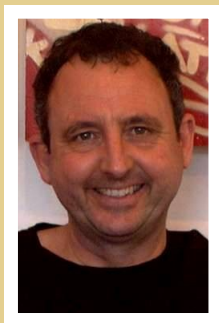
And we constantly update the website too:
www.savong.com



What big teeth you have! The students presented toothpaste, toothbrushes and a comprehensive lesson in oral care.

Dental as anything. Singapore students bring smiles to Savong's School

Students from XinMin High School in Singapore had a full-on journey to Siem Reap recently and helped complete the study room at the orphanage, conduct lessons (just love their photo—left—teaching dental care) and also spend time playing with the orphans. Said their lead teacher: "My students have learnt much from this trip and even at the airport, there were still tears in some of them as they couldn't bear to leave Cambodia. All of them felt that 3 days at the orphanage was too short and some wanted to stay 2 weeks to a month at the orphanage. All of them also wanted to come back next year to see the children again."



Letter from Duncan.

Savong and I talk or email most days every week, and the other day he was clearly under pressure with just too many things to do in the day. He had banking to arrange, he was guiding a volunteer around Siem Reap, he had food to pick up for the orphanage and there was important paperwork to pick up from a local Government office. To be honest, he was feeling a bit grumpy and I didn't help by reminding him that he can expect this kind of busy-ness for the next 30 year of his life!

The particular wall he's hit will be familiar to anyone who has ever run an organisation. At first everything is small scale, and operations are conducted on an ad-hoc basis. Then the organisation grows and the ad-hoc systems aren't quite sufficient, but the prospect of implementing the alternative (full systems and management structures,) looks even more off-putting. A business consultant friend of mine said that when you have between 5-8 to employees, that's when the uneasy transition occurs—where things teeter between ad-hoc and systematic; between having all the information in your head versus having to put everything on paper on in some electronic file.

That's exactly where Savong is right now, and he's feeling the gear-change between Savong School as the little three classroom organisation in a remote rural area—and today's reality: a growing school with additional facilities, and services and an orphanage as well. In business-speak; he's delivering more services to more students.

So at this moment I've been counseling Savong to slow down a little, to take a breather once the current mini-projects are finished, (computer classroom, study room at the orphanage) and to let things settle into a new more systemised routine.

I'm not sure he'll heed that advice entirely, (he lives in an environment where there are limitless local needs) but he's listening

Two things will greatly take the pressure off Savong. The first is a generous donation from an Australian, Damon, who in response to our last newsletter, fronted up with a gift to buy the school a tuk tuk with which to ferry volunteers and students. Peter Kitto from the UK meanwhile committed himself to meeting the driver's salary each month. Together these two gifts will not only provide a job for a local unemployed person, and enable the day to day business of moving people and goods around (going to market for example, or picking up volunteers) it will also free up Savong from a lot of his travel time each week: often he spends two hours a day doing the school to Siem Reap circuit. We often think of gifts in terms of their direct impact—helping students, facilitating volunteers—but I think this one will have a really positive impact on the time management of the school's Director. Nice move.



Breather at the orphanage. The boys take a break during the building of the study room.

The second thing that eases the pressure is that important paperwork I mentioned at the start of this letter. It is the official Government Registration or License for the orphanage. After months of jumping through red tape, and ensuring the orphanage meets the local requirements, the Savong Orphan Centre has official recognition and permission to operate.

That's quite a feat, and it reflects not only Savong's drive, but also the willingness of so many supporters to help with things like building a water tank, adding a kitchen, working on the study room, and providing monthly commitment for the feeding and care of the 20 children whose families are otherwise unable to provide the care and education these children need. Together you have put the orphanage on a sound footing. I think an especial thanks should go to John and Christina Quill in the USA who first looked at the empty field and committed to build the orphanage in the first place.

Take care everyone, and many thanks.

Duncan Stuart

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John and Christina Quill—USA

Last month something of an unsung mystery was cleared up when we met by email the donors who had helped the orphanage get off the ground. John and Christina Quill are USA residents, and had independently met up with Savong in 2008 while on a back-packing holiday in Cambodia with three of their children.

It was on this tour that they not only visited the school, but they were shown an empty field and told of the need to build a home for the needier children at the school.

When they returned to the USA they forwarded the funds for this building, and it was constructed within a few weeks. Their faith in the project—

really a blind leap of faith—has led to a wonderful development over the last 12 months with the orphanage now providing a good home for 20 children, mostly boys, most of whom have families, but these families cannot support them in terms of basics such as food or schooling.

The Quills are the last people to seek personal glory, and until this month their generosity had gone unheralded, (and fund-raising efforts back home unsupported) so we were certainly glad and happy to add their story to the website. Christina works in health care, and her ambition is to one day return to Cambodia perhaps to work in the Children's Hospital while John teaches.



John on the left, Christina (with the hat) in the middle . A meeting of tribes in 2008 that led to the building of the new orphanage.

New enrolments at Savong Orphan Centre

The orphan centre has three new children. Two children recently returned to their extended families, while the three new students have arrived bringing the enrolments to 20 in total. The new boys are:



Name: Tun Bros. Age:15

Brief description: I still have parents and three sisters and one brother and my parents are farmers and they can not support me to school and our lives rely on the rice farm and vegetables. I'm really happy to live in SOC.

Name: Di Chear. Age:11

Brief description: I only have a mum and my dad died five months ago because of sickness and he had been sick for a long time. Indeed my mum can not help me to school but I am very lucky to see Savong and he helps a lots. I am very happy to live SOC. I wish in the future I can study in University.

Name: Leum Som Oeun. Age: 14

Brief description: I study grade 6 and I have two brothers and three sisters and I still have parents. I move from them because they can not support me to school or give me enough food .I am very lucky to living in SOC.

Our longest term teaching volunteer returns to Japan

Savong School has welcomed the visits from many dozens of people over its four years since it opened in September 2005 but the record for longest stay goes to Mia, from Japan, who came to Cambodia to give months of her time: immersing herself in local life, and assisting teacher Neang with his often solitary task of teaching Japanese to the students at the school.



Because the school is in a rural area, it isn't equipped like some others in terms of being able to offer handy residential facilities for volunteers—and basically Savong and Aneed are able to offer one simple room, and those who stay share the school's quite basic facilities. This isn't 5-star!

But Mia fitted right in and became part of the rhythm of daily life at the school: really she became part of the family, and Savong and Aneed's two young daughters, Visa and Suna, simply adored her.

Mia also made a very significant contribution to the teaching of Japanese at the school. The main teacher, Neang, is self-taught, and he relies on meeting with Japanese visitors to brush up on his pronunciation and his glossary. With Mia's presence his own skills were lifted enormously.



In early November students from Chung Cheng High (Singapore) did a lot of spadework to help in the building of the study room at the orphanage a few weeks ago.

The temperatures were blazingly hot, and if the students expected a relaxing school trip to a foreign land, then they were in for a shock.

The mission: move metres of sand, rock and soil to form the foundation for the study room.

Head teacher on the visit Soon Suet Peng reported to us: "Hi! The effort was nothing compared to the sacrifices by all of you I read about on the website. We enjoyed ourselves and gained much more than whatever "suffering" experienced. All the blisters, aches are worth it especially when we see the smiles on children's faces. We will be back!"



SAVONG SCHOOL NEWSLETTER

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