

Our Journey so far

"...if we believe we can, then I'm sure we can"

The Foundation for Developing Cambodian Communities (FDCC) began with an idea 18 months ago. Within six months this idea led to the creation of a registered NGO (Non Government Organisation) in Cambodia with a newly rented building, three local staff working with local volunteers and the first of our children preparing to move into Mekhala House Orphanage. Importantly, we also had a small but growing number of Australian volunteers committed to creating opportunity for Cambodian orphans and their communities. We have made significant progress since then in only a short space of time. Today we provide a home and opportunities for 20 children, with up to 10 more expected to join our 'family' within the next six months. We are creating partnerships with local Cambodian NGO's to extend our network of services to the community in Prey Veng. Our 'lean and agile' Foundation Board is involved in developing and implementing strategies to grow the organisation. We have an increasing number of wonderfully generous donors and volunteers and growing confidence in our ability to really make a difference to lives of rural orphan children and poor Cambodian communities.

I've been reflecting on how were we able to make such good progress during the past 12 months. There are probably three good reasons. Firstly, the enthusiastic hard work and commitment from our staff in Cambodia and from the growing pool of volunteers in Australia and Cambodia. I'm continually delighted, amazed and thankful for the willingness of people with full lives to dedicate time and energy to our project.



Secondly, there is the unconditional generosity of our donors. Organisations, friends and families have supported us without the benefit of a tax deduction by making donations for our ongoing operating requirements or to purchase much needed equipment for the orphanage. There have been all sorts of creative fundraising activities by colleagues and interested supporters. For example, funds for FDCC were 'gift' options on a wedding register, at a celebration renewing wedding vows and for a 21st birthday. Thank you to everyone who has been involved to date and we welcome your ongoing commitment to our children.

Finally, the third reason for our progress during the past twelve months is simple. People believe that we can make a small difference. And if we believe we can, then I'm sure we can. **Di Willis, Director**



The name "Mekhala": It's cultural significance

The Cambodian mythological figure, goddess Moni Mekhala is famous for outwitting a giant, Ream Eyso, by using her wits and quick thinking. As a result, she beat him during a contest and was rewarded by a famous and wise hermit with a magic jewelled ball. Ream Eyso was jealous of her prize and attempted to take the ball from her using force, but she maintained her composure and outwitted him, yet again.

Mekhala portrays Cambodian ideals of behavior; she is calm, passive, fearless, undemanding, modest. Ream Eysaur shows undesirable Cambodian characteristics; he is greedy, treacherous, violent, and vengeful. It is for this reason that we selected the name Mekhala for the orphanage. We would like our children to aspire to these Cambodian ideals of behaviour which are appropriate to the Cambodian culture. You may logon to the following website to read the full story of Moni Mekhala and Ream Eyso: http://www8.sbs.com.au/worldtales/read_story.php?storyID=42

Leadership Seminar: A success

In partnership with Team Synergy, FDCC successfully convened a Leadership seminar on Friday December 1st to raise funds for Mekhala House. The seminar invited senior leaders from both the public and private sector to come together to share their insights into leadership. We were very fortunate to have such an array of quality speakers to whom we are very grateful for their time which they have all volunteered.

The speakers included: David Spokes, *CEO City of Port Phillip*; Dr Rhonda Galbally *CEO Ourcommunity.com*; Dr Michael Henry, *Principal The Strategy Shop*; Councillor Dick Gross, *President of the MAV*; Paul Buckley, *CEO Latrobe City Council*; Shane Higgs, *FDCC Board Member*; Jill Reichstein, *Reichstein Foundation*; Janet Bolitho, *Mayor City of Port Phillip*; and Anna Demant, *Lonely Planet Foundation*.

FDCC board members all contributed to the seminar which raised valuable funds for ongoing operations of our Cambodian Orphanage. The day ended up with a networking dinner at a local restaurant and feedback suggests the day proved to be an inspiring event for all those present.

Enquiries regarding further information about the seminar can be directed to Nick Petrucco on nick@tsmc.com.au or 0409287950.

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Mekhala House "their home"

My first trip to Mekhala House serendipitously coincided with the arrival a couple of days earlier of five new girls, as it provided a fascinating opportunity



to view in a snapshot the journey the girls take from entering the orphanage. On the one hand, it was rewarding to see how settled the existing girls were, how well they mixed as a group and how happy they seemed going about their daily routine.

This contrasted with the faces of the new girls, which were filled with looks of being overwhelmed and, on one little girl, a look of nothing short of sheer terror - especially

with these new big strange people, which meant she threw her arms over her head and sought sanctuary in the nearest wall when anyone came near her.

But it didn't stay like this and - like any girl - all it took was to take them clothes shopping for the smiles to break out. We went to the market, with Rady's wife Sopanha in charge of the outfitting and negotiating and by the time we returned complete with new school uniforms, shoes, hats and bags, the first step towards fitting in with their new life had been taken.



What was most pleasing to see though, was that the established girls really made an effort to include the new girls in all their activities. Some of the older girls took a big-sisterly approach to their new companions, spending time with them at mealtimes and making sure everyone was included in the games. Within the few days I was there, this had a profound effect on the outward demeanour of the new girls - gone were the apprehensive looks, to be replaced by beaming smiles, accompanied by "hello". It was evident they had begun to feel like Mekhala House was their home.

Building... The Cambodian Way



With five new girls to house, it was time to utilise the two downstairs rooms, which meant cleaning out everything and building screened walls and a door for each room. The wood and bamboo strip were delivered on a donkey-drawn cart, while Kim Hel and I went to get the fly-wire screen on his motorbike. With a sketch plan to work from, all the lads, including Borin our only male orphan, enthusiastically pitched in with the few tools left from Andrew Skewes' kitchen building venture. With walls not quite straight and wood that was even less so, getting everything to line up perfectly took a few attempts and progress on the first room was somewhat slow - not helped by the belief by the new security guard, who was working tirelessly, that it would only fit if

one of the frame's sides was shaved sufficiently - with pieces of broken glass! Sanity finally prevailed and the saw was used to complete the job. With the learning from the first effort, the second room was completed in no time.

Now the living space has expanded greatly for the girls and, when the bunk beds and mattresses that have been ordered arrive, we will have completed the fit out. **Mark Gemmola, Director**



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All donations can be forwarded to:

The Foundation for Developing Cambodian Orphans Trust
ANZ Banking Group: BSB 013 423 Account No: 4961-05454

"Thank you" for a new kitchen

Andrew Skewes, his daughter Annabelle (aged 16) and her friend Claudia (aged 17) were kind enough to volunteer their time and own travel costs during the recent school holidays to visit Mekhala house in Prey Veng. Before they left Adelaide, they raised enough money to pay for the building of the new kitchen. While they were there, Andrew built the undercover kitchen, so that the current kitchen could be converted into a bedroom to accommodate additional children at Mekhala. This was completed in a record time of two weeks using the most basic of tools. (See the photo of the children outside in the kitchen in article "Our journey so far") Together with Prom Sophearith, the day-time security guard, Andrew did an absolutely sterling job building the kitchen from scratch using local materials.

Annabelle and Claudia spent time with the children, teaching them English and playing with them and Annabelle had this to say about her time there: "The time I spent at FDCC was great, I really enjoyed it. The children were absolutely gorgeous and Claudia and I were quite sad to leave them. I myself had no idea what the orphanage was going to be like and I was surprised at how established it was."

"I think you've done a fantastic job setting the whole thing up. Thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to spend time there. I think it's an experience that will always stay with me (especially all the wonderful children)." Thank you from all us at FDCC who appreciate your valuable time and support!