

A first visit to Mekhala House

By FDCC volunteer Leila Alkassab

The road to Prey Veng is rough but the never ending fields of rice and wooden houses on stilts makes the drive a scenic one. After 2 hours we finally arrive to the small town and I get to meet all the children of Mekhala house. I've never seen so many beautiful smiles in my life and I knew immediately that my two weeks with everyone here would be great!

We threw a birthday party one night for all the children whose birthdays fell in the months of May and June. Preparations began with some of the staff; Sorithy, Sinath, Sopanha and I taking a trip to the market to buy a cake, fresh fruits, drinks and sparkles.

After the preparations finished the music was put on and the dance floor was quickly filled. The sight of 200 balloons got everyone in party mode and the room was full of the sound of squealing laughter and party whistles. Party games were played, including musical chairs, which was extremely fun to watch. The children were split into three groups and they danced around the chairs, nervously waiting for the pause in the music so they could leap into the closest seat. Rady (our Cambodian Executive Director) teased everyone and increased the edgy, excited environment by



lowering the volume, making the children even more eager to get one of the disappearing chairs.

Everyone received a prize in the end and afterwards I was treated to a beautiful show of traditional Khmer dancing by the girls. Then the birthday children blew out their candles and we all had some cake! After all that food and soft drink it was time to release some energy. As with the conclusion of most parties, we were all on the dance floor rocking to an endless number of Cambodian and Western pop songs. The night ended after lots of fun and dancing, with tired but happy children.

Meet our Donors...

John Lee and his wife Samantha have been long-term supporters of FDCC, giving regular monthly donations to support Mekhala House. Here is why they do it...

"There are a few reasons for our support for FDCC. As Christians, God tells us to help the poor and disadvantaged. I am not an orphan, but was taken away from my family at the age of 8 to live in a boys' camp by the Pol Pot regime, similar to a concentration camp. So I understand the pain and hardship without parents by my side, especially when I was sick.

As I grow older I feel more of an urge to help the poor and disadvantaged in the third world, especially in Cambodia. I am very happy and pleased that there are many good people like the FDCC team putting in the time and money to help these kids. On behalf of the children of Mekhala House, I thank you all again for your kindness, may God bless you all." **John Lee**



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Meet our Staff – Sorithy

Prom Sorithy is the Administrator at Mekhala house. He was born on 15th December 1976 in Prey Veng and previously worked in administration at the Ministry of Tourism. He finished high school and completed a human resources degree at Maharishi Vedic University.



Sorithy loves reading, playing football, driving and has travelled extensively throughout Cambodia. Sorithy has completed training and received certificates for hospitality, managing change and development, English writing skills, management and leadership and computer training. He has also received a certificate from World Vision for completing training in how to prevent children from trafficking and sexual exploitation linked to tourism.

Accounting Volunteer Position Vacant – Do you know anyone?

FDCC is seeking an accounting volunteer to assist with the management of its accounting activities. This volunteer position is Melbourne-based, reports to the Finance Director and will require a commitment of 2-3 hours a week. The volunteer will be required to use the MYOB accounting system and produce monthly finance reports for the Australian board. Accounting experience is essential.

Interested parties please email info@fdcc.org.au for a copy of the position description.

Education – A Strong Focus of FDCC’s Work

Our prime objective is to provide the children with an opportunity to improve their lives and education is the main vehicle for that. They all attend the local primary and secondary schools where they are able to learn and mix with other children in the community. Many of the children may have had little or no formal education before arriving at Mekhala House so we face many challenges in helping these children to develop.

The House Mother, Sinath is responsible for monitoring the progress of all of the children. Each month we receive a report on the children’s education and it is pleasing to see how well some are performing. Two of the older girls, Theara and Sorey have consistently been among the top students in their class for grades and more recently Phally and Bopha were 5th and 6th out of 31 in their class. We have high hopes that these girls will continue to perform well and eventually go onto university.



However, some of the other girls have struggled and Sinath works with them out of school time to help them catch up. Some will always experience learning difficulties at school and in the long term, when they are old enough to leave Mekhala House, we aim to help them transition to work in the community.

However it is rewarding to see how some have responded to the attention and support. For example, one of the girls, Sdeung was underperforming last year and also exhibiting some behavioural problems but after lots of support from our staff and volunteers Sdeung has improved from 32nd out of 34 to 15th in her class.

Overall the most pleasing aspect is the total enthusiasm that the children have for going to school. Seeing them satisfy their hunger for learning is immensely satisfying for all of us at FDCC.



Fundraising Success!

FDCC and its supporters have recently held successful fundraisers for much needed funds to sustain Mekhala House.

Bopha Devi Dinner

A fundraising dinner was held at the Melb Cambodian restaurant Bopha Devi on 21st June 2007 and was attended by 80+ people, including tables from Lonely Planet, Telstra and CRA International. The Cambodian food was an absolute hit (no fried grasshoppers in sight) and everyone rolled home after feasting on the delicious dishes including pumpkin parcels, rice paper roll prawns, Saraman Chicken and for dessert, Black Rice Crumble. Yum!

A highlight of the evening was the auction of donated items run by trained auctioneer and FDCC director, Shane Higgs. One of the items up for auction was a framed photo signed by movie star Sean Connery (a 007 collector's item) which featured posters of all 7 Bond films and came with a certificate of authentication. There was some frenzied bidding at the end which included an anonymous phone bidder, but the Telstra team prevailed in the end!

As a result of this fantastic night, FDCC raised over \$10,000 from a combination of the dinner, sale of raffle tickets, the auction and general donations. We thank everyone who attended and/or donated money & prizes for their generosity.



The Telstra team with FDCC Director Melani

Laptop Donation

Through a connection made possible by another of our supporters, Helen Scott, we have been able to benefit from a Telstra initiative that recycles second-hand computers and donates them to charities mainly in the Asia-Pacific region called the "Helping Hand" project.

Telstra has kindly donated 15 laptops to Mekhala House which will eventually be used to provide computer classes to the poor and underprivileged in Prey Veng. FDCC thanks Helen and the Telstra team, headed up by Grant Johnston, for making this happen.

All donations can be forwarded to:

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

Yoga fundraiser at the Williamstown Yoga Centre (WYC)

Susanne Calman, director and teacher at WYC held a yoga fundraiser on 21st April 2007 to raise money towards the establishment of an English school in Prey Veng, Cambodia.

She successfully raised over \$1,600 from the entry fees, raffle sales, a silent auction and general donations. About 30 people attended the two sessions and were treated to a wonderful relaxation and meditation session lasting 1 ½ hours. FDCC thanks Susanne, all the attendees, the people and Williamstown businesses who donated prizes and money.

FDCC fundraising in Austria!

One of our supporters from Graz, Austria, Cati Nicholls, raised 400 Euros for Mekhala House by holding a night in a small cafe with some young readers and musicians. The event was mostly attended by local university students who gave generously after Cati talked about the Mekhala House project and children. They had a fabulous time that night and FDCC thanks Cati and her friends in Graz.



Future Fundraisers

Music Concert – The Willy Philly Band

The Willy Philly Band and friends are holding a music concert to raise money for Mekhala House on Friday September 7 at the Holy Trinity Church Hall in Pascoe Street, Williamstown. It starts at 8pm with tickets at \$20 and drinks at bar prices. Contact Wylva on 0408 678 531 or email wilton2@tpg.com.au for further info.

And a Wine Auction is planned in Melbourne for October...details in the next newsletter!