



mekhala

the foundation for developing cambodian communities

FDCC NEWSLETTER JUNE 2008



A message from Di Willis – Founding Director of FDCC and the Mekhala House project

By chance a couple of articles about Cambodia landed on my desk several weeks ago. The first was a reflective piece from a British traveller who spent many years in Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. One line struck a chord with me. 'In Vietnam they grow rice. In Cambodia they watch rice grow. In Laos they listen to the rice growing.'

FDCC has been working with the people in Prey Veng for a number of years now and for all of us involved it has been an ongoing love affair. The collective culture is one of gentleness, acceptance and passivity. Our staff and children have experienced poverty and hardship on a level outside of the experience of western poverty and increasing numbers of our supporters feel passionate about helping them achieve meaningful change in their lives. We bring commitment, dedication and resources to the people in this impoverished region.

As I pondered on the notion of Cambodians watching rice grow it struck me that I sometimes underestimate the lessons I am learning from these gentle people who lead a simple existence. From a western management background, I expect I'd have difficulty just watching rice grow. I would want to increase the

yield, to create new markets, to investigate export opportunities and build a profitable enterprise. Money might come with the changes I could make, but an important question to ask is "what would be lost?"

As I reflect on the successes of the past few years, it's clear that we've achieved so much. We now care for 44 children who had little to look forward to, children without parents and children who were often forced to work rather than attend school. Some were physically abused and all were denied basic food and health care. At the same time our staff and children have given us the gift of appreciating a simple existence, they have helped us to understand that success isn't necessarily tied to structure or efficiency. Sometimes it's OK to watch the rice grow.

The second article I mentioned came from a British paper, The Guardian Weekend (April 26th). Titled 'Country for Sale – hundreds of thousands who fled the Khmer Rouge are homeless once more' the article talks about Cambodia having become a refuge for cash and speculators who are fleeing paralysed western financial markets. Some indicators suggested that Cambodia's previously ailing economy was turning a corner resulting in European speculators hunting for elusive 30%+ profits by buying into developing countries and awaiting

soaring land values. The ruling Cambodian People's Party is allowing investors to buy up the land – the government has sold off all of the islands, complete with forests, lakes, beaches and reefs and therefore the livelihoods of Cambodians who had a tenuous connection with the land. Forty five percent of the entire country has been sold off, depriving people of their economic resources and with bulldozers flattening entire villages.

Despite being an impoverished, remote province we've noticed an increase in the cost of land and houses in Prey Veng. Many of you are aware that we've outgrown the current Mekhala House rented property and have begun raising the money needed to buy land and build a permanent home. The emerging land crisis should spur us on to do more and to do it quickly. We want our children to have a permanent 'home' to provide greater comfort for the children and which will allow us to provide increased educational facilities. Also, importantly, we want a base where the children can return to visit their Mekhala House family once they grow into young adults.

Above all we need your continued help to develop our children and the community.

Di Willis

We need your help to raise funds for land and buildings! If you have a great fundraising idea, please contact us on fdcc@fdcc.org.au

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Clothes Request

At Mekhala House, we rely on donated clothing for the children so any clothes (in good condition) to fit girls between the ages of 3 to 16 years old would be gratefully received.

Suitable clothes include:

- light-weight long skirts, pants, t-shirts with sleeves (both long and short)
- mid-length to long dresses;
- knee-length skirts or shorts; and
- hats, sturdy sandals and runners.

Please contact Melani on 0414 291 680 or email fdcc@fdcc.org.au to organise delivery or pick-up. The clothes will then be sent over to Mekhala House in Cambodia via visiting Australian volunteers or FDCC directors.

Meet our Executive Director

Sok Rady is the Executive Director of FDCC in Cambodia and was born on May 24th 1975 in the Kampong Cham province. Rady used to work as an accountant at a rubber plantation company and also as a brand director at MVU before working at FDCC. He is in the process of completing a Masters degree and likes listening to the radio and playing sport. Rady has a wife and one biological son & daughter but when asked about his family, he says that he has 46 beautiful children.



Cabaret Carnival

by Aaron Lamb

March 9th saw the return of the Cabaret Carnival, this time at a major West End London venue. We had tap dancing belles, perfect prom queens and songs about darleks! Every penny of our admission price was sent to Mekhala House and all the performers gave up their time and talent for free as well as the venue.

Big thanks to Paajoe, Catherine, Anna, Tom, Tim, Simon, the Cabaret Carnival family for all their help on the night, all the acts and everyone who came to see the spectacle of fun! A total of £800 was raised and the carnival will be back in the early summer!

Bopha Devi Annual Fundraiser

Our annual Cambodian restaurant fundraiser was held for the second year running at Bopha Devi, Docklands on 15th May 2008 which was attended by 50+ people. The Cambodian food was delicious with plenty to go around and Chan & his team did a fantastic job with the service.

A highlight of the evening was the auction of donated items run by auctioneer, Andrew Dawson. We had some great prizes like a signed photo of Angelina Jolie (considered a rarity!), a LCD 32" flat screen TV and a beautiful semi-precious stone and hill-tribe silver jewellery set.

Everyone enjoyed themselves and as a result of this fantastic night, FDCC were able to raise over \$7,000 from a combination of the dinner, sale of raffle tickets, the auction and general donations. FDCC thanks everyone who attended and specifically the following people for prize donations; Susanne Calman of the Williamstown Yoga Centre, Jo Clark, Chris Hara from Fitzroy Framing, Carly Pearce from Gypsy Jewellery, Annette Philp, Andrew Batey and Chan Ouy from Bopha Bevi.



Bush-dance Fundraiser

by Lexey Odgers

It was Nigel's impetus, Wylva's enthusiasm and Tess's passion for the cause that were responsible for raising \$3,800 for Mekhala House at a recent Bush-dance in Fitzroy.

I mentioned to Nigel that I used to love going to Bush-dances, where adults and children were assured of a great time. They were real family affairs where tables, laden with food and lemonade would only be visited between the *Virginia Reel* or the *Pride of Erin* and the progressive dances would go on for eons.

"I'd like to organise one for my friends one of these days", I said wistfully. "Well you should speak to Wylva and Anton", Nigel said. I embarrassedly blurted out the idea to these amazing musicians, although had I known Wylva better I should not have been embarrassed. "If you do it to raise money for Mekhala House, Anton and I and Willy Philly will play", she said. I was in awe of the conviction and commitment behind the suggestion. Then with gusto, Tess and Wylva hit me with everything they knew about Mekhala House. Wylva had tears as she told me of the injustices done to children in Cambodia and how she felt we could help.

The seed was sown. Musicians Jen and Terry committed their time and energy free of charge, as did Nigel, Tess, Baz and Tyler. We had a band, I booked a hall, sent out the invitations and now all I had to do was find out how to fundraise. I had no idea what to do, but it is fantastic how people will volunteer to help a good cause. Steve said he would be the auctioneer and I received generous offers of items to donate.

On the night, we had more than 100 people, nearly more than the tiny hall could hold. It started with the children and the genius of Terry calling the dances. Pretty soon, the dance floor was full and Wylva had the dancers doing a conga-line and weaving in and out of the hall. Friends who I had not seen dance before got up to enjoy themselves in a really happy environment.

More than 100 more people now know about Mekhala House. Annie has gone on to fundraise by selling beautiful Cambodian bags at her school. The team at FDCC could not have been more supportive. Along with FDCC, thanks go to Lyndell, Terri, Judy, Janine, Ruby, Steve, Frank and



Giselle, Leonie, Mum, Kath and Paul and Ray, Sue and Graham and Jette and Rob who wrapped and organised and carried the gifts, made the signage, bought tea and coffee cups, drinks, collected at the door, set up tables and chairs and decorations, sold raffle tickets and cleaned up afterwards.

I guess the whole message from this is, start with an idea, make it a fundraiser and you'll be amazed at how it becomes a group effort because Mekhala House is such a good cause.

Additional thanks...

We would also like to acknowledge the following people and organisations in this newsletter:

Denis Binnion, Chief Executive Officer of the **Workers' Educational Association of SA Inc.** from Adelaide for his kind gesture in letting one of our volunteers to attend their touch typing workshops. Our volunteer, **Margie MacDonald**, will return to Cambodia in June to use her gained knowledge to help the children learn to touch type too.

Zonta Club of Adelaide Flinders for their fundraising efforts in organising a "Walk for Cambodia" in which they were able

to raise \$3,000 towards operating costs. A special thanks to the club's recently-elected president **Carolyn Colquhoun** and Zonta member **Dr Sarah Cunningham** who threw their support behind the fundraiser.

Nick Petrucco of **Team Synergy Management Consultants** who ran a Leadership Forum in Melbourne again this year with net proceeds of \$8,400 going to Mekhala House. Thanks to all the attendees and also the facilitators for the day; **Marie O'Sullivan, Gavin Didsbury, Terry Coyne, Sue Coyne** and **Tony Taormina**.

Annie Johnston of Eltham who sold some bags from Cambodia at her school to raise \$365 for Mekhala House operating costs.

Leila Alkassab had a 2008 New Year's fundraiser amongst her family and friends and through their support was able to raise \$450 for Mekhala.

Every dollar counts and we appreciate all efforts to assist us in keeping the Mekhala House project funded. It costs A\$3,000 to \$3,500 per month for operating costs and nearly 100% of your donations (apart from some bank fees) goes directly to the project.

For donations and enquiries, please contact FDCC on 0414 291 680 or email fdcc@fdcc.org.au