

Issue 9

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FDCC Grows Up!

In December last year FDCC was registered with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission as a company limited by guarantee. While (rightfully) this event may not generate the same levels of excitement as our work in Cambodia, it represents a major milestone in the history of the organisation. In three years we have grown from a small group of people sitting around a kitchen table developing an idea of helping underprivileged children in rural Cambodia to establishing a registered company solely dedicated to this objective.

So what does this actually mean? At a high level, it provides assurance to donors and other stakeholders that FDCC is committed to helping the children and communities of Cambodia over the long term. Also, importantly, this is the first step in a process to become a tax deductible organisation, which will allow FDCC to access funding from a wider range of donors including the business and corporate sectors. Greater funding will allow us to significantly expand our work in Cambodia and provide opportunity to a greater number of children.

Our next step is to invite interested persons to become members of FDCC and a separate letter will soon be sent out to everyone explaining this process. FDCC has also adopted a constitution and a set of membership rules that govern its operation in Australia. These will be available on our website soon.

FDCC's evolution from an idea to a company operating a successful and worthwhile project in Cambodia has resulted from the commitment and passion of many people, who are too numerous to mention here. Therefore, briefly, I would like to thank everyone who has donated money or given their time to assist us in our journey, which is providing hope and opportunity to many deserving children. Also, finally, on behalf of FDCC, I would like to thank Sarah Guy and Justin Cherrington at Mallesons Stephen Jaques for their wonderful advice and help in drafting the constitution and membership rules.

Mark Gemmola – FDCC Director

Volunteering at Mekhala House

We have been United States Peace Corps volunteers in Prey Veng, Cambodia since April 2007. Our jobs have been to teach English at the local high school (Sam) and teach English, pronunciation and methodology at the regional teacher training college (Leena). Our organization also asked us to get involved with other projects in the community and FDCC has been the perfect place for that.

Leena worked closely with Sopheap (the children's English teacher) to help improve her English skills and enhance her knowledge of student centered learning techniques. Also, she planned and implemented health and hygiene and HIV/AIDS workshops for the staff and children. She

held arts and crafts activities with the children and helped facilitate the week-long English Camp over the summer.

Sam worked with the children in the realm of arts and games. Last year he led music sessions every week and this year he taught the children some schoolyard games. Over summer he co-facilitated an art, drama and games program with Soran (a Cambodian volunteer) and helped to plan English Camp.

Overall, we have had a wonderful experience at Mekhala House and it's been our pleasure to volunteer there. The children have brought smiles to our faces more times than

we can count and we cannot thank them enough for that! We are also deeply indebted to the staff who made our time here so rich.

Leena (Kara) and Sam Snyder – U.S. Peace Corps Volunteers



Leena with Mekhala House children

Meet Our Staff – Seth Tharoth



At just 22 years of age, Tharoth is the English Translator at FDCC. He is currently studying Accounting at Maharashi Vedic University in Prey Veng Town.

Tharoth is enjoying gaining experience at FDCC as he would like to work for a large International NGO in the future. Tharoth is very interested in learning about other cultures and loves learning more about the world outside Cambodia.

Tharoth likes to visit friends in his spare time and likes relaxing on his own as well.

Hello Mr Owl

What sort of a mother would take her daughters cherished stuffed toys, throw them in a black garbage bag and take them away in the boot of her car?

Well, perhaps a mother who saw an avenue to introduce her daughter to a world where children did not have some of the advantages and possessions which her daughter might take for granted. For Julie Raffe, Chief Financial Officer of Village Roadshow, both in her personal and professional life, is interested in both supporting women in business, and some major social issues in Australia such as homelessness. So when she heard through word-of-mouth about the activities of FDCC, she both saw an opportunity to help others, and introduce her daughter to an avenue through which she could pass on some of her good fortune to the chil-

dren of Mekhala house.

FDCC Directors Gavin and Marie volunteered to take the stuffed toys, together with some clothing for the girls with them on a visit to Mekhala house in November. But Julie's generosity posed a problem. They had donated 40 toys and some of them such as Mr Owl were quite large. In fact, when all together, larger than the suitcases available to take them.

The solution was to use suction bags, where surplus air can be removed, thus allowing everything to fit in the cases. However if you have Mr Owl sitting on your couch for a couple of weeks before he flies to Cambodia to enrich the life of a child who has never had a stuffed toy before, chances are you might get pretty attached to him yourself!

So Mr Owl and Gavin got into the habit of having a quiet chat about the day's activities as dinner was being cooked each night, until the night when Gavin arrived home to find his dinnertime companion almost squashed beyond recognition, and seemingly pleading for release from the wrong side of a transparent suction bag!

However the good news was that despite a rather indignant and disgruntled fluffing of feathers, Mr Owl took his place amongst all the other toys arrayed in front of the children at Mekhala house. You can imagine the excitement Mr Owl and his friends produced, as one by one each of the children came forward and received their toy, allocated by a scrupulously fair ballot system. The pictures tell the remainder of this story.



Mr Owl and friends are joyously received by residents of Mekhala House



Mr Owl and Houn

So what's life at

mekhala House really like?

An education is one of the greatest gifts that can be bestowed on a child – yet in Cambodia fewer than 50% of enrolled children complete grade six and only about 30% of the adult population have completed some school level. The literacy rate is only 63%.

Therefore, at Mekhala House, FDCC places a strong emphasis on education. The children attend public school and we now have 10 children in High School and 34 children in Primary School, with our youngest child attending Under-Primary classes each morning.

The children have displayed their understanding of the benefits of education. During a class discussion one of the girls proudly said, "I am committed to being a good student so that I can become a good person in society." The children love to learn and love going to school. Another of the girls expressed, "Before coming to Mekhala House, I never thought I would have the opportunity to study." Many children had little edu-

cation prior to coming to Mekhala House since their families were not able to afford the basics of their children's education such as uniforms and books.

At Mekhala House we also try to increase learning beyond just academic education and run a series of programs that teach the children subjects such as life skills and health and hygiene. We also encourage the children to learn skills such as traditional Khmer dancing and sewing.

The joy of performing was evident recently when the girls offered to perform at Australian FDCC Volunteer, Sarah Miller's 30th birthday party. They attracted quite the crowd with their beautiful costumes and professional performance. Each dancer wore a costume that they had sewn themselves, quite a feat that we're sure many Australian students would have trouble with!

The creative side of learning is also

"We now have 10 children in High School and 34 children in Primary School."

an important element of education as it helps the children express themselves. Arts and crafts, music and games are taught as part of the FDCC programs and we have some very talented artists and sportspersons amongst us. The children have really enjoyed making pen holders, hats, jewellery and learning how to scrap-book photos, keeping these small possessions to decorate their rooms.

FDCC has initiated a project which encourages the children in their schooling and behaviour, where they earn smiley stamps in an awards book when they achieve outstanding or much improved results at school or display good behaviour at Mekhala House. Those with the most stamps are awarded personalised medals at the end of each month in a ceremony attended by the staff. This has been a great way of making the children feel special and encouraging them to always do their best.

In providing the Mekhala House children with education, we believe that they can gain good employment which benefits both their families and the community. Also importantly it helps the children develop confidence and self esteem and help them to maybe one day become leaders within their community.

Sarah Miller - AYAD Volunteer



The girls dance at Sarah Miller's 30th Birthday party

Want to help us continue our good works?

Donations can be forwarded to:

The Foundation for Developing Cambodian Communities

ANZ Banking Group

BSB 013 423 Account No: 4961-05454

Fundraising Update...

Sprocketheads Fundraiser

In November last year The Sprocketheads held a fundraiser at the Toorak Lions Hotel for FDCC. More than 100 turned up to relive their younger days rocking to 80's Aussie rock songs. There was also an auction Richard Proudlove baring his well formed torso on stage to auction himself off for a dinner date – which generated enthusiastic bids! Thank you to the band members and supporters, who generously donated their time on the night. Also thank you to the organisers on the night: Madonna Derks, Richard Proudlove, Sue Storen and Remy Schotten plus the Toorak Lions Hotel for donating the venue.

Over \$4,000 was raised for Mekhala House from the night.



Special Thanks...

Special thanks go out to Leila Alkassab, who ran a fundraiser selling fair trade goods at her home in December, which raised \$350.

Thanks also to Jo Clark and friends who raised over \$2,000 towards operating costs for Mekhala House by selling Cambodian bags on behalf of FDCC.



COME ALONG TO OUR

Pirate Funday!

Sunday 5th April 2009

10am - 4pm

Seaworks

82 Nelson Place, Williamstown (west of Ann Street)
Melways 56 E9/10

Children under 4 free, Children 4 and older \$15
(all activities included in price)

Adults - gold coin donation at the door

