



HELPING HANDS CAMBODIA NEWSLETTER

Number 19

September 2007

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All our students get two new uniforms.

Chanti made a comment to me a little while ago along the lines of "how can we teach the children about hygiene issues when some of them literally only have one set of clothes to wear". Day in day out, night and day - the same set of clothes.... Can you imagine it?

Thanks to Koren, a young lady from Adelaide, who single-handedly raised a *very* considerable sum of money for us, we recently bought each of our students two uniforms consisting of two tops and two bottoms. (And we had a lot of change left over from Koren's donation.)

Koren also spent a month volunteering at the school and helping to teach our English classes.



If there was ever a case of pictures telling a thousand words, then these two are it. It was a very exciting time for all and we obviously enjoyed giving out the uniforms as much as the children enjoyed receiving them.



You may wonder why, in this environment, we gave the children white tops? The reason being because white tops and blue pants or skirts are the official uniform of all Cambodian schools. Thus, they can wear their uniform to the government school as well.



Left: *Koren looks at a shirt one of our students was wearing to school.*



Below: *Koren "sizing" up a student.*



Thanks Koren!



Toothbrushes for all!

As part of our ongoing commitment to try and improve the general health and welfare of our students we also recently gave them all a toothbrush (thanks, Mum, for providing 300 toothbrushes). We spent a day on dental care teaching how and why the children should brush their teeth. A random sampling of 40 children showed that only 5 owned a toothbrush. The smiles on the faces of the children as they chose which colour toothbrush they wanted were almost as big as when they got their uniforms. Such a small thing, that I think I can safely say the majority of us take for granted.



Let there be light! We now have solar power

The fact that there is no electricity in our village means that it is very, very dark at night. Our classes go until 8.00pm in the evening and we used to have to rely on a small and inadequate amount of light from a car battery or a noisy, and expensive to run, generator. Thanks to Brian (see below) and our many other generous donors, we have now gone high tech and have installed two solar panels on the roof of our school. Even in the wet season there is more than enough sunshine for us to power 8 lights at the same time, as well as run a tape player, TV, etc.

As usual, getting the equipment to the school was a challenge, the solar company assuring us they would be able to make it in a tuk tuk (small carriage pulled by a motorbike) despite us trying to warn them about the state of the road. Well, the tuk tuk driver went as far as he could then we had to hire an ox cart to go the rest of the way.



Mitsubishi's high tech solar equipment being delivered by ox cart.



Installing the panels on the roof. The workmen had nothing to protect themselves from the scorching heat or hot tin roof.

Brian's story

You may recall I mentioned Brian Kuhl (also affectionately know as Daddy Kuhl) in my last newsletter. Brian, from Darwin, Australia, became ill with dengue fever while he was volunteering with us. I'm pleased to say that he is now fully recovered and back to his bubbly, energetic self. Brian spent quite a bit of time with us and we can thank him for both his research and financial input into our solar power system. Here is Brian's own story about the time he spent with us: *There can be few more charming and tranquil locations than the Cambodian countryside, and specifically in the area adjoining the Helping Hands School/Community Centre at Prasat Cha Village.....*

So this is me waxing lyrical. My name is Brian or in Deb's parlance, Daddy Kuhl. The observations were made on my recent visit to Siem Reap to spend some time with Deb and try to be some help in all the great work she is doing.

To be honest, on the evening in question I was not providing any help to speak of. Rather I was resting beneath a tree waiting for Chanti, Deb's able assistant and my ride back to town, who was giving a bunch of children an English lesson. For me it became a time of reflection as the scene before me became increasingly animated. The peaceful, totally rural setting, with the odd farmer bringing his oxen or buffalo home after a day grazing or ploughing in fields nearby, changed quite dramatically.

Within the space of 30 minutes the farmers had to compete for space in crossing the narrow wall across the nearby weir with a constant stream of cyclists making their way home. It was "peak hour at Prasat Cha"!!!! Literally dozens of men and women, returning at days end from their jobs around the Angkor temples and in Siem Reap, some 25 kilometres away. What I was witnessing was as close as one would get to a "traffic jam" in that setting.

How nice it was to reflect that here was a situation that would have been almost undreamt of by the people of the village 12 months ago. The happy voices of the children in the picturesque school behind me, the school that Deb and you, her supporters, helped the villagers build. The dozens of bicycles jamming up the track, some of the 240 bicycles introduced into the village

under a purchase or reward program initiated by Deb to get at least one bicycle into every home. And the very fact that those same bicycles could not have traversed that track and indeed the people would not have had those jobs had it not been for the bridge that Helping Hands built to provide rainy season access to the village.

Through Deborah's initiative and your support much has been achieved over the past 18 months toward improving the village infrastructure and the living standards and health of a number of families/individuals in the village. However, while the residents indeed live in a place endowed with natural beauty, the underside of the village reveals that so much still needs to be done to raise living standards to an "acceptable" level, albeit one that we in the west would still consider to be extreme poverty.

Things that we take for granted such as reticulated water and power and sewerage systems are realistically generations away. The importance of establishing wells in strategic locations to provide clean drinking water cannot be over-emphasised. Nor can the necessity of adult education on the subject of health and hygiene in the home. These are initiatives on which Deborah is currently engaged.

Basic lighting is another area to be addressed. In time to come solar power will be an obvious solution in the area. But that remains a long way off for these people. In the meantime access to a simple camper's lamp, which we might keep in the shed for use once or twice a year, would provide a huge improvement on the smoky little oil lamp burned in most houses in the evening. LED technology may provide a short term solution and prospects of sourcing lamps at an acceptably low price are being investigated.

Despite the harsh history endured by this country over many centuries and the poverty that prevails, the spirit and positive outlook of today's generation of Khmer people is wondrous. But given the continuing corruption which holds back development in Cambodia, the people on the ground are hard pressed to improve their lot without outside help.

Helping Hands and other similar small non-government aid organisations cannot change the face of Cambodia. But through the seemingly boundless energy of Deborah Groves and with your continued support, a real difference can be made in the lives of the people of Prasat Cha, one of the poorest villages in the poorest Province of the country.

*Thank you for taking
the time to read this
and thank you for
caring.*

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