

## BIKES, BIKES, BIKES!

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My right hand man, Chanti, has recently been spending some time in the village talking with the villagers about their needs and how we could best help them. He told me that just about everyone wanted a bicycle. Their reasons for wanting a bike were varied though all their reasons were very legitimate.

The main reason they wanted bikes was so that they could ride from the village to Siem Reap to find work - a trip of 25 km's (one way). Because of the tourism boom here there is a huge amount of construction going on and the villagers can easily find work as labourers. They earn around \$2.00 a day.

The bikes are also used by children to get to school. Those children that live more remotely, or who attend the high school (which is in another village) in particular need bikes.

Bikes are also used to take produce to market to sell and to collect firewood for cooking. Some of the poorest families collect firewood and sell it to other villagers.

Of course, bikes are also needed to visit a doctor as the nearest medical center is about 10km's away.

We came up with the idea of asking the villagers who were able to do so to contribute to the cost of the bike. At first we thought we would ask them to put in \$10 USD, but then lowered it to \$5.00 USD so as not to preclude too many people. Our reason for asking them to contribute to the cost is so that they will feel ownership of the bike and look after it. We try very hard not to give "handouts".

Chanti came out of the village with a list of about 30 people who wanted to pay and get a bike. Last Tuesday we organised for them to come to Siem Reap with their \$5.00 and meet us at a designated spot. I was surprised to find not 30 but 45 people anxiously awaiting our arrival. All but 5 of them had their money, the five that didn't have agreed to work for us for several days on another project (which I'll tell you about soon).

So off we went to the bike shop. The owners of the shop must have thought they'd won the lottery! They gave us a very good price - \$25.50 USD per bike, fully fitted out with all accessories such as lights, bells, baskets, locks etc. (The bikes are not new, they are reconditioned. I think they come from Hong Kong or China.)

I did an impromptu survey of some of the villagers while the bikes were being prepared. Of the 16 people I asked; 3 were going to use their bikes for school; 1 was going to use it to buy things at the market to sell in the village; 3 were already working in Siem Reap but either had a very old, dilapidated bike or rode on the back of someone else's bike; and 9 were going to go to Siem Reap to work for the first time.

So how did we fund this? Well, my brother Shaun, his fiancé, Donna, and her friend Dan, who all live in Sydney, held a raffle with their workmates. Shaun works at IBA, Donna at Nestle and Dan at Multiplex. They raffled off three of my photos of the temples of Angkor, all one off limited edition prints. They also had some other friends do fundraising. Basically the amount they raised was exactly the amount we needed to buy 45 bikes. So three cheers for the Sydney contingent! *Thank you so much*, I know you all worked very hard selling your raffle tickets and I hope you understand how much you have helped the people of Prasat Char village.



*You obviously don't need me to tell you that this guy was rather pleased to get a new bike! He's holding the light which is about to be attached.*



*Each person chose their own bike and there was much deliberation about which bike to take.*



*We "branded" all the bikes*

Now what.....? Well, there are actually 250 families in our village and we want to be able to ensure that they all have the same opportunity to have a bike so, yes, we're back on the fundraising trail ;- ) ..... and as I mentioned above we have another project in the pipelines, but I'll tell you about that in the next newsletter.

Warmest regards,

Deborah



*The boy in the yellow shirt will be using this bike to go to high school. He is one of the very few children from the village that does attend high school.*

*The boy in the middle comes from a family of six children. His mother is widowed and they are extremely poor. Since getting his bicycle he has started working as a labourer in Siem Reap.*

*with HH (Helping Hands). Just in case anyone has a "little too much" rice wine and tries to sell their bike.*



*Happy customers.*