

Kampuchea House Newsletter



December 2023

SUASDEY and greetings to all our supporters.

It is with great sadness, but also great joy, that we send this final newsletter.

As you all know, our student residence in Siem Reap closes at the end of December for good. The long journey which began in rural Dom Dek 16 years ago is coming to an end.

The reason for this has been communicated many times, both in our Secretary's letter to you and our President's report for 2023, which will be attached to this newsletter.

Of course, it is sad to see the end of a journey, especially a journey which has seen so many achievements on the part of our kids - opportunities embraced, career paths chosen, jobs and apprenticeships found, studies carried out successfully. But it is also a joy to see the nurturing, care and love that has been part of the Kampuchea House family story and that lives on amongst our kids.

Testimony to this is the fact that at our KH reunion lunch, held on the 28th November in Siem Reap, 36 out of 42 kids who had been in our care over the years attended – some travelling for

up to six hours to get there! There were also 12 ex-staff, a number of visitors, our wonderful ex-English teacher, Sean, and of course our President and Vice-President, Libby McCann and Belinda Lightfoot.

Emotional speeches were made, surprise gifts were given to the kids and staff, there was much fun, talk and laughter – and a tear or two shed.

You will find attached speeches made by our Director Leng and our top student Chinh, now completing his specialist studies in anaesthetics. Their words speak for themselves – nothing can better describe the family kinship, care and support provided to both staff and students over the years.

It has been said before, but must be said once again:

A huge THANK YOU to all of you, our donors, sponsors and supporters, for your generosity, because without you this journey would not have been possible.

A huge THANK YOU to our Director, Sour Sokleng, for her unerring dedication, and for managing and administrating KH with great efficiency while at the same time providing the maternal love and leadership the kids needed.

A huge THANK YOU to Libby and Belinda, for having the vision and courage to begin this journey and carry it through to the end, never shying away from all the hard work done along the way.



KAMPUCHEA HOUSE
REUNION LUNCH NOVEMBER 2023





KH Reunion Lunch in Siem Reap November 2023



Belinda and her boys, including Sean



Libby with Chinh and Minea



Leng and Chinh during his speech

Speech given by Chinh at KH Reunion on Tuesday 28th November 2023.

On behalf of the KH's children, I would like to say Thank You for organizing this reunion event before KH is closed before the end of this year. It has been very tough to say goodbye to a place where we used to live, learned, and grow together and to all the children, students, teachers and all the parents who have been supporting us from a very difficult life to the brighten of education life. We are very grateful for everything that KH and all the sponsors have done to us, feeding, teaching, and warming as a family. Without the kindness of KH and the sponsors we would end up our future in a way our natural family did.

Today I am very happy to be back together again but also sad to say goodbye. I can say that without KH and all the sponsors my brother and I would never become what we are today. Last but not least, there is nothing that can describe about my gratitude to KH and all the sponsors beside the word THANKS and my brother and I promise that we will keep up our hard work and to be a good citizen for the society and help other people as much as possible as KH had taught us. At the end of my speech, I would like to wish everyone all the best, health and happiness. You all will be remembered for our whole life. Thank you.

Speech given by Leng at KH Reunion Tuesday 28th November 2023.

Hello all,

I'm very happy to see all of you here today and I want to thank the Kampuchea House committee, especially Libby and Belinda, for making this day happen. I've always hoped to meet all of you again someday.

Time flies, and it's hard to believe I've been working for KH for 14 years. When I first started, I was a small assistant with little knowledge. I want to thank Belinda and Sokhoeun for accepting me into KH and guiding me through the challenges. You both have truly changed my life.

KH has given me everything: family, friends, and especially the wonderful children. I've learned about responsibility, teamwork, and being a caring mother to them. Every day I learn something new from KH, which has brought me to where I am today. I feel very lucky to be part of KH because it fulfilled my dreams and gave me a loving family.

To the children, it has been a joy to see you grow, smile and seek happiness and good health. You inspire me and I've learned so much from you. Even if you haven't achieved everything KH hoped for, I'm proud to see that you can take control of your lives. That, to me, is true success. We are really proud of you.

I also want to thank the staff, especially SreyMom and Hom, for their hard work and their patience with me. Thank you very much.

Today's success and happiness wouldn't be possible without the support of sponsors and staff in Australia who worked very hard to find funds for us. Words can't express how thankful we are. Thanks to all the committee members, Libby and Belinda, and also to Chris, Lyn and Ann who are not here today. Also thanks to all the supporters and sponsors, including Westbourne Grammar School, who have been supporting us from the beginning until now. You are our heroes and you have changed our lives and the lives of future generations.

As for my plans, I've decided to go to Australia to look after Elvin (my son). I can't leave him alone during his teenage years. So early next year I will be moving to Australia with him and he will start school in year 7. It is difficult to say goodbye to the place where I call home and the people I call my family, but we can't stay together forever.

I sincerely hope this day will be unforgettable for all of us. Words can't describe the emotions I'm feeling right now. This may be the last time we are together, but I hope we'll meet again in the future. KH will always be in my heart and memories. I love you all so much! Thank you.

KAMPUCHEA HOUSE (AUSTRALIA) INC PRESIDENT'S REPORT - AGM 2023

Having just returned from Siem Reap, it was wonderful to see our beautiful children after an absence of 4 years in the country. It was so impressive to see how they have grown, matured and how they all made such an effort with their presentation. Our farewell reunion held on Tuesday 28th November was an extremely special time for all. We had around 60 attend on the day including all our past staff. There was so much excitement, chatter and tears. Tears of happiness and joy. Wonderful speeches by Leng, Sean, Chinh, Belinda and myself, with of course translation taking place! It will be a day long remembered in my heart and one I am sure for many others.

When I look back to 2007 when I meet with Les Stott, Wesley College teacher at the time who had the vision, inspiration and dream of starting a home for orphans and deserted children, I never imagined that I would have so many visits to Cambodia. His dream came true and 16 years later we are now at the end of its journey. As you all know Kampuchea House has been an organisation where we wanted to provide a family home environment with the best educational skills allowing all the children as adults an opportunity to pursue a career and future successful life ahead.

As this will be my final report to you, our supporters I wish to thank many of you.

Westbourne Grammar has been on this journey from day one and our number one sponsor over all these years. It was driven by Meg Hansen, Geoff Ryan, Jim Mitchell and Andrew McGregor but most importantly by all the students over those many years. The Community Centre, kitchen and amenities blocks were built with funds from Westbourne. A truly wonderful relationship developed between the school and our children.

The initial houses were built with funds from Wesley College, St Kilda Road, The Platinum Donors, The Edwards Family and the Bike Riders. Fundraising continued to build our 5th house and the new amenities blocks. Mr and Mrs Chris, as they are so fondly known by the children over the years, have provided huge support. Mr Chris installed all 5 of the huge blue water tanks as our underground water supply had dried up. It was so appropriate to have them both there for our reunion last week.

To all our sponsors of the children, so many of you, we would not have continued for all these years without your amazing ongoing financial contribution, especially those that have financed our kids with their tertiary studies at university and other educational institutes. My apologies to not name all of you but my report would then go on for pages!

Our remaining students that are still studying are doing well. Rina is working whilst nearing completion of her accounting degree. Ban is on the pathway with his apprenticeship in motorcycle mechanics. Net will be commencing her hospitality course at Spoons whilst Chayna is now completing her internship as a chef. Somnang has returned to Dom Dek village with his house mother SreyMom and he will continue his schooling there. Yim graduated with her english degree and is now teaching. Minea ends his 6th year of his medical degree and he will continue with further studies in Orthopedics. Chinh is now into his 3rd year of Anaesthetics and they both live together in their apartment in Phnom Penh.

Kampuchea House continued to be so well run on the ground in Siem Reap. Our thanks go to Sokhouen, our original Director and now especially to Leng, our Director who has been with us for over 14 years. Leng has provided excellent leadership skills for our children and staff and she has run our organisation with such professionalism, honesty and transparency allowing it to be a highly respected organisation in Cambodia. We wish her all the very best with her future pathway in life and with her career.

Hom and SreyMom, our 2 remaining staff have been with us from day one. They have provided excellent care, consistency and love for our children. I wish them well and I know SreyMom will continue to provide a family life for Somnang.

My final thanks go of course to our committee who have worked tirelessly here in Melbourne. Belinda, our Vice President has over the 16 years provided us with all the regulations and requirements needed by our staff and children in Cambodia. She has devoted her time to Kampuchea House and I know the children and staff will very much miss seeing her. Congratulations Belinda on a brilliant job for our organisation.

Chris, our Secretary has kept you all informed and been a great advisor to us all on the committee. Lyn, our Treasurer has always provided excellent updated financial reports over the many years she has been on the committee and finally Ann, our Media and Communications has kept all of you informed with great newsletters and anything else that has been required. I want to personally say it is a huge thank you from me, as Kampuchea House would not be what it has been over all these years without your dedication and enthusiasm to assist with providing all the care for our children and staff in Cambodia.

Our financial position for the year ended 30 June 2023 shows reserves of \$181,084 with an operating deficit of \$52,422. Our total remittances to Kampuchea House, Cambodia during the past financial year totalled \$91,169. The increase with our expenditure in Cambodia relates to our education costs, especially with the older children's tertiary fees. With the closing of Kampuchea House, Cambodia further costs were incurred

with the independent set up of these children including ongoing support for 6 months until they are capable of financially supporting themselves. Any financial reserves that we hold at our final winding-up date will be donated to other charities aligned with similar objectives of ours whether it be in Cambodia or Australia.

As I write this report, Belinda and Leng are in Siem Reap finalising the closing of Kampuchea House which will take place on December 31st.

In conclusion I wish to acknowledge how much I thank all of you, our sponsors especially Westbourne Grammar over the 16 years for your generosity and kindness, Leng and our staff in Cambodia, our past volunteers over the years, particularly Will Murray, Ajaya Haikerwel, Sean White and Tom Wilkins, our past committee members, particularly our past Presidents Jason May and Chris Penman and finally our committee here in Melbourne.

For me personally it has been a wonderful journey, one to be long remembered and one in which I only hope we have made a difference to the lives of those children who have been a major part of Kampuchea House. I only hope we have made changes, giving them an education and an opportunity that will make life a little easier for them. I wish them every happiness and success in the future.

With warmest regards

Walter McCann

President

12 December 2023

**WE WISH YOU ALL A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS AND
PEACE AND JOY IN THE NEW YEAR. THANK YOU FOR
ALL YOU HAVE DONE TO MAKE THE KAMPUCHEA
HOUSE STORY SUCH A SUCCESS AKUN**

