



Kampuchea
House
Newsletter

OCTOBER
2018

OUR KIDS IN SIEM REAP

PCHUM BEN (ANCESTORS' DAY)

This newsletter comes to you during a very important religious festival in Cambodia that finds our office closed for a week. The reason for this is that all Cambodians travel back to their homelands during this 15 day period to visit the pagodas where their ancestors passed away.

Pchum Ben, or Ancestors' Day, is celebrated on the fifteenth day of the tenth month in the Khmer calendar, at the end of the Buddhist Lent. The tradition reflects the deep respect Cambodians have for their ancestors. They gather together in their ancestral lands to feed their ancestors' spirits at dawn with balls of sticky rice and sesame. The festival originated during the Angkorian Era, when people followed Animism, well before Brahma and Buddhism. Apart from its religious significance, it was also a convenient way for the monks to receive food during the heaviest part of the rainy season. The villagers take food to the pagodas for them as well when they visit to feed their ancestors.

Cambodians believe in re-incarnation and that those who have bad karma can be trapped in the spirit world. During the period of Pchum Ben these unfortunate ghosts are released from the spirit world to search for their living relatives and repent. By offering them food their relatives can ease their suffering. It is believed that those who are greedy or envious during their lives end up being hungry ghosts. These ghosts have huge appetites but only pin-hole mouths – a terrible fate.

As most Cambodians have relatives who died during the Khmer Rouge era, it is important for them to do everything they can to ease the transition of their ancestral spirits to the next phase of their spiritual path, especially for those with bad karma or who have died a violent death.

Cambodians believe that by giving happiness to their parents they will have happiness in their own lives, and subsequently their own children will love and respect them in the future too. Not such a bad philosophy that perhaps we could learn from too!



MEET SOUR SOKLENG

... or Leng, as she is known to all of us at Kampuchea House.

Leng began working with KH in 2008 as Assistant Director and in 2012, after an extensive selection process from a wide range of highly qualified applicants, was appointed Director. A graduate in accounting from the Institute of Finance and Accounting in Phnom Penh, Leng has all the qualifications to fulfill her administrative role within the organization, running both the office and house for our kids in Siem Reap on a tight budget and with strict accountability. Leng reports back to the Board in Australia in excellent English on a monthly basis regarding all that goes on at KH, both financially and otherwise.

Apart from her administrative duties, Leng also deals with the inevitable bureaucracy attached to dealing with Social Services and the various government departments in Cambodia. This applies to the more straightforward tasks, such as enrolling the children in their schools or higher education, to meeting with Social Services over the children's welfare and the running of the organization, re-ratifying our Memorandum of Understanding, as required by the Cambodian Government from time to time., and any official tasks.

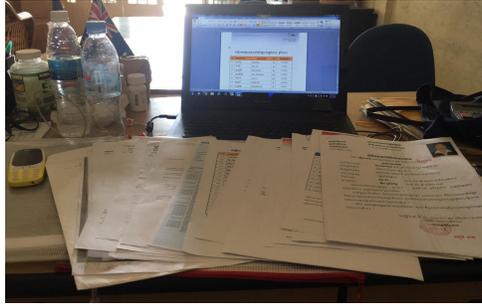
However much of Leng's job is not just sitting at a desk tallying figures and paying bills. Those of you who visited our home at Dom Dek in the past will have seen Leng at the wheel of a utility truck which she would drive the 40 kms to and from Siem Reap. The same ute is used for her monthly shopping trips to stock the house and office with food for the kids and staff, school stationery, clothes for the kids, pharmaceutical needs etc She accompanies the kids to medical visits, the dentist and on outings, as well as overseeing their progress at school. In short, she deals with all their physical and emotional needs.

Anyone who has travelled to Cambodia with one of our fund-raising tours or school trips and has had the chance to meet Leng at KH or at one of our social functions will have been struck by her calm sense of self-assurance, her inner serenity and ready smile. In particular what has impressed so many is the firm but affectionate way she interacts with the kids. For them she is not only the Director of KH, responsible for all decisions regarding their welfare, as well as disciplinary matters and advice, but also a carer, a confidant, and, as many would call her, a "mum".

Like all mothers, Leng has to juggle many different tasks every single day. But her "family" is far larger than most. Maybe Leng's resilience and compassion stems from her early contact with personal loss - her husband died tragically in an accident while their son was still a baby. Despite this she has done a wonderful job of raising her beautiful boy Elvin, who is now nearly seven, and coping with the demands of an all consuming and highly demanding job

In the following medley of photos we would like to show you just some of the aspects of Leng's daily life in her role as director of KH - from the monthly shopping done at a myriad of markets, groceries, pharmacies, always on the hunt for the best price; buying birthday presents and prizes for the kids, as well as all their clothing and hygiene needs; dealing with local bureaucrats from the Social Services; attending meetings and visiting government departments in Phnom Penh; presiding over visits from our participating schools and guests during golf tours, or other visiting donors; counseling the children individually regarding their education, future employment and vocations; dealing with breaches in discipline or the failure to meet education requirements; dealing with staff issues; paying the bills, running the administration and reporting back to the Board in Australia and doing everything she can to ensure the smooth running of Kampuchea House which makes it the happy, secure home it is for our children and staff.





THANKYOU SO MUCH LENG!

WE APPLAUD YOU!



DENTAL HEALTH

(As reported on Facebook)

The KH residents are currently on the long school break so it is the perfect time for their annual dental check-up. Thanks to Marj, from the Purple Mango Wellness Centre in Siem Reap, we were provided with the opportunity to participate in the community dentist clinic programme for NGOs, which means any work required is offered at a discounted rate. We are very pleased to report that all the kids received an excellent report for the state of their dental hygiene with only a few fillings and a couple of extractions (due to crowding) required. We also took the opportunity for Sokhoun, from Green Gecko, who is currently studying dentistry, to come to the house and give a lesson on "cleaning" to remind them of the importance of good brushing techniques. We would very much like to thank the donor, who wishes to remain anonymous, for covering the costs incurred for this check-up.



CONGRATULATIONS

As reported on Facebook:

The Cambodian school year finished in August and we now have the exam results for all of our kids. We are very pleased to report that all our primary and secondary school students passed their exams and will proceed to the next year level.

Somnang attends a non-government school and he passed both the Khmer and English components of the year. They hold an official graduation ceremony for all years and he was very proud to receive his certificate.

We had seven students attending high school (years 10 – 12) and five were successful in passing their final exams. Two of our Year 12 girls are now applying to undertake a four-year teacher training course, one is applying for a hospitality course, and another is applying for an internship in the travel industry.

We awarded presents to Yim, Rina and Nu for their excellent results in Year 11. Well done girls! Their success is particularly pertinent in light of a recent report on the state of education in Cambodia which, in part, reads as follows:

"Girls in particular continue to suffer from deep-seated cultural biases that see education as a man's prerogative – young women are often pulled from school to shoulder the burden of domestic labour and, once they reach their late teens, marry."

A party was organized to celebrate the results and the start of the long school holidays.

We thank all our donors and sponsors for their support which enables us to ensure that we have the funds to allow our children to continue their education through to Year 12, and also to provide them with the opportunity to undertake further tertiary study if they desire.



BEST WISHES YOUEN

Congratulations are due on two counts to Youen!

In August Youen became engaged to Pheara, a delightful young man from Battambang whom she met while training at Haven. Pheara chose to follow the traditional Cambodian ways for the engagement process, which shows his great respect for Youen.

In September Youen graduated from Haven Training Restaurant, fulfilling her dream of becoming a professionally trained cook.

Those of you who have not visited Haven – one of our favourite restaurants in Siem Reap – will not be familiar with the wonderful work they do to support disadvantaged young adults. Each year they take in around 15 trainees, whom they teach on a daily basis. They are trained as professional cooks and also participate in life skills workshops. Haven takes on financial responsibility for the trainees, providing protected shared housing, medical care, and a monthly allowance, as well as English and computer lessons.

Youen was selected as one of the trainees at Haven and, despite struggling at times, worked hard. With the encouragement of Sara, Paul and Steffi (the founders of Haven), and the support of Pardet (the head chef), she persevered and was duly rewarded.

Youen is currently undertaking an internship at the Park Hyatt until the end of this year. KH will continue to be her guardians until she secures full-time employment. Leng attended the graduation ceremony.

We wish Youen every success in her career and every happiness in her future life with Pheara.





