

# *Student Sponsorship Program Update – September 2007*

## **Program Name Change**

Since many of our sponsored children are in high school, we are now calling the program Student Sponsorship Program instead of Child Sponsorship Program. We prefer to sponsor older students because they have more financial and family pressure to drop out of school and start working. Without sponsorship, only 12% of the students who start school finish high school.

## **Students Receive More Funds and Communities Benefit**

Last year we increased the cost of our program, so now we would like to report back on how your money is spent.

The social workers recommended that the students receive more support, so that's where most of the funding increase goes. Some students don't have enough money to pay their teachers for "private class." Private class is the afternoon session of school which helps students pass the exam to advance a grade. Teachers are paid only \$15 - \$20 per month by the government, so they charge students for "private class" to increase their income.

In Kampot Province you supported the activities of the sponsored students' club. The social workers there are helping students learn about career choices, issues in Cambodia today, and what it is like to go to the university.

You also helped poor families increase their income by supporting the development of micro-credit programs in several provinces. You supported forest associations in Pursat and Kompong Chhnang Provinces that prevent illegal cutting of forests and subsequent loss of livelihoods.

You funded projects that benefited entire communities in Kompong Chhnang, Pursat, Oddar Meanchey, and Kompong Thom Provinces including building a school, wells, bridges, a dam, a pond, and a culvert.

## **First University Students**

We are pleased to announce that we have our two students attending the Royal University of Phnom Penh (the public university in Cambodia). Chhim Samout is from an indigenous group called Kui in Preah Vihear province. He is one of the first indigenous people in Cambodia to get a college education. The second student is Chhuon Samphoah, from Kompong Chhnang province.

## **Students Help Each Other**

Ritthy's family is very poor and lives in a shack, but he has a thirst for knowledge and helping others. Ritthy used his sponsorship money to buy a white board, so he could tutor other students after school. When two high school teachers from Eugene, Oregon visited Ritthy, he solved a physics problem on his white board and asked how he could go to school at MIT.

## **Nine Local Groups Administer Student Sponsorship Program**

The social workers who manage our Student Sponsorship Program are the staff of 7 small Cambodian-run rural NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations - the international term for non-profit organization), one student group, and one community group. Each of these groups has a slightly different focus, although all have the common goal of helping the rural poor. Eighty-five percent of Cambodians are rural and about half are living in dire poverty (45% of the

children in Cambodia are malnourished).

Most of these NGOs help start credit projects like women's loan funds, rice banks, or cow banks. Several are trying to help indigenous people in Cambodia who are the poorest of the poor, the least educated, and the most vulnerable to losing their land and culture. Some of the groups are involved in helping communities manage forests or fisheries because these natural resources are so important for the survival and financial well-being of most rural families.

## **Why Specific Gifts Create Problems**

Several kind-hearted donors asked if they could help their student's family by buying a cow or providing another gift. We have decided not to do this for two reasons. First, we are trying to treat the students equally and fairly. Special gifts create jealousy and conflicts in the community. Second, we prefer to empower people to help themselves, through credit and education, instead of providing gifts that make people look to foreigners for help. We do provide grants for cows, houses, boats, and fishing equipment to individual families, but this activity is part of an empowerment program where the mothers participate in our self-help groups and learn self-sufficiency skills.

## **A Note on Cambodian Names**

In Cambodia, names are written with the family name first, then the given name. For example, for *Im Chan-Ry*, the family name is *Im*, and the given name, *Chan-Ry*. The family name is the person's father's or grandfather's given name.

## **Thank you for sponsoring a student!**

You are making a young person very happy and helping improve Cambodia's future.