

Friendship with Cambodia Celebrates its 15th Anniversary and \$1.7 million in humanitarian aid

Helping Cambodia Recover

Friendship with Cambodia's Founder and Executive Director, Bhavia Wagner, explains FWC's beginnings and connections.

Driving to Cambodia from Vietnam in 1991 in a van with 12 people was an adventure. We were stopped at the border and the Cambodian guard told us "foreigners are not allowed to enter." Our driver made up a story "this is a group of health care workers" and gave the guard a pack of cigarettes. He waved us on.

Phnom Penh was like a ghost town. The streets were empty, there were no passenger cars, only a few cargo trucks. It was already 12 years after the genocide, but recovery was very slow because the US blocked international aid to Cambodia as part of its Cold War policy. Meeting genocide survivors and hearing their tragic stories broke my heart. The poverty was extreme. I wished I could do something to help.

While we were there, the Soviet Union collapsed. Shortly afterward, Vietnam pulled out of Cambodia, and UN troops came to orchestrate a national election. International aid organizations were allowed into the country.

I went back to Cambodia every couple of years to volunteer for aid organizations, lead educational study tours, interview people for my book: *Soul Survivors*, and finally, start Friendship with Cambodia. I've seen a lot of changes in the last 27 years.

Gradually, the infrastructure improved; roads were paved and phones started working, even when it rained. After the civil war ended in 1998, the garment industry arrived and is now the largest employer.

In 2003, I formed Friendship with Cambodia and we started responding to the worst problems. Several civilians a day were stepping on landmines. The survivors are shunned by society and are the poorest of the poor. Friendship with Cambodia has been reaching out to them. Our current program is run by Sister Denise with Jesuit Refugee Services.



*Lieng (left) was one of only 50 physicians to survive Cambodia's genocide (1975-1979). Bhavia (right) documented her story in *Soul Survivors*.*

The next crisis, was the AIDS epidemic. People didn't know what AIDS was or how to prevent it. Today, it is still common for husbands to use prostitutes and contract AIDS. The family sells everything they own for his medical care, he dies, and the wife and children end up in the slums of Phnom Penh. In our early years, we funded Dy Ratha, the teacher whose story is told in my book, who started an organization to care for families with HIV/AIDS.

This leads into the next crisis: orphaned street children. These destitute children pick through garbage for something to eat or sell. They are very vulnerable to being trafficked for begging or sex. We started helping street children through Krousar Thmey. The organization's director at that time was Cheam Kosal. She is an amazingly capable woman and was my interpreter for my book interviews in 1994. Now Kosal directs our Student Sponsorship Program.



Sponsorship Program Director, Kosal (right), at her daughter's wedding.

Sex trafficking and violence against women is the current crisis. To help the victims, we have been funding the Cambodian Women's Crisis Center, which was started by Srey Phal, whose personal story is told in *Soul Survivors*.

Cambodia is a beautiful country to visit. The ancient stone temples of Angkor Wat are stunning. Cambodians are welcoming. Tourism has become the second largest employer.

The biggest problem in Cambodia today is government corruption. It increases poverty. Eighty percent of the population are subsistence rice farmers. They depend on sustainable use of community forests for their livelihoods. Government officials take bribes from foreign corporations who clear-cut community forests and start plantations. Friendship with Cambodia helps rural people defend their land rights.

The two most effective approaches for ending poverty are education for girls and economic empowerment for women. These are Friendship with Cambodia's largest programs. This type of aid has a ripple effect and has improved the lives of thousands of families.

Dreams Come True — an Education & a Job

**209 secondary school students
and 114 university students**

have been sponsored by FWC, since 2003

These children grew up in extreme poverty, sometimes not having a enough food to eat, not having money for a school uniform or a bicycle to go to school, having to pay fees to the teachers to attend classes, and having to move to another town so they could go to high school.

We also have helped thousands of children stay in school by economically empowering their mothers through our Women's Self-Help Groups.

Most of our university graduates are now helping improve life in Cambodia. Meet a few of them:



Ren Savong (above) was in our Student Sponsorship Program for 9 years. Now she is a **Community Development Officer** for a rural NGO in her home province. She helps find some of the students for our Sponsorship Program.



Kao Phan **teaches high school** near her parents' village. We supported her through university; like many graduates, now she is supporting her relatives to attend university.



Ben Navin is working as a **midwife** in a hospital in remote Pursat Province, where she is from.



We sponsored Hiem Meng for 8 years. Now he works for Union Community Farmer **helping farmers** improve their income by growing organic rice. His dream came true—to help poor families.



Pum Channa is a landmine survivor. We sponsored him for 10 years. Now he works for the government Ministry of Social Affairs **helping disabled and poor people**. He loves his job.

Friendship with Cambodia

Founded in 2003 as a non-profit organization to provide humanitarian aid to Cambodia and education about Cambodia.

(541) 952-2009 www.friendshipwithcambodia.org

Please support our programs. Donations are tax-deductible.

Friendship with Cambodia's Current Programs

Education for Poor Rural Youth

42 students are currently attending university (35 girls and 7 boys). We give them career counseling, financial support, housing, English and computer classes, confidence building, and help them get internships and jobs.

Empowerment of Women

We have been supporting the training of rural women as community leaders and we formed a regional Women's Network. We provide technical support to Women's Savings Groups and fund four groups. Through these four groups, close to 500 women are improving their lives through economic empowerment.

Healing for Survivors of Trafficking and Gender Violence

We support a Women's Shelter for girls and women who were sex-trafficked, raped, or beaten by their husbands. The shelter accommodates 60 women and girls and is run by our partner organization, the Cambodian Women's Crisis Center. They provide trauma victims and their family members with shelter, counseling, life-skills training, literacy, English classes, legal assistance, and vocational training.

Care for Street Children

Through our NGO partner, Chamkar Morn Center in Phnom Penh, children living on the streets are offered temporary shelter with food, clothes, schooling, loving-care, and help in finding long-term solutions. The shelter hosts an average of 30 children per night.

Help for Landmine Disabled

Four workshops were held in 2017 for 110 disabled women in rural areas to help them heal psychologically, grow in self-confidence and make plans to improve their futures. Based on requests, grants for income generation initiatives include 16 to start small businesses, 12 for raising chickens, 5 sewing machines, and 1 artist training. We provided 12 new houses, 5 new toilets, 14 wheelchairs, 3 bicycles, 22 mini-libraries, 15 scholarships for their children, and emergency food for 23 women. And our team visited 622 disabled women in remote provinces to give them encouragement.

Gratitude to many special people at FWC

We wish we could acknowledge everyone who has made a significant contribution to Friendship with Cambodia—much appreciation goes to those listed here and the dozens who are not listed.

Bhavia Wagner started Friendship with Cambodia in 2003 following her national speaking tour to 30 cities, promoting her book, *Soul Survivors*. "I gathered the names of hundreds of people who wanted to help Cambodia," explained Bhavia. "My work experience was in managing non-profit organizations, so I thought 'Maybe I could start one to help Cambodia.'" To her surprise, she is still the director 15 years later.

Bhavia met **Peter Swift** through a connection on her book tour and was very impressed with the ingenuity and cost-effectiveness of his humanitarian aid programs in Cambodia. Southeast Asia Development Program is his NGO. His focus was empowering women and communities to solve their own problems. FWC started funding his programs and Peter helped FWC start our Student Sponsorship Program.

Karen Molleson and **Lowell Hill** were on FWC's first socially responsible Cambodia tour in 2004. Afterward, Karen started helping manage the Student Sponsorship Program and is still doing that with much excellence 14 years later! Both Karen and Lowell have served on the FWC Board of Directors and Lowell was Board President. Their capable and heartfelt support has been invaluable to FWC.

Marie Delahaye has been a thoughtful advisor for Bhavia for 20 years, going back to when Bhavia was director of a peace center in California. Marie was FWC's first Board President and has returned to that position, still providing excellent guidance.

Linda Young started volunteering in 2003, helping with FWC's benefit events. Next she coordinated FWC's Fair Trade Crafts Program, bringing it up to \$30,000 a year in sales and to "boutique" quality. She is a current FWC board member.

Donna Napier, formerly a CPA, has generously helped with financial oversight since 2006, volunteered in the FWC office on a weekly basis, and is currently on the FWC board. She is a gem.

Victoria Gomez-Trenor from Valencia, Spain, decided to use her inheritance to help women around the world. She became a major donor of FWC and supported FWC's programs from 2005 to 2015. We are very grateful to Victoria for her generous support.

Dan Weiner, a retired physicist, attended all of FWC's educational events. He was particularly concerned about women who stepped on landmines. When he passed away in 2015, he bequeathed FWC \$200,000, which is now funding our program to help women disabled by landmines.

Additional star donors include: Brooks Foundation, Dave and Ruth Poole, Ida Wheeler, Jean Carley, Jeffery Ford, John Andelin & Ginger Geoffrey, Liz Lorber, Nancy Gordon, Peter Watt, Sharon Monday and Jack Paxton, and Sophia, Tania, & Beth Sturtevant.

Student sponsors and annual donors are our heroes—their loyal and generous support creates stability and success for FWC.



Helen Gregory ^{^^^} started **Women for Women Ohio** (above) for the purpose of funding girls' education. The group chose to focus on Cambodia because the need is so great. Women for Women Ohio is now sponsoring 15 girls in university through FWC.

FWC has been blessed with many very capable long-term volunteers. Here are only a few:

JoAnne LaFleur helps manage our Fair Trade Crafts program, sharing her artistic magic and caring nature.

Katie Geiser has been faithfully volunteering for events, craft sales, and in the office, and brings in her sunshine.

Shoshana Kerewsky, former board president, gives engaging educational programs, and creatively promotes FWC.

Channary Bill coordinates support, organizes events and craft sales, translates, promotes, and offers brilliant ideas.

Pujita Mayeda authored our book *Responsible Travel Guide Cambodia*, cooked for 300 at our benefit dinner, and helps out in many ways.

Vern Arne volunteers for events, served on the board, delivers chocolate, and lightens us up with his humor.

Other currently active, capable and loyal volunteers include: Carol Pucci writes for FWC. Tom Auciello designs our Travel Guide maps. Glenn Gillis is our IT specialist. Ellen Hartstirn and Nancy Leigh-Smith host craft sales. Victoria Wake, Beth Sibley, and Mallory Landers are on the Stewardship Council. Bob Lee raises funds for Happy Family Orphanage.

Volunteers in FWC's early years include: Peggy Baldwin, Rosemary Brockmann, Jackie Van Rysselberghe, Courtenay Padgett, Lola Erwin, Tricia Clark-McDowell, Rachel Jordan.

Former board members are all greatly appreciated, including John Dennis, Andree Phelps, Sonya Margerum, Ravy Young, Terry Kirby, Leaksmeay Strubey, and others.

Our part-time staff have made valuable contributions to FWC through the years: Office Managers: Mel DeSalvo, Sunday Silver, Lisa Borja, Erin McSpadden, and Jessica Shogren-Carlson. Bookkeeper: Elaine Hayes. Tour Staff: Carol Gleason and Don Lyon. Counsel: David Atkin.

Cheam Kosal was Bhavia's Cambodian interpreter in 1994. In 2003, she was directing Krousar Thmey, our partner organization for helping street children. Now she is the outstanding director of our Sponsorship Program and of Holt Cambodia.

900 children living on the street received shelter and care through FWC

Sokleng is 12 years old and was found begging near the Royal Palace in January 2018. Her mother sells coconuts and her father is in jail. Our social workers invited Sokleng to stay in Chamkar Morn center for safety. Her mother and Sokleng liked the idea. Sokleng adapted very quickly and made friends. She never had a chance to go to school. Now she attends classes at our center and has learned to read. She visits her mother and brother often. Our social workers are trying to help improve her family situation so Sokleng can return home.



Over 22,000 women have been empowered by FWC

The women in this photo are on their way to patrol and protect their community forest. Illegal land encroachment and deforestation are critical issues that destroy the livelihoods of rural families. A logging company owned by a Cambodian Senator's wife is illegally taking away the land rights of this community. These local women are trained in human rights, women's rights, the Land Law (2001), and other laws and regulations. They are leading their communities in the struggle for justice, economic stability, sustainable use of resources, and preservation of bio-diversity. FWC also empowers women economically, through our Women's Self-Help Groups.



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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

*It's our 15th Anniversary
\$1.7 million in aid*

4500 disabled landmine survivors were given assistance through FWC

Our workshops for disabled women are led by disabled women. The survivors tell their stories to gain strength from one another. We help them make plans for a brighter economic future. They are trained in environmental awareness and disability rights. We help them with self-acceptance and we give referrals to other services. We give them books-in-a-bag and encourage them to share the books in their village. We teach them how to talk to village leaders about their rights.



New food cart business for a landmine survivor.

1300 survivors of trafficking and gender violence received healing support from FWC

This year, half of the clients at the Cambodian Women's Crisis Center are girls who have been raped. Women do not usually report rapes, but they do come to the center when they are severely beaten. The women's crisis center also helps trafficked girls and does advocacy work to strengthen laws to protect women, enforce existing laws, and change attitudes toward women and abuse.



Group and individual counseling enables clients to recover from trauma, mental distress, and feelings of shame.