

Free education for children in rural Cambodia

Reaching for the Cambodian Sky

Savong School Newsletter-Number 12 January 2015

Newsletter of the Cambodian Rural Schools Trust—a New Zealand based charity
PO Box 7-37-725 Parnell



SCHOOL COMMITS TO QUALITY

Late last year Savong’s School opened up primary school services - and made moves to work much more closely with the families of students: for example by phoning the parents if the student doesn’t show up.

It also tightened up expectations of students (and their families) saying, look, we can provide quality free education, but you need to be a regular attendee in return.

The initial impact was a reduction in enrolments, to 190, but steadily since November more and more students have enrolled and right now we are up to 225 students including 41 primary students and 184 studying in the foreign language and computer programs.

The result is a better quality of teaching, thanks to improved teacher to student ratios.



Noeng Ty and Chuon Channteng: the first graduates.

SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Meanwhile the Scholarship program is going well, with 13 successful students *currently studying* at Angkor University and majoring in a variety of subjects including Tourism, IT and English.

Last year we produced our first graduates through the scholarship program with Chuon Channteng and Noeng Ty both graduating. Two other scholarship winners have been offered very well paid teaching positions by the Ministry of Education while Proeurn Sarath has chosen to set up an NGO school with support of another charity. All three express a desire to fish their degrees (they are each one year away from completion) but the opportunities that opened to them were too good to refuse.

The latest wave of 5 scholarship winners were recently presented with laptop computers and the enrolment fees for 2015 have been paid.



We can support an entire school with 250 students, as well as a dozen university students for the cost of sending these two to a New Zealand grammar school.

FUND-RAISING TARGET FOR 2015

This year we begin serious fund-raising for our school in Bakong, near Siem Reap Cambodia. Over the past 9 years Susanna and I have worn most of the building and running costs, but as we approach retirement (gasp!) it is time to share the funding around. Many hands make light work, they say.

Our target (expressed in US Dollars,) is:

RUNNING COSTS SALARIES, BOOKS	\$US 39,000
SCHOLARSHIP ENROLMENTS, LAPTOPS	\$US 5,500
TOTAL	\$US 44,500

I looked up how much it costs to send a boy to Auckland Grammar per-annum, and on that basis (if we include uniforms, laptops, school trips etc) we could enrol two children for the same cost as supporting an entire school in Cambodia.

That’s just for perspective.

The new name for this newsletter REACHING FOR THE CAMBODIAN SKY was inspired by to things. First, it was inspired by Savong’s a main objectives and purpose of his organisation. It remains the same as if did in 2004: to help poor rural students to reach their potential through education. Second, the masthead was inspired by the motto and my old high school in New Zealand. “Reach for the Sky” it said.

The Cambodian sky is at once beautiful, stormy, sometimes hazy, other times fantastically clear. A bit like the project!

Photo taken one evening at Savong’s School.

Nine years of quiet progress at Savong's School

Twilight falls, and from the classrooms the quiet murmur of students at work. In nine years the school has matured from the small three-classroom entity to become a thriving hub for local Bakong students. Here's five reasons why I love the project and where it is today.

- 1) **The objectives have never changed in 9 years.** Back before it was built, Savong dreamed of a school that served rural students, would be free, would provide language and other skills that would help these students reach their employment potential. Savong has never lost that vision though in that time we have added computer education as well as support for top students to proceed to university. The dream remains the same.
- 2) **The students are enthusiastic and hard working.** Most already attend the local Bakong High School which is itself improving year by year. Yet here they are, voluntarily attending additional school because they want to.
- 3) **The staff are positive, professional and up-skilling themselves.**
- 4) **The top students get further support.** Top students get a full scholarship that support them through the 4 years (or more) that they need to complete intermediate year followed by a three year Bachelors degree. Our sights are rising higher and higher and these students are making the most of their amazing opportunity.
- 5) **The social interaction at the school is very positive.** It starts at the top with the rapport between teachers, but it goes further: in the way that scholarships students give something back to the school – and acting as mentors for younger students. It shows in the way that students congregate before and after class – enjoying the school as a supportive place within their community.

Duncan Stuart



Anticipated enrolments this coming term: 250 students

Number of teaching staff 13 including some Scholarship students who are “giving back.”

Also thirteen. The number of full University Scholarships currently being supported.

Registered with the Ministry of Education? Yes. And exam results are recognised by the State.

Where we need sponsorship assistance? Those scholarships are great value—but each requires \$1000 per annum.

Follow my blog: <https://savongschool.wordpress.com/>