

# CANADIANS BRING HELP TO ASIA

by Adrienne Dartnall and Rick Lennert



Adrienne and Rick (back) deliver new computer equipment to Srey Po school in Tak Mau.

*For the last ten years, Adrienne Dartnall and Rick Lennert have traveled to Asia each year to help impoverished children and families by funding projects and purchasing equipment and materials to support ongoing programs. Their work began out of the tragedy of losing their twenty-one year old daughter and only child, Danielle, when she was killed by a drunk driver. They set up a registered charity called K.I.D.S. to receive donations from people in Canada, which they personally take to Asia to ensure that the money raised goes directly to the people who need it most. Adrienne and Rick oversee the spending of all funds and 100% of all donations goes directly to bringing better futures to children and families living in poverty. Following are messages that they sent home via email to tell their supporters at home how their donations are being used.*

## DECEMBER 19, 2009

We have left Bangkok and are now in Cambodia after a good rest to recover from the trip from Canada. We traveled to Phnom Penh to purchase a few items that we needed before heading up to Stung Treng to visit the Srey Poh village free school and Mekong Blue, the Women's Weaving Centre. Among our purchases in Phnom Penh, we bought over 400 pieces of used clothes (only \$100) to put into a clothing bank to replace worn out clothing for both the Srey Poh village school and the Weaving Centre kindergarten (that was a bit of work sorting through piles and piles of garments!). We also purchased about 80 school uniforms for the children—here in Cambodia all children who go to school wear uniforms and the children at both schools really wanted to feel like all the other children who go to government schools, so we bought them uniforms to instill inspiration and pride in themselves and their school. We purchased a new laptop for the Weaving Centre as theirs gave up, and it is much needed to help with the management of this great program that assists vulnerable women get out of poverty, have sustainable incomes and provide for their children. We also purchased two deep cycle batteries to help power their solar system at the centre.

We went to the village to visit the kids at the school. We had not seen the new windows and walls since they were added after we left last year. The new walls help keep the kids in, the dogs and cows out, and also give more wall space for the children to decorate their school. All the children came running up to greet us and say helloooooo. The school looked great—there were beautiful, bright coloured origami

paper birds and colourful paper chains hanging from the rafters. The teachers greeted us warmly and were happy to tell us how well the children are doing. There has been a marked improvement in the children's learning, behaviour, hygiene and nutrition levels.

The only good meal these kids get each day is at the school. We had to increase the funding a bit, as in addition to the hot breakfast meal we provide the children, they get a healthy snack in the afternoon. We started out the meal program at thirty cents per day per child and now it sits at fifty cents to feed each child a really good, nutritious meal and snack per day. Ridiculously cheap for our part of the world but since most of these rural families struggle to make barely \$1 a day if they are lucky, you can imagine how hard it is to feed their families.



We arrived at the school just in time to see them tuck into their meal, and it was heart warming to see their happy little faces as they ate their breakfast, which is usually a bowl of hot vegetables, rice and meat soup. The meals are prepared fresh and cooked over a wood brazier on the doorstep of the classroom. The teachers asked if we could put a small roof over the cooking area as in the rainy season they get soaked while they make the meal, so we are going to have this done. We also visited the kindergarten at the Weaving Centre where another thirty small children stay, learn and play as their mothers weave and work. K.I.D.S. will continue to provide two teachers for this program. We will be putting on a roof for the outside play area so the children can have a bigger area to play during the rainy season and be shaded from the hot sun.

In our many trips to Cambodia we cannot help but be struck by the poverty and the desperate situations the poor people here face. However, we are now seeing pockets of hope like in the main park in Phnom Penh, which used to be filled with poor people begging or just sitting and staring. Now there are families walking and children playing and there are food stands where people can eat and visit together. At the village in Srey Po, before we would see the children walking around listlessly with nothing to do looking so sad and ragged, and now they are smiling and going to school and learning to use their minds which will hopefully help them escape a lifetime of poverty eventually.



## DECEMBER 31, 2009

After leaving our friends in Stung Treng and heading back to Phnom Penh, we reconnected with the children that K.I.D.S. assists in Tak Mau, a few kilometres south of Phnom Penh. We have been supporting a group of exceptional kids who are keen to learn but come from very poor families that do not have the resources to send them to school. These kids range in ages from 9 to 18—four boys and six girls plus Sen who is 26 and will be graduating from university in three months. She has taken on the role of leader and mentor for the group. The children use the house of Sinat, a great man who we have known for six years. Sinat lived in a refugee camp in Thailand for many years and after the war he was one of the first people to bring children back to their homeland from the refugee camps. He and a French man started one of the first orphanages in Cambodia and that is where Sen lived for many years. Sinat is now retired and his house is a sort of an unofficial learning centre for the group. Each year, one or two of the older kids are able to find work, thanks to the education or vocational training they have received and we are happy to see them attain their independence.

It is great to see the kids move along in their studies and grow with each passing year. They put their hearts and minds into learning and under the watchful eye of Sinat and with the mentoring of Sen, they are progressing well. Last year we promised them that if they continued to study well we would supply them with a computer to put in the study room at Sinat's house. They delivered and so did we. The children have all had some computer training at various levels, however access to computers is limited by the number of children in public schools. Although eleven people to one computer might sound high, they will now have much more individual time to practise their skills. Their smiles were priceless as we uncrated and set up the computer. Within twelve hours we received an email from Sen telling us that the practise schedule was all worked out, printed and posted for them to start their computer work. What a great opportunity for a new year.

Moving on to Siem Reap, we are always very happy to see our longest and dearest Cambodian connections. You Vath runs Somnang House, which is totally supported by K.I.D.S. There are eight girls plus You Vath, her daughter, a cook and several dogs that live in a small house together. The girls come from the terribly sad backgrounds that are common here, many have deceased or missing parents and had no hope of an education until they came to Somnang House. You Vath runs a tight ship, teaching self-discipline, self respect and respect for others. She shares her love and warmth with the girls. The girls are all happy to attend school on a regular basis and to live in a consistent family style setting. Their lives are so different from before and every one of them is so very happy to have the chance they have been given.

We have started to sit down with the girls and help them with their English. Although they are shy at first, they have a pretty good vocabulary considering their limited time studying English.

We have purchased new bicycles for the kids, as theirs were worn out from the

several kilometre ride to and from school four times a day for morning and afternoon classes. These kids are on the road at 7:30 am and not finished school until 7:00 pm. They do come home for two hours at lunch but spend many hours on the road and in the classroom. They also go to school Saturday mornings.

We have also assisted another group of children from a less well funded shelter with bicycles to get to school, as well as a three month supply of rice, as they are having a hard time making ends meet.

We took about 45 children in total for our yearly picnic. As always, the kids have an incredible time, eating, drinking pop and swimming. It is great to see them just having fun like they don't have a care in the world for a change.

We have really only just started to get into the projects here in Siem Reap and already there is so much need and so much to do.

## JANUARY 4, 2010

Being in Siem Reap, Cambodia is an amazing experience; the majesty of the temples of Angkor Wat cannot do anything but stir one's mind and soul. The Khmer (people of Cambodia) with their bright smiles and cheerful demeanour have built a great infrastructure of restaurants and hotels in all price ranges to accommodate one's every need while visiting the temples. It's easy to think that this beauty and appearance of prosperity is shared by all, but this abundance is in fact still a veneer. Though there are many who benefit by this prosperity, there are still vast numbers of children and families at risk and there is much work to be done. The reality is you are in one of the poorest countries in the world and if you really look, this veneer has cracks and chasms that are incredibly deep and filled with unbelievable poverty. One of these chasms is on the edge of Siem Reap in the village of Mondul 3.

In most places in Cambodia there is a large presence of NGO (Non Government Organization) vehicles going to and fro full of both locals and foreigners working hard to restore health care, clean water, education and the cleaning up of land mines left over from many years of conflict. In Mondul 3 it does not take long to notice the total lack of any signs of NGOs of any kind, domestic or foreign.

It is difficult to even begin to describe the conditions in Mondul 3. There are some 1800 families living here, many in squalid shacks spread throughout the area, few if any own the land that they live on. The chance of children making it to five years of age is one in seven; life expectancy is around fifty-five years of age. Illiteracy is more common than not, and the main sources of income in the village comes from collecting rubbish and scrap to sell at the recyclers, working hard labour at construction sites, and selling anything they can to get by. Sadly, lining both sides of the main road on the way into Mondul 3 are corrugated tin and concrete brothels. Some of the women and girls who work these brothels are forced into this life due to dire poverty, illiteracy and desperation; others unfortunately have been sold into these situations by a parent. The thought of doing this in our part of the world is unthinkable—how can we even

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imagine the torment in a parent's decision to sacrifice one child's life or have all of your children face starvation? This is how bad things can get here in Mondul 3. Futures and lives can be bought for under \$100, a visit to a brothel, mere pennies. The parents of one family with several children, both working together all day peeling and selling sugar cane, clear an unbelievable wage of less than forty cents a day to try to support their family.

That is what makes the lack of any aid here in Mondul 3 so unbelievable. Up until two years ago these families had no help and no hope, then New Hope Community Centre was formed by Kemsour, a local young man who had to do something. Kemsour was well on his way to making a fairly good life for himself owning three tuk tuks (motorcycle taxis). He sold them all, rented a small house in Mondul 3 and opened the doors of New Hope to try to help. A few weeks later he was joined by Kerry, a woman with a continental sized heart and spirit to match, from Australia. Kerry first came to New Hope for a short volunteer stint, went home, packed up her life, and returned to work with Kemsour to help those who no one else would.

Since Kerry and Kemsour came together to assist this area, they really have created a place of hope. New Hope Centre has a free medical clinic with a Khmer doctor that serves some seventy people a day. The centre teaches haircutting, cooking, computers and sewing. New Hope has two small bamboo classrooms that teach both English and Khmer to over 400 kids a day on a rotating basis, quite a sight and sound as they loudly sing out their lessons.

They do a monthly rice drop to help feed the poorest families by distributing more than 4,000 kilos of rice and a fish sauce that helps many of these people stay alive. They provide grants to start small businesses for income generation, and a myriad of other needs as problems arise. Many people now come and volunteer here which helps increase the awareness and funding of the programs, however, they still operate on a shoestring budget and considering the daunting task that they face, it is truly a heroic effort.

From the moment we met Kemsour and Kerry last year, we knew that this was a worthwhile place to put funds. Thanks to the generosity of others, K.I.D.S. was able to sponsor the entire monthly rice drop and do a major restocking of the supply of medicine at the clinic (the doctor was hugely grateful). We have made arrangements to repair several of the worst houses, ordered a new sewing machine and bought a new gas cooker for their training programs and will provide them with a new camera to help them document and assist them with their family sponsorship program. We are making arrangements to help a family earning forty cents a day to purchase their own cart so they do not have to rent one and their daily profit will increase. We will also be buying bicycles to assist families and kids to go to school and to work. We bought the usual much-needed mosquito nets, mats and blankets for distribution.

Earlier this year, New Hope received news that they received funding to purchase a piece of land in the heart of Mondul 3 that will house the new and larger clinic and save them the monthly cost of rent, and they are now fundraising to purchase the adjoining piece of land to build a larger vocational center and school for the children. We hope that we can help build this school next year.

We leave on Tuesday for an expedition out onto the Tonle Sap Lake, another incredibly forgotten place. We will be gone a few days to distribute school supplies and help the lake clinic with its amazing work.

## JANUARY 14, 2010

Tonle Sap is a large lake in the middle of Cambodia. The primary source of income and protein on the lake is from the myriad of fish that inhabit the Tonle Sap. The sight, sound and smells of these fishing and processing endeavours permeate the senses. We returned from the lake a couple of days ago after spending three nights and four days traveling around five floating villages aboard The Lake Clinic (TLC) boat. When we say floating village, it is in the truest sense of the word—virtually everything from homes, schools, stores, mechanic shops and the raising of pigs, chickens and ducks is carried out on boats or float houses for which buoyancy is provided by bamboo. The crew of the TLC consisted of a doctor, nurse, midwife and the captain/cook/pilot and Sothat who would be our assistant and interpreter, all Khmer people.

K.I.D.S. provided the funding for this trip, and before leaving we loaded up the boat with medicine, food and water. While the crew would be looking after the medical needs of the villagers, we were going along to have a look at the schools and assist them with school supplies. Before we left we went shopping at the local markets and shops



and bought a scribbler, pencils, crayons, eraser, ruler, maps and children's story books as well as a tooth brush, toothpaste, a bar of soap and a comb for each of the nearly 700 kids in the five schools we would visit, so the little ship was pretty full.

Before leaving, we met with Jon Morgan the founder and director of TLC, with whom we have worked for many years. Jon has always been a big thinker with a heart to match his visions, and when he told us three years ago of his vision to bring health care to people on the lake we were in total support of this daunting and worthy cause. We had heard about the remoteness of these villages. Two years ago when we returned to Cambodia, Jon had taken his idea and turned it into reality as the TLC small ship was mostly built, and K.I.D.S. provided most of the funds for the engine.

This year when we met with Jon and discussed ideas about how we could further assist TLC, he told us about their Village Health Volunteer (VHV) program that needed funding. The concept of the VHV program is to train young, interested and eager volunteers to assist both the medical staff and the community of villagers to bridge their traditional world and the world of modern medicine. The VHVs are essential as they live in the villages and have the trust of the local people. Before the TLC came along, most of these people had never been off the lake, let alone seen a doctor. The VHVs are trained in providing information on nutrition, immunization, and family planning, prenatal and anti natal care as well as health promotion and disease prevention. Each VHV is assigned about thirty families that they monitor to ensure the families learn about health care. They also communicate the families' conditions to the medical team, nipping many major problems in the bud. With the large extended families on the lake, the work of the VHV team of eleven reaches many people. We had four days to observe the VHVs in action, they are an integral part of this project and we were happy to sponsor some of their training, transport, stipends, food allowances, meetings and training materials for this year.

As we were heading out to the villages the first day, Sothat described the villages out on the lake as the "end of the world" due to their isolation and remoteness. If you were a sick child or adult on the lake you would need about thirty litres of fuel to make the trip one way to the port, which is still forty minutes from the nearest hospital. The cost of thirty litres of fuel is over \$25, add on the road transportation, hospital fees, medicine and accommodation and just a one way trip could cost \$50 to \$70—more money than most people could make in three to six months and more money than these villagers could ever have in hand at any one time in their lives. This is why the TLC and her crew has become a critical lifeline to better health and wellness for these villages. This is an amazing project. The results and value were easy to see as each time we pulled into a village, boats of every size filled with young and old and came from all directions for help, and hundreds were served in a few days.

Jon Morgan, the man with the big heart and big vision, has brought the villagers at this seemingly "end of the world" much closer to ours and is now working with the Impact Foundation of Norway to build a much larger TLC #2 to further fill the need of more villages living on the lake. Have a look at [www.lakeclinic.org](http://www.lakeclinic.org)—there are some great blogs and photos of TLC and the work they do.

Adrienne Dartnall has a long history of working for non profits and volunteering in her community and is currently the executive director of Nanaimo Family Life Association. Rick Lennert is a self employed home renovator and builder. Kids International Development Society (K.I.D.S.) has charitable status (#86067 3235 RRO01). Contact Rick and Adrienne at [adrienneandrick@hotmail.com](mailto:adrienneandrick@hotmail.com) or 250-754-0180.

