The Sharing Foundation Newsletter

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College grads are faring well and paying it forward

TSF college alums are all smiles at a gathering with college program coordinator Lee Steppacher and her husband Dan Shepard.

by Ban Kosal and Lee Steppacher

College graduation is a rite of passage said to open doors of opportunity. In Cambodia, our graduates are not only bursting through those doors, but they are already paying it forward, contributing to their families and investing in education.

The first nine TSF-sponsored college students graduated in 2009. They were real pioneers, and brave too; they were the first in Roteang to leave their homes in the village and attend school in Phnom Penh. There was much to learn: about city life, dorm living, and of course, college classes. Now, six years later, 56 TSF-sponsored students have graduated. With the help of graduate Ban Kosal, the board recently conducted a survey which shows how well these former students are creating new futures for themselves and also for their families.

College students in Cambodia have to declare a major when they enter school and then, a course of study is prescribed for them. However, it is difficult for students to know what they are interested in when they lack exposure to professionals and mentors to guide them. In the first years of the TSF college program, many of the students focused on hotel and tourism because the government saw this as a growing industry. Now, with better counseling, our students' majors are more diverse, with many focusing on banking, finance, information technology and accounting, and a few studying English, engineering, architecture and medicine.

TSF students are doing well. Of the 56 graduates, 52 of them have jobs, and good ones, in their fields of study!

Regardless of their majors, the survey shows that after graduation, TSF students are doing well. Of the 56 graduates, 52 of them have jobs, and good ones, in their fields of study! Those without jobs are looking for them as changing jobs is fairly common. The employers now are as varied as the students, according to the survey. They include consultants, restaurants, banks, real estate firms, tour companies, hotels, government ministries, schools and NGOs, including The Sharing Foundation.

The vast majority of the graduates continue to live in Phnom Penh where most of the jobs are located. Like recent grads in the States, they partner up with a few friends and rent a room or an apart-

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Connect and Re-Connect

Join us for an event to celebrate TSF's work in Cambodia

TSF will host an event for friends of TSF on Sunday, September 20, in Concord, MA from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., rain or shine. Ann Trudeau, TSF President, stated that her vision for the event is to be inclusive: "We'd like to see everyone come who ever has been or is a friend of TSF or who just wants to learn more about our work." Deborah Nelson, TSF Vice President, added, "The event is a way to reconnect with people who may have lost contact with TSF, as well as to connect with new potential friends and supporters of TSF." Trudeau stated, "Not only do we hope Dr. Hendrie will be in attendance, but all of the original founders of TSF have been invited and we hope they will come."

Is this an event for adoptive families? "Absolutely," asserted Nelson, "We are very hopeful that the 'reconnect' part of the event will spur adoptive families with children born in Cambodia to rekindle connections with original travel groups, as well as to make new friends and connections. All will be interested in seeing how profoundly the work of TSF touches

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Notes from the President

by Ann Trudeau

The top priority for The Sharing Foundation's board and staff is to be a nurturing, caring family for 72 children, raising them to be independent, self-confident adults. As the children age, their unique personalities begin to emerge and we need to adjust our focus on their individual needs, as well as their ability to function responsibly in the wider world.

When the orphanage was founded, the population was almost entirely infants; now there are only three. The majority of our children, 45 of them, are elementary school age, 5-12 years old. In addition, we have 22 teenagers, ages 13-17 and with that group, Elephant and the nannies are beginning to experience some of the challenges that all parents of teens face. The kids want to have more control, be more independent, and make decisions on their own.

One question we have been grappling with is how to give so many teens more latitude while keeping them on track. Our In-Country Director Elephant outlined two good proposals which we believe will help motivate the kids and teach them more about the world around them. The first proposal allows each of the older youth to participate in two overnight field trips during their stay at Roteang: one to Angkor Wat and one to the beach. Fortunately, the first year of this new adventure has already been funded by one of our steadfast donors, Denise Gosch and her team in Florida.

We hope that most of our children will become financially independent. The second proposal will allow those children who have met behavioral expectations to receive an allowance. This small sum would allow the children to buy a small snack in the village, like some of their classmates do, or to save for something larger. For many of the kids, this will be the first money they have ever received and we hope that overseeing it will bring some joy yet also be a learning experience. We are still seeking an interested donor for this project.

Besides academics, arts, and sports, orphanage kids are digging in to learn what is needed to grow their own food, similar to their peers in the farming community of Roteang.

As our children grow into young adults, they will not "graduate" from the orphanage, their home. Two members of our "family", Vuthea and Pharoth, have graduated from University but we know that path will not be appropriate for all of our youth. Some of the children might live at the orphanage much longer, possibly permanently, due to handicaps. Fourteen of our children are HIV Positive, and most of them function well. Other students have significant disabilities. TSF will make sure that each child has a plan based on his or her needs. Those that leave will always be welcomed "home" for celebrations and weekend visits, just as Vuthea and Pharoth are now. Regardless, each child will be supported as they find their way in life and grow into adulthood.

Our children do not have birth families that can care for them. But they have us. As Elephant says, "We are their parents forever."

We plan to be in place for many years to come. The Roteang Orphanage had its license renewed this year after many months of hard work by Elephant. Bruce Grant, UNICEF Cambodia's chief of child protection, was quoted as saying that all of the 228 facilities (orphanages) were inspected by the Ministry of Social Affairs in 2014, but only 147 were properly registered. Since 2009, Cambodia has taken a more conservative look at NGO orphanages, in the best interest of children. Back then, the Minister of Social Affairs Ith Sam Heng announced that 70 orphanages would be closed saying, "Children belong, first and foremost, with their families, not in institutions."

TSF agrees that children should live with their families whenever possible. In several cases, we have opted to assist families when help was needed, rather than accept a child into the orphanage. In another situation, we welcomed three boys into the orphanage while their mother was in prison and then coordinated their reunification after her release. One of those boys is now sponsored in our high school program and hopes to go to University, thanks to The Sharing Foundation.

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Doing their share អរគុណ (aw koon) Thank you!

Thanks to Alyson Leach of Galeton, PA, the Galeton Area School and their hard-working school nurse, Laurel Kosa, *the kids look great in their new yellow shirts. It seemed like chaos handing out the shirts but within a few minutes every child under the age of 8 was wearing a new, perfectly fitting yellow shirt. The children aged 6-12 years were delighted to receive the lego sets stacked on the table.*

Tradition rings true in orphanage music program

by Daline and Elephant

Pinpeat orchestra, one of the oldest forms of traditional music, dates back to the ninth century when the power and prosperity of Cambodia was at its peak. The musical form remains popular today and the children of Roteang Orphanage have the good fortune to participate in this lasting tradition through lessons, dance, and student concerts. In 2013, the Rotary Club of Concord, MA, generously donated funds for Cambodian traditional musical instruments, bringing the art form to the orphanage.

Originally played for the Royal Court, pinpeat continues to be heard at ceremonies, classical ballets, puppet shows, and funerals. The understanding and appreciation of such music is one way to strengthen our kids' values as Cambodian citizens.

At Roteang, TSF music students take two-hour classes twice a week. Initially, there were six students from the orphanage in the music program. Since then, the program has expanded and a second class of five students has been practicing for four months now.

The students learn a variety of music, including the Blessing Dance and Monkey Dance, so they now accompany those children at the orphanage who take traditional Cambodian dance lessons. Children who do not participate in either of the programs hear the music as it echoes across the campus, and enjoy the many performances for visitors.

June Grace, the past Rotary President, explained, "Supporting The Sharing Foundation has been one of the Rotary Club of Concord's most gratifying endeavors.... Buying the instruments was our way of equipping the children with the tools to participate in the traditions of their culture. One of Rotary International's areas of focus is basic education and literacy. We believe music education is one way of achieving that." □

Roteang Orphanage kids demonstrate their musical instruments.

Daline is head of preschool at Roteang Orphanage, and also an English teacher.

Two-year-old Physrey Jasmine, daughter of a young Roteang villager, has been abandoned to the Roteang Orphanage and is in need of a sponsor. Jasmine has integrated well into orphanage life. If you would like to sponsor Jasmine, the cost is $1,200 per year, which can be paid annually, semiannually, or quarterly. This covers Jasmine's food, clothing, medical care, her nanny, and the staff who keep Roteang Orphanage in top condition. For information, please contact Sally Stokes at orphanage@sharingfoundation.org.

High school sponsors needed!
The Sharing Foundation needs several sponsors for high school students for the 2015-16 school year (the cost is $300 per year). If you are interested, please contact Richard Recknagel at highschool@sharingfoundation.org.

College grads faring well and paying it forward

Soy Sovannthida, 2011 (left); Soun Sokret, 2009 (right).

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ment. A few of the older graduates have married and yes, there have even been some TSF student romances! In order to save money, a few of the graduates live with their families in Roteang, but the commute is long and tiring, particularly on Cambodian transportation.

Salaries are, of course, on a different scale than those in the U.S. In Cambodia, where the nationwide average wages are $3 per day, a starting salary out of college is approximately $150-$200 per month. The TSF graduates who are five or more years out of college have doubled that amount!

Now here is the amazing part that makes the story so powerful! Time after time, the students say they are making money so they can send it home to help support their families. That was the motivation that inspired them through college, and now they are happy to help the families who sacrificed so much. Each one of the graduates has an inspiring anecdote to share, and we wanted to share a few:

Kuch Seiha, who graduated in the first TSF class in 2009, is now working as sales account manager at Neeka Limited. She used her salary to support her sister's college education, and now that her sister has graduated and is employed, Seiha can save and share more with her family. Recently, she made a family trip to Siem Reap possible, something they had never done before. The sisters continue to live together in Phnom Penh and Seiha hopes that once her sister is self-reliant, together they can contribute more money to improve her family's living standard.

Ban Kosal graduated with a bachelor's degree in economics in 2012. He is now working as national economist at the Ministry of Economy and Finance. He lives in Roteang in order to save money so that he can help to send his younger siblings to school. He also uses part of his salary to continue his study of English at the Australian Center for Education. He commutes to work each day to Phnom Penh but the benefit, he says, is that his mother cooks for him! In the future he believes that, with education, his family will be prosperous and also help the community.

Sin Vuthy, whose story is on a video on our website, credits TSF with changing his family's life. After graduating with a bachelor's degree in English literature, he is now pursuing a master's in business administration. A very busy man, he also works as credit manager at Angkor Capital Bank, is married, and has a young daughter.

Soun Sokret, the first in his generation to graduate, has a bachelor's degree in business management. He is working as partnership executive officer at a nonprofit organization called Smile for Children (PSE). With his salary, he contributes to his family and to his sister's education in Phnom Penh. He is now finishing his master's in business administration and in the future, he hopes to own a business.

Soy Sovannthida, who graduated in 2011, is working at the Australian Center for Education. She contributes to her brother's college education and also to her family's well-being. She is studying for her master's in development management and wants to help her community, especially the poor.

All of the graduates express appreciation for what TSF has done to help them and, in return, they want to help support their families and the "next generation," their younger siblings and school mates. On their own initiative, the young grads formed an Alumni Association and maintain close communication, including using Facebook. They share potential job opportunities among themselves and internship possibilities for college students. They also speak to high school students about education and act as inspiring role models. Some of the alumni have been trained to lead workshops to help college students find jobs. TSF now relies on the alumni and we expect that in the future, as their numbers grow, they will become more and more integral to the organization.

So again we say a heartfelt thank you, especially to all of the college student sponsors, and to every person that supports TSF programs. We could not relay such strong success stories without you! □

Ban Kosal is a TSF university graduate. Lee Steppacher is a TSF board member.

Sin Vuthy, 2010 (left); Ban Kosal, 2012 (center); Kuch Seiha, 2009 (right).

Kids revel in traditional New Year's celebration

by Mom Seaneth

This spring, the Roteang Orphanage celebrated the Cambodian New Year or Chaul Chnam Thmey. Traditionally, the holiday lasts for three days beginning in mid-April, the end of the harvesting season.

In-country Director Elephant celebrates this every year because the kids have been good and working hard in school. Elephant thinks they deserve to have a really wonderful function with their nannies, friends and other staff.

On the first morning was the monk's blessing for good luck of everything in the whole orphanage that is our 15-year tradition. We started in the morning up to night, 9 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

The kids played games together, danced, and painted. They played Chol Chhoung, a game with two groups of people standing opposite each other and throwing the chhoung (a garment tied in knots) rapidly back and forth. If someone is hit by the chhoung, that group must dance to get the chhoung back while the other group sings. Another popular game was Chab Kon Kleng, played by imitating a hen as she protects her chicks from a crow. While both sides sing a song of bargaining, the crow tries to catch as many chicks as possible.

As in all cultures, food is an important part of the celebration. Elephant's wife and son went to Dem Kor market to buy the banana leaves, banana fruit, sticky rice, bacon from the pigs, string, sticky rice powder, mung bean, and palm sugar to begin the two-day process of making sticky rice cakes, the traditional food of the New Year. The recipe can be found on our website!

On the second day of the New Year's celebration, people traditionally contribute to those less fortunate. On this morning, Elephant, his wife, Farm Project Head Mom and Mom's wife went to the orphanage to share the sticky rice cakes and soft drink with the children, along with some small money for them.

On the last day of the New Year celebration, Buddhists traditionally wash the Buddha statues and their elders with perfumed water, a symbolic practice to wash bad actions away. It is also thought that a kind deed will bring longevity, good luck, happiness and prosperity.

On this day, they burn the incense and spray the perfume to pray for the best luck, happiness, and more prosperity for the orphanage. Also, the nannies helped prepare Banhory (a Vietnamese dish), fish with mango sauce, and duck curry for everyone.

All in all, it was wonderful traditional celebration, enjoyed by the children with their extended Cambodian family, thanks to those who support them from afar. □

Mom Seaneth is a long-time TSF staff member and head of the Farm Project.

Orphanage kids enjoy their traditional New Year's celebration and delicacies.

For traditional New Year's sticky rice cakes, the rice is combined with coconut, palm sugar, and mung bean, placed in a banana leaf, and tied hard in five places with jute string.

Connect and Re-Connect

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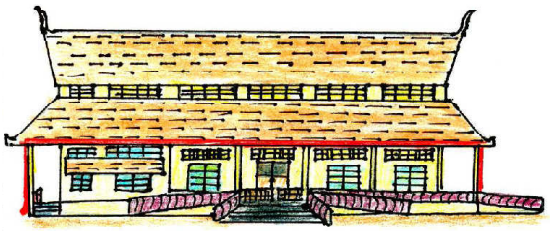
the lives of children, youth and families in Cambodia."

Bernadette Feeney and her family have graciously agreed to host the Sunday event at their home in Concord. "Our family hosted a TSF event a few years ago attended by 200 or more supporters and it was so great to see the turnout. Elephant (the TSF in-country Director) was there and it was just a beautiful day. The smiling faces let us know that it was a great time for all. We are so glad to be able to host the event again." Added Trudeau, "We hope that Elephant and even his wife may be able to attend—they're working on their visas right now."

Nelson says that TSF has a lot of great programming planned for adults, teens, and children: "Stay tuned for details... we'll have guest speakers, advice for families considering travel to Cambodia, Cambodian live dancing, and youth activities to help teens make connections while having fun. We'll have Cambodian crafts for sale, and Cambodian food is on the agenda as well."

TSF is hosting a BBQ in Concord on Saturday, September 19, from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. Although the BBQ is intended for TSF friends who are coming from some distance for the main event on Sunday, anyone is welcome to attend the BBQ. However, space is limited so register early to guarantee a place!

Registration for the event is available at www.sharingfoundation.org. Suggestions for nearby accommodations are there too. Mark your calendars and stay tuned for more details by email and on the registration web page. □



Helping to Care for Cambodia's Children

The Sharing Foundation

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Our Mission

The Sharing Foundation's mission is to help meet the physical, emotional, educational and medical needs of orphaned and seriously disadvantaged children in Cambodia. Our goal is to help prevent some of the problems associated with poverty by developing, in consultation with Cambodian community leaders, programs to improve the health and welfare of these children and their families.

Join in the fun! Everyone welcome!

Connect & Reconnect

Activities for all ages, Cambodian food, dance, and more!

Sunday, Sept. 20, 2015, Concord, MA

11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

See the related article in this issue.

Registration and more information are online at sharingfoundation.org.

The Sharing Foundation

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