The Sharing Foundation Newsletter

www.sharingfoundation.org

CARING FOR CAMBODIA'S CHILDREN

SPRING 2021

Graduation in Time of Covid

Lee Steppacher

Graduation from University is a rite of passage and one that deserves celebration, even during times of Covid! It just takes a bit of ingenuity and technology. This year, 8 TSF sponsored students completed their studies and graduated from university, and we wanted to honor their accomplishment.

We were not able to host the event that has become a tradition for TSF, a community-wide ceremony and party held in Roteang village. Instead we hosted a Zoom party, coordinated by Elephant in Cambodia and Colleen Gearns (our technology wiz) in New York City. Yes, there were challenges. First was the time difference that was surmounted when those in Cambodia agreed that

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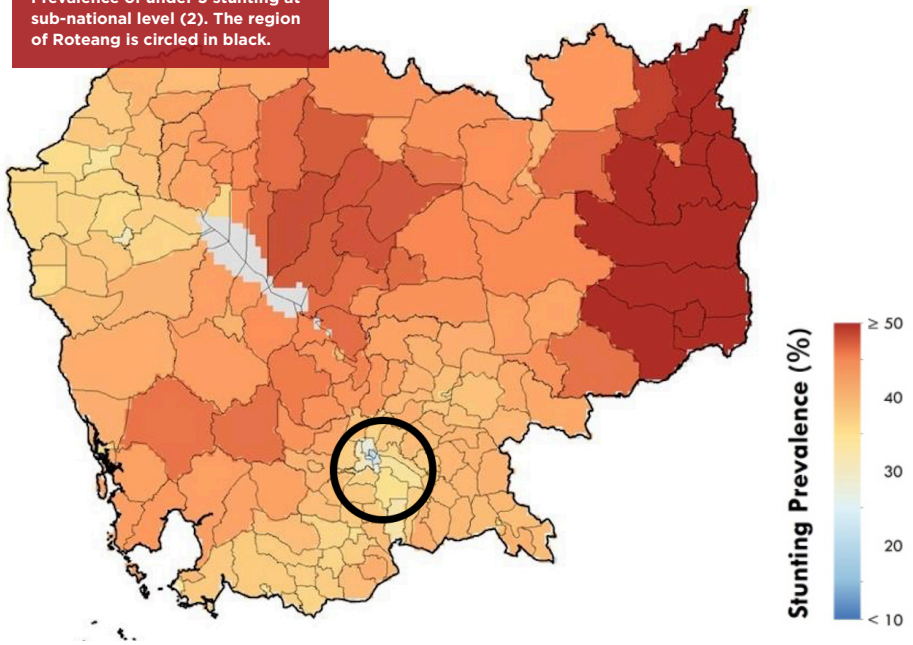
Run Soneath, accompanied by her mother, receives her certificate from Elephant, the Master of Ceremonies. Run Soneath was selected by her class to give one of the graduation addresses, which can be found on the TSF website.

Improving Nutrition at the RCC

Deborah Nelson

Along with Elephant and our in-country staff, TSF president Ann Trudeau and the board have been keeping a watchful eye on the changing needs of our RCC residents as they get older. With a majority now in their teen years, their nutritional needs have shifted, as has our recognition that there is more we could be doing to support the health of our youngsters. We were fortunate in 2020 to have Brittany Barrett, MS, RDN (Master of Science, Registered Dietitian Nutritionist) donate her time to understand nutritional challenges in Cambodia in general and at the RCC in particular, and to make recommendations to the board and Elephant. Ms. Barrett came to this role with much experience, including working with underserved populations in Kentucky and Ghana. Ms. Barrett prepared a 23 page report for TSF and presented at a recent board meeting (1). This article is based upon her work as well as the input of our Physician Advisor, Dr. Sandra Meyerson.



Prevalence of under 5 stunting at sub-national level (2). The region of Roteang is circled in black.

As a nation, Cambodia continues to face severe nutrition challenges. Ms. Barrett cites the Global Nutrition Report (2) which focuses on country level progress towards global nutrition targets including anemia, low birthweight, exclusive breastfeeding, childhood stunting (3), childhood wasting (4), overweight and obesity, and diabetes. The current report states that Cambodia is

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2020 Challenges and Achievements

While The Sharing Foundation faced many challenges in 2020, we also achieved a lot, most importantly in Cambodia. On top of our ongoing projects and responsibilities, last year we also:

- **Supported a school in Elephant's hometown of Mondulkiri generously donated by the Holdorfs;**
- **Took in a new baby girl, Chanta, at the RCC;**
- **Sponsored a weekend field trip for more than 50 kids to the Bou Chra waterfalls;**
- **Switched from a private visiting physician to regular doctor visits for all children at a credentialed clinic in Phnom Penh;**
- **Commissioned a full nutritional study of the RCC diet completed by a US trained nutritionist;**
- **Repatriated four RCC children to their families; and**
- **Moved the farm, built a new farm school, and started a fish farming experiment.**

Here in the U.S., we also had some important accomplishments. One of the biggest was recruiting two new Board Members, Jim Ganley and Emma Schumacher. Jim is the managing partner of CheckBox Systems and previously served on the TSF Board from 2001 to 2010. He resides in Portland, Maine with his husband, Steve, and their son, Ethan, who was cared for as an infant at the former Roteang Orphanage, now the Roteang Children's Center (RCC). Emma lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts and works as a UX designer at an EdTech company. She has designed our newsletter for several years and she traveled to Cambodia to visit our projects in late fall 2019, just before the pandemic hit.

In addition, Board member Colleen Gearns orchestrated several events to bring The Sharing Foundation community together using Zoom, including the final university graduation of eight students. This global connection with our students will be one of the changes we adopt for good!

Beyond our achievements last year, we also had to adapt due to COVID-19. Our Cambodian staff was impacted the most. The vocational school teens and university students came back to live at the RCC as did little Srey Leak from the School for the Blind. The staff had to coordinate remote learning for more than 50 children (!) while simultaneously keeping an eye on restless kids without their usual routines of dance and music classes and tutoring for much of the year. The bright spot of learning during Covid was the government's cancellation of the national exam, allowing all 12th graders to go forward to university as if they had passed. In the past, some of our students have failed this exam and not been able to graduate High School, but this year all of our sponsored high school students, including one who had failed the test in 2019, plus six RCC kids, have moved into the TSF dorms and started university.

Our new baby girl Chanta with Chanthan in May 2020

2021 will see our programs flourish again. Our most important goals will focus on the RCC population. Our upgraded approach to medical care will mean increased annual costs due to transportation and clinic fees. We also want to improve life for our kids who struggle to learn. Most RCC children came to us from deprived backgrounds, which may have impacted their learning ability. We plan to hire a teacher that can provide "special education," which may be challenging because the concept is not well known in Cambodia. This salary will be up to $3,500 per year.

If you would like to help us with the city doctor plan, the special education teacher, or to continue our efforts to purchase a used bus, please contact us at info@sharingfoundation.org. Thank you, as always, for your generosity!

Graduation in Time of Covid

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they would start the celebration on Sunday morning at 7 am! Second was the internet connection that is unreliable in many parts of Cambodia. Knowing that he had good internet access, Elephant offered to host the event at his home. He decorated this space with a banner, set up chairs for guests and created a party atmosphere. Third was ensuring that the audio was clear enough for everyone to hear and understand. Colleen coordinated the recording of short videos of each of the graduates, as well as a beautiful blessing dance that were shown during the event. There was even a dress rehearsal to work out any unexpected glitches!

And it was a success beyond our expectations! In addition to all of the participants from Cambodia, 30 people participated from the U.S. University sponsors, board members and TSF friends and Dr. Nancy all were on the Zoom event. For the first time, sponsors of the graduates were able to participate in the ceremony. Not only did they see the presentation of diplomas, but they were able to see and speak with their student in real time, many for the very first time, and offer congratulations. Elephant placed his camera in such a way that we could watch the presentation of diplomas with ensuing photographs as they happened. It is such a moving

Colorful bouquets adorn the certificates indicating 4 years of hard work. The flowers are given to the graduates by their peers.

moment when the graduate stands with his/her parents and is first given a beautiful bouquet of flowers from an alumna and then a special diploma presented by Elephant on behalf of TSF. So much happiness and pride is visible.

After the formal ceremony, as refreshments were brought out, Elephant took his camera to the guests and introduced them to us. Many family members had travelled into Phnom Penh to attend graduation and it was wonderful to 'meet' them.

Not to be trite, but the challenges of living in a pandemic have opened up new opportunities for TSF. While Zoom does not replace real on-the-ground, in-person visits to Cambodia, it does allow for those that do not travel to be more actively engaged. And surprisingly, it is possible to have a feeling of 'being there', even over a computer screen. Many sponsors expressed how moved they were to interact with their student and participate in graduation…

Some of the rising First Year's from the RCC join the Graduation celebration—in 4 years time, this will be them.

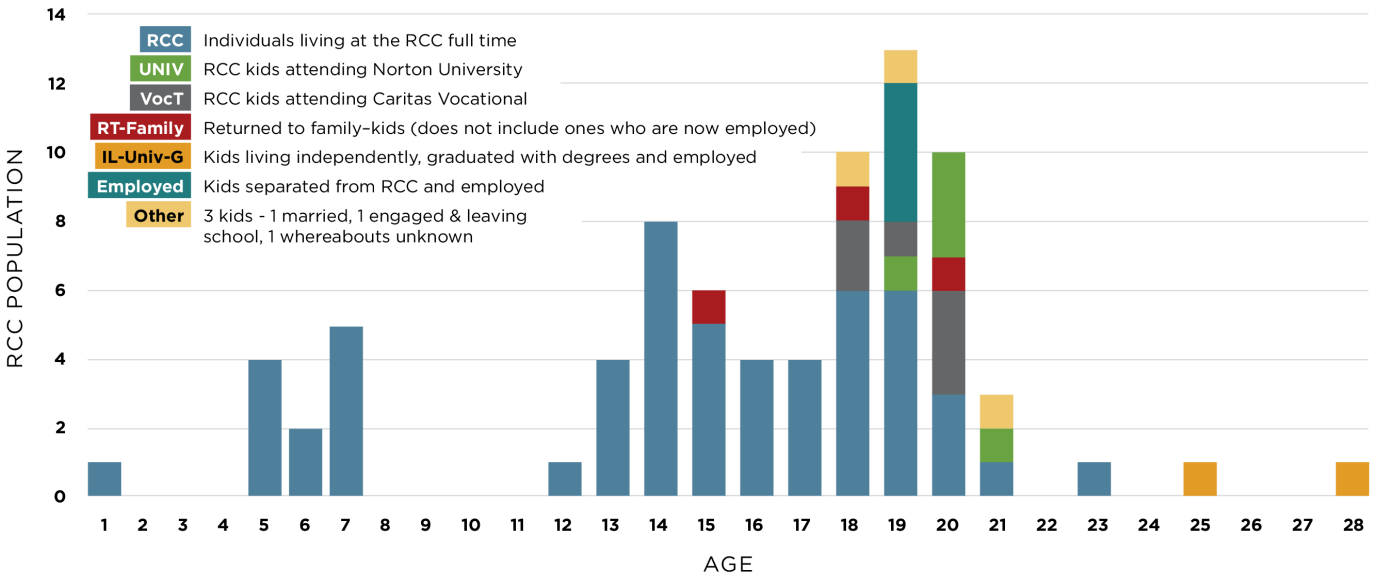
"The graduation was so moving…being there brought home how important TSF is in the lives of these young people. I felt the joy last night with the smiles and laughs, chickens clucking and families grinning with pride over their graduates who have worked so hard! Kudos to "the village."

The graduation was the highlight of my week. The students speak English so well, and Elephant's enthusiasm is [so] engaging. Thank you for including us, and for your time, energy, and talents to keep The Sharing Foundation thriving.

It was wonderful! Everyone who organized it and participated was just so positive and appreciative, a joy to be a part of such a group."

Of course we hope that the restrictions on our lives will lift in the coming year, but in the meantime we are being creative and learning new ways to stay connected to those we care about in Cambodia. We are confident some of these lessons will endure when life gets 'back to normal'. TSF

TSF Population Summary—Multi-Year



The List of Successful Seniors

As mentioned in the Notes from the President, the national exam was cancelled in 2020, allowing for all of our sponsored high school students—plus six RCC kids—to begin university in January! Check out the list of successful seniors and their majors below:

No.	Name	Sex	Major
1	Sophal Nil Randy	M	Electrical engineering
2	Sol Visal	M	Software development
3	ChhunSreyka	F	Banking
4	Run Sreyneang	F	Accounting
5	SuonphornTheara	F	Law
6	SuonphornTheary	F	Banking
7	Tith Kimlin	F	Accounting
8	Sean Lina	F	Accounting
9	Houeng Makara	M	Architecture
10	Horn Phally	F	Computer science
11	SrouySoklin	F	Banking
12	KoimPhanna	M	IT
13	Roth Ly Touen	M	Engineering
14	Roth Bear	M	IT
15	Roth SokEang	M	Management
16	Ly Sokpheak	F	Nursing
17	Roth Sopheak	M	Management
18	Roth Chanpiseth	M	English

Improving Nutrition at the RCC

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on track for none of these nutrition targets. As of 2018, Cambodia tracked 114th out of 157 countries in terms of progress toward meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (5). Micronutrient deficiencies are common in Cambodia (e.g., about half of women are anemic (>50% during pregnancy), about 90% of the general population evidences riboflavin deficiency, and >60% show zinc deficiency). It is likely that most if not all of our children came to us with prenatal and early childhood malnutrition.

Cambodian markets offer a wide variety of vegetables and fruit, spanning the color palette

While our RCC children currently have good diets, there is room for improvement, especially as our youth get older. Highlights from Ms. Barrett's report include ensuring adequate protein, folate, zinc, iron, calcium, thiamin, riboflavin, iodine and other nutrients. Towards this end, she recommends at least one serving each of pork, chicken and beef/duck each week. Youth should continue to eat fish and shrimp as much as they like (at least 2-3x/week). Using whole fish including bones in the preparation of food (such as the sour soup which the children love) is encouraged to boost calcium. Eating at least one egg every day (two for the older children) will help with protein, iodine, and riboflavin, among other nutrients. Additionally, she recommends the cooks include legumes and as many different colors of fruits and vegetables as possible, to help meet nutrient and phytonutrient needs. Increasing the amount of shelf stable sugar-free milk offered to the children is also recommended, as dairy goes a long way to addressing calcium, riboflavin and Vitamin D needs. Continuing to provide vegetables high in calcium such as kale, broccoli and bok choy is also recommended. Adding in more fortified foods such as plant milk may also be possible.

What's for lunch? Soup for 60+

Sharing a meal with friends—refreshment for body and soul!

Elephant and the staff have received the report and are reviewing it. Elephant will work with Ann and the board on determining which recommendations are most feasible for implementation considering availability of foods, challenges with refrigeration, RCC's distance from the city, costs, and respect for cultural nutritional norms and food preferences. Dr. Meyerson and Ms. Barrett hope to be board visitors sometime in the next year to work directly with staff and youngsters on nutrition. In the future, board oversight trips will entail working with Elephant to keep the children's nutrition a priority. TSF

1. The full report is available at our website.
2. Global Nutrition Report. Cambodia Research Profile. 2020. Please note that the Global Nutrition Report for Cambodia has just been updated for 2020 data and most recent statistics were not available at the time of this research project. While the new report states that some progress is being made in the areas of low birth weight and under 5 stunting, the general state of nutrition indicators and advice within the report remain the same.
3. Stunting is defined as below minus two standard deviations from the median height-for-age of the WHO growth reference. Based on data derived by the Global Nutrition Report (newly updated in 2020), stunting is prevalent in 28% of children under 5 years in Cambodia.
4. Wasting is defined as below minus two standard deviations from the median weight-for-height of the WHO growth reference. Wasting is characterized by a rapid deterioration in nutritional status over a short period of time but can also persist over longer periods of time. Cambodia's under-five wasting prevalence is 6.2%. The WHO asserts that a prevalence exceeding 5% is alarming due to its close association with mortality. Further, the presence of wasting is heightened in children 0-23 months, which is the most critical age for growth and development (first 1000 days).
5. USAID, Cambodia: Nutrition Profile. 2018.

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