



Children of the Mekong

Samrong Education Centre

This year, whilst we have been working on a number of projects, our major project has been to provide disadvantaged children in **Samrong**, Cambodia, access to education.

To help you understand why we have focused on improving the education in Samrong, here are a few facts about the city:

- Samrong is the capital city of the Otdar Meanchey province ('OM'), in North West Cambodia
- OM was the last stronghold of the Khmer Rouge, until late 1998, and remains to be the most landmine-ridden area of the country, as well as one of the poorest provinces
- In OM, the enrolment at primary school is **36,247 children**
- This drops dramatically to **6,597 children** for lower secondary school level
- Which drops to **2,863 children** studying at upper secondary school level

These figures are horrifically shrinking, so we have stepped in to help them grow, to allow each child access to the full education they are deserve. To do this, we had to find out why this has happened. From a number of studies, we have learnt that this is due to:

- 1) Lack of income for the poorest families:** many children are *sent to work* in paddy fields or across the Thai border for additional earnings
- 2) Prohibitive cost of the parallel tuition system:** although necessary for a satisfactory level of schooling, these additional lessons are *not within the reach* of the poorest families
- 3) Lack of secondary schools in remote villages:** in OM, there are *180 primary schools* and only *25 secondary schools*, so as a consequence, many students do not even have the option to continue studying

The next step was to **addresses the need**. We have come up with a few ways to do this:

- 1) For the last 10 years we have been running a **sponsorship programme** in OM, which supports the poorest families and sends their children to school. Not only does this sponsorship *cover the school related costs*, but it also provides the *basic needs of the family* (rice, oil and hygiene products)
- 2) Since 2006, our **education centre** in Samrong offers extra tuition (18h/week) as well as non-academic activities (library, vegetable garden, sport), which helps keep them the children in the education system
- 3) We have also opened four **foster houses** next to the centre and one in a remote village, which welcome the further students and give them access to secondary education

This year, we have received several grants from Trusts and Foundations to support the education centre. 13 runners took part to the British 10K and raised funds for the centre as well.

Beneficiaries for 2013:

- **320 students** (50% girls) will be direct beneficiaries. 79% of the students' families are farmers and 95% of them earn less than \$60/month. However, through the monthly sponsorship, family support and social monitoring, the life of *their families* will be greatly improved, making the total number of **beneficiaries above 1,500** (based on an average household size of 4.6 persons).
- **153 students** aged 13 to 21 (50% girls) and in grade 7 to 12 (18% primary school, 47% secondary school, 31% high school and 4% vocational training) will receive **free tuition** (mathematics, English, Khmer, physics, chemistry and biology) **and non-academic activities** in Samrong's main centre
- **52 students** aged 13 to 21 (42% girls), will be hosted in **5 foster houses** (4 around the centre and 1 foster house in a remote village). Life in the foster house is organised like family life - everyone can find their place and the stability they need.

The programme team is made up of the programme manager, two social workers and two overseas volunteers. Together, they monitor the children and encourage parents to keep them in school. To evaluate the project, the social workers regularly gather information which is used to measure the progress. This is **evaluated every year** by the programme manager.

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