

## Sunrise Newsletter April to June 2009



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You will enjoy the detailed reports from Robert in Siem Reap and Brenton in Adelaide, below. Most of this period had me travelling with my feet barely touching the ground in my pursuit of the funds we need to keep on turning over day by day. I will have more **Sunrise One Snippets** to report in the next Newsletter as I will have spent most of the time with the children in Cambodia. In April I spent time in Singapore, where Susie Lawson, my **“woman in Singapore”**, who arranges all my visits, had me speaking at schools, women’s groups, and corporations, before flying down to Australia to talk at the Wollongong Principals’ Conference and the Happiness Conference at the Sydney Convention Center. Next on to Perth to address the Presbyterian Girl’s School at the University of Western Australia, followed by Rotary Clubs, a Jewish Business Club in Sydney, meetings with speaking bureaus, radio interviews and speaking at a Women in Finance lunch in Melbourne. Finally I was able to spend time in Adelaide with our 5 Sunrise students there to see how

well they are doing. One of the most important aspects of this time away was the many meetings I had with the Opera House and the girls at Zing Public Relations, who are our pro bono publicity agents, helping to arrange our concert on 1 October. **All details about how to book tickets to the concert are at the end of this Newsletter.** I was able to fit in a few days’ break in Bali, where I just relaxed and one very special personal night for me, was going with a friend to see Simon and Garfunkel in Sydney on the night before returning to Cambodia. What a blast to the past that was! To all our sponsors and friends, who are the reason we have anything at our Sunrise Villages, please always know how dear you are to us and how much we appreciate your support and interest. I hope many of you can make it to the Opera House to see some of the children whose lives you have changed. They want to perform just for you, to say thank you. Please try to come... The photos below give you an idea of daily life at Sunrise One!

Love and light,

*Geraldine Cox AM*

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*“There's a crack in everything - That's how the light gets in...”*



Trouble, multiplied by 4!



Trees are for climbing!



Sunny, leading the morning exercises



Five minutes later, cooked in ginger and chillies-delicious!

## Sunrise Angkor Children's Village Report from Robert Madsen:

Over fifty children now live in Sunrise Angkor Children's Village, our second centre close to the centre of Siem Reap town. Over the last few months, renovations and new developments have continued, with new staff, activities and initiatives.

Significant improvements have been made in safety and protection of our children, a priority as Sunrise Angkor is on a main road, close to the centre of town. Our front fence has been raised, and a protective fence now separates our centre from the adjacent primary school. We now have just one entrance point for all children to the centre, and with the new fencing painted green and yellow; we have managed to avoid making the centre look like a security compound.

Other developments continue. The old French era building upstairs from the office is being modernized, and soon we will welcome a new library and study area. Shelves have already been stocked with books. This old building in Sunrise also is where thirteen teenage boys sleep, with their house father.

The last few months has seen an increase in activities for all our children here. One highlight is the opening of our new computer school which is now fully operational.



We have employed an experienced computer teacher to facilitate the learning of our forty children who are now enrolled in classes. The program has been extremely popular, and our children are constantly lining up outside the computer room, eager to join their class. Once again, thank you to Austbrokers and Prince Alfred College in Adelaide for their kind support to get this important program up and running.

New educational and family activities have also begun. Every Thursday afternoon all children and staff meet together in the new garden and grassed area behind the office, and sing the Khmer National Anthem. This family group meeting is also an opportunity for me to speak with the children directly. Sundays are now particularly busy with activities: arts and crafts in the mornings, and in the afternoons, more than twenty children gather with their house mothers to sing Khmer songs, an activity that came directly from the children's requests.

Our educational activities are ongoing; over sixteen children study English at the Australian Centre for Education, and we continue our traditional Apsara

dancing and music lessons. Five of our teenage boys have also recently been recognized as outstanding students in the local high school. They have been proud to wear the special uniform given to them, in recognition of their achievements.



We have also introduced weekly developmental play games; new skills that have been given to our house parents with the kind assistance of volunteers from Australia. Our smaller children are kept busy with daily games activities, special times to play on the new swings, and watching 'Bananas in Pajamas' on television has become a daily ritual.



The new activities are also an opportunity for the house mothers and fathers to increase their interaction and build relationships with their children. They also gain communication and problem solving skills. The activities are particularly useful for many of our children who have suffered loss, abandonment and trauma.

Managing trauma, loss and stress in children is an area that Sunrise is currently focusing on, with the development of our new psychosocial program. Sunrise Angkor has recently employed our first psychosocial worker, with a plan to recruit more staff in Sunrise 1. Children are learning about counselling, the importance of sharing feelings, in a trusting and supportive environment. Our staff has also been introduced to the importance of encouraging children to express feelings, through different ways such as drawing and the arts. Having worked as a trauma and grief counsellor in Australia before coming to Cambodia, it is particularly rewarding to be part of the development of this program.

New staff skills in providing emotional support has been tested, as one of our new children, an orphaned 12 year old girl, has suffered depression, leading her to suicidal thoughts and self harm. In our staff team meetings, staff have shared strategies to assist her

and other children, through such feelings. It has been rewarding to see that many of our house parents have expressed to our girl the simple but powerful words that she is cared for and loved – essential words in helping anyone with suicidal feelings.

Our psychosocial program has also focused on career counselling for our older children. Eight of our children will be soon leaving Sunrise, as they are now over eighteen years of age. Transitioning from care is one of our biggest challenges, and our social worker has been assisting in finding vocational training and career opportunities for our teenagers. We have recently placed two teenagers in the Paul Debrule hospitality school, a well established local hospitality and cooking centre, and we are also following up training opportunities for careers as electrician, mobile phone and air conditioner repair businesses and other practical areas.

We have also begun a life skills and career program, including weekly group discussions with our teenagers covering areas such as career choices, managing adjustment to new environments and life outside the centre. This is an opportunity for our children to share feelings and thoughts about leaving their Sunrise home. With links that are being made with local businesses, we are also planning new work experience programs for our older children which will give much needed life skills and experience, increasing their confidence when leave Sunrise.

Other challenges have been the management of some of our new children who have special health problems and difficulties. Two of our new children have been diagnosed with epilepsy, and we have recently received our first child with HIV Aids, an eleven year old girl, one of four siblings orphaned by this ongoing health problem in Cambodia. Our young 2 year old boy, Kom Soth, will also be soon requiring heart surgery to repair a 7 cm hole in his heart. We no longer, though, have to travel to countries like Singapore to treat such problems – Kom Soth will have his surgery in a now modern hospital in Phnom Penh.

The challenges and difficulties are made easier with the kind support we have received from many visitors and supporters. Despite the economic downturn, travellers and supporters continue to visit our centre, bringing donations such as rice, cooking materials, clothes, toys, and other educational materials. In June, the American Embassy in Phnom Penh



conducted a toy drive, and presented our children with many gifts that are now used daily by the children. Many thanks to the US Embassy for their kind support.

Our staff has also received some training from some skilled volunteers, including developmental activities for children, and in June, staff received training in providing relaxation skills to children. Other volunteer guests have included students from the Anglo Chinese School in Singapore, who were busy assisting us with much needed painting and other renovation work. Although we normally do not take volunteers, occasionally a need arises, and ongoing support from organizations such as the Anglo Chinese School has been most appreciated. Thank you to our volunteers, and others who continue to help us in developing and supporting our centre.

#### **Adelaide Office Report from Brenton Whittaker:**

I hope this update finds you well and thank you for your ongoing support.

The past three months seem somewhat of a blur! We have been very busy due to Geraldine's visit.

Along with many new arrivals at Sunrise, Gaynor in our office has a new grandchild. Congratulations Gaynor! Chrissy continues to get five children and a husband out of bed each morning and still manages to get to work on time. A very organized person!

I apologise for any delays of recent times. We have experienced some problems with our server, but the wonderful staff of MGA Whittles have assisted us to change over to a new server. We hope this will eliminate any future problems. The ACF is a growing organization so 'growing pains' are a fact of life for us.

It is always wonderful having Geraldine in Australia. Most of our contact is via electronic means, so when we meet face to face it is a special time. Many are asking me if the current financial situation has affected our organization and expressed concern. Some sponsors have been forced to discontinue sponsorship for financial reasons, but at the same time we have received new sponsorships. Basically we are treading water in this regard and are still in a good position to put food on the table and provide for our children. Thank you to all who have been placed in the difficult position to stop sponsorship. We fully understand your situation and wish you all well for the future.

Our Sunrise children and young adults in Adelaide completed their first two terms of the school year with very good results. Theaneath and Chhay topping their classes in a couple of subjects. Congratulations to our girls! Sopheak our eldest boy is completing Year 12 and started Rugby in second term. I attended his first match and it was a little daunting when I saw the size of the other players. But Sopheak proved his worth and played very well. No stretcher or ambulance required! Narith is coping well in Year 12 and attended his school dance recently. Narith loves

music and dancing, so was keen to be there. He wanted to arrive in a Hummer, but in the end had to settle for a Ford Laser. Kong Kea is causing a storm on the soccer field at his school St Peters College. I watched as 5 different players positioned to take the ball from Kong Kea, but failed on every count. The boys call him 'Kong' and there is no question he is King of the soccer field! Most of the children attended a local performance of 'Anything Goes' with Geraldine and her 94 year old mother, Dot. They experienced seeing tap dancing for the first time and were practicing in the aisle at half time! Prior to the performance Mr. Thy of the Regent Thai restaurant in O'Connell Street, North Adelaide, hosted us for dinner. Thank you Thy for a truly memorable meal. Mr. Thy even provided pro-hok, which is a traditional Khmer dish of rotten fish! We were sat well away from other patrons.

I would like to remind you to update your email address if you have changed it and for those who recently secured an email address, we would appreciate if you could notify us. It would save us a great deal of money to be able to send out profiles and other information via email rather than via Australia Post.

Some of our wonderful sponsors donate gifts to their sponsored child from time to time. We regret to advise that this causes problems with those children whose sponsors do not do this, so regrettably, we must request that sponsors refrain from donating in this way. If you do send money for a gift for your child, it will be utilised amongst all of our children for such events as visits to the beach, etc.

We hope you all understand the reasoning behind this new policy.

We are all very excited about the Opera House Concert on 1 October. This will be an amazing time for the Foundation and for our children involved. I have been asked which children will be attending and the current list is attached to this newsletter. We cannot, however, guarantee the children listed will perform. In 2002 we experienced an outbreak of chicken pox one week before departure and, of course, children can break a leg or take ill at any given moment. Some children are undergoing TB treatment and we are not sure if they will be granted a visa, if the treatment has not run its course. Certain things we have no control over in life, so if your child does not make the performance, we seek your understanding. For those who attend I assure you this will be a very special night. Geraldine is to be commended for all the time and effort she has put into making this a reality. It takes a lot of guts and determination to do what Geraldine does. Just as many doors close in her face, as they do open. Thank you also to David Perkins from our Board, who is a lawyer and ensured all the contracts were in order.

To help fund our Sihanoukville project and support the many volunteers involved please buy our new 'Dance To The Light' 2010 calendar. Copies available very soon! Thanks to Martin Plunkett and Cheap As Chips in Adelaide for supporting this calendar. Tracey Shelton in Phnom Penh and A Little Bit Of Photography for their outstanding contributions. It is the most beautiful calendar to date!

This will be my last report from the Adelaide office, as I have relocated to Bali to play a more hands-on role with my charities there, but will continue to support Sunrise as a proud volunteer and Board member.

### Khmer Proverb

*Associating with evil people will bring you suffering.*



Sunday Games