



KEP GARDENS NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2013

Hi Everyone,

So much has happened since the New Year that I fear you may not read this newsletter because it is too long. Print it and save it for when you normally would spend time reading a book!!! I'll try not to rave on too much.

First off, happy New Year and we hope 2013 is a good one for you all.

Last day of term before the Christmas break was a day of games, lots of fun and icecreams. Everyone always attends that day, I wonder why???



MANY, MANY THANKS TO THE BRODIE BUNCH FOR THEIR GENEROUS DONATION

Kep Gardens is a non-profit, non-government organization, with no political or religious affiliations.

Your support is vital to ensure the continuation of the many varied programmes that are offered.

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We had a quiet Christmas with staff and their families. As usual on Christmas Day we spent all afternoon and into the early evening eating and drinking. Roast pork and Khmer dishes kept coming all day with various people popping in to have a drink. All the usual Christmas excesses but a very pleasant day.



No good pictures of the children as they were sitting under trees and because of their dark skin their faces were lost.

Early in the New Year a friend from Australia arrived to stay. It was lovely to see her and catch up. We have known each other since our children first started primary school and know a lot of the same people.

Sothea's Wedding

We all headed to Prey Veng early January for Sothea's wedding. The people who have followed Kep Gardens will know that Sothea spent 4 years at Kep Gardens as our manager. Roughly a year ago he got a job with a much bigger NGO in Phnom Penh working with the children in the slums. It took 1 day to get there, 1 day to get back and 1 day for the wedding. His wife, Mary, is a lovely girl who we had met a couple of times before the wedding. She is a social worker at an NGO in Phnom Penh. It was also great to meet up with Sothea's family again. We may go to stay in their village for a couple of days during Khmer New Year in April.



Jill standing next to Andrew
Sothea's parents next to Jill

English School

School started the day after we got back and a day later Jill's friend arrived. We cannot thank Jill and Rosie enough for all their help. Both work in the ESL section of the Education Dept in South Australia and brought years of experience with them to Kep Gardens.



Rosie



Their timing was perfect as the day after they left the first 2 volunteers arrived from BeMore. During Jill and Rosie's short stay we had organized a volunteer programme, introduced 2 new programmes into the English school, Rosie had written lesson plan examples for the 4 different levels and many other helpful examples for myself and the volunteers to follow. What can I say, they both sorted out all the things I was concerned about and came up with great ideas to utilize the resources we already had. If only they lived and worked here we would have the best school in Cambodia! Thanks so much Jill and Rosie. Although I was shell shocked when you left, after coming back to earth, we hope we got across to you both just how much we appreciated all your help and how valuable it was for Kep Gardens.

To top it all off, the day after they left a parcel arrived on the bus from Phnom Penh. This not

only contained some much needed lower level reading books but a new computer which we desperately needed. I used to hold my breath each time I turned on the old one expecting that it had finally given up the ghost. One major load had been lifted from our shoulders. We should nominate you guys for Australians of the Year.



Volunteers

Arie and Dinie, the first 2 volunteers from the Dutch organization BeMore were just fantastic. The two new programmes we introduced were a reading programme and a conversation programme. As Rosie and Jill left as the volunteers arrived, I still had to finish organizing paperwork, books etc for the running of these programmes. They were a tremendous help in finalizing the organizing and have been great while we were trialing the best way for them to run smoothly and efficiently. They work very hard from 1.00 in the afternoon until 8.00 at night and then have to travel back to Kep for dinner. Each of them has one week of lessons they give on a particular topic freeing me from the classroom to also participate in listening to reading and conversation with students every second week. We help them of course with lesson plans that Rosie set up. With only 1 teacher, regular

conversation with the older students was almost impossible. Now we have regular help the older students are getting much needed practice at speaking the language. Already I can see an improvement in their confidence at speaking. They had the vocab and the grammar knowledge, not enough practice. The volunteers are loving it and feeling as if they are contributing in a major way. The students have accepted them without question which made them feel part of the team as soon as they arrived.



If the other volunteers have the same work ethic and desire to follow the way we want things done like Arie and Dinie we will have a very fruitful and successful association with BeMore.



While 2 people are listening to English reading, Pheara is listening to the students read a Khmer book to help them with their normal school work at the same time. This is done before class for the first 3 classes so they don't miss lesson time. The older students combine their reading and conversation during lesson time but they are capable of fitting back into the lesson and picking up from where they left off.

Hello,
We are the first volunteers from the Netherlands at Kep Gardens! Arie and Dinie Holkers, 63 and 60 years old. In our country we have jobs as a manager, Mental Health and lecturer, Health and Technology.

We always wanted to do volunteering jobs abroad, so we got in touch with Be-More, a Dutch organization for volunteering. They have made an agreement with Kep Gardens. Janine and Andrew are doing an impressive job here, worthy to get support!

We are the first volunteers of Be-More and together with Janine we organized the basis of the extensive English programme. Most of all it is important that the children get individual coaching in English writing, reading and conversation.

Janine and two volunteers are able to realize such an extensive programme. We will leave after 4 weeks, the 2 new volunteers will continue the programme, together with Janine.

We are very grateful for this experience and for working together with Janine, Andrew and their staff.

Arie and Dini Holkers

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Health Programmes

While all this has been going on we have been going back and forth to a private hospital outside of Kampot taking Pheara's father for continuing treatment on his leg and another staff member's wife who turns out to be menopausal. This brings up another need in the community. The women have no idea about their bodies, nobody tells them. (Neither do the men for that matter). This lady thought she was suffering from a major illness. Once we get the library/community centre built we will offer health information to the community which we will be able to also organize through this hospital.

While at the hospital we organized for eyes, ears and general health checks for all students aged up to 16. So in the last week of February we will hire a wagon and transport groups of roughly 20 at a time for 4 afternoons to the hospital. They will charge us a small fee per child but are interested in becoming involved in joining with Kep Gardens and will take photos for their publicity to show community participation even though they are a private hospital. We're happy with this as it means it is affordable for us for our students to have first class medical checks from European paediatricians. If any follow-up treatment is needed we will go to Takeo for eyes and Phnom Penh for ears as this hospital is fairly

new and is in the process of gradually increasing the services they offer.

After spending time at Kep Gardens, Dinie and Arie believe in the work Kep Gardens is doing and so would like to help in some way. As Dinie is a nurse and Arie worked in mental health, this programme appealed to them. With help from their friends in The Netherlands they have offered to fund the medical checks and treatment. Thank you very, very much for your generous offer. They feel it is a really worthwhile ongoing programme to be involved in. Teeth last year, rest of the body this year. We intend to sponsor these checks every year as well as the dental visits annually. We are gradually increasing the ways we are of help to the community apart from education.

Career Student Programme

A very big thank you to the people who donated to our Career Student programme. Thanks to you we reached our goal to pay the private tutors for the year and a month's living expenses in Kampot to attend lessons from more experienced teachers during the July swot back period.

The programme is proceeding very nicely. To reward them for their hard work and commitment we have organized for the students and the teachers to attend a morning team building and an afternoon personal motivation programme at Action Max Asie, an adventure park recently opened in Kep. They still have a long way to go and we feel this will assist them to help each other when the going gets tough. This will be a Sunday of course so they don't miss any classes either at school or Kep Gardens. Another parent/teacher meeting was held at the end of January, a bi-monthly happening. These are important because any problems are discussed and we are able to nip them in the bud before they turn into major problems.



The two girls who admitted to “not studying very hard previously because there was no point” are steadily improving so we believe they will be up to scratch by the August exams. Remember, we are talking high grades, A’s or B’s, not just a pass. One of the boys has no problems as these subjects are right up his alley. The other boy we worry about as he has no self confidence. The teachers say he has high ability but he does not believe in himself. We have to work on this somehow before the final exams.



Signing of Documents

We heard from a student that the Provincial Governor mentioned Kep Gardens in a recent meeting of heads of departments that he attended. The Governor said that Kep Gardens had spent a lot of money and time helping the people in their community and that the Government needed to support our efforts. When we wanted signatures he asked them to sign quickly. Hmm, let’s see if anyone takes any notice. But it is good to know that he has acknowledged us positively and publicly. Since our meeting with him we have had to redo the lost documents again but they are all finished and resubmitted so waiting on a phone call again to pick them up!!



Local News

We have just had a long weekend of 4 days. Normally we don’t close for the Cambodian public holidays as we would never be open but Friday was the procession and ceremonies in Phnom Penh of the King’s casket and Monday was his cremation. The majority of people in Cambodia loved their “Father King” and we didn’t want the community to feel that we were being disrespectful so we closed the school. On Saturday the career students still attended classes and on Sunday we had the parent/teacher/student meeting but this was OK as they weren’t the important funeral days.



Locally, some people electrocute fish in a pond or their rice fields using batteries. A dangerous pastime! One person recently used the electricity supply from his house to catch fish and electrocuted himself. Let’s hope others take note of the dangers but also give the fish a fighting chance.



Chinese New Year this coming weekend and early next week. It doesn’t affect our classes much. Very few don’t turn up to class (those who have a Chinese grandparent still alive) but most attend.



Cheers, Andrew and Janine

These photos were taken by Joakim Leroy when visiting Kep Gardens. He has a studio in Thailand.