



# KEP GARDENS NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2014

## Happy New Year to all our friends and Kep Gardens' supporters

We have had very cold weather for almost 2 weeks now. Three blankets on the bed at night, socks and jumpers. Hard to believe so I had to put in a picture of a fire we had in a 44 gallon drum on the night of the Career Students' party because it was so cold. Only about a month ago we went through a box that had our winter clothing in it. We decided we didn't want to keep it so gave it to staff. The other night I was so cold and Sopheak arrived to work on the bar wearing my thick winter dressing gown, blue with white hearts!! I wanted to be an Indian giver and take it back but he was colder than me so I didn't.



### Career Students

Mid January the three nursing students went to Phnom Penh to sit for the entrance exam to gain entry into the four year degree course. Andrew couldn't have been given a better birthday present as we heard on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January that they had all passed and been accepted. On Monday, 3<sup>rd</sup> February they start their studies at Life University in Sihanoukville. We had a small party for the students, parents and teachers before they went. Very exciting time for Kep Gardens as it proved that if given the opportunity, teachers, students and parents all working together, in other words, teamwork can make it

happen. The people who supported the students last year will be pleased to know that their donation achieved the desired result. Thank you very much. You have been instrumental in opening up a whole new world of career options for four young people from a rural area in Cambodia. Their lives and those of their families will never be the same. We look forward to continuing our support and watching them grow with interest. **We have not yet reached our target for this year's university fees. Still time to join us.**



Unfortunately, our Engineering student couldn't join us as he had his first term exams the next day. He has settled into Phnom Penh and doing well.

We never cease to be amazed at the generosity of others. A friend of ours, Jan King, was buying a new second hand ute and gave us her old one. You can't imagine how much easier it is for Andrew to get his guys to work sites and transport tools and material from site to site. A logistics nightmare before which disappeared overnight. Jan knows what we think about this but we want everyone to know what a champion she is and how much we appreciate her generosity.



At about the same time, Sothea gave us an old, Tico that his father had used for ages and then given to him. He never drove it and it was taking up too much space in front of his apartment in Phnom Penh. So I can use this to go to the market or down to Kep. Moves at about 25 kph, in fact most people pass me but I have my independence back. Or at least I will when all the things that are wrong with it are fixed. At the moment, every time we use it something else breaks down. Be awhile before it's on the road!



## Staff Changes

Because we have at least two volunteers staying here all the time and many times four or more, we found ourselves in a position of running a guesthouse on top of all the other things we had to do. Too much for just two people so we had to do something about it. Kimsy, one of our hospitality students, has come back as the volunteer co-ordinator. She has always been good with people and organizes their travel requirements, acts as the guide on small local outings and generally looks after any questions they may have to do with general living at Kep Gardens. Pheara is not here anymore. Choun has taken on all the cooking. She came with me to Kampot over the Christmas New Year break and attended cooking classes at a friend's restaurant. Thanks Paul from Frangipani Restaurant in Kampot. The food has greatly improved and Choun has risen to the occasion of the extra responsibility and work. Just the two girls but they work well together and do a good job running this aspect of Kep Gardens.

## Organized Activities

Below is an extra we have added to visitors' and volunteers' stays at Kep Gardens to give them additional experiences of Cambodian life. Kimsy has only taken a couple of trips so far but they have been successful. Added to this are the weddings in the village but we can't always guarantee being invited to one when volunteers are here.

### DO YOU WANT TO SEE FIRST HAND AND LEARN ABOUT TRADITIONAL KHMER VILLAGE LIFE?

Make a booking with Kimsy if you would like to participate in any of these activities.

1. Village walk and home visit.
2. Hike through the valley to learn about the local flora and fauna.
3. Fishing in a local pond using Khmer traditional rods.
4. Visit the local Phnom Prous Pagoda.
5. Digging for crabs in the rice field to cook and eat.
6. Digging for and cooking crickets to taste.
7. Sugar palm making (tuk tuk necessary).

**The \$1 charge per person will go directly to the local people to thank them for hosting your visit.**

## Andy's Bar

Been talking about setting this up for ages but the grand opening of Andy's Bar finally happened in December. After a hot day and more than 7 hours work, much of it talking, most of the volunteers would love a cold drink. Sopheak, our hospitality student who works with Andrew during the day returns after class to run the bar. Good for him as he is doing what he was trained for in Siem Reap and earning some extra pennies too.



We even have bar stools now and a small boom box with USB sticks with Khmer on one and the old 60's and 70's music that we like on another. Very pleasant after a hot day to sit and relax together. A nice end to the day. So if anyone is coming to visit, let us know beforehand what you would like to drink and Sopheak will stock it for you. Great venue for a small party too like the Career Students' party.

*"Life should not be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside, in a cloud of smoke, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming,  
'Wow! What a Ride!'" ~ Hunter S. Thompson*



## Driveway Lights

Because of the generator we have now it was possible to light up an area for the bar as well as install poles and lights down the driveway. Lit up like a Christmas tree now and the students can actually see where they are going when they arrive and leave at night.



The picture doesn't do it justice but for people that have been here you will get the idea of what it looks like.

## Volunteers

Our current volunteers, Arie and Dinie, must be gluttons for punishment as they are back for a second time. Great to see them again. They were our very first BeMore volunteers a year ago. We were very happy to hear that they see a big improvement in the students, especially their self-confidence. This must be credited in large part to the Reading and Conversation Programme which is only possible with the help of volunteers.

Obs Stedeke, a primary school in The Netherlands sent library bags with Arie which we gave to Class 1. Thank you very much to this school for their interest in our students and for their generous donations of many useful bits and pieces, especially the classroom resources.



Our present library monitors. Next term it will be the girls turn.



Class 1 with the library bags that are nearly as big as some of them!

## Student Hospital Visit

As Arie and Dinie have again sponsored the students' health checks at Sonya Kill Memorial Hospital we arranged that one class would attend during their time with us so that they could go with the students and see how their money was being spent. The remainder of the students 14 years and under will attend next month when the majority of the hospital staff will be back from leave. Thank you Arie, Dinie and friends for your continued support to ensure the hospital health checks are a yearly event on our calendar.



Many of the children from Class 1 were undernourished. This is something we need to address as a community.

Rianne, the BeMore representative, and the two volunteers at the time also took all the classes for a day talking about the environment and recycling, making things out of plastic bags and cans.



Choun has started walking around Kep Gardens over by the dam and down the driveway every couple of days with some members of the younger classes. They pick up rubbish and get a different sticker every time they participate. Everyone wants Kep Gardens to be clean so we hope they take this concept home with them and around their local community. Our latest visitors commented on the impression they first had when arriving that "Kep Gardens was cared for". This attitude filters right down through the staff and students. Great to hear it has been noticed.

We discovered some unknown artists during November. Rebecca and Karen are both arty farty people and took a whole week of classes introducing various techniques within the scope of available resources. Some of the older students surprised themselves as they didn't realize they had any artistic talent at all, never having had the opportunity to express themselves. Very successful and something we should do more of when volunteers bring these skills to Kep Gardens.

Looking back on the year, 2013 saw many changes which all brought their own challenges: our association with BeMore volunteers; the Career Student Programme; the teaching of Khmer to children who cannot read or write their own language; new generator; increase in apprentices and work undertaken by the trades training section; inauguration health checks and dental clinic visits; bunkhouse accommodation for volunteers and friends. The list goes on and on but these were the big things.

The New Year, 2014 already has some exciting projects and visits planned: a visit from a group of students from Korea; World Challenge groups camping; workshop/storage area being built.

### **VISIT FROM SCHOOL IN KOREA**

A friend of a friend came and stayed at Kep Gardens for a few days last year reading with the children. She is a teacher in Korea and has contacted me and arranged a visit in June with her class. We will spend the day together, playing games at Kep Gardens and then swimming and a picnic lunch at Kep Beach. Sounds like fun and a great way for kids from different countries with different languages to interact.

### **WORLD CHALLENGE**

World Challenge from Australia contacted us late last year wondering whether we were interested in hosting groups of students from Australia during their summer holidays and England during theirs. They came and visited to check out whether it would be a suitable venue for them to send groups here. We have now been added to their list of destinations and can expect groups from England around July this year and Australia from December. They will camp at Kep Gardens. Could be interesting during the rainy season!! Groups are from 15-25 students aged 15-18 years. Good job for Kimsy to organize. She will enjoy it and we can recruit extra people from the village to come in to help with cooking. We're looking forward to it actually. Will learn heaps the

first visit but should be fun handling all the mistakes.

### **WORKSHOP/STORAGE AREA**

The most exciting prospect for us for 2014 is the building of the workshop/storage area. How nice it will be to have somewhere secure for storage, freeing up some living areas like our room for instance. We desperately need somewhere secure to store the tools and a place for the apprentices to work when it is raining as well as being away from the classroom when using drills or cutting tools. Work has already started but will continue in fits and starts, stopping when an outside job requires all the apprentices.



Once the workshop is finished the chicken house will be bricked up for security and the chickens and geese that are left can go back home safely instead of camping out on our doorstep. The pig pen will also be completed during this process of building so 3 jobs will be completed at one time.

So many new and exciting things to look forward to in 2014.

We hope all is well with you and that you have some things to look forward to during 2014.

Cheers, Janine and Andrew