

Hi Everyone,

2021 started off reasonably normal. Schools were opened up in January and we carried on as we did in late 2020 with half classes, temperature taking, social distancing etc. Numbers of cases were very low and stable plus there had not been any deaths. We continued along quite happily, taking precautions but our lifestyle was not drastically changed as we did not have lockdowns like many other countries in the world. FAMOUS LAST WORDS. In February a new cluster broke out in Phnom Penh but unlike previous others this spread to many other provinces. We now have 24 deaths and the number of cases increasing every day in many different provinces in the country with children as young as 18 months being affected. Here in Kep we have 2 cases, both from the local Damnach Changeur market where the majority of the population pass through every day for food and general supplies. Now it is a waiting game to see how many people end up infected. Schools were closed again from Monday, 22nd March. Some teachers received vaccinations but they ran out although we now have notification that the remainder will be called in very shortly. All provincial borders have been closed for 2 weeks to stop people moving around for Khmer New Year. But life goes on so what have we been doing in the last 3 months?

Cultural Craft

On Thursdays, Keat, an elderly lady from the village comes to Kep Gardens and moves around the classes either talking about what life was like before the Pol Pot era or doing craft using banana leaves or coconut leaves. With today's technology, it is important that the younger Cambodian generations do not lose touch with their culture. Keat has lived the last 40 years by herself as her whole family died during 1975-79. She enjoys spending time with the children, many of them village children that she has watched grow from babies.



Clean up

The Kindergarten class out and about picking up rubbish. Good job, cleaning up the road leading to Kep Gardens.



We thank the Buddhist Library in Australia and Cambodia for their continued support of our project.



Career Students

A big thank you to Ian Stephens from New Zealand/Australia for sponsoring our 3 career students to receive 2 hours per day for 6 days a week extra tuition in chemistry, biology, maths, physics and Khmer literature. Thank you to the teachers who never missed a day and to the students for giving their best. Unfortunately Year 12 examinations were cancelled last year so all students passed but we are sure that these extra lessons have helped the boys immensely to pass their entrance exams into university. Pitak has passed and will attend the Techno College in Phnom Penh to do a 5 year mechanical engineering degree. Phanya passed and will attend the Royal University of Phnom Penh to study IT engineering. Tithaka has yet to sit for his entrance exam to do medicine. We wish all three young men the best for their future. Thank you to Martinis for providing a delicious meal and pleasant surroundings for us all to celebrate the conclusion of a long but successful year.



International Women Association

International Women Association, Kep, represented by Vicki, Ian and Amyssie, paid us a visit bringing backpacks and pencil cases for the students. What is special about these gifts is that they are made by local women out of recycled cement bags. Many of the students received them last school year and are still using them today. The backpacks are very strong and waterproof, an important asset as the students walk or ride through heavy rain to get to school. IWA was very generous in providing us with backpacks and pencil cases for the new students this school year. Thank you very much for visiting us twice. IWA have a shop on the Phnom Penh road near the electricity office. They have many items for sale, all made of recycled materials, providing employment for local women and helping the local community.

Congratulations

How proud is Kep Gardens of its team member, Kimhean? Very, very proud! Kimhean has wanted to write books for quite awhile now. She has been entering various competitions, writing stories and posting them on Facebook for friends to read. She entered a competition recently run by the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts. There were 118 competitors and 10 were chosen to have their story published in a book. Kimhean was one of them. Wow! Great Job!! We will definitely be buying a copy for the library. She attended a ceremony in Phnom Penh recently where the Ministry recognised competitors' efforts. Kimhean: not only a great teacher but a great role model for the students - follow your wildest fantasies, work hard and it's possible to achieve your dreams.



"More amazing things being done at Kep Gardens for the incredibly intelligent young people of Cambodia. Congratulations Kimhean Ngov, great work Janine and Andrew and the whole team and volunteers at Kep Gardens. You should all be so proud of yourselves. And a huge pat on the back for everyone that generously donated to this great, genuine and honest Organisation."
Craig Lewington, Australia

Health Checks

We began our annual health checks in January with our Kindergarten class attending Kep Referral Hospital. This was going to be a regular weekly trip by ramok for the next 15 weeks or so until all the younger classes had been checked but school closure has put a stop to that. Thank you to the hospital for facilitating our students en masse.



Another class planted sunflower seeds.



How Do Plants Grow?

The younger classes are learning about how plants grow. For the first step they placed some water and four bean seeds into a zip locked plastic bag. The bags were put in the garden where they would receive morning sun. The students checked them every day but it was expected that after a week the seed will have sprouted.

A couple of students were lucky and all 4 bean seeds sprouted but some only had 1 or 2 sprout. Some students took great care of their seeds, others not so much. The boy who showed the most enthusiasm had all 4 of his seeds sprout. We were happy for him, well deserved. All sprouted seeds were planted and we look forward to watching them grow.

Every day the students measured their plants and wrote in their journal recording any changes; number of leaves, changes in colour, healthy and any other differences they observed.



Unfortunately, with the school closed, the care of the sunflowers and the beans has passed to Mr Huch who by the photo below is doing a great job. Thank you to Angela from Kampot Seedling and Flower Shop for providing the sunflower seeds.



Kindergarten picking beans from the garden.



Training Courses

The last two weeks have seen us holding training courses. Some of our staff attended a zoom course with the Buddhist Library from Kampot. It covered a couple of important topics pertaining to teaching English in Cambodia - how to improve the students' pronunciation and class management. Consequently, we repeated the same course with all of the Kep Gardens' staff present. Good job Buddhist Library and thank you for sharing your power points with us.

Cooking fried rice and a Khmer sweet



Monitors

Thank you to Jay for obtaining 2 monitors for our classrooms. Thank you John and Tyler from NHCC International School for kindly donating the used monitors to Kep Gardens. Great additions to our classrooms.

Keep safe everyone. We hope you enjoyed your Easter break and didn't eat too many Easter eggs!!
Cheers, Janine and Andrew

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