



The reading shelter built by the 2006 Addventure VSA Group

BOOKS FOR Cambodia

In 2000, a Cambodian Ministry of Education study in cooperation with UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) and UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) revealed that after years of war and cultural genocide, 60% of Cambodian adults were either totally illiterate or had basic skills that were so poor they were unable to read. This was due to the collapse of the education system which has had to be totally rebuilt. Today, 85% of children attend primary school. However, the dropout rate remains very high and only 17% of students reach secondary school due to the poor quality of the education system. Books For Cambodia wants to help to change that.

Can you imagine going through school not having access to a local library or even a good school library? No opportunity to read on your favourite subject, to get help with school assignments or just to read for pleasure? This what many school students in Cambodia experience.

Books are very inexpensive in Cambodia, so your donation can buy many more books than in New Zealand. The average price of a book purchased recently in Cambodia was NZ\$1.50 and that included an Oxford Khmer-English Dictionary.

Books For Cambodia was initiated by Jennie Wilson, a former VSA (Volunteer Service Abroad) volunteer and now one of the principals of Gecko Trails - a small group tour company specialising in tours in Southeast Asia.

Marie Nicholls, now a Trustee of Books For Cambodia, was part of the November 2006 Addventure VSA trip to Cambodia. This was a life-changing experience for Marie as a first-time traveller to Asia. "I immediately fell in love with Cambodia and the people who, despite years of extreme hardship, had such a positive 'get on with it' attitude to life. Seeing the children's faces when we unwrapped the books [we as a group had brought from New Zealand] was something I will never forget. When I was asked to become a trustee and help with fundraising for Books For Cambodia, I was very happy to become involved - to ensure that schools involved have well-stocked libraries and well-trained staff. I will be returning to Cambodia in October to take more books, visit Cambodian friends and to explore more of this fascinating country."

In November 2006, Gecko Trails led an Addventure VSA trip to Cambodia, where the group helped build a reading shelter and set up the library at Kla Krohim High School (650-plus pupils). As a result of their efforts and donations, the library was increased to 531 books. Another group undertook a similar project in neighbouring Moy Sophea Senior High School (3000 students) in February, where the library there was increased to 700 books.

For more information, or to make a donation to Books For Cambodia, email Helen Walch, partwks@globe.net.nz or phone 06 364 6602.

Visit: www.vsa.org.nz for more information on Addventure VSA trips.



It's not just a matter of books. Supporters of Books For Cambodia have also contributed to equipping the libraries, funding training for the librarians and renovating the libraries - which were basically just storerooms for textbooks. Books For Cambodia are also in the process of becoming a Charitable Trust.

Photos: Marie Nicholls



A group of Kla Krohim students outside their library