

MOUNTAIN GIRLS HOMESTAY PROJECT COMPLETED & BLESSING CEREMONY



Culmination of a wonderful partnership between ODA and GoPhilanthropic USA.

The Mountain Girls Homestay Education Project was completed, blessed by the Monks, and welcomed by the girl students, their families and the residents of Wat Village on Sunday 25th Oct.

Funding by GoPhilanthropic Foundation under the expert guidance of Linda DeWolf - who marshalled their generous supporters - and one in particular Greg Kadel - who funded an enormous amount of the total cost – allowed ODA to respond to the Mountain Commune Chiefs request for help, so girls could attend Secondary school, as there is none in the Mountain region. 15 girls are now settled in their homestay which was built on top of the ODA No 5 Free English School building. Their Secondary School is a short walk away and they learn computers and English in the ODA English school they now live above. 5 more students will join them in the next week for the new school year.

The design, costing and construction was managed by Leng and Trai Vet, who is an ODA student in his last year of Civil Engineering. Management took a lot of time of course - but it was a great experience for them both. The original school building had to be strengthened with a straddle system to take the extra weight load. Assistance with the structure design was given by a regular ODA Australian volunteer – Terry – who is a retired Engineer. Construction took almost 4 months and has been delivered on budget, which Leng and Trai Vet are very pleased about.

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Leng had the idea of a tailoring class and workshop addition to the girls studies to make uniforms for the ODA Uniform Project. Once trained this will provide the girl students with some income, so they can help provide for their families, while they continue their studies. Families need their children from around 12 years old on to be working and contributing - so for them to allow their girls to continue studying - this places a big burden on the families and they are all very happy at this sewing workshop project addition.



13 of the MountainGirls in their new bedroom with the lady Leng has employed to sleep with them each night for security. Sophan the ODA Schools Manager and his wife are also at the bottom of their stairs.

25th Oct was the most important next step – Blessing of the building by the monks to ensure nothing bad would happen to the girls there. They would be far too frightened to sleep there until this was performed. Blessings are shared by families and villagers so a very full, crowded, exciting day was shared. The blessings took place, speeches by Leng, Commune and Village Chiefs and the District Governor took place.





Next were celebratory Apsara Ancient Blessing and other dances by the very professional ODA Khmer Culture students. The villagers love these, as they are such an important part of their heritage and many never get to see them performed. From the tiniest tots to the oldest people – they were mesmerised at the performance by the ODA kids.



Dignitaries began cutting the building sash with Leng performing the final cut, and declaring the Homestay Open!

Village ladies had been cooking up a feast from early morning, and 4 huge woks were bubbling away with traditional Khmer Chicken Curry, and fresh rice noodles completing the fare. A cast of thousands was happily fed.



The Village and Commune Chiefs approached Leng, asking if ladies from the village could attend the tailoring classes as well - so they also would have more opportunities for future employment. Leng said yes – he would work out a way to have that happen, as he felt it was a great idea and would enable youngsters to remain in their village longer. We could see Leng suddenly dreaming up the idea of a possible Village factory in the future so wages could be earned close to home. It's such a pity they have to leave home and live in costly accommodation to gain employment. Who knows - but Leng has added it to his 'Dreams list' for the future.



Then the villagers started up their disco band so everyone could dance all afternoon. These occasions form their social life and are eagerly attended by all ages. The band instruments consisted of an empty gasoline tank with appropriate holes gouged out to produce the required sound and a big stick with wires attached – this provided an excellent base sound, tom tom type drums with animal skins stretched over and a traditional Khmer string instrument made up the band. Of course the obligatory LOUD speakers thumped the music out for all ages to enjoy!



ODA Schools Manager Sophan, Leng and the Secondary School Principal meet with the girls families in what will be the tailoring training room



It was wonderful to see the Mountain Girls participation in the construction process – after school they would change into old clothes and appear to help workers and clean up the site daily. They also approached Leng to see if he would allow them to build walls around their kitchen area. They had watched the builders, so laid the bricks, tapping them into place like professionals – they also mixed a render

batch and covered the brickwork then painted it!

They are so proud of their efforts and Leng is proud of their wish to contribute to the project. They plan to grow vegetables and chickens so they will be partially self sufficient just like they are at home. This, plus the Uniform workshop plan will contribute to the running expenses and possibly allow ODA to offer even more students this opportunity in future.





A zillion thanks to all GoPhilanthropic supporters who contributed to make this project possible and especially Linda and Greg. ODA is indebted to you all - and with 5 more girls due to start the new school year in the next 2 weeks – that will mean you have helped change the lives of 20 eager students.- and put in place the housing to ensure this project will live on for future students.

Tom Tom Akun – Thank You Big Big from ODA and the Mountain Girl Students.



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