



KHM-CHO-SOM-P01, Cambodia
Reporting Period: January – December 2017

School on the Mat - Cambodia

Budget: \$41,190 – fully funded!

Update:

This is the 2017 report for Year 1 of a three-year project which supports five teachers to run ten informal schools in five villages along the border of Cambodia and Thailand. There are morning and an afternoon schools in each village from Monday – Friday teaching reading and writing in Khmer, basic maths, together with creative activities such as arts and crafts, drama and music. The informal school provides a means of helping children into the formal school system. We appreciate that our partner has identified the major barriers to children improving their lives which is not being able to attend school either because they are crossing the border for work with their parents or because they need to look after siblings while their parents cross the border.



Our partners report that School on the Mat is very much appreciated. Classes contain 15-25 students and the villagers are aware of the positive impact for their children's futures. There are 219 children in the SOM program. 165 passed the first semester exams, 92 in Grade One and 73 in Grade 2. Pre and post "tests" were also given on topics such as basic rights, negative impact of drug use, personal safety and hygiene. 90% of children know where to go and who to contact when they feel at risk. By early December 2017, 76 students were enrolled into government schools – a great result for these students to gain further education. It is expected soon that our partners will exit out of two villages as 95% of children will be enrolled in government schools. 133 remain in the program with 85% advancing to the next grade level, with the other 15% needing further teaching and some are very young. Teachers receive ongoing training.

Camps for parents/guardians covered topics such as parenting, abuse, drug use, domestic violence, child labour, child rights and the importance of education. 60% of parents say they have improved their parenting techniques. The villagers provide a place for the school to meet and are supported by the village elders and chief. One of the parents said, *"I'm happy that my child is studying here. Before, I did not see the benefit of study because we would still end up as labourers, but now I am aware that it is not only useful for finding a better job but it teaches my child good behavior and respect for others."* 13-year-old Srey Wait said, *I am very thankful that School on the Mat lets me come for no cost as my parents are so poor. My goal is to study hard and have a good job so that I can have a better future."*

Issues affecting the program are the rainy season, transient families due to lack of work, poverty, political instability – things that do not affect us so much in Australia! Many parents cross the border into Thailand to look for work. Some take their children with them and others leave their children at home with grandparents or in the care of the eldest child. The risks of child trafficking are high and children are not educated, perpetuating the cycle of poverty. We thank you for allowing these little ones and their families to gain a foothold in education against so many odds, and for all that this project teaches to entire communities.