

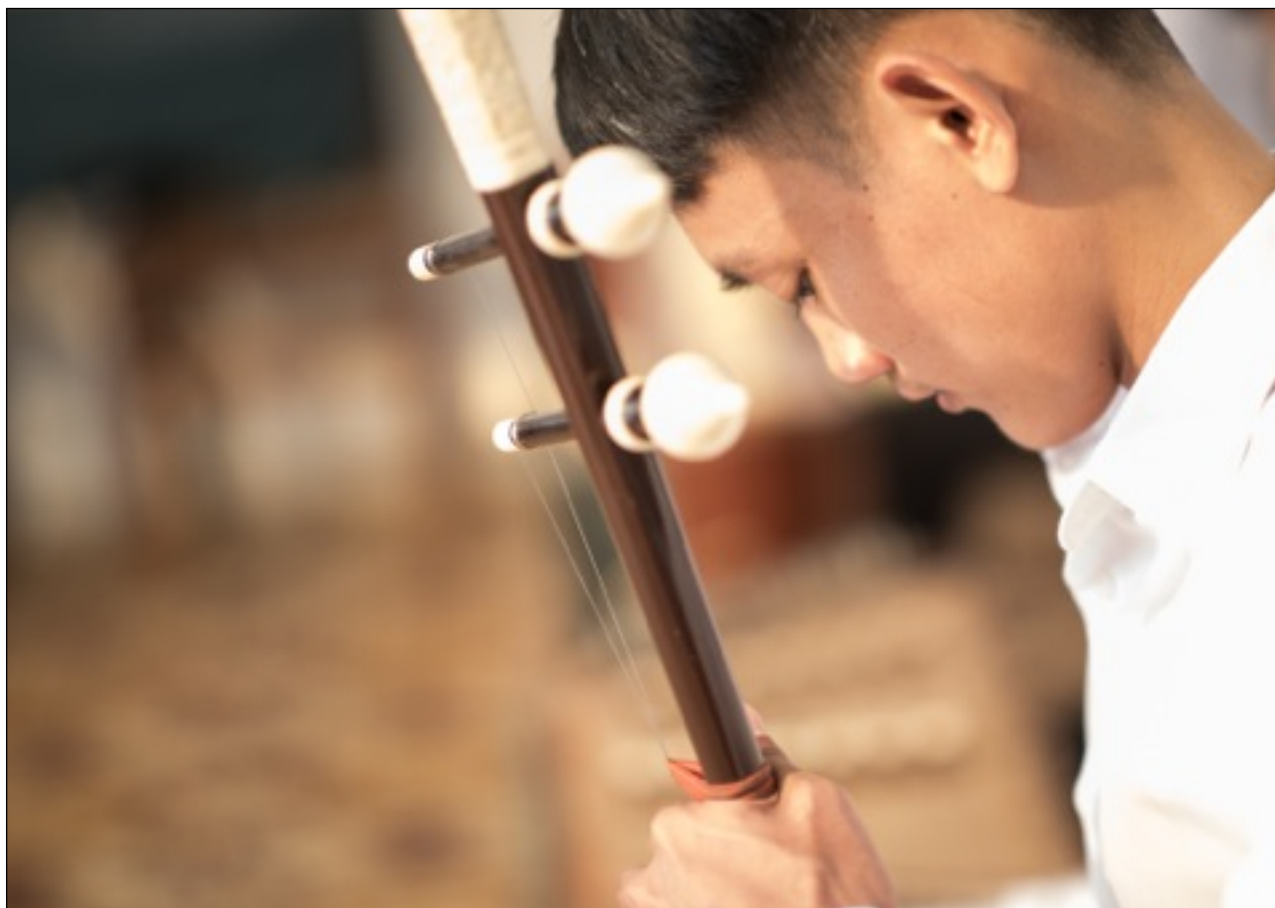
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# Khmer Cultural Development Institute

**Progress Report April 2019 - 2020**

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**Kampot Traditional Music School for Orphaned and Disabled Children**



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## Introduction

KCDI has made much positive progress in the last year in many areas and this has allowed us to grow and strengthen. In this report I will show the different areas of growth and my observations. Please do not share or copy this report.

### Residential Children's Program



**KCDI has four main programs, two of which are Residential.** The first is the Residential program for very vulnerable children. The second is our rehabilitation and vocational training program in residence for blind children and youth and the third is the free tuition of Traditional Khmer arts to local children from Kampot, who are often very poor. All three programs teach the arts as therapy, vocational training and as preservation of Cambodia's traditional cultural heritage. The fourth program is Childsafe where our school coordinates with other partners and the authorities to check on vulnerable and at-risk children in the community and to provide emergency temporary shelter to street-children, abused children or lost children and to mothers with small children who have no roof over their head. I will go into detail about each of these programs in this report.

KCDI is now an official member of the **International Childsafe Program**. I will explain this in another section. Through this work we have strengthened the capacity to identify and research the backgrounds of very vulnerable children together with our Childsafe partner Epic Arts and the Department of Social Affairs.

This has led us to identify an increasing number of children who are in desperate circumstances but whose cases were previously overlooked by the Government

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Department of Social Affairs due to lack of training and expertise in aforesaid department. In the last two months we have taken into our care (after extensive checks and permission from the authorities) several children. The first are two brothers aged 12 and 14 whose mother left them then disappeared with a new husband. The boys father has no fixed abode and lives on building sites where he works as a labourer. The elder boy had been separated from his brother and placed in a care centre. With permission from the authorities, we united the brothers and they are now at our school and remain in contact with their father.

The next case was of two little girls aged 8 and 6 whose parents separated and then both of them went their separate ways with another man or woman, cutting off all contact with the two little girls and leaving them with their grandmother who has Polio. Nobody knows where either parent has gone. The girls come from a remote rural area in Kampong Trach and their grandmother lives in a broken shack and is unable to feed them adequately or send them to school, her health also does not permit her to give full-time to care for these two small, lively children.

In order to alleviate the stress and pain that the children felt at losing their parents and to help this small family recover, I suggested that their granny come with them to stay at our school a few days so that they could all get used to us and not feel that they were losing their grandmother, or for their grandmother to feel her grandchildren had gone to an unknown location. Therefore on their first day at KCDI their grandmother was with them for a few days and stayed with them until they had settled in. She can come and visit whenever she wants and they can stay with her during the holidays. They have both settled in and are laughing and playing.

Another little girl also from Kompong Trach aged six has been recently orphaned. Her parents died of AIDS. She has HIV and we will transfer her medical care from her rural health centre to Kampot hospital AIDS and HIV clinic. She was living with her elderly great aunt and uncle who could not provide for her properly, had no proper home and lived in an area too remote in Kompong Trach for her to be able to go to school every day. We are undergoing further checks to find out the quality of treatment by the great uncle and aunt towards the little girl, as we found that she was emaciated and frightened. From there we can ascertain whether it is possible for her to remain with them during holiday time, or whether she needs complete protection. She has no other living relatives.

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Last week a mother contacted Childsafe and came to our school with her two children a boy and a girl aged about 8 and 10. They were children from her first marriage (first husband has disappeared). Tragically and dangerously her second husband beats the children from her first marriage. He often gets drunk and hurts her children. She and her current husband are desperately poor and have no home. They work on building sites and live on the sites that they are working on. This means in this desperate situation the mother has nowhere to go and cannot leave her second husband. She has no family, no help, no refuge and she is destitute. There are no refuge centres or NGOs anymore in Cambodia for battered children or wives. She has very small children from her second marriage and they do not get beaten, only the slightly bigger children from her first marriage. Out of desperation and to protect her children she has asked us to take them into our care which we have. They have never been to school and are very small and malnourished for their age.

We are currently (together with our Childsafe partners Epic Arts and the local authorities,) doing background checks to verify the mother's story. Our next step is to provide temporary emergency care for the children at our school and help them and their mother by providing our school as a safe space for them to meet and be together, even though she will continue living with her second husband. If her circumstances were to change and somehow she were able to earn enough to keep a house for herself and all her children, then obviously they could go and live with her. For now we can be a safe haven and they can still keep that vital mother-child connection.. However we will probably have to have a protective custody injunction against the step-father. Additionally we will make a legal document to ensure that nobody takes the children away from our school to use as labour. This is a huge problem in rural Cambodia, where children are put into care when they are small and then taken away when they are adolescents so as they can earn money for their relatives, cutting short any chance to finish their education and to really make a future for themselves and get out of the cycle of poverty. In this case, it seems the mother is deeply concerned and loves her children and wants the best for them. We will see what the future holds.

Recently Childsafe was asked to assist with another family. on the outskirts of Kampot town. Again four young children aged 6 to 15 had been left with their grandmother who could no longer cope. Their mother had left them when they were very small, marrying a Chinese man and moving to China. Each child has a different father of

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whom nobody knows the whereabouts with the exception of one, who is already married and has not recognised the child. Their grandmother has done her best and they have been living in rented property on a lake. She makes a meagre living selling water greens and cannot cope anymore. They all live in a room 6x6m with one bed to sleep on. The room is part of a row of tiny houses on a lake into which everyone defecates, washes from and drinks with. The local authorities felt that their situation was an emergency case and asked for our immediate assistance.

Together with their grandmother's coordination, we will provide education and meals and the children can sleep with their grandmother. Having been abandoned by their mother, their grandmother is their point of reference and they don't want to be separated from her at night, which is as it should be. We will be organising the best way to help them.

We also have in our care a little boy aged nine whose parents died from AIDS and he himself has HIV. He has been quite disturbed and was with us for a period, before returning to live on the streets. He is with us again and we hope that he will choose to stay with us and not return to the streets. For now he is doing well. The presence of Covid-19 has meant no more tourists in Kampot and so he cannot beg from foreigners anymore, (which is a great help), as well as which he is afraid of catching Covid.19 which for him would be fatal.

Some of our residential programs overlap with our emergency ones. So if a child living on the street has no relatives and nowhere else to go, then our school can take care of them long-term. Sometimes these overlaps can be difficult or complicated because of ingrained behavioural issues especially in children who have lived on the street a long time and have used glue, drugs or stealing to get by. We had a 12 year old boy who had been with us as part of our Childsafe program for **Temporary Emergency Assistance**. He had been on the streets half his life and then stayed with us for about three months, however one day he disappeared taking with him valuables belonging to our older blind boys. During his stay at KCDI, we did extensive research into his family background and found that his family had separated and that some of his brothers and sisters had been put into care and others had gone with their mother to Phnom Penh, but the boy in question had run away and didn't want to be with his brothers and sisters. We later found that he had a grandmother in Chhouk District whom we contacted, (it can take months to track down a street child's relatives). He was seen in Chhouk and passed by his grandmothers. We hope that he will learn to stay with his grandmother. This illustrates that we don't always manage to help our children as much as we wish.

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We of course continue to have at our school all our other children who are in residence and have been for several years now and who are growing up well. Many of these children suffered severe abuse from their extended family, to the extent of life-changing injuries such as the loss of an eye or being sold into slavery. Our role and vision and mission is **only** to provide care where children have nowhere else to go. If a child has a loving relative who cannot take care of them due to illness, old age or isolation then we ensure that they **always** remain in contact and that these vital links are not broken. Many of our children have gone through so much suffering and loss that it is difficult for us to grasp the extent of it.

Rural Cambodia is still desperately poor notwithstanding the estimation of Cambodia's "*Rapid economic growth*" by the World Bank and IMF. Such growth has not positively affected the rural population (about 70%) of Cambodians still living in isolated areas and without clean water, toilets, access to adequate healthcare or schooling beyond primary school level. The garment industry though providing quick fix salaries, also exploits young workers (especially women) with back-breaking work and no protection. Mass tourism has brought about inflation of basic essential goods, increase in social problems such as drug and alcohol abuse, prostitution and child abuse, harm to the environment and distortion of housing prices and rents in towns rendering it impossible for local people to afford to live in the place of their birth anymore.

Three of our children after having been abandoned by their mother were placed in an orphanage and suffered severe neglect and abuse there before the orphanage closed down and they were placed with us by the local authorities. Our earlier group of children are adapting to the presence of our new children and are getting on well, especially as the new little girls are quite a lot smaller. Our new boys are well-behaved. They've had a rough time and been used to lots of hardship.

The rise in numbers of abandoned children speaks volumes about the state of Cambodian society today. When our school first began, we cared for children whose parents had died because of the war and from disease.

Today although several of our children are completely orphaned, over half our resident children were abandoned. Nearly three quarter of all children suffered abuse or

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severe neglect. The main causes of death amongst adults today in rural Cambodia are road accidents, tuberculosis, malaria, infectious diseases such as meningitis and cancer.

Three of our children lost their parents to disease and have no adequate carer at all, or have an elderly grandmother or relative in poor health who cannot really cope.

Of our blind or partially blind children and youth, one boy was abandoned by his mother but has a loving father. Another youth's parents separated when he was a very small boy and his mother (who does love him) is so busy with her new family and work that he was placed first in the NGO (now government-run) Krousar Thmey for blind children in Phnom Penh as a child and then he chose to come and stay at our school as a youth.

### **Residential Program for Blind Children and Youth**

At the time of writing, some of our blind youth are staying at their rural homes with their parents because they suffer from health conditions such as asthma and with the risk of catching Covid-19 we felt they were safer away from the town. Cambodia has so far managed to control the spread of infections and there have been no deaths. Our blind youth telephone our director and teachers every day and have asked to come back to our school, because they say they are bored at home! We think this will be possible in mid-May.

For a period of nearly six months they were studying physiotherapy at a clinic and their course and transport were very kindly sponsored by a Cambodian lady who owns the *Pharmacy Lida*. They really enjoyed the course and were doing very well. However the lady in question was unable to sponsor the period of a month and a half before the Covid-19 shutdown in Cambodia.

This is an optimal form of vocational training for the blind and we wanted to take it to the next step so that they could have this as a form of profession together with their music, as they have now formed an orchestra. When the risk of Covid-19 subsides we would like to find sponsorship for them to continue their course and become fully qualified.

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Meanwhile before Covid-19 they were all attending state school in the mornings with their Braille teacher supporting those students in lower grades and upper grade students attending lessons by themselves. We have been given funding by the Avery Dennison Foundation through CAFA (Charities for America) to cover costs of their Braille teacher, some of the costs of transport to state school, Braille materials and some costs towards their food and clothing. This is about \$3,000 and is an important help towards supporting our blind children and youth. The fact that the Braille Teacher expenses were covered meant that we had a spare amount in our general KCDI funds and we could finally raise the rest of our staff's salaries - an important step for the well-being of our staff who are doing such a fantastic job.

Our blind children and youth then study Traditional Khmer Music in the afternoons and have formed a successful orchestra which has the potential to become professional. They even do a bit of folk dance in order to keep their muscle tone up. They also have access to computer classes with Miss Bopha who is our assistant accountant and secretary.

### **Changes in Cambodian Society and Factors contributing towards the Abandonment of Children**

There seem to be several factors behind abandonment. The first is economic where a separated parent cannot make ends meet and moves to Thailand or a distant province to work. However in many cases the parent disappears and loses contact with their children. The second factor is personal, where a parent meets someone else, leaves their spouse, re-marries and follows their new spouse. There is no sense of responsibility towards children from the first marriage and they are treated as a nuisance or an impediment to the second marriage. We even heard of and are currently investigating the case of a Cambodian woman leaving her children at the local pagoda because her foreign Western companion didn't want her with children. Rarely do we hear about parents separating and the father contributing to the well-being and upkeep of his children in his first marriage, or the mother staying in contact and contributing. It does happen but not often. There are also parents who sell their children into slavery or prostitution and we have also rescued children who were sold as slaves and we have taken care of them.



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Dire poverty is a huge factor in rural Cambodia and not to be compared to poverty in Western countries. Another factor is lack of education and lack of development of the mind and general knowledge. Additionally although there are laws that forbid parents to sell or harm their children, knowledge of these laws does not filter down into rural communities. Alcohol and substance abuse, gambling and violence is very serious throughout Cambodia, most especially so in rural areas.

Research needs to be made into this phenomena to better understand what leads parents to abandon their children or sell them, as it is extremely wide-spread. From accounts by older Cambodians and survivors of the Khmer Rouge, society was very different *before* the war and the genocide. A parent was expected to stay in contact and help maintain their children from their first marriage. People were generally very peaceful and could leave their property and motorbike untended below their wooden houses (on stilts) without fear of theft. Violence was very rare and women and girls could safely travel about.

It seems that decades of war and the utter devastation caused by the genocide, which affected every individual in Cambodia between 1975-79, has damaged the fabric of society even twenty years after the end of the war.

It is possible that people who survived the genocide were so damaged afterwards that they could not show their love nor communicate well with their children, who in turn inherited the trauma and lack of love and have themselves dysfunctional relationships with their spouses and their own children and so it goes on.

The Cambodian government has not embarked in any form of discussion, recognition or healing program for survivors of the war and the genocide. Some foundations like the Cambodian Centre for Documentation have begun this and are doing well. However the problem is so vast and it is so late in the day to face this problem that already the next generation of Cambodians has been damaged by the collective trauma of their elders.

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## Outreach Program

We normally have different programs running to give free arts lessons to local school children and disabled youth, with a special emphasis on very poor or vulnerable children who need assistance. In the past we have taught up to 450 children from a local primary school, formed a Pin Peat orchestra in the countryside district of Chumkriel and in Tray Koh in Kampot. This year we were scheduled to provide free arts lessons and help with meals for poor students from Di Pok middle school. We wanted to form a proper dance troupe and orchestra to help children have a vocational training option and to really work to preserve these art forms. Additionally we were also asked to provide basic arts training to students at teaching college so that they could have some background knowledge in traditional culture as part of their formation. All this has been put on hold because of Covid-19. However we are optimistic and believe that this can be started in late summer or Autumn, if Cambodia continues to keep the virus under control

## International Childsafe Program

This is a really important step for our school and I am really happy about our progress.

The International Childsafe Program is run by the International NGO *Friends International* who provide important training to NGOs worldwide in order to understand what is child abuse and how to spot it and/ or prevent it. This is an internationally recognised program and as an official Childsafe Partner it gives us credentials and experience in taking care of vulnerable children in a way nothing else does. Together with the NGO M'Lop Tapang, Friends International and APLE have trained our staff on different, intensive workshops in the different complexities of children's rights and the myriad challenges they face. APLE is an investigative NGO working with police and Interpol to catch child-abusers. At the same time, we have had to complete over a dozen documents (Amongst others, MOU with the Ministry of Interior, MOU with the Department of Social Affairs, Human Resource (updated), Child Protection Policy (updated), Staff Code of Conduct (updated) Vision and Mission (updated).

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We had most of these documents, but they had to be modified and updated to fill the criteria given by the Childsafe Program.

I cannot stress how valuable this training has been and continues to be for our staff. Training continues online for now. They have grown tenfold in their understanding of the many facets of childcare, child protection, how to deal with expatriates, how to investigate child abuse and identify vulnerable children. Our staff are wonderful and we are very grateful for this opportunity. Above all Mr Nguon Sothy our director has demonstrated himself to be a *Tour de Force* in understanding the complexities of Cambodian society and district and village bureaucracy, connecting different departments, police and giving expert advice to fellow Childsafe team members. He has won the respect of everybody (Friends International M'Lop Tapang, local authorities included)

In Kampot we partner with Epic Arts and after extensive training with chosen staff, we have created an official Childsafe Team in Kampot. Epic Arts look after the hotline (telephone for emergencies), while KCDI take in children for emergency, temporary shelter. Together KCDI and Epic Arts investigate and verify accounts not only of child abuse, but also of emergencies such as the sudden death of a child's parents or abandonment and where relatives cannot cope due to old age, illness or extreme isolation or poverty. All this is done in coordination with the Department of Social Affairs and in some cases, the police.

KCDI originally helped get the police and Department of Social Affairs involved early last year so that they could receive training and get on board the Childsafe Program. Now Phnom Penh, Sihanoukville and Kampot have proper Childsafe Programs.

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## Traditional Cambodian Arts Program

Our school currently teaches the following subjects:- Pin Peat, Mohori and Plein Ka music with Masters Uon Sambo and Ros Samouen, Yike dance and music is taught by Masters Bèm and Mrs Savorn. Folk dance is taught by Master Mrs Vy Lida and classical dance is taught by Master Madame Tong Kim An. This latter has been put on hold because of Covid-19, because Madame An comes back and forth from Phnom Penh. These classes is likely to resume in around mid-May. Traditional Shadow (Small) Puppet Theatre (Lakoun Sabaik Touch) and Production of shadow puppets. This latter is taught by Masters Ros Samouen and Khourn Bèm. Sometimes a local folk dancer from the Department of Culture comes and assists us for performances.

The Ministry of Culture donated two beautiful Chapey Dong Veng instruments in December in order to celebrate our 25th anniversary and to allow us to start a course in Chapey for our blind students. However we have had to delay this three month course for the following reasons. The first is that the designated Chapey teacher suddenly asked for a salary not only for himself but also for his son (the teacher is blind), then a lesser known Chapey teacher was contacted and was willing to come, but said he just had to have a TB test because he hadn't been well, then Covid-19 arrived and we had to stop. We hope that we can resume this three month course in Autumn and that our second option as a teacher is well and does not have tuberculosis!

## Financial Support and Accounting for KCDI

We have several areas of support and this growth and consistency has helped us immeasurably. It allows us to develop our programs further, to help more children and generally have confidence in the future.

The first is the **Michael Merriman Foundation**. Mr Merriman has generously committed to donating \$20,000 (\$5,000 four times per year) for 2020. Due to the Covid-19 shut-down in the USA it has been quite difficult for Mr Merriman to get his donations out, but he has tried very hard to get funds out and has succeeded so far. His donation is a very important step to providing financial stability to our school

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The second donor consists of all donations gathered through **GlobalGiving**. We are able to concentrate on fundraising campaigns throughout the year, the most important being the Christmas period. We also have kind donors who donate regularly each month.

The third donor is the **CMEH foundation**. CMEH is now no longer functioning, but the co-founder Elisa Hamil very kindly donated half of her NGO's assets to our school for the use of medical costs in 2019. Her donation was made last year and we have not yet completed her funding, which is good. This donation provides our children with all forms of medical care, as well as transport to hospital, dentists, eye specialist etc;

The fourth donor is the **Avery Dennison Foundation** who donates through **CAFA (Charities for America Foundation)**. After having passed very vigorous criteria our school was awarded this funding of \$3,000 per year for three years. This funding goes towards our **Blind Children and Youth Program**, supporting the Braille Teacher, Braille materials, some transport, some (but not all) food. The CAFA funds according to strict regulations, are kept in a separate bank account, with separate account books and a different Excel report made from the main KCDI funds.

Last year (2019) we received emergency and vital financial help from Mr **Joseph Mahon** who also assisted us the year before. Normally Mr Mahon has his own programs and wouldn't be able to help our school, but he very kindly and generously rallied to our call for help when we couldn't find donors last year.

We have also received very generous help from our Chair Dr Peter Carey who has often stepped in when funding has been slow to arrive. Last year our board member Judge Juanita Rice and her spouse also gave a generous donation. Generally, but not always, US donations pass through Peace Notes who have charity status and can facilitate donations. Judge Rice generously covers the transfer fees

Our school also raises funds from the sale of our CDs and hand-made shadow puppets, from visitors to our school both Khmer and expatriate. We also receive donations from individuals (sometimes unknown) to our school.

A former **AfID** volunteer (Accountants for International Development), Amelia Curtis continues to assist us in checking our reports and giving assistance from a distance (she lives in Australia). Her help for the Avery Dennison /CAFA donation has been

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especially valuable and she has helped us upgrade our accounting to a higher level. She also assists with compiling our Annual Financial Statement as an external auditor. Amelia has also been very helpful in assisting me to create more professional budget requests. We are extremely grateful to Amelia for her expert help. Our Board treasurer Mr Choun Mao has also provided wonderful assistance and continues to be an authority in overseeing transparency and correct practice in our accounts department.

### **Administration and Staffing of KCDI**

We continue to have the same marvellous teaching staff for our arts programs, some of whom have been with us nearly 25 years and also two wonderful ladies who cook and clean for our school. We are looking for a good housemother to assist our teacher and resident staff, as we have so many new little children.

Our secretary Miss Bopha is excellent and well organised and is a very good assistant accountant to Mr Uon Sambo. Her presence is very important for the smooth running of our school and bridging administration with practical school affairs and children's needs.

Mr Nguon Sothy our director has been doing wonderful things. Mr Sothy was previously our assistant director, but we could never find a really good director and so we (the board) appointed Mr Sothy director around 4 years ago. At first Mr Sothy could only work part-time because of his other duties as school director in a state school. Additionally sadly his wife became very ill and for a period of two years he had to assist her until her death in February 2019. Mr Sothy then himself became very ill and we were all very worried. Happily he has pulled through and is now working full-time at our school. Mr Sothy is a greatly respected person in Kampot province and has huge experience working with children and in the field of education. He is also a very generous person who loves our school. He first worked at KCDI as our secondary school teacher from 1995 onwards, when we still taught state school subjects inside our school. Now our children go to state school for their national curriculum education.

We have two offices. One near my bedroom (which is also the children's sick room when required). This office is where I used to run our school. Here we now keep all files

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from 1994 and an office computer and all food and clothing stocks. A special stock book is kept by our accounting staff of these assets. Our second office is near the school entrance and is the hub of our accounting and administration. After lamenting the lack of order in this office I asked Mr Sothy to help. In December 2019, Mr Sothy at his own expense had our office painted and then brought unused, but new furnishings (with permission and as a donation to our school) from state school stock, so that our office has new, functional furniture. Mr Sambo our accountant then got help from the local university and had new shelves installed. This means we now have a good, functioning office easy to work in which facilitates good order and good working practice.

Mr Uon Sambo our accountant has also been very good at rallying local Cambodian donors and supporters. With their support and support from universities in Phnom Penh and artists there, Sambo has got Cambodians to paint our external wall, make a new name plaque for our school, provide funds to put down concrete behind the dining area and other numerous endeavours. Additionally both Mr Sothy and Mr Sambo have rallied Cambodians to donate rice, clothing, sanitary equipment, water filters, mosquito nets etc; This is an extremely important step in Cambodian staff being pro-active in fundraising and in the wider Cambodian community taking responsibility for social problems and the more vulnerable.

Mr Sothy and our teaching staff and children all got together last week to make a vegetable garden. We already use this part as our vegetable garden, but we rotate the land leaving it fallow for a year to recuperate. This year our children planted aubergines, water-greens and other vegetables. We also have big fish in our fish ponds.

Next to the office is our children's playroom where they can do their homework, read books (we have a mini-library) and play. There is a little television donated to our school in 2017 as well. Our children have their own individual toys and cuddly toys, but there are also interactive toys which our secretary Miss Bopha keeps in her office along with colouring materials and she gives them to our children to play with during the day, putting them away after play so they don't get lost.

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## Conclusion

KCDI has grown in strength and quality and all our staff have worked well, with some being quite exceptional. These exceptional staff include Mr Nguon Sothy, Master Ros Samouen and Miss Bopha as well as Mrs Ny our cook.

In a separate annex and separate mail, I will detail our school's Covid-19 response and the time-line of our proactive measures according to precise data recorded in my Whatsapp messages with Mr Sothy.

There is room for improvement in the organisation and distribution of our Arts training. This will now be made easier by a greater number of residential children and an eventual continuation of our Outreach program. I will keep you updated.

Our school's training in Childsafe, the continual presence of Mr Sothy and the wonderful work of residential staff and teachers combined, provides our children with a safe, loving haven and our school with a deeper knowledge of childcare needs, children's rights and good organisational capabilities. I am profoundly grateful to each and every member of staff for their most wonderful work. What they do goes way beyond a job and they are the very fabric of our school.

My profound thanks also go to our wonderful board members and to our special donors who help keep our school open and running, allowing us to help so many children.

Thank You All!

**Written by Catherine Louise Geach (founder) 10th May 2020**

**Khmer Cultural Development Institute  
Kampot Traditional Music School for Orphaned and Disabled Children**

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