

THE CHILDREN OF CAMBODIA FOUNDATION STRATEGIC PLAN 2022 - 2030

"Supporting School Children in Cambodia"

Introduction

The Children of Cambodia Foundation was formed in 2010. Its aim is to provide educational opportunities and support for school children in the Communes of Ruessei Lok and Songveuy in rural Cambodia and in doing so increase their literacy and numeracy levels.

The current focus of our work is a group of 10 primary schools in one of the most impoverished parts of the country. Education, commencing at an early age, is critical to the ongoing development of the country. Attending school is not mandatory and finding the funds necessary to send children to school can be very difficult given the level of poverty. A key feature of our work is to assist families with school age children by covering the cost of mandatory school materials and uniforms. In doing so it is expected that school attendance levels will increase and remain high.

Since it was established, Children of Cambodia has supported over 5,000 children from 10 of 15 primary schools in the two communes (local government areas) in which it works and over 90% of eligible children now attend school. An important aspect of the work is that it is carried out in partnership with the local communities and school support committees. These relationships are critical in building trust and ongoing capacity to continue to develop future educational opportunities for the children in their villages.

Our operational model is based around the commitment of volunteers. There are no salaried staff and limited administrative costs, which ensures that the bulk of funds raised can be directed to the key beneficiaries; the children and their families.

What we are trying to achieve

To achieve the desired outcome of improving literacy and numeracy levels amongst the children and ultimately the villages as a whole, it is important that as many school-aged children as possible in the communities in which we are working attend school now and in the future.

Our primary aim is to provide a means for all primary school-aged children to attend school. A secondary aim is to create a physical and emotional environment which assists with achieving this outcome.

We recognise and respect the Cambodian national curriculum and no part of our activity interferes with this. We play a role in supporting the delivery of the curriculum, by funding part of the teachers' professional development and providing library books and teaching aids where appropriate. We can also improve school facilities where necessary which assists in providing a more effective and enjoyable place for learning to occur.

It is difficult for us to measure literacy and numeracy levels outside the school testing processes. However, it is expected that the support initiatives that we put in place will have the effect of ensuring that these outcomes are achieved for those children who attend school. We will regularly monitor and report school attendance and retention rates as surrogate measures.

Benefits to the community will be accentuated if students continue on to secondary school. Although our current focus is on primary school children, once there is evidence that high attendance rates are being maintained, a sponsorship program for secondary school students could be considered. Support of this nature would return a greater benefit to the community in the long term.

To ensure that achievements resulting from our work are sustained, the three-way partnership between community, school and ourselves must be maintained and strengthened. Decisions associated with our work need to be made jointly and must be based on demonstrated need.

In line with these aims we will:

Short Term

- Continue the distribution of school stationery, uniforms and bikes on a basis agreed with community and school leaders
- Introduce a mechanism to hold regular discussions with village leaders and school support committee chairpersons about our work
- Add one new school a year until all schools in each of the two communes are supported
- Set key metrics and undertake a formal evaluation of performance

Medium Term

- Strengthen relationships with communities and schools as required
- Undertake a further performance evaluation
- Develop a mechanism for assessing local community self-sufficiency

Long Term

- Introduce a sponsorship scheme to support children from our schools as they move on to secondary school
- Continue to evaluate and report on performance

Raising money for the children

The Foundation's annual expenditure budget for the core program of providing school stationery, uniforms and bikes to needy students has been in the order of \$30,000 AUD to \$35,000 AUD in recent years. If the scope of our work is extended to 15 schools, a basic annual budget in the order of \$50,000 AUD will be required. The provision of core materials costs around \$10 per student.

The introduction of a student sponsorship program in future years will require additional funding, the size of which will require further assessment. Funding for school improvement works will only be considered once the annual budget for the core program has been reached.

Raising the necessary funds for our work is challenging. Access to government grant funds is limited, if available at all, given the overseas nature of our work. Similarly, Australian philanthropies focus primarily on charities whose beneficiaries reside in Australia.

The widespread use of social media has opened up access to much larger numbers of people than in the past and using it in creative ways must be optimised. We need to increase the number of regular private and corporate donors. It will be essential that we clearly communicate the positive results of their contributions to these donors. Central to this will be the development, regular measurement and presentation of appropriate metrics associated with our work.

We should explore opportunities to encourage adopting Children of Cambodia as a favoured charity for the purpose of directing sponsorship funding of participants of fun run and other challenges, along with other similar fund-raising opportunities.

We will:

Short Term

- Form a dedicated fund-raising sub-committee utilising member interests and skills
- Search for a social media marketing expert prepared to provide services on a pro bono basis
- Explore opportunities to partner with Australian schools and form partnerships where possible
- Develop a marketing product aimed at encouraging corporate partnerships
- Promote regular donations
- Ensure that the outcomes of donations are communicated to donors

Medium Term

- Consider engaging a brand influencer to raise the profile of the Foundation
- Conduct a focussed corporate marketing campaign
- Develop guidelines to assess candidates for secondary school sponsorship

Inspiring our supporters

A network of supporters is important to ensure our sustainability. In 2020 we introduced a membership concept to provide an opportunity for particularly keen supporters to become more involved in our work and to provide a more dedicated group of people to assist with our activities. Members in particular have told us that they appreciate being kept informed of aspects of our work and opportunities to be involved in decision-making. It is very important that the benefits of membership are made clear to the member group and others who might be interested in joining it.

Membership is free. When establishing the group, we decided that it is important that members demonstrate commitment without the obligations associated with payment of a fee.

Events have been part of our fund-raising program since the Foundation was formed. Most of them have been labour intensive, many of them have had limited returns. However, supporters have told us that they appreciate the networking opportunities that events provide, opportunities to discuss Children

of Cambodia matters, to meet Board members and to feel involved. It is recognised that events are more than purely fund-raising affairs.

To optimise the benefits of networks we will:

Short Term

- Increase our supporter communication processes
- Ensure that event promotions encourage supporters to invite friends and associates to attend with them
- Increase our use of social media with assistance of a social media expert (see above)
- Ensure that opportunities to involve and communicate with members are maximised
- Ensure that the fund-raising subcommittee (see above) considers the importance of events and the promotional opportunities associated with them

Medium Term

- Investigate the use of an 'influencer' to assist with growing the supporter group
- Grow and strengthen the membership group

Making it all happen

The fundamental task for most charities is to raise funds to assist defined beneficiaries in a prescribed way. Many charities have significant administrative costs associated with their various operational models.

A key feature of the Children of Cambodia operational model is that administrative costs are kept to an absolute minimum. Since its inception, over 90% of funds raised each year have been allocated directly to the intended beneficiaries – the children and the schools in the villages in which we are working. This model has been a critical feature of the financial support that we receive. Supporters have given a clear indication that it should continue. The strong view is that the Foundation should remain a low administrative cost charity.

To ensure that we can maintain the current approach, it is essential that we have financial targets in place and that expenditure is prioritised.

We will continue to rely on volunteers and seek pro bono professional assistance where possible. In instances where this is not possible, low-cost alternatives will be sought.

Virtually all of the Foundation's administration has been undertaken in Australia. The sole Cambodian resource has been primarily associated with the distribution of core materials purchased from local suppliers and liaison with school principals in relation to student numbers. Where necessary, we have engaged a local contractor to have school improvement projects undertaken. Employment for this work has been on a casual basis. The purchase of materials locally and the engagement of local people to undertake school improvement work has broader benefits to the communities in which we work. It has always been overseen directly by Children of Cambodia Directors during regular visits to Cambodia. These visits should continue.

The three-way partnership between Children of Cambodia, schools and communities is particularly relevant in regard to achieving desired outcomes and must be utilised as much as possible, whether by providing resources to assist with the delivery of school improvement projects or the distribution of essential school materials.

To ensure that we can continue to deliver our work effectively we will:

Short Term

- Develop a clear policy in relation to expenditure on tasks other than those associated directly with the schools
- Develop a prioritised list of projects for the next five years with a clear distinction between core and non-core elements
- Prepare revenue and expenditure targets for the next five years
- Identify those tasks for which external professional assistance is required
- Investigate the availability of pro bono professional assistance for the above tasks
- Develop a contingency plan to ensure that materials and where necessary, school improvement projects, can continue to be delivered when either Children of Cambodia Directors cannot visit Cambodia or the usual Cambodian resource is not available

Medium term

- Investigate the possibility of forming a partnership with another charity to deliver school improvement projects

Keeping it going

Children of Cambodia has been in existence for 11 years. There is very strong support for it to continue. This will require continued commitment, not only from its Board of Directors, but also from its members and broad range of supporters.

Effective governance will be critical. Ways of spreading the load and maximising the use of available expertise and general resource need to be examined. This will assist the Board of Directors staying focussed on decision-making.

The beneficiaries of our work are the schools in Cambodia, the people in the villages where the schools are located and the traders from whom we purchase goods and services. To date, none of these groups nor any Australian Cambodian community members have been involved in the Foundation's governance. Without the involvement of our major stakeholders our work may not be as effective as it could be. We will therefore seek to involve a representative from the Melbourne Cambodian community to advise on cultural and other issues.

To ensure that enthusiasm is maintained and fresh ideas continue to be forthcoming, the Foundation's Board needs to be regularly refreshed and we will explore mechanisms to encourage new ideas from the broader member and supporter groups.

An important feature of our work has been the regular biannual visits to our schools to oversee the distribution of materials and school improvement projects. It is critical that this continues as the visits foster strong relationships with the school communities, an essential ingredient for a successful future.

To ensure that our work can continue successfully into the future we will:

Short Term

- Review the vision for the organisation
- Review the existing Board sub-committee structure and enlist external membership as appropriate
- Develop a succession plan for Board members and office bearers and a strategy for seeking non-Board involvement in sub-committee and other activities
- Investigate the possibility of involving a person from the Melbourne Cambodian community in an advisory role

Medium Term

- Investigate a mechanism for involving a representative from our group of schools in Cambodia in the governance of the Foundation