

# THIS LIFE CAMBODIA

**ANNUAL REPORT 2019**



អង្គការ វិទិត្តសាស្ត្រកម្ពុជា

THIS LIFE  
CAMBODIA





## THE POWER OF STORIES

What do you see when you look at these children? Chances are, all you see is a boy giving his little sister a ride home on his bicycle. It's the kind of thing you see every day in Cambodia, but a complicated, tragic, and eventually uplifting story led to this moment. You see, this was the day that Srey Ny returned to her family home after several years in residential care.

"This is the life I always wanted," Srey Ny told us that day. She had been placed in residential care after her mother died and her family went through an extended period of tragedy. Her remaining family members were not able to look after such a young child, so she was separated from them and her beloved brother. Years later, our expert team worked closely with local authorities and Srey Ny's residential care centre to trace her family. Our team then spent time preparing both Srey Ny and her family for her transition back to family life and living in the family home. It was an emotional day. "I am so happy to be back in my warm and lovely home," Srey Ny told us.

You can see the difference a story makes, and we are fortunate to witness many truly inspiring stories on a daily basis as a result of our work. Young men who thought they would never get a job finally find one. Students celebrate after succeeding in their high school exams. Families thrive and are happy together. But we know that the road to these moments is often hard. That young man had spent time in prison. Those students were about to leave formal education at a young age because their school's facilities were so bad. That family lived with domestic violence for years.

This year's annual report is all about stories. We'll tell some longer stories but also some short and sweet ones of real people's lives. We'll show you not only all the amazing things we can do with your help, but also why your help is so necessary.

Thank you.



# CONTENTS

4

Mission and vision

5

The story of TLC

7

Letter from the Board

8

Letter from the  
Executive Director

10

The story of the helmet

14

The story of the school that  
wouldn't give up

16

Education

22

Children and Families

34

Community Research  
and Consultancy

38

The Foundations

40

Financials

42

The story of the future

# MISSION AND VISION

## VISION

This Life Cambodia's vision is for vulnerable children, families and communities in Cambodia to be supported to access and create opportunities in this life.

## MISSION

To listen to, engage with and advocate alongside children, families and communities as they define and act on their own solutions to complex social challenges

## VALUES

As an organisation This Life Cambodia will

- respect local culture and value local expertise;
- utilise rights-based and strengths-based approaches;
- contribute to evidence-based good practices;
- plan for sustainability, with clear entry and exit strategies; and
- act with Integrity, accountability and transparency.





# THE STORY OF TLC

This Life Cambodia was founded twelve years ago by Billy Gorter.

The communities we partner with are battling serious social challenges. We listen to them and work alongside them to overcome the problems they identify, putting into place the solutions they design, to facilitate progress in the direction they choose. The communities lead the way, with us by their side, and then - when they are on the right path - we step aside to allow them to move forwards on their own two feet. This is our Future, Together approach.

We work this way because we believe our partners are the experts when it comes to their own communities. That's why we don't go into communities and tell people what their problems are or how they should fix them. While this approach works in the short term, the results are often limited because problems, solutions and priorities do not always align with the views of the communities they set out to serve.

We try to do things differently. We don't build new schools or establishments, we work to galvanise existing community institutions, resources and infrastructure, ensuring it will thrive long after our involvement ends. For example, we help people to set up their own businesses or teach them how to fundraise for themselves. These are skills they will be able to call upon in the future. This sustainable model ensures more meaningful impact and a better outcome for communities.

Because we use a community-led, community-powered approach, we don't focus on single issues. Instead our focus is to develop a broad, adaptable and sustainable range of programs which match different communities' needs as they vary from place to place and change over time. One community told us that an inadequate local school was the biggest problem, inspiring us to co-create an education program that has gone on to prevent 12,000 children from

dropping out of school. The major issue for another community was youths going to jail, never returning to their community, and instead being pulled into a life of rootlessness and crime. We set up a program to train juvenile prisoners while keeping them connected to their communities. This program has been successful in reducing re-offending from 60% to 2% within the first six months after the youths are released from prison.

We don't work blindly. We use a time-tested methodology, which begins by listening to each community describe their situation, researching the problems and solutions they bring to us, and testing them through a pilot initiative. We evaluate the pilot, and if successful, we implement it as a full program. We call this the four S approach: Study, Scope, Scrutinise, and Scale. We always have an exit strategy to ensure that we don't foster dependence. We work with an urgent emphasis on creating independence from the beginning. Over twelve years, we've seen enough lives and communities transformed to know that as long as we don't stop listening or learning, our approach can continue to foster extraordinary results.

## OUR "FOUR S" APPROACH



STUDY



SCOPE



SCRUTINISE



SCALE



# A TURNING POINT FOR THIS LIFE CAMBODIA

In five years time I believe we will look back on 2019 and see it as a turning point for This Life Cambodia. We saw another year of impressive growth, with existing programs expanding to support more people than we have ever reached before, and new programs launched to reach people we haven't been able to reach in the past. But that's not really what I'm talking about. What made this year momentous was the essential strategic work we did behind the scenes to get TLC ready to embark on a new stage in its development.

We have developed our Strategic Plan to guide us from 2020 to 2025. Although this Plan was finalised after the financial year ended, most of the substantial work that went into it took place in the first half of 2019.

We work hard to include all of our stakeholders in this incredibly important process. All of our programs are born in Cambodian communities when people tell us about challenges they face and let us know how we can support them. We make sure these views and insights feed into our planning process.

Just as importantly, we want to ensure our employees are fully involved in every step of the journey. That's why in July every member of the staff team - from drivers to directors, community workers to cleaners - gathered together in Siem Reap and together we developed our strategy for the next five years. This helped us prioritise, identify areas for improvement, and discover new ways to implement our core values. At this stage, we also consulted with

fundors and partners over our plans, so we could listen to their valuable insights. You can learn more about this on the last page of this annual report (page 43).

I attended the all staff Strategic Planning summit and met a lot of This Life Cambodia staff for the first time. As the Board of Directors Chair, it was a very proud and happy moment for me, seeing the obvious passion and commitment each staff member brings to their work, their clear understanding of why the organisation exists, and what it needs to do to fulfill its mission in the future. I left feeling very confident in This Life Cambodia's ability to achieve extraordinary things in the next five years.



Mihajlo Starcevic, Board of Directors Chair

# THE STORY OF THE YEAR

Last year's 10th anniversary annual report gave us the opportunity to look back over a remarkable decade. This year's report is much more future-focused. A lot of the work we did this year was about preparing ourselves for the next stage of our development, ensuring that all of the foundations are in place so that we can build for the future safe in the knowledge that our structure is sound.

That's certainly not to say that some remarkable things didn't happen in the last year. In fact, it was arguably our most successful year to date. We continued to grow our impact, recognition of the exceptional work our program teams have done over the last decade. They have proven that we can deliver results again and again, which is why our funding partners stick with us... sometimes for much longer than they originally intended!

We also won funding to pursue exciting new projects. Launching This Life Reuniting Families was a very proud moment for me personally. We began this work twelve years ago by talking to people in Cambodian communities. They told me from the start that most so-called orphanages are unnecessary, and that the children within them usually have living parents or other relatives. Poverty was usually the reason children were living in orphanages. Communities told us that they wanted to prevent families being broken apart in such a damaging way in future.

In fact, even after twelve years and thousands of conversations in more than a thousand villages across Cambodia's provinces, not once has anyone identified an orphanage as a solution to the problems they face. That is why we have never considered offering residential care to children, and have always worked to keep families together. But now we have an opportunity to go further and

repair some of the damage done when families do break apart - This Life Reuniting Families identifies children in institutions who do have family and then helps to return them to a loving home. We work hard to make the transition smooth and we tackle any problems as they arise. It is difficult but essential work, and reading the stories of these children being reunited with their families greatly moves me.

On the back of our campaigning we secured more funding to use social media as a force for good in Cambodia. This is a highly innovative approach to creating change. We will continue to focus on our grassroots programs in Siem Reap, Banteay Meanchey and Phnom Penh, while simultaneously developing creative concepts that pursue the same goals. We will continue to leverage the power of social media for mass engagement, resulting in meaningful nation-wide impact at minimal cost. Our End Violence Together campaign reached 1,000 people for every dollar spent, something which is impossible if you are restricted to traditional groundwork.

The success of our model for campaigning for change is laid out in the section on our biggest campaign to date, End Violence Together, on pages 10-13. We pushed the boundaries of our comfort zone to deliver these campaigns, and I could not be more thrilled that the move has paid off. Most importantly, we reached millions of people we wouldn't have otherwise with life saving messages, and the fact that the campaign won four international awards is a very nice bonus.

The award that made me happiest was the Grassroots Justice Prize we won in New York in July, because it took into account all the work our teams do to use the law to help vulnerable



---

## LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Cambodians. It's only given out every two years and to win it we had to be assessed by a panel of expert judges as well as by the public. Thousands voted for us across the world, from more than 50 countries. If you were one of them, thank you, it has meant so much to our team here.

A motivated, happy team is absolutely crucial to our work. For This Life Cambodia to deliver on our objectives, our staff have to feel fulfilled and supported in their jobs. That's why at the beginning of this year we completed our first full staff engagement survey to find out whether we are succeeding in making that happen. Just as all of our work begins with the act of listening to communities, our organisational values begin with listening to our staff. The results were very encouraging.

Staff members told us they are happy in their jobs and that they believe that TLC is making a positive difference: 94% of staff were clear that TLC is making a difference both in Cambodia and the world, and 89 % of staff answered with a resounding "Yes" when asked if they believed their role in TLC had a clear purpose. No wonder our staff achieve such great results working with schools, prisons and communities.

Our staff members are TLC's most powerful asset because their work reflects their personal values: 73% are able to articulate and understand TLC's organisational values and all report that our values are consistent with their privately held values. And, offered a scale of 1 to 10, 76.4% of TLC staff told us they rated their happiness between 8 and 10.

The survey also identified some other areas for improvement around feedback and benefits, which we are already acting on. We

will repeat our staff engagement survey annually, checking that our staff are still highly motivated and committed to our mission. We have achieved so much to be proud of in the last twelve years, as we work with ever more people. In the future we want to achieve even more, supported by a highly engaged and eager team that is integral to our journey and to our success.

Who else do we need on our side? You. We need the continued support of every person and organisation who has believed in us so far, as well as those who are considering donating for the first time or supporting us in another way, such as by volunteering. Even if you don't have the time or the money to do any of these things, supporting us on Facebook and helping us get the news out about our work and our campaigns, makes a lot of difference. Go to page 43 and you can see into our future - we want you to be part of it!



Billy Gorter, Executive Director

# THE STORY OF THE HELMET

At the end of 2019 our communications team received an exciting challenge. Manan Trust, the funder of our domestic violence program This Life Without Violence, saw how much could be achieved through social media in Cambodia through the results of our 10 year anniversary campaign, "Family Portraits". That campaign handed over our Facebook page to ordinary Cambodians to tell the stories of their families, stories of strength and love, in an effort to encourage Cambodians to stay together rather than making the difficult choice to send children to orphanages. With a tiny budget, we reached almost a million Cambodians - Manan Trust wanted to see if we could create a similar campaign to spread the word about the law on domestic violence, supporting our teams, working with communities on the ground.

The need for such a campaign was very clear. Over 20% of Cambodian women experience domestic violence, but just 24% seek help. Forty percent of victims who don't seek help consider the violence normal. Worse, just 8% of Cambodians know there's a 2005 law to protect women and children from violence... including from the police. Social attitudes underpin this: until recently, the "Chhab Srey" ("Women's Law") was taught in schools, enforcing women's subservience to husbands. We needed to replace Women's Law with knowledge of the Domestic Violence Law.

We believed the explosive growth of social media in Cambodia was an opportunity to do just that, while supporting our work on the ground. According to Hootsuite's research in January 2019, 8.4 million Cambodians are now social media users, a growth of 20% on the previous year. This exceeds 50% of the population, reaching into even the most rural communities. Remarkably, research by Lotus Media found that 79% of Cambodian Facebook users believe the platform "empowers me to support causes I care about,

compared to 53% globally. We believed TLC's credibility from a decade of grassroots experience working with domestic violence survivors, coupled with creative use of social media to engage Cambodians eager to help their country develop, could be catalyst for real change.

We took an instantly identifiable and iconic national object - the crash helmet, ubiquitous in Cambodia where motorbikes vastly outnumber cars - then subverted expectations. We created an alternate universe where women and children didn't wear helmets outside to protect themselves from road accidents, but wore them inside their homes to protect from violence.

Clearly this was a fantastical scenario and such protection isn't practical in the real world, so our campaign then demonstrated that the real way to protect yourself and those you love is through knowledge of the law. The flagship of our strategy was "Protection", a two minute film, visually beautiful and scripted to puzzle and intrigue before revealing its message. The film showed four very different women entering very different homes, but first putting on their helmet. In the final frames a celebrity voiceover pressed home our campaign message.

To carry the message to as many target audiences as possible we recruited a range of influential Cambodians with very different fanbases we asked them to record video or photographic messages of support alongside our orange helmet. We worked with feminist pioneer Catherine Harry (profiled in Time and Forbes magazines), actresses with older fanbases such as Yan Linda and singers with young fanbases including Nikki Nikki. We also employed interactive elements such as a helmet Facebook frame people could place on their profile pictures and a downloadable "digital helmet" inscribed with legal advice.

Most importantly, all of this content drove people to an attractive, user-friendly landing page, featuring life-saving resources in Khmer and English ([www.thislifecambodia.org/endviolencetogether](http://www.thislifecambodia.org/endviolencetogether)). Resources included an easy-read version of the law, the first audio version of the law for women unable to read, places to seek help, links to support organisations, and a downloadable “digital helmet” graphic that included key information (to be saved to phones and kept for when the holder may need help, almost like a donor card).

The campaign achieved rapid success with an enormous audience. By the end of the campaign, the video had been viewed by over 1 million Cambodians and had reached almost 4 million (or a quarter of the population). More than 257,469 people engaged with the campaign across Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter, and content was shared more than 9,000 times on Facebook alone. Most importantly, more than 13,000 unique visitors went to our campaign page to access legal advice/resources.

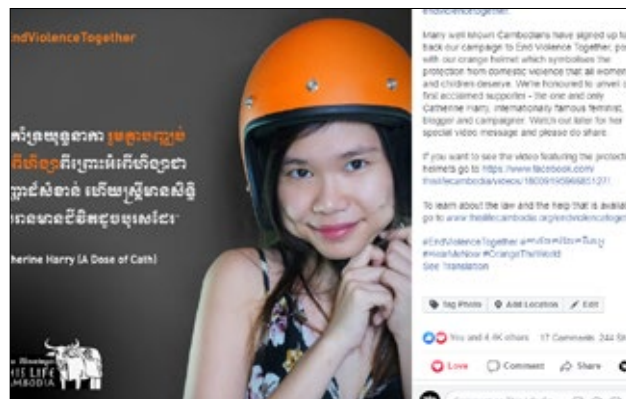
All of this activity led to greatly increased awareness of the law, confirmed by feedback gathered from the community. We received messages publicly and privately from victims of violence saying they’d been inspired to take action. Our campaign materials were so effective that other NGOs and the Government requested use of them in events and campaigns of their own, and the film was shared globally.

The campaign was such a viral phenomenon that it received a major feature in Cambodia’s leading newspaper the Phnom Penh Post (headline: “NGO’s domestic violence video viewed by 1 million”), as well as several features in the most popular news website, Sabay, and others.





## CAMPAIGNING FOR CHANGE



Our profile and reputation grew significantly as a result of all the coverage and campaign. Our Facebook following grew by over 10% providing an even more powerful base for future campaigning and fundraising.

We hadn't dared hope that the campaign would be so successful, but what happened next was completely impossible to predict. Throughout 2019, the campaign gathered a huge amount of international attention for the creativity of its approach and its effectiveness on a tiny budget. The first award the campaign won was the Australian Not For Profit Technology Award for Best Social Media Campaign of the Year, followed by two awards at Australia's Social Media Marketing Awards, for Best Use of Facebook and the Best Social Good Campaign.

The most extraordinary moments were winning two global awards. The campaign and our in-the-field work against domestic violence were the key factors considered by the judges of the Grassroots Justice Prize. Not only were we shortlisted by the judges, by thousands of people across the world voted for us and



we won the public vote for raising awareness of the law.

The final award was the highly prestigious Shorty Award: our campaign was named “Best Work For Developing Countries” from all the campaigns across the world, and we shared the winner’s stage with global megabrand like Microsoft, National Geographic, IBM and PETA.

Winning such awards is very exciting – but if that’s all they were good for, we wouldn’t enter. The real reason we enter is because they can have an enormous positive impact on the work we do, reaching all the way to the communities we support. They greatly increase awareness of our work, and pave the way for new opportunities to win funding – all of which allows us to help more Cambodians.

Awards also matter to our staff. As a grassroots NGO our team is our biggest asset. Yet many of our social workers and community workers do jobs which are difficult, stressful and rarely recognised or lauded by wider society. We can thank them ourselves (and we do!) but sharing with our staff the global awards they have won is probably the single best way we can show our gratitude and recognise them for all they do. Seeing what is possible motivates them to do even more.

In the same way, our campaigning work supports the teams on the ground. Our video was seen by hundreds of people in our communities, and more people became curious about the law. This meant they were receptive to learning about it from our staff. All of this takes us one step closer to the ultimate goal, a Cambodia where domestic violence no longer scars communities.

# THE STORY OF THE SCHOOL THAT WOULDN'T GIVE UP

In February of 2019, we learnt the news that a school we work with - Chansar Lower Secondary School - had been named Siem Reap's number 1 school for Outstanding Achievement by the Siem Reap Youth and Sports Education Congress, beating 83 other secondary schools. What made this achievement so incredible was that just two years before, the school had been in serious trouble, struggling with teacher shortages, demoralised students, a high drop out rate, and a community that wasn't engaged.

The turnaround was astonishing, and was result of the entire community, staff and student body working together with passion, supported by This Life Cambodia. Few stories better illustrate how This Life Cambodia's guiding principles and model of community collaboration work than the story of Chansar. As our Education lead, Borany Chea, says, "What makes TLC's approach to working with schools different is that we approach our work through actively listening to the community and then we support them to get really involved in the school."

Before we began our redevelopment program in early 2017, other NGOs had done important work in developing the school's infrastructure, but teaching quality and community engagement were still low, and the school drop out rate was very high. As always when we work with schools, our mission was to get the community, teaching staff, student body and local authorities working together, listening to one another and collaboratively creating a plan to improve the quality of education in their community. We then help them to put these plans into action so that all stakeholders in the community are involved. The involvement and support from



local authorities is crucial to making lasting change in children's education.

At Chansar the changes came in fast and furious! Very soon, the community joined together in an energetic and engaged School Support Committee, the student council became active, and teaching improved so much that Chansar is now a shining example to other schools of the great things Cambodian communities can achieve when working together.

The results are obvious. Three years ago, one in five students dropped out of Chansar; now 95% remain in school. The impact of the changes on the students can hardly be overestimated. As Rith, one teenage boy, told us, "I felt so much regret back then, because I didn't know how to read but still I felt I had to drop out of school.



Now the school has improved I can stay and be a doctor so I can take care of my people and my parents when they grow old.”

The wider impact on the community is even more powerful. For twelve years, whenever we have gone into Cambodian communities and asked them what they care about, education has always been one of the first things mentioned. Most families – even those who are poor and lack education themselves – want their children to succeed in life and know that education is the surest route out of poverty. Education is essential not just to children and families, but to the development of whole communities, and ultimately the country.

It isn't just Chansar which has benefited from our program. As Pech Sopheaktra, Vice Chief of Secondary Education in Siem Reap Province says, “This Life Cambodia helps many schools in Siem Reap. When schools take part in TLC's program we see many positive changes. First, there's a change in the school environment, then in the school management and finally in the involvement of the community.” But Chansar is undoubtedly one of our favourite schools, and watching the way in which winning the award has made them even more motivated and committed to creating a first class learning environment has been one of the most rewarding things we have seen in all our years in Cambodia.







# EDUCATION

While most of our programs take a case management approach, starting out within families and then creating a ripple effect more widely in society, our education programs begin at a community-wide level.

Our lower secondary school development program was our very first initiative, developed from in-depth discussions with community members, and then enacted through projects that seek to utilise existing community structures to have an impact across whole villages, communes and districts. The program works within struggling secondary schools for three years, reducing drop out rates and improving the teaching and educational environment by involving the school, especially through the Government mandated but often neglected School Support Committees.

Our other key education offering is our Moto Doctor social enterprise, which offers vocational training on motorbike repair to young adults. Some of these young people arrive having been released from prison, and some come from particularly difficult circumstances in rural Cambodia. They are usually people who have at some point felt like they were out of options, but they leave with hope and a brighter future.



# LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

We have long believed the solution to Cambodia's education challenges lies in public schools. Over the last nine years we have developed a sophisticated program based on simple principles – that an engaged community (using existing but neglected structures called School Support Committees) and a motivated student body (using the sometimes forgotten Student Councils) can improve public schools, even the ones which are struggling most. Working together, they can raise funds to improve infrastructure, recruit great teaching staff, ensure children stay in school.

Our Lower Secondary School Development Program (LSSDP) has now been successfully implemented in 15 schools in Siem Reap province. Those communities now continue developing their schools and supporting education without our direct involvement. In this most recent year, we exited 11 schools, and in the new school year we are introducing our program to 15 additional lower secondary schools in Siem Reap province. Our five year goal (2020-2025) for the program is to scale up and rollout LSSDP at the national level in partnership with the Cambodian Government.

Our model isn't to build new schools or learning centres outside of the public school system – instead we support communities to improve the schools that already exist. Activities are all based around capacity building and include enrollment campaigns, community consultations, and education awareness campaigns. By tapping into the passion and talents of parents and community leaders, and teaching them how to improve teaching and facilities and fundraise for themselves we are able to operate the program on a three year cycle and know that when we exit, the community has the drive and skills to keep building on the progress made. That's what we mean by sustainability.

**Chay Koch's story.** "Before, parents never really came to the school, they weren't involved. Since TLC started helping us, most of the local parents come in to talk to us about their kids' education. That makes me very happy." Chay Koch is principal at Run Ta Ek High School, a school we have been supporting for three years.

"The changes have been huge. The community, the teachers and the students are now a team working to make the school better. The environment is friendlier and the education the children are getting is improved. Best of all, 21% of our students used to drop out; now that's down to 9%."

**The Venerable Te Reas' story.** This highly respected Buddhist Monk in rural Siem Reap says "If we can change education for the better, we change the future for the better. That's why I am so happy to be active in school development."

Outside of Cambodia, many people don't realise the important role monks play in the development of rural communities, but for two years Te Reas has acted as vice-chief for the School Support Committee at Kok Kandal Secondary School. His energy, passion and fundraising abilities have been incredibly important to rejuvenating the school. "Everyone needs to have a sense of ownership in the school, otherwise, we cannot achieve what we can when we unite."



**92%**

of villages participated in community consultations regarding education

**92%**

of students in grades 7-9 passed their exams

**94%**

of School Development Plan activities were completed within 11 Lower Secondary Schools

**\$125,373**

was raised by 11 communities for school development projects, an increase of \$91,681 from the prior year.

# VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE: MOTO DOCTOR

The Moto Doctor social enterprise offers vocational training on motorbike repair to young adults from disadvantaged backgrounds. Studying and working in a fully operational repair shop in Siem Reap, students split their time between the classroom and the shop floor. They also develop the necessary skills to either start their own business or find work in their community.

We recruit vulnerable young people from residential care, from communities in which we operate other programs and through partner NGOs. Students undertake training while conferring closely with a case manager to set personal and professional goals for when they have completed the one year program. Though education has undoubtedly improved in Cambodia over the last decade, many children still drop out of school at a young age, particularly in rural areas where good schools may be very far away and the pressures of poverty drive children into working early. Moto Doctor not only offers an alternative to formal education but can help to reduce migration for young people who might otherwise leave home to seek income opportunities.

In addition to teaching moto repair, the program provides small business training and a personal development skills curriculum which addresses topics including healthy relationships, physical wellbeing, substance abuse, money management and safe migration. Working in a group with other young adults from similar backgrounds creates a collegial environment and with support from TLC's staff, students also develop their confidence and self esteem. While the program is donor supported, it operates as a social enterprise, and shop profits contribute to funding operational costs and to Moto Doctor's sustainability.

**Sophea's story.** Sophea\*(name changed),dropped out of school at an early age, before he'd completed grade 7. After working locally to support his family, he took the desperate step of travelling to Phnom Penh to be a construction worker. Unable to earn enough money to support his family, he returned home, frightened and unsure about the future.

Luckily, he learned about Moto Doctor from a local NGO and he set off on another long journey but now with much more optimism. "As soon as I arrived at Moto Doctor I felt like I had another chance in life, a chance to grow. I loved Moto Doctor most because it was about sharing and caring; we share food together and look after each other as we are all from the same background."

Sophea became one of the best students and was quickly hired by a local repair shop when he graduated. Though he had come so far, Sophea missed his home and had new and bigger hopes. "My dream was to open my own motorbike repair shop in my home town."

We supported Sophea in his new ambition and helped him to get the right tools for the job. This didn't just mean physical tools like spanners and wrenches, but business tools like being able to balance the books and offer good customer service. Today Sophea runs his own shop outside his family's home in Kampong Thom. He is now a confident young man excited about his future.





31

young adults provided with  
moto repair skills.

17

students supported in finding employment  
or starting their own small repair business.

77

family members have benefited from the  
small businesses opened by Moto Doctor graduates.





# CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Our Children and Families section incorporates a range of distinct but mutually supportive programs that improve the lives of children and families, thus strengthening the communities. Many of these programs focus on reinforcing existing institutions or services which have been mandated by the Government, or mobilising or revitalising these services if they are inactive. These institutions include the child protection services we support through programs like This Life Reuniting Families, juvenile justice services strengthened through This Life Beyond Bars and other local authority structures designed to support communities.

We prefer to always work within existing structures, but will develop new services when a community identifies a problem and a solution which doesn't fit within these structures. For example, our This Life In Families program established new ways of supporting the families of prisoners that had not been considered before, while a newer program like This Life With Choices responds to the growing problem of drug and alcohol addiction by helping to develop new services to treat and support people with addiction problems, and their families and communities.



# THIS LIFE BEYOND BARS

This Life Cambodia has been working with youth in prisons since 2010. Our program, This Life Beyond Bars (TLBB) provides vocational and personal development training, case management and family visits in the three prisons with the largest number of incarcerated children and young people. Our goal is for them to return to their families when they leave prison and to commence productive lives in their communities.

Thousands of young men enter Cambodia's prisons every year, often for minor offences, and some are later found to be innocent. While they are in prison many lose contact with their families, fail to gain skills or education, and are placed in contact with more serious criminals. The result, as in so many places around the world, is that they often reoffend. That's why TLC strives to help these young men maintain contact with their families, understand their responsibilities for past actions and gain education and skills so they can contribute meaningfully to their communities again.

The TLBB program also provides personal development training to address issues such as health and hygiene, stress management, healthy relationships and goal planning, drug and alcohol counselling for those who require it, access to vital legal advice and support for referrals and post-release follow up support. We also provide capacity building for prison staff, communities, and other NGOs.

When we started TLBB, 60% of juveniles released from prison were reoffending within 6 months. The recidivism rate of youth who complete TLBB and return to their community is now at 2% within the first 6 months of release, and 4% in total.

**Ponleur's story.** Fixing a life is harder than fixing a motorbike, but not impossible. Even if you've made big mistakes in your past, you can make your future better. Ponleur,\* a young man from provincial Cambodia, is a perfect example. Like many boys from struggling rural families in Cambodia, he dropped out of school when very young and migrated to Thailand to make money. Returning home, feeling lost and aimless, he ended up being pressured by friends to take drugs, and was soon addicted, arrested and imprisoned.

Ponleur entered This Life Beyond Bars program and proved himself to be hard-working and determined to make a better life for himself after his release. Now, with our continued support, Ponleur runs his own motorbike repair shop in his village and has become a good role model for other young men like him.

**Bunthorn's story.** "Drug addiction is rising so fast in Cambodia, so stopping it is a challenge everyone must accept," says Bunthorn, This Life Cambodia's drug counsellor. Bunthorn was recruited when we realised the huge increase in new young prisoners arrested on drug-related charges. "Drugs can destroy everything," Bunthorn says. "I try to help kids stay far away from them." We know that if we can't address drug problems while these juveniles are in prison, they have little hope of changing their lives when they return to the outside world. We need to break the cycle of poverty, addiction, and crime, and Bunthorn is the kind of person Cambodia needs for this huge task. "It makes me sad when I see kids who have big drug problems, but it feels good when I can help them to change, and live better lives."



**156**

young prisoners with access to case management support, vocational training, personal development and family visits

**155**

young prisoners reconnected with their families

**100%**

successfully reintegrated with their families after being released from prison

**0%**

of former prisoners reoffended, compared to 60% before

# THIS LIFE IN COMMUNITY

The goal of This Life in Community (TLIC) is to enlist community support for children and families at risk of being separated, with children often ending up needlessly institutionalised. By building the ability of local authorities such as Commune Committees for Women and Children and Village Chiefs to address issues impacting at risk families, we enable community leaders to work effectively with families experiencing challenging circumstances.

As with our other community based programs (This Life without Violence and the Lower Secondary School Development Program), This Life in Community builds upon existing community structures to make an impact across entire villages, communes and districts. One very effective tool in our community based work has been to arrange exchange visits between different communities. Facilitating dialogue between residents of different villages and communes provides a valuable opportunity for sharing experiences and learning from one another. After visits the communities are inspired with new ideas of how to deal with school drop out rates, domestic violence issues and community development plans.

With This Life in Community we strive to build the capacity of residents to identify and respond to issues within their communities, by enabling the community to respond to cases of potential child-family separation, strengthening collaboration and cooperation of service providers (NGOs, government bodies) to prioritise community based care options over institutional care. We also ensure communities are aware of the resources and support services available for children and families and conduct awareness raising campaigns focused on the benefits of raising children within their families and communities as opposed to institutions.

"I was very happy to have worked with TLC over the years due to the strong relationships we have with the community and the impact of This Life In Community. TLC has helped to build the capacity of students and event organizers for big events such as International Women's Rights Day and International Children's Rights Day. Through training sessions, TLC has helped build the capacity of the Commune Committees for Women and Children in working with vulnerable women and children in their communities."

**Mr. Mok Bros, the District Governor of Soutr Nikum.**





RESULTS AND IMPACT

**289**

local leaders developed their knowledge and awareness of child protection measures.

**360**

cases of vulnerable people were supported by local leaders.

**2240**

community members attended community and awareness raising events including International Women's Day.

# THIS LIFE IN FAMILY

This Life In Family (TLIF) is dedicated to preserving families who may be at risk of separation because a parent or primary caregiver has come into conflict with the law. Social protection measures for children with a parent in prison are limited in Cambodia. Having a parent in prison puts a tremendous burden on the remaining parent to earn sufficient income while caring for the family. There is a higher likelihood that children with a parent in custody will drop out of school due to financial pressures or having to take care of younger siblings. Other potential negative outcomes include siblings being separated from one another or children being placed in institutional residential care due to an unstable family environment.

There are two facets to TLIF: The Family Preservation project offers short-term, immediate assistance at the time that a parent is apprehended by the law. The objective of Family Preservation is to ensure that legal rights are upheld, referrals to legal services are made and family or community based care options for children are sought. The Family Support project offers a range of longer term assistance options for families. Arranging for family members to visit their parent in prison, income generation support, education scholarships and health allowances are some of the services we can offer to help keep families together.

**Theavy's story.** The wife of a prisoner: "When I had a phone call from the TLIF Case Manager, I was really happy and I thought: I hope there is someone who can listen and talk with me about my family condition and story because I never heard about anyone who works to support the family of a prisoner, most people never care about it."

*There are more than 2,600 women in Cambodia's overcrowded prisons, many of whom are mothers.*

**Soum's story** tells of the impact on young children.

"I really miss her. Every time I visit her, I can feel her warmth through her hand," says Soum\*, a 6 year old boy. For the last two years, Soum's mother has been in prison on a drug charge, so he and his 3 brothers live with their 75 year old grandmother. It's hard for her to care and provide for 4 boys at her age, so we support this improvised family unit, making sure the children's needs are met and they go to school. Without our support, these boys would have likely been placed in residential care, an outcome we always try hard to prevent.

Perhaps the most important part of our work is making sure that family connections are maintained so that when Soum's mother is free they can once again be a family. The boys visit their mother once a month, taking food as well as drawings. "I do dream about the future," Soum says. "I want to finish my studies and maybe become a teacher. Most of all I wish I can stay with my mother forever after she returns."





**177**

families are enrolled in This Life in Families;  
79 in Family Preservation, and 98 in Family Support

**325**

children supported to remain in  
family based-care

**34**

families received income  
generation support

**137**

families were supported in visiting family  
members in prison

**89**

basic needs, emergency packages, and health  
allowance given to families



# THIS LIFE WITHOUT VIOLENCE

In 2016 we successfully piloted This Life Without Violence (TLWV), a community based program addressing the pervasive problem of violence against women and children in Cambodia. For the entire time we have been working in Cambodian communities, we have heard and seen what a serious problem this is. In order to understand how to address and reduce this problem, we conducted detailed research into violence and its impact in rural Cambodia in 2014. Now, with additional donor support we are able to work directly with more than 7,400 community members across 22 communes; our indirect reach extends to as many as 165,000 people.

Our work is complex and far-reaching. We rally communities to understand the risk factors causing domestic violence (e.g. drug & alcohol misuse, gambling and poverty), support local authorities including village chiefs and police to understand their roles in preventing domestic violence, encourage the development of local support groups for families experiencing domestic violence and educate young Cambodians on how to build healthy, violence-free relationships. Our hugely successful Facebook campaign "End

Violence Together", raised awareness of the problem of domestic violence in Cambodia, and provided crucial information on the law and places to get help (you can learn more about our online

**Soun's story.** Soun\* met her husband when they studied at primary school, and the first 7 years of her marriage were happy. Sadly, last year their marriage deteriorated as her husband increasingly abused alcohol. He began to abuse her verbally and, finally, physically.

Soun sought help from her village chief and his support helped the couple to resolve their differences and live together without further abuse. As a result of her experience, Soun has become an active member of our "This Life Without Violence" programme. She has learnt about the domestic violence law and her right to live without fear of abuse. She urges any woman who experiences violence; "Please seek help from a local authority near you as soon as possible. They can help you."

**Socheat's story.** Socheat became involved with the TLWV program after experiencing domestic violence in her family. Our program staff met with her after receiving a referral from the community to provide counselling and we invited her and her partner to participate in the community groups for men and women. Both attended training as part of the program. There are never quick fixes to end family violence, so many interventions are necessary, including making sure Socheat and her children are safe.

Socheat's husband's attitudes have changed as a result of his participation in the men's group. He understands the law, has tools to manage his anger, and has a group he can reach out to when necessary. Socheat now has more confidence and even provides counselling to other women experiencing domestic violence in her community. In collaboration with the local authorities, we continue to visit Socheat and her family to check on their progress.



**280**

local authority members were trained  
to respond to domestic violence

**38**

families experiencing domestic  
violence were given direct support  
with their case

**709**

students were trained in domestic  
violence awareness

**245**

teachers and student council members were trained  
in domestic violence awareness and response

**2124**

community members attended community events

# THIS LIFE REUNITING FAMILIES

One of our newest programs, This Life Reuniting Families (TLRF), was rolled out this year, and contributes to the reduction in the number of children in residential care institutions in Cambodia by building the capacity of social workers to reintegrate children with their families and promoting family based care. We work closely with the government and social workers to help with the challenging but crucial work of reuniting children in residential care with their families. We operate in partnership with the U.S. Aid funded Family Care First Initiative; a network of organisations working together to support children living in safe, nurturing family based care.

The majority of children in residential care (orphanages) have at least one living parent.

Often, they are in care due to poverty and lack of educational opportunities, and frequently come from families who perceive institutional care offers better options for their children. Based on significant research, it is widely acknowledged that institutional care can have harmful effects on a child's development and that children do best in a family based environment.

The team undertakes several key activities. We build the capacity of social workers to assess children living in Residential Care Institutions (RCI) and their families with the goal of reuniting them, conduct family tracing of each child to be reintegrated, assess each child's family, and explore alternative care options when family tracing is unsuccessful or reintegration is not an option. We also develop individual plans for reunification and reintegration of children to successfully reunite children into direct family or kinship care, and support families to ensure successful transitions, including parenting skills, legal support, counselling, income generation, and support for children to return to school.

**Mesa and Chanthea's story.** 17th June 2019 might not sound like a special date, but it's one the Sok family will never forget. It's the day that 13 year old Mesa\* returned to the family who thought he had died as an infant. Mesa had spent years living in a residential care institution, unaware that he still had a family out there. It took months of hard investigative work before our team located his older sister, Chanthea, and told her the incredible news that Mesa was still alive.

"We thought he died when he was a baby," Chanthea remembers. Mesa's birth came at a very difficult time for the family. His mother died and his surviving sisters went through a period of grief, trying to cope with their own loss and responsibilities at a young age and without support.

In fact, Mesa recovered and went to live in a residential care institution in Siem Reap. As soon as we met Chanthea, she said she would love to have her little brother back. Though exciting, reunifying a family creates huge changes and challenges for everyone concerned. That's why we patiently worked to advise them, arranging several opportunities to meet and get to know each other. We assessed Mesa's new home, and helped Chanthea create a small business to support her existing family and its newest arrival.

"Being separated hurts a family," Chanthea says, "but I'm really happy we are together again now. We have lots of plans for him. He'll go to a local school, make new friends here, and we'll take care of him and bring him up to be a good person."



115

social workers have been trained on best practices for reintegration

71

local authorities were trained on their roles and responsibilities in supporting family reintegration

9

children are actively in the reintegration process

4

children were reunited with their families or relatives and back in their communities

4

families with reunited children received support to set up their own small business





# COMMUNITY RESEARCH AND CONSULTANCY

Our Community Research and Consultancy section was created to translate community voices into new knowledge, which can then be used to inform good practice programming and as a tool to advocate for positive change. This section oversees monitoring, evaluation and research for This Life's programs and regularly publishes research reports which have an impact at an international level, and make the information freely available to anyone who can use it. Our commitment to monitoring and evaluating our own work helps us learn from our mistakes, focus our energy on the things we do which are most successful, and ensure that we always have the impact we hoped we would in communities.

In addition, we partner with philanthropists, academic institutions and other organisations to conduct rigorous research to inform the development of evidence-based policy and programs. Too many development initiatives and NGO programs are hampered by lack of local understanding, and we help to rectify that through our expert team of researchers. Our goal is for this section to be an engine for learning, change and innovation within and beyond our own organisation. Finally, this section also acts as an engine for change within the NGO sector, facilitating information sharing and collaboration between other NGOs, and allowing even small NGOs to develop the skills they need to create change and communicate that change.





# COMMUNITY RESEARCH AND CONSULTANCY PROGRAM

The Community Research and Consultancy Program (CRCP) evolved from This Life Cambodia's early commitment to the importance of research, self-assessment and learning. Ensuring that community voices are integral in developing new programming is vital to our approach to community based development. The CRCP team also oversees monitoring and evaluation of our programs to help us learn and adjust and to ensure that we are having the positive and long lasting impact we strive for. We regularly publish and make freely available research reports on a variety of social justice issues which inform our programs and have an impact at an international level - all research reports are available to download from our website.

The consultancy arm of the CRCP team undertakes research support, design and implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation projects for NGOs, universities and foundations. The majority of consultancies we engage in are in areas complementary to TLC's own programming and as such broaden the scope of knowledge which can advance important social justice issues. Consultancies are also an additional source of revenue for This Life Cambodia. Read on for updates on three of our consultancy partnerships followed by summaries of two recent research reports.

## **University of Newcastle, Australia:**

In 2018, we became the implementing partner for an innovative nutrition research project with the University of Newcastle, Australia. The VISIDA project, (Voice-Image-Sensory for Individual Dietary Assessment) utilises a proprietary smartphone app and

wearable sensors that evaluates the nutritional values of what people are eating. As the University's implementation partner, we apply the study protocols, train research assistants, develop support materials, recruit local participants, and oversee data collection and management.

## **Voice:**

Our partnership with Voice in Cambodia is illustrative of how This Life Cambodia provides capacity building support to other organisations working in the development sector. As the Linking and Learning Facilitator for Voice in Cambodia, we support Voice grantees in developing their own linking and learning. We promote participation of members of the Voice grantees' target groups and foster the building of communities of practice around issues and challenges that concern them. So far, we have 23 grantees from across Cambodia signed up to the VOICE project, with 42 participants from 20 grantees coming together to participate in our most recent Linking and Learning event in March 2019.

## **GHR Foundation:**

Our long standing consultancy with the GHR Foundation is a collective impact initiative facilitating collaboration and learning amongst seven grantee NGOs. All are working on residential care reform using family or community based care models with the goal of preventing family separation. An Insight Analysis research study was successfully coordinated and presented to inform donor strategy and respond to broader needs for national care reform.

**NEW RESEARCH FROM THIS LIFE CAMBODIA:****Why Children Accompany Mothers Into Prison**

This research aims to provide insight into the causes underlying a mother's decision to have her child/ren accompany her to prison. In Cambodia, children can remain with their mother in prison up until the age of three; how decisions are made as to whether a child accompanies their mother or not, is not always clear. By uncovering some of these influencing factors and considering alternative options for care or sentencing, women can be better supported to make informed decisions that are in the best interests of their child.

**Care Reform in Cambodia: Insight Analysis**

This Life Cambodia undertook an analysis for the GHR Foundation to evaluate the current efforts of the government and NGOs working on care reform in Cambodia. GHR and its partners will use this research to collectively develop and implement efforts to evolve a thorough and sustainable approach for strengthening families and keeping children in safe, nurturing family and community-based settings.

**The Story of our Voice Summit**

When we connect, we make things happen. That's why collaboration is one of the driving forces behind TLC's work, and why we are proud to be responsible for helping 18 grassroots NGOs link and learn from each other as part of the Cambodia-wide Voice project. Our third Voice summit drew 42 of the most creative and passionate people in the NGO sector together.

Few of us learn best by being spoken at, yet this is how most conferences work. So our theme was "unconference", with all the members encouraged to hijack the schedule and run separate, interactive sessions involving games, role play and arts.

Topics chosen included positive parenting skills in communities, the challenges of grassroots advocacy and (our favourite) the power of positive thinking. All the grantees said they loved the unconference format, and will adapt it for future events.



# THE FOUNDATIONS

It's been another year of remarkable growth for This Life Cambodia, but that poses its own challenges. In order to support our expanding team, we have had to continuously strengthen our foundations, the finance, HR and communications teams. Sometimes this meant hiring additional staff, but where possible we embraced cost-cutting and time-saving technologies.

The need for this further investment can be seen most obviously in the **HR team**. While 10 staff members did leave in the last year, 38 joined, which requires a very capable and well resourced team working as efficiently as possible. Luckily, the year before we'd implemented Orange, our online Human Resources Management system. This paid off handsomely in automating functions like expenses and time off requests, reducing paperwork and hastening turnaround times.

Cutting down on administration allowed the HR team to focus on more important matters, such as ensuring our new employees were well prepared, fully motivated and able to make an impact from their first day in the job. We also bolstered the team through the addition of a very capable young intern.

With more funding comes the need for more financial reporting for internal and external stakeholders. For that reason our **finance team** has also grown into a team of four and one intern.

Having a strong finance team is crucial because we have always considered sound finances and total transparency to be high organisational priorities, particularly when it comes to recording expenditure and matching it accurately against funding from our donors. We are also fully committed to meeting all statutory requirements in both Australia and Cambodia.

Our **communications team** also expanded during the last year, although this was externally funded and a consequence of the team's success in campaigning for change within Cambodia (see pages 10 to 13). The success of the Family Portraits campaign of 2017 led to increased funding for the End Violence Together campaign of 2018, which went on to reach 4 million Cambodians, spreading awareness of the law on domestic violence as it did so. It also went on to win a series of awards for its creativity and power.

This higher profile also led to a flurry of news articles about This Life Cambodia and a major growth in website visits and social media following, all of which provide a powerful base for improved fundraising and campaigning in the future. It also required an ever improving and more engaging social media presence, and considerable efforts were made to make our storytelling stronger and our photography and videos sharper.

The team also continued to support program teams by telling their stories to the world or assisting them through fundraising. RUN TLC, our annual running event, was another success this year, with a record number of runners in Australia and Cambodia raising funds on our behalf, for which we are extremely grateful.



## FINANCIALS

**Board of Directors**

Mihajlo Starcevic, Board Chair

Hayley Lee Allan, Vice Chair

Claire Coxon, General

Emily Doig, General

**Senior Management Team**

Billy Gorter, Executive Director

Se Chhin, Deputy Director

Linda Meus, Chief Financial Officer

Jaime Gill, Communications and Marketing Manager

Borany Chea, Education Section Lead

Lindsay Brown, Community Research & Consultancy Section Lead

**Principal Banker**

ABA Bank - Cambodia

Commonwealth Bank of Australia - Australia

**Auditors**

APV Cambodia Co. Ltd., Certified Public Accountants

**Major Program Donors**

B1G1 Giving Inc.

GHR Foundation

International Committee of the Red Cross

Manan Trust

Tingirana Foundation Limited

Phoenix Foundation

Firetree Trust

Voice Grant Facility

WISE Philanthropy Advisors

World Childhood Foundation

	01 SEPTEMBER 2018 - 31 AUGUST 2019	01 SEPTEMBER 2017 - 31 AUGUST 2018
<b>Support &amp; Revenues</b>		
Grant Income	1,042,947	721,724
General Donations	86,965	40,470
Other income	30,284	40,889
Internal charge M&E	65,890	40,012
Revenue from Service	37,530	16,401
Moto Doctor Income	18,481	55,417
Income released from capital grants fund	18,413	6,720
	<b>1,300,510</b>	<b>921,633</b>
<b>Expenses</b>		
Central office and core costs (Organisational promotions and capacity fund, assets and equipment, operational salaries and capacity building)	47,399	58,605
Programs	1,235,669	883,135
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>1,283,068</b>	<b>941,740</b>
<b>Net Assets, Beginning Of The Year</b>	<b>128,973</b>	<b>123,168</b>
<b>Adjustment</b>	<b>68,921</b>	<b>25,9</b>
<b>Net Assets, End Of The Year</b>	<b>215,336</b>	<b>128,973</b>

#### Notes to financial statements

This table provides a summary of the Statement of Activities for 1st September 2018 to 31 August 2019. This Life Cambodia is externally audited each year. The full audit report for 2018-2019, including cash flows and breakdown of expenses by program is available upon request.





# THE STORY OF THE FUTURE

The most important thing about the story of the future is that it hasn't been told yet. That can be exciting and frightening, particularly in turbulent times such as these.

That's why if you are embarking on a long journey, you need a detailed map and a reliable compass. That's exactly what our Strategic Plan is for us. Even during a busy and exciting year, we knew we needed to invest time in creating our 5 year plan and did so, involving everyone from communities to staff teams to funders during the year long process.

The Strategic Plan will come into operation on January 1st 2020, so doesn't fit into the scope of this annual report, but here are a few sneak previews of what it will contain.

In response to unmet need, we will launch two new programs, one working with the legal system to find alternatives to prison for as many convicted young people and women as possible, particularly mothers. This follows our highly acclaimed report earlier this year, "Why Children Accompany Their Mothers Into Prison". We will also be building on our success at counselling young prisoners with drug problems and creating a program to support people with addictions.

We intend to double down in Cambodia, by which we mean that we will be trying to expand several of our programs across the country, including This Life In Families and This Life Reuniting Families. We will also be looking to increase our capacity in research and communications, two areas of work where we can influence social attitudes and even the policies of decision makers.

Finally, we will be moving ahead with our plans to pilot at least one of our programs overseas. This is something we have been exploring for some years now, after being approached by decision makers in neighbouring countries requesting our support. As ever, we researched the problem thoroughly and developed our plan carefully.

We know that our plans are ambitious, and we're proud of that. We want to create positive change as much as possible, and we know we have the team and the methodology to do it. But we're certainly not reckless. Not only will we have the detailed Strategic Plan to guide us, but we will also have a new expanded board with even more experience in law, finances, communications, program delivery and international expansion.

One final thing is that expanding overseas will mean changing our name. From 1st January This Life Cambodia will become This Life, a powerful name that works anywhere in the world.

Join us. Let's make an impact in This Life.



  @thislifecambodia

[thislifecambodia.org](http://thislifecambodia.org)