

Ratanak International

Ratanak was an eleven month old girl who died in 1989 because no medical supplies were available in Cambodia. In response, this charity is devoted to serving Cambodia's vulnerable and exploited.

Tenacious Care

Autumn 2013

STORIES FROM HOME BASED CARE

One of Ratanak's long-standing projects is Home Based Care (HBC). This program encourages Christians from local Cambodian regions to engage with those forgotten in their communities, those cast aside as a result of poverty and illness – those unwanted.

It is into this lonely scenario that Christian volunteers, backed by a project doctor and trained staff, come alongside those unwanted to provide comfort, companionship and support. In the past this program focused on palliative care for dying AIDS victims ostracized from the community



Above: Two women from our Home Based Care Program.

why we are different, why we care. It is encouraging to see the churches embracing this role and being a blessing to their own communities, businesses and even within their local prison. Over the years this program has helped thousands, but 'thousands' does not communicate the deeply personal impact such a program has on individual lives. So here are just a few of the lives you have impacted through your support of Ratanak.



Saron – Home Care Volunteer

"My name is Saron, and I have been volunteering with the HBC program for one year. Prior to volunteering with HBC, I did not really have love for others and the ability to solve conflicts between friends or my family members. I was primarily leaning on my own ways. I also felt hate toward people who are HIV positive or living with AIDS because I was afraid the disease might transfer to me. I also disliked people around me who have done bad things (like committed crimes)."

by fear – much like the lepers of the New Testament. Recently the program has become more general in focus due to the fact that retroviral drugs are now available and the mortality rate among AIDS victims has significantly dropped.

The Home Based Care program is exciting because it both empowers and equips the local church to engage with compassion and hope in the lives of those often rejected by the community. It is not, however, exotic work. It is the slow, deliberate work of commitment and love, often in filthy and unsanitary conditions. It is servanthood often in squalor – in the kind of places you would expect to find Christ.

Compassion is often the door through which people meet Christ for the first time. When people are shown unconditional love, they want to know

IN THIS ISSUE...

- ♦ Stories From Home Based Care
- ♦ "Sleep With Me, Free Breakfast"
- ♦ Tenacious Care
- ♦ Understanding Your Environment: National Election
- ♦ New Experiences in an Ancient Wonder
- ♦ New in Brief – *Opening Soon!*
Another Dam
Ride for Refuge



But when I started volunteering at HBC I felt my heart began to change. I am a different person because now I love the people I disliked before and I'm not selective like before. I especially have compassion now for the prisoners who have committed crimes. I now have pity on them for what they have done against people and God.

The special thing for me is that since I believed in Jesus through HBC I have had encouragement, confidence, pity and love a lot more than before. Seeing these changes has caused me to continue believing in God since then."

Phy – A Client

"Growing up in rural Cambodia, my parents were very poor. When I became a teenager my mother asked me to quit school to help look after my younger brothers and sisters. My mother was very busy as a seller of firewood and vegetables. When I became a young adult, I worked as a motorcycle taxi driver and a laborer to support the family. I got married and had two children – both died. I never once thought that maybe I had HIV until I had a blood test at the provincial hospital.



After I began taking the ARV drugs, I worked as a fisherman and a construction worker. However, because my health was sometimes strong and sometimes weak I couldn't work consistently and I couldn't support my family's needs. Nowadays HBC provides home visits for my wife, my other little child (ages 8 months) and me too. HBC gives us 20 kilograms of rice and 30,000 Riels (\$7.50) each month. On top of that we also receive infant formula for our baby. I'm so grateful to HBC for assisting me and my family with food, money and formula every month. Through HBC's care and influence, our family now believes in Jesus."

Thearin – Child of a Home Based Care Client

"When Uncle Chhun (HBC staff) missed a time to come see me I didn't feel good because there are no friends here for me to play with. The kids who live near me hate playing with me because I am living with AIDS. When I tried to play with the other kids, they wouldn't play with me, so I felt sad, and sometimes I cried.

But now Uncle Chhun comes to see me. I felt so happy because he gave me some pictures to paint and he gave me a ride on his motorbike. That made me feel good and warm in my heart."

Thida – A Client

Thida is the daughter of former HBC clients: a couple who died from AIDS some years ago. She has been living with her grandparents, to whom HBC gave a small business loan. Thida's grandmother was also hired to sew small handbags for income. Unfortunately, Thida's grandmother also passed away from Tuberculosis complications. Thida's grandfather is now her only family.

In Thida's words, *"I am fourteen years old, studying in grade seven. Before I received help from HBC, my life was very hard. I was orphaned by my parents and my grandfather is very poor.*



Due to HBC's support my life is less difficult. They have helped me in a lot of ways like providing school materials, clothes, shoes and regular visits. Recently HBC gave me a new bike so that I can go to school more easily. I don't have many other

words to say, just only thank you to every one working in HBC who has helped me."

"SLEEP WITH ME, FREE BREAKFAST"

Every now and then a photo turns up that says it all. This particular photograph (recently taken) communicates with jarring clarity the value of a girl in South East Asia. (See photo on upper right page.)

Ironically, the illegal and secret bombing campaign inflicted upon Cambodia by the Nixon administration, which killed hundreds of thousands and served as appetizer for the Killing Fields, was code named *Operation Breakfast*.

It was just one of the many courses of destruction dished out to this little country by any and all concerned. And so today, once again, young Cambodians are consumed, this time at the hands of the international sex tourist – Westerners included.





Photo Credit: Jamie Wright

Somehow the casual offer of a free breakfast to make the 'product' more saleable adds profound insult to injury. I continue to be outraged. Please remember to pray for Ratanak, and other Christian friends, who contend for such broken lives in some very dark places.

TENACIOUS CARE – THE RAP CENTRE

When we launched the Ratanak Achievement Program last November, we opened the doors to a fair amount of chaos. Moving teenage girls to a new home is never a simple thing. Moving traumatized teenage girls from a secure rehabilitation environment to an open community home encouraging independent decision-making and interaction with the community at large is truly a challenge. This is a high risk but necessary process if we are to see the development of functional young women.

Despite all the planning and staff training, the first four months after opening could be characterized as chaotic. It takes time to get a teenager to settle in and develop a routine. Creating a stable routine for the thirteen girls was vital and at times so elusive.

The staff seemed to be lurching from one crisis to the next. There was a withering diet of drama that kept the Ratanak counselors and social workers run off their feet. And there were times we wondered if anything resembling normal life would come. However, in the midst of these 'storms', God's steadfast love was still real and evident. It gives the staff incredible joy to see Christ alive in these girls.

Thankfully, we seem to be over the worst of the adjustment. Great credit goes to the staff that was truly long suffering. They demonstrated both skill and unfailing determination, working long hours with the girls as they settled into their new reality. At the moment the majority of them are moving forward with their own daily routines, home chores and work/school responsibilities, while Christ's love grows within them through both their 'storms' and their everyday life.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR ENVIRONMENT: NATIONAL ELECTION

Key to the successful running of many programs is the creation of stability. Cambodia is not known for its stability! Ratanak has a long history navigating many difficult circumstances. In years past we struggled to maintain medical programs in the midst of the civil war. We are well-positioned to deal with the July 28th elections. Experience has taught us to be cautious, so for most of July we made preparations. Normally we don't spend a lot of time assessing local politics, but this election was shaping up to be different. There were many fears there could be violence.

Even though Cambodia is becoming more developed as a country, its institutions are still young and it is still rebuilding from the trauma of 40 years of war and genocide. As a result



Above: Protests in Phnom Penh after recent National Elections.

there is far less stability than the casual observer would realize. Those of us who remember 1997 know just how fast things can change. I remember wondering if things were going to turn bad. Then, instantly, everything blew up! A long-lasting power struggle between political factions took a sudden, violent turn, resulting in a coup, and the deaths of many. The circumstances, though different today, remind us of the importance of being prepared.

Our staff have worked out their emergency protocols,

gathered supplies and made sure the girls are safe. The election results give the opposition party significant gains on the current ruling party. As of the end of August, things remain calm and it is our hope that they will remain so. Either way we are well positioned to deal with trouble. Our job is to provide safety and stability for those within our programs and this extends to outside factors. The Cambodian staff have done a great job of being ready. Pray for them that they will have wisdom under all circumstances.

NEW EXPERIENCES IN AN ANCIENT WONDER

Our Elder Care Program continues to serve and support the 'Grannies,' elderly women who regularly come to the night shelter where they are treated with dignity and love. They have had long lives with much suffering and it is a joy for them to be cared for after long, hot days of begging.

They recently, along with the shelter staff, went on a cultural visit to Siem Reap. A simple trip, but one normally impossible for them. Both they and the staff had never been to see Angkor Wat, which was originally a massive Hindu temple built in the twelfth century and is today the national symbol of Cambodia.

They toured the temple ruins and then the National Museum and a 'Cultural Village'.

A number of them said "I have lived here all my life but have never known about the history or the Khmer culture." They were most impressed with everything they saw and with the new foods they ate while there. They all enjoyed going to the local New Life Church, where one person in the congregation came and told them how blessed he was to see 'old people' come to church. This is rare in Cambodia.



The 'Grannies' continue to enjoy going to church when in Phnom Penh. They also love their devotional times at night and can often be heard singing hymns they have learnt by heart. Their eager grins communicate wonderfully how they feel loved and accepted at the shelter. It is lovely to see joy and dignity in these women that have lived so long knowing little of either.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Opening Soon!

Soon to be up and running – another intensive job skills training program for girls coming out of situations of exploitation. For those with a sweet tooth, it will simply be another *fantastic* cake shop!

Another Dam

We've just completed the construction of another irrigation dam that is changing the lives of thousands. It has since then already protected the community from major flooding in the area. Please pray for continued protection for these villagers from the heavy rain and floods. More updates on this in the next newsletter!

Ride for Refuge

The big day is approaching! Join us on October 5th for our Fourth Annual Ride for Refuge event as we ride to raise funds and awareness for Ratanak. We currently have teams in Vancouver, Waterloo, Ottawa, Winnipeg, Kelowna, and Toronto East. Register to ride with a Ratanak team, start your own team, or support a biker by donating! Help us confront the sexual exploitation of children in Cambodia and provide hope through our prevention and rehabilitation programs. Sign up today at www.rideforrefuge.com/partner/ratanak. We would love for you to join us!

As always, this newsletter represents only the 'tip of the iceberg.' We are privileged to serve many. Our work is frequently overwhelming, but it is also our greatest joy to represent you in Cambodia as we seek to bring compassion and help in the name of Christ. I trust you also are encouraged and blessed. Thanks for all your continued support and prayers.

Blessings,

Brian McConaghy

Ratanak



International

BRINGING LIFE TO THE KILLING FIELDS OF CAMBODIA

Box 81038, Burnaby, BC V5H 4K1 Canada Phone: 604-325-9300 www.ratanak.org