**2013 FDCC Annual Report**

This is the fifth annual report for the Foundation for Developing Cambodian Communities.

**FDCC achievements this year**

The past year has seen FDCC continue to grow the organisation and work closely with FDCC in Cambodia to help the underprivileged and orphaned children of Prey Veng in Cambodia. During this time the Australian Board has worked effectively together on a range of initiatives directed at ensuring the sustainability of the projects in Cambodia.

In August 2013 FDCC received notification from the ATO that AusAID had completed its assessment of FDCC’s Overseas Aid Gift Deduction Scheme (OAGDS) application and had recommended to the Minister for Foreign Affairs that FDCC be declared an ‘Approved Organisation’. The ATO’s receipt of the application means that the Minister for Foreign Affairs had notified the Treasurer of his approval. This successful completion of the first step represents a major achievement for FDCC in the process of the organisation attaining DGR status (i.e. offering donors tax-deductibility on their donations). FDCC is now working with the ATO to complete the remaining steps and expects that the granting of DGR status will be completed in early 2014.

In October 2012 FDCC welcomed Aaron Lamb as a Director. Aaron has had a strong past association with FDCC and has ‘hit the ground running’, driving the development of a major strategic marketing plan for the organisation, including new branding and website, that FDCC aims to fully roll out before the end of 2013. In early 2013 Patricia Whitney-Wall resigned her position as Director due to work commitments. The Board thanks her for her contribution during her time of service.

I would also particularly like to thank Tony Batsakis of KPMG for his pro bono assistance in auditing FDCC’s annual accounts and Joanne Clark for her work in preparing the annual financial report.

**FDCC membership drive and fundraising activities**

As at 30 June 2013 FDCC had 114 members who have assisted in supporting the work to improve the lives of many children in Cambodia. We are grateful to all of our members and supporters as their interest in and support of our activities are essential to allowing FDCC to raise funds for its projects in Cambodia.

In terms of Australian fundraising, FDCC raised $65,000 for Mekhala House which was lower than prior years and reflected the uncertain economic environment in Australia, but also reflected the delay into the 2014 financial year of the annual fund raising dinner.

FDCC has many regular donors, some who give on a weekly basis, some on a monthly basis and some who provide donations when their circumstances allow. They are all essential to helping provide a sustainable funding base for the organisation. Equally important are the volunteers who organise fundraising events for FDCC. For the Directors, it is gratifying to see so many people willing to support FDCC’s work. These people are too numerous to mention, but a big thank you to everyone who has volunteered their time or donated money to ensure FDCC continues to be able to support the work in Cambodia.

And also, I would like to thank Cambridge University Press for generously printing and publishing the calendars without charge to FDCC. In the past year, $14,500 was raised from this activity. The girls at Mekhala House again took the photos for the calendar, which had the theme “My Cambodian Village”, and the improving quality of the photos is very evident.

FDCC’s main focus is obviously to raise money to fund the work done by its partner organisation in Cambodia and also to provide support to the staff that allows them to carry out their important work in a professional, efficient and effective manner. One of the most pleasing aspects of this work is to see the staff in Cambodia continue to grow and develop in their roles. Their enthusiasm and willingness to learn has greatly benefited both the Mekhala House and Mekhala Learning projects, and we will continue to foster their efforts in assuming more ownership in these projects.

**Mekhala House project**

All of the children of Mekhala house continue to grow and learn under the care of the committed staff in Prey Veng. They continue to impress with their growing self-confidence and general development, especially as they participate in peer to peer development programs. Most of the girls are now attending high school and this means that Mekhala House has a more ‘grown up’ feel as the girls make the transition from children to young women. For the girls, learning continues to be a major focus of their time and this has been demonstrated as they continue to perform significantly above their peers at school.

Last year we proudly reported that the first two girls to complete their secondary schooling whilst residing at Mekhala House were both successful in obtaining entrance to Kam Chay Mea university. In the most recent 2013 school year, another Mekhala House girl, Thida, has successfully completed her Year 12 studies, performing exceptionally well by achieving top student status in her class throughout the year. She was rewarded for this hard work by qualifying for a scholarship and being accepted into a Phnom Penh university to study marketing.

The two former Mekhala House girls, Theara and Sorey, have now completed their first year of university studying business and accounting. For these girls it was a year of significant change settling into their new environment, but they managed extremely well, passing their exams and forming many new friendships in the process. It is pleasing to note that both girls often took the opportunity to make the 50km trip back to Mekhala House to visit the staff and girls. This clearly demonstrates how supportive the environment is at Mekhala House that those who have left still feel that it represents ‘home’ to them.

Each year, our programs at Mekhala House are audited by the Cambodian Ministry of Social Affairs, and it is especially reassuring to report that Mekhala House is consistently ranked by the government officials as one of the best managed orphanages across Cambodia.

Significant credit and thanks must go to Sok Rady, the Director of Governance and External Relations, Thon Setharoth, the Operations Manager, Phlong Sinath, the FDCC Child Manager, and all of the staff for their hard work and dedication in caring for the children.

**Mekhala Learning Centre project**

The Mekhala Learning Centre (MLC) continues to provide many underprivileged children in the region with access to learning important computer and English skills. It provides them with access to learning resources for their secondary and tertiary education and also greatly enhances their future employment prospects.

During 2013 the MLC staff focused on offering first year university students the opportunity to study the course. This represented a change compared to previous years and reflected the fact that many students starting university in Prey Veng have never learnt how to use a computer. These students have greatly benefited from the knowledge they have gained, which will allow then to access greater information during their studies and then compete for work with graduates from larger, better-resourced universities in Cambodia. Classes were carried out for students five days per week during the afternoon. The MLC community library, which now houses over 3,800 books and is clearly the largest in Prey Veng, receives up to 600 visitors each month, and is very well patronised.

The feedback from students in both courses to date has been very positive. It is especially pleasing to hear that quite a number of past MLC students have been successful in obtaining employment in and around Prey Veng which would not otherwise have been possible without their training at MLC. For this, significant credit and thanks must go to Sok Rady, Thon Setharoth, Mou Monyrothana, the new MLC Project Manager, and all of the staff for their hard work and dedication in developing such an effective education program for the people of Prey Veng.

The Morris Foundation and Cooper Investments were the key donors for the Mekhala Learning centre during the past financial year, and FDCC is very grateful to those donors for their generous support.

I would also like to thank Global Development Group for partnering with FDCC on this project. Under the arrangement with GDG, donors to Mekhala Learning are able to make tax-deductible donations.

Under the guidance of FDCC Director, Gavin Didsbury, the Cambodian staff established a social enterprise business which employs the resources and students of MLC in undertaking paid data entry work for organisations in Australia. The former students are paid an hourly salary for their work and remaining profits go directly towards funding the operation of MLC. Since commencing in July 2012, this social business has generated almost US$5,000 profit to the end of June 2013, with the expectation that the social enterprise will be expanded in FY2014.

**Conclusion**

Finally, to the Cambodian staff, Directors of both FDCC Cambodia and FDCC Australia – and especially to all our donors and local volunteers who support us in various ways – we should celebrate the continued achievements of both projects. With ongoing cooperation between Australia and Cambodia, and with everyone’s’ continued enthusiasm and support, we will continue to achieve wonderful outcomes for the Mekhala House children and the broader community of Prey Veng.

Patrick Arthur

FDCC Chairperson