

REPORT FROM CAMBODIA

Former Trustee Brian Stenson contacted us last autumn to say that he was planning another visit to Cambodia. The Trustees asked Brian if he would be willing to visit two of our projects there and report back. The first of his reports, about his visit to DDSP in Pursat is published below.

I travelled to Pursat town in Cambodia on 4th December 2019 and met with the staff of DDSP - Disability Development Services Program. The organisation exists to supply services to the most disadvantaged people in the province of Pursat. MSAVLC has been funding the Paraplegic and Quadriplegic Rehabilitation (PQR) project for a number of years.

All six districts in the province are now covered and there are 115 PQR beneficiaries, of which 43 are female. I was given an up-to-date report on the PQR project via a Power-Point presentation.

Health and Rehabilitation

Twenty new wheelchairs have been supplied to beneficiaries at a cost of \$130 each.

Walking frames and mattresses are also supplied.

Routine repairs are carried out to the above as necessary.

Healthcare and sanitary materials are supplied.

Buntha, a physiotherapist, gave a summary of his typical workload. He does 35-40 visits per month. In addition to his physiotherapy he mentors on various health issues, trains family members in the care of the disabled and advises with regards to village disabled funds.

Referrals are made to Pursat and Battambang hospitals as required.

Although the number of land-mine victims has reduced, the overall number of PQR beneficiaries remains about the same due mainly to an increase in road traffic accidents.

Basic Needs and Social Interaction

Peer to peer meetings and activities take place once or twice monthly in a central district location. Transport and food are provided. On average 5-7 beneficiaries attend. Counselling and motivational encouragement is very important for these marginalised individuals. Awareness is raised concerning their legal rights and advocacy is promoted to counter discrimination.

Learning materials are supplied to children. Inclusive education of disabled children is promoted at school level, through teacher training, and adaptation of toilets, ramps and playground facilities.

DDSP and Village Disability Peoples Committees work with local government. Commune leaders and personnel from the Department of Social Affairs are seconded for capacity building. It is hoped that DDSP can vacate the basic needs space as the government bodies take over their role.

New latrines are built at people's homes or existing ones are adapted if they are too small, in need of a ramp or if the drainage is poor.

Enhanced Income Generation

A revolving fund is provided to some families to promote farming and chicken raising. The selling of rice and wood supplements income.

Challenges

Limitations of family members in coping with the care of the disabled person. Training can be



Math Yusof, 36 years old, had his spine broken by a branch of a falling tree in 2005. He was confined at home until 2008 when DDSP began to assist him. A suitable toilet facility was built and a wheelchair provided. Through regular counselling, peer to peer meetings and physiotherapy, his overall mental and physical health improved. His mother and family members contribute to his care. His self-confidence is quite evident now as can be seen in the photo. Alongside Math Yusof is Tep Buntha, physiotherapist and Pheng Samnang, Director of DDSP.

quite slow and family/marital breakup is not uncommon. Often the client is left with his/her mother and the young children. DDSP workload is increased in these cases.

Distance from the base in Pursat is another factor contributing to the workload. The furthest client is 180km away and DDSP only manage a visit once every two months. I discussed the use of mobile phones as a means of monitoring but sometimes there is no signal and only two clients have access to video-enabled smartphones.

Overall funding has been reduced. There are fewer NGOs in Pursat and Cambodia. Some donors have redirected funding elsewhere.

I discussed possible government funding as an important step in long-term sustainability and was informed that the government has indeed increased the budget for the commune council fund – this mainly goes towards construction and roads and canals. But a small amount is being devoted to building social welfare capacity within the commune councils. Indeed, a commune disability representative, who collaborates with DDSP, now exists. I was told of a National Disability Strategy Plan to which DDSP has been an advisor. Hopefully this is an important stepping-stone towards genuine sustainability in funding the social welfare services.

Unlike other projects for less severely disabled people, where

the aim is for self-sufficiency, over time, PQR clients will never be able to become completely self sufficient. The service that DDSP provides is truly remarkable. The individual impact is enormous. Never ones to stand still, DDSP are working towards job placements for their clients via skills training courses. Indeed, inclusivity is key for development rather than just raising visibility of disabled people. The influence on local and government systems is also beginning to have an impact. This is essential to sustain the services into the future.

DDSP deserves and needs our continuing support.

*Brian Stenson
Former Trustee*

VIETNAMESE LORRY DISASTER

The deaths of 39 Vietnamese nationals found in a container lorry in Grays, Essex was a tremendous shock to everyone in the UK, in Vietnam and around the world. The Trustees extend their deepest sympathy to their families and friends, here and in Vietnam.

For a few days in November newspapers gave details of the victims and the manner of their deaths. But sadly little coverage was given as to why the tragedy happened in the first place.

We know that most of the victims came from north Vietnam: from Hanoi, from Ha Tinh Province or the neighbouring province of Nghe An, but we know little else.

This region has particular resonance for MSAVLC as we have for many years supported the British Friendship Hospital, Ha Tinh General Hospital, and Ky Anh Blind and Elderly Associations, all of which are in Ha Tinh Province. Honorary Secretary, Mary Lidgard and I have visited Ha Tinh Province on a number of occasions and we have many friends and acquaintances there.

Ha Tinh and Nghe An are two of the poorest provinces in Vietnam.

The climate is harsh and devastating typhoons are frequent. Most of the population scrape a living from the land, or in fishing and fish farming – mainly squid and prawns.

Unemployment is high in these provinces, and the need to support their families drives many young people from the area to Hanoi or further afield, in search of work.

However, in 2016 Ha Tinh was the site of Vietnam's worst environmental disaster. It was caused by a catastrophic chemical spill from a steel factory, owned by a Taiwanese company, Formosa Plastics.

Cyanide, phenols and iron hydroxide were accidentally dumped by factory workers in the Gulf of Tonkin. The spillage poisoned up to 125 miles of the northern coastline and ruined the fishing industry. Millions of fish were washed up on the beaches and fish caught out at sea were banned for consumption. As a result thousands of people lost their livelihoods and coastal communities were decimated.

Formosa Plastics eventually took responsibility and apologized to Vietnam. The firm was fined \$500m by the Vietnamese government. However, it may be that insufficient



North Vietnam

compensation reached the affected communities. The fish farms were devastated, the coral poisoned and the fishing industry will take years to recover.

Perhaps it was these circumstances that drove these desperate young people to stow away in a refrigerated container lorry, in an attempt to provide for their families.

*Peter Lidgard
Editor*

HEROES

MSAVLC's hero in this edition is Ruth Elliott, a British psychologist who graduated from Cambridge University in 2002. She is the founder and director of Daughters of Cambodia, our project partner in Phnom Penh, capital of Cambodia.

Daughters of Cambodia is an organisation which facilitates girls' and boys' exit from the sex industry. It provides alternative income generation and recovery programs that enable them to set themselves free and make sustainable healthy choices for their lives.

From a very young age Ruth felt that she wanted to help people in distress. Before university, she travelled a lot in Asia, doing voluntary work with young people. She witnessed the horrors of poverty and sex-trafficking, and she was determined to help. Ruth travelled to Cambodia where she worked with an anti-trafficking organization that carried out 'Raid and Rescue' operations, designed to rescue girls from the brothels. However, the brothels were usually warned that the raids were to take place, and the brothel owners were usually long gone. The raids were also found not to be effective, as although the rescued girls were offered skill and life change programs, they were not found jobs. Very often they returned to the sex industry to provide for their families, who they were expected to support.

Most of the girls were young, some only 10 years old. The girls had to work from about 5pm when they were obliged to dress themselves up and plaster on their make-up. They worked until about 4.00 am, and then they were then locked in their rooms. The customers picked out which girl they wanted to have sex with, and the girls had to take as many clients as possible during the night. The men were often very unkind to the girls.

Ruth realised she had to do something, but that another approach was necessary, so she started an outreach program whereby girls could voluntarily leave the brothels and attend a nearby centre. She hoped to bring the girls out and find them jobs so that they would not have to return to sex work. Ruth was advised not to do it, as it was feared that she would incite the wrath of the brothel owners, but regardless of this, she started by walking into the brothels, sitting on the floor and chatting to the girls. She did



Ruth Elliott

not ask permission, but tried to form a relationship with the brothel keepers, so that she was not perceived as a threat. They accepted her, possibly because there were no police with her. She took medical supplies into the brothels, and she rented a centre in the red light area of Phnom Penh where she started running a medical clinic, with the help of a nurse/practitioner. She told the girls of the centre, but did not expect any of them to come. She had no donors, and only enough savings for 3 months. She agreed to wait for any of the girls outside the brothel in her car to take them to the clinic if they wished. To her great delight some did, and after the first day seven girls left the sex industry. Within twelve months 100 girls had left.

After about a year she found that the outreach approach was no longer necessary. At the centre she talked to the girls and ran jewellery and art therapy classes for them. She asked them what they needed to leave the sex trade, and all said 'a job'.

Ruth tried to get the girls into vocational training programmes given by NGO's, but she found that the girls did not qualify, as they had had no education. They were unemployable, as they had no literacy, numeracy or social skills, so she decided to start a business herself. She had no business training, but she had studied design. Cambodia supports a thriving garment

industry, so she started with this, small scale at first, and with very little capital. She purchased a few sewing machines and with help she taught the girls a trade. Daughters of Cambodia was born.

Over the next few months some sewing machines were donated and some donations were given. Orders began to come in from abroad, and with the help of training courses and a designer, Ruth extended the business to include jewellery making and screen printing on t-shirts.

Her very first order came from a church in Australia who ordered some cushions, and then people who had doubted her, volunteers and churches joined in to help. Other orders followed, and at first everything was sold overseas. Then Ruth had the idea of opening a shop in Phnom Penh.

Premises were found and the shop decorated and opened on the ground floor. Ruth found that there were empty rooms upstairs and had the idea to open a café in one of them. She was then emailed by a team of volunteers from New Zealand, who agreed to come and help her for three months. The head of the team happened to be a professional chef who taught the girls how to cook, and stayed on for a year!

Ruth decided to use another room in the centre as a spa. To her delight she had a phone call from a massage therapist in Canada, who volunteered for 3 months and taught the girls her trade. In 2010 the Visitor's Centre was opened and customers came. Trip Advisor promoted them, and they were listed as number 3 in 'Things to do in Cambodia'. Within three months the shop was profitable, and in one year the café was profitable too. Ruth also started asking for sponsorship for the girls.

Up to now about 775 girls have been helped by Daughters. In the first year about 95% of them stayed out of the sex trade. Unfortunately the sex trade pays more than Ruth can afford and some girls do return out of necessity, but others go on to open

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their own businesses with the training that they have been given. Some work for daughters, in fact 30% of the employees are former sex workers. A few have even gone on to university.

Ruth dedicates her whole life to her work and continues to work tirelessly for Daughters. She is an amazingly kind and caring person, and an inspiration to us all.

*Mary Lidgard.
Honorary Secretary*

PROFESSOR TRINH NGOC TRINH

Very sadly we have to report that Professor Trinh Ngoc Trinh, Founder and Director of the Highland Education Development Organisation in Vietnam, passed away in December 2019, age 84.

The Trustees and supporters of

MSAVLC send their sincere sympathy to his family and friends, both in Vietnam and around the world. A full profile of Professor Trinh appears in the November 2019 Bulletin, as the first of the charity's 'Heroes'.

It is as 'Brother Ngoc' that he will be remembered by the Vietnamese people, especially by the ethnic minority tribespeople of the Northern Highlands. It was to them that Professor Trinh Ngoc Trinh devoted his life and his work.

GREG PHILLIPS



It is with deep regret that we have to announce the death of Greg Phillips, one of our most loyal supporters. He died on the 23rd November 2019, aged 82.

Greg was a man of principal, a supporter of the peace movement, a teacher of English, a brilliant actor, a town councillor and Mayor of Fairford, a great family man, and a friend.

Greg and his wife, Jane, travelled extensively, and they were moved by the plight of the poor and sick people in Vietnam and Cambodia. They became keen supporters of MSAVLC, organising fund-raising Safari Suppers, taking part in Curry and Quiz nights, and attending the Annual General Meetings held in Cheltenham.

Greg acted as the auctioneer at MSAVLC's 50th Anniversary Celebrations at the Houses of Parliament.

He will be sorely missed by all those who knew and loved him.

NEWQUAY EVANGELICAL JUNIOR CHURCH FUND- RAISING FOR NEW HOPE CHILDREN'S HOME

The young church members have once again been saving their collection money each week for New Hope Children's Home. Before Christmas they gave MSAVLC just over £100 to buy Christmas presents for all the children.

On behalf of the Trustees we want to say a big thankyou for the money raised, which went to make Christmas very special for every child at the Home.

*Lynn Firth
Trustee*

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Our next Annual General Meeting will be held in London in May. All supporters are most welcome to attend.

Full details will be published in the next Bulletin, on our website: www.msavlc.org and on our Facebook page.

DATA PROTECTION.

MSAVLC is committed to making sure that our communications with you are secure, considered and welcomed. We promise to respect any personal data that you share with us, we will keep it safe, and we will not share it with third parties.

If you no longer want to receive the Bulletin and want to be removed from our mailing list, please contact:

John Firth, Honorary Treasurer MSAVLC, 1 Hillside, Tregunnel Park,
NEWQUAY Cornwall TR7 2AJ.

Or email: msavlc.treasurer@gmail.com

NEWS FROM THE TRUSTEES

At their meeting in January, the Trustees were pleased to receive news from All Ears Cambodia about the Listen Out Loud Kratie! outreach project which we have been funding for the last two years.

Kratie is one of Cambodia's poorest provinces, and All Ears Cambodia is the only agency providing audiology and ear health care and education to the 300,000 people who live there.

The Trustees agreed to fund an extension to the project, which will now continue until the end of February 2021.

The Trustees also agreed to fund the purchase of five head-mounted binocular headlights for All Ears Cambodia. They will be used for ear examination, both in the All Ears clinics throughout Cambodia and in outreach projects such as the one in Kratie.