Andy and Ming's work for and with disabled youngsters

19 September 2014

A meeting of representatives from Kampong Chhang and Kampong Thom met in Takhmau with supporters and staff to celebrate and mark the formal handover of the top management to their new joint Board of Directors and Governing Body.

Secretary-General John Lowrie had led NHS/NHU from 2009 when beneficiaries asked him to help to establish their organization and to raise funds for it. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen difficulties (described here), this process took much longer than he anticipated. Even now we have had to make changes required by the Ministry of Interior in order to have and to keep our own registration. Accordingly, the members are confident that they no longer need to retain John as an expatriate in the senior job. Instead, in due course, the new Board will appoint their own new Director. In the meantime, Mr Khat Bun Heng, who steered the new registration process, will take charge. He will work closely with the new Board made up of old and new members from the two provinces. John, along with Andy, Ming and Ray (right), will continue to serve as consultant advisers.

September 2013

We (Andy and Ming) spent a long weekend in Kampong Chhnang finding out how the old computing students are getting on now that they have finished high school. Some were away in Phnom Penh doing scholarship

exams for entry to university. This year the national examinations for high school leavers were delayed because of the national elections, so now that they have got their results they are anxious to find a university quickly as most classes start in October. A couple of students have started working, but we hope they will find better jobs soon.

Three students have been accepted by PNC for IT courses. One is offered a two year course on system and network administration or web developing. The other two will do a six month data entry course after which they will work for Digital Divide Data, a local social enterprise that provides jobs and careers in computing to disabled and disadvantaged young people. One of the two students had a bad motorbike accident a few months ago and had to have pins put into his shoulder and down his leg. He is still using crutches and it will be a few months more before he recovers properly and is ready to start his course at PNC in January.

We also taught the new group of students to see how they are doing in their computing class with Visal. We had two sessions with each group and taught them about tables in Microsoft Word. They did well and seem bright. We hope to see them again soon to teach them Logic and give them some career advice so they are prepared for their future when they finish high school next year.

We also bumped into Kosal, one of NHS's better known beneficiaries, who has also finished high school this year. He has a passion for music - both singing and writing songs - and we hope NHS can help him to fulfil his dreams.

Visal, an early beneficiaries of NHS, started his own IT business in his parents' front room in Kampong Chhnang after studying and working in Phnom Penh for a few years. We can see how his business has grown in these past two years. One customer was already waiting at his shop at 7 o'clock on Saturday morning before Visal could get his breakfast eaten! He never turns away any work and still has his "Can Do!" attitude. We were impressed how quick and how thorough he is in problem solving, always getting to the root cause of his customers' problems - no wonder they are queuing at his door! He still comes down to Phnom Penh to provide IT support to some NGOs and schools. He is now happily married and has a two month old baby boy.

April 2013

On 19 April, nine NHS students sat entry examinations to apply to join our partner NGO "Passerelle Numerique" (PNC, formerly CIST) in the hope of emulating the students who graduated last November (please see below and "Human Stories").

PNC's mission is "to enable the largest number of youths in a precarious situation access to training and skilled employment in Information Technology."

Congratulations and good luck to our students who all passed the test and will go for interview on 6 May. If they get through the interview a home assessment will come next.

02 December 2012

Visal's wedding - another happy occasion for NHS staff to celebrate! Visal has been with us since he was a high school student and later as a university student; afterwards he started working in various companies and now he runs his own IT business. As a student he got help with his education and some living expenses. Now in return he is helping NHS to train students in computing.

Visal's wife, Sophy, a very sweet girl, is also from Kampong Chhnang. They were old school mates in Kampong Chhnang but only got together after meeting up again while working in Phnom Penh.
We wish Visal and Sophy a happy life together!

03 November 2012

In early November we were invited for the graduation of the NHS students who studied IT in PNC (formerly CIST). They have worked very hard for the last two years and achieved good results, including a "top 10" student award for Man. PNC's courses are very practical and all students go out on internship with a company each year. They ensure that the students attend classes regularly, are on time and do a lot of self study. We saw them maturing into young adults capable of looking after themselves and adopting a good attitude towards their study and work.

Both Man and Kiv have now joined the company where they did their last internship - Man as web developer for Web Essentials and Kiv as IT support for Open Net. The other two girls should soon get a job in systems and networking administration.

This year, for the first time, PNC invited parents to attend the graduation ceremony, though not all could attend as most are from provinces and villages far away. However, Man's mum and sister, and Kiv's mum and aunt made it there. They were obviously very proud of their child and we were happy to take family photos. All the parents have been very supportive, giving their blessing for the students to stay away from home and concentrated on their studies.

This is the first group of NHS students to undertake the two-year IT course in PNC. Two other NHS students did a 6 months' data entry course with PNC earlier and both are working for Digital Divide Data. We hope that all these students will serve as role models for the NHS computing students coming through and that their success will serve as an encouragement for more students to apply to PNC. NHS has helped to supplement PNC's rather meagre living allowance and will continue to provide for any new students when needed. We will also continue to mentor the students when they come to study in Phnom Penh.

August 2012

Mr John Vijghen on behalf of SKN kindly presented the certificates to the 12 students graduating from Visal's first class, as well as giving an encouraging talk to the new batch of 12 students. Already two students have obtained good jobs as a result of the skills learned, one in Korea and another with Beeline Mobile Telephone Company. The students asked Mr Vijghen to convey their thanks to the Dutch children who every year sold stamps to raise funds for development projects with children. They said that without this kindness, they would not be able to acquire IT skills. A special tribute was paid to their teacher Visal who 7 years ago was a poor student just like them, but today was a computer expert; a teacher and the owner of his own business.

July 2012

The second intake for the computer classes operated by Visal commenced on 2 July with the 8 students braving the first torrential rains of the wet season. Sovanda is giving them a briefing before they get down to serious work.

16 January 2012

Congratulations to Visal who has now successfully established his own computer business in Kampong Chhnang. He has come a long way, as his personal story tells, as a poor boy who thought computing skills were beyond him because of disability. Visal's achievement is the ultimate success story of organizations such as NHS, where

personal poverty and social exclusion are made a thing of the past. Here, not only is there a genuine self-sufficient private solution for Visal and his family, but because he is now training more poor disabled young people in computing, these students too may well follow him with their own successful careers and businesses. We wish them and Visal well as they meet future challenges.

Pictured on the left of Visal is Stephen Pfeiffer of Stepsafe, with his partner Eva from the Australian/US NGO that was the first organization to help NHS when it became independent.

Sokim came from a family of seven with parents and an older brother who are farmers, an older sister who is a factory worker and two younger siblings who are still in school.

Sokim first did a short computing course with NHS after she finished high school. NHS then prapared her to apply to study in CIST. She passed her test and interview, and started data entry training in Phnom Penh in October 2010.

Six months later she finished her course and started work in Digital Data Divide (DDD) in Battambang. We visited her twice in Battambang and saw that she had settled down well. DDD helped to transport her bicycle and other belongings to Battambang and they also helped with finding accommodation. Her place is near enough for her to bike to work and it is only a 5 minute walk to the market to buy food.

Sokim's first task in DDD was to enter data in Greek! It was difficult, but she worked hard and learned to recognise the characters. She spends her time after work to study more English on the computer in DDD.

On our second visit we were rather worried when Sokim's room-mate told us that she and Sokim buy a single bag of food to share, and Sokim eats very little. A bag of food costing 2500 riels is already little for one person, and then sharing and eating less is even worse. Like every dutiful daughter, she has been saving money to send back to her family. We advised her that she has to look after herself first or she will fall sick and will not be able to work. We hope to visit her again soon

Sopheak finished high school in 2007 but had no money to continue his studies and did not have a job. He came to NHS to study computing. When CIST started a new course to train data entry staff for Digital Divide Data (DDD), Sopheak had the chance to apply and passed the entrance exam. In May 2009 he started his training in CIST and six months later he started working in DDD. From a situation of having no job and no money to study, Sopheak now has both. He has matured to be a confident person and during this year's new CIST intake he came to help prepare NHS students for the CIST logic test and interviews.

This October Sopheak started his degree course in IT at SETEC University, with DDD paying 60% of his fee and the rest taken from his DDD salary. In Sopheak's own words:

"After I passed scholarship in CIST I think that my life is changed I can improve my knowledge and skill, especially data entry. In CIST I knew a lot of teachers that have good experience for teaching students in all the subjects. This school has good rules for students, every student that study there after finish they get good knowledge and can find a good job easy. I think that all of the people that has opportunity to study there is a lucky person.

After I finished my 6 months Data Entry Operator(DEO) at CIST I have to work at DDD. I have now worked there for 8 months. I'm very happy that I can do the work that the team leader gives me and next month I'm going to request for money to study at University.
Now I'm very happy because I can get the salary to support myself everyday, work experience and especially can get the scholarship. I hope that in the future I will finish university and can find a better job than now. If I finish the university and can find the good job to support my family, my teachers and DDD would be happy. I think that I'm a lucky person that can study at CIST and work at DDD. In my mind in the future I won't forget CIST and DDD because these places help me to start my life again after I finished my study at high school."

Sovannak had also finished high school for a year with no job to go to and no money for further study. When NHS announced its next computer class, he came to enrol. We encouraged him to apply to some vocational institutes run by NGOs and he passed the test for Don Bosco in Phnom Penh. He now studies IT and pays only $40 a year for the fees. He stays with his father's friend who also provides him with meals.

Sovannak has five brothers and one sister. His parents are separated and the children live with their mother. His two younger brothers and his sister are still in school. NHS also provides support when necessary. In his spare time he joins Vechheka and his CIST friends to do more training with Andy.

Vechheka comes from a small and relatively young family consisting of both parents and a younger sister. His father is a musician for weddings and ceremonies. His mother makes a Khmer sweet and goes round with the tray of food on her head to sell. It is a hard job, especially in the heat or rain. Both parents incomes are irregular. Their wooden house is built on a bit of land belonging to a friend and consists of only one room with a lean-to.

After studying computing at NHS, Vechheka assisted his computer teacher, Rithy, and looked after the new students during their open sessions where they do more practice on the computers on their own. Being a bright lad, he passed his entrance exam and interview for CIST and is now doing IT which is what he likes most. CIST (Centre For Information Systems Training), a French organisation specialising in IT courses, is practical in its approach and trains students in good work ethics. They study the whole day and Vechheka will be ready to start work after his two year course.

Not only can he study for free, CIST also provides free accommodation in Phnom Penh and a small food allowance. He shares a house with 10 other students near his college in Phnom Penh. NHS continues to provide support when necessary. In his spare time he and his CIST friends do more training with Andy who was also his trainer in NHS.

We can still count on Vechheka to organise or arrange things for us - it will be done!

Visal: *"Always looking on the pleasant side!"* Visal was one of the first eight students in NHS's computer training project in Kampong Chnnang, notable as a very bright and pleasant lad. He is a polio victim brought up by his uncle and aunt. When Visal finished his level 12 at high school, he didn't have money to further his studies. His days were spent helping at his uncle's tyre shop and assisting the new computer teacher at NHS. As he showed great interest in computing, his former teachers, Ming and Andy, later sent him to train and work in Lucky Diana computer shop in Battambang.

Whilst there, he stayed with AFS, a French NGO helping poor children. In return for free accommodation he taught computing to their children in the evenings. He went back to Kampong Chnnang during the weekends to continue helping. For six months, he did three jobs and every week travelled between Kampong Chnnang and Battambang - a good four hours' journey on the bus. His hard work paid off - he was soon ready to move to Phnom Penh and start his four year degree course in Information Technology at SETEC University. He studies in the evenings and in the day time he works at Yejj, an NGO which specialises in computer services and job-oriented training. For updates on Visal's progress, please see Latest News 1 August 2011 and 16 January 2012.

Computer Vocational skills [Extract form 2004 Annual Report – the Koala Computer Centre.]

There a few facilities outside Phnom Penh for disabled people to acquire computer skills, and those that do exist are private and expensive. Cambodia has belatedly joined the digital revolution and it is one skill area where jobs are plentiful and disabled people can compete on equal terms. Computers and internet access open up new opportunities for personal educational advancement, through distant learning and general access, and for greater knowledge of the outside world. Combined with English, computer skills considerably advance both individual and group advocacy skills. Therefore LMDS acceded to demand and agreed to open up a small

computer vocational skills centre. In-country supporters have offered to provide training for the first batch of trainees whilst grooming two or more trainers. The Australian Embassy has kindly provided the funding for 10 new computers and ancillary equipment. The centre will open in May 2004.

Colleagues and partners Andy and Ming Price will be honorary trainers as well as technical advisers.