

John and Tess Castledine, Cambodia



Dear Friends and Family, We hope you've had a really wonderful Christmas with your family and friends. Tess and I really enjoyed our Christmas with our family and grandchildren back in Australia. This month we're back to Cambodia into the work for 2007.

Just at the moment we're enjoying having a lot of visitors from Australia who are helping us with teaching, painting and other work on the new building. The children are all learning lots of new songs and are really enjoying spending time with their new friends. More on that next update, there's already lots to report from the past couple of months!

Before the end of last year, the Sovana Poom family grew once again. We had 12 new additions, 7 girls and 5 boys and all are settling in well. Although each of the children have come from very difficult circumstances where poverty, alcoholism or abuse were the ever present reality, we know that they have a safe home and a bright future as they learn with us.

School

Our children have really been blessed by visits from friends during November and December and together we enjoyed a couple of very special outings.



An Australia team visiting with the 2H Project took the older children and leaders out for a day at the water park. The children and adults alike all had lots of fun on the slides and in the water pools. Quite a change from the muddy river the children would usually swim in!

In December team from Harvest 10/40 blessed our whole family with a trip to the Zoo. For many of the

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younger children it was their first trip in a bus, so even the travel was very exciting. The gibbons, tigers and the dancing elephant were all very popular with the children and adults!

It was a fantastic day for everyone involved and no doubt will leave a lot of happy memories for the children. In fact, shortly after the trip Somphoa, one of the newest children in the Home shared with us that both her and her two younger brothers had never even been out of our village and across the Mekong River to Phnom Penh city, let alone on a special outing like we had. So for these kids and our whole family, the day was really very memorable.



It's been great for the children to have some special treats around Christmas with the trips out.

We still need essential ongoing support to provide all year round for the children's needs. Feeding, clothing and providing for a family this large is a big job and we are not government funded, all our support comes from individuals and businesses. So we need your help! The cost of living in this country is rising rapidly which also requires the stretching of our dollar further.

We'd like to thank those people who have helped by supporting the work here and telling family, friends and colleagues. Please pray with us that more individuals, businesses and schools will come on board to support this work along with us.

New Building

Our young men have been busy plastering in the auditorium section of the new building over the past couple of months. Before they started work on this building, they had no prior construction experience. Learning as they go along, the guys have done a great job.

We've also had some contractors come in to help us with the bathrooms. So far four of the eight toilets have been finished and amidst all the dust and construction of the rest of the building, these tiled, clean havens look wonderful!

Please don't forget the new building is a major project which will enable us to reach many more people and more effectively train and teach our children. We still need financial help to finish this project. The first stage is well under way but the second stage which includes bedrooms and classrooms requires funding to commence the work.

Church

Pastor Thoeun, his wife Sopeak and all the leaders of Sovana Poom Church have had a very busy time over the last month.



As a church outreach we celebrated Christmas with a dinner party and invited 200 people from the local village. It was a wonderful night with presentations by

the children of a Christmas drama portraying the birth of Christ, many songs and a special Christmas message from Pastor Thoeun. Everybody really enjoyed the night and our cook, Ra excelled as she and the ladies made a delicious beef curry for everyone.



Spotlight: Taroad

Before he came to live with us two years ago, Taroad and his four older sisters had been all alone. Taroad's eldest sister was only 11 but she was taking care of her three sisters and baby brother the best she could. These kids had no food, no decent clothes, they lived in a bamboo shack and barely got by. Their father was a gambler and a drunk and their mother had left them, they had an older brother but he was out on the streets looking after himself. These little children had nobody to care for them.



Every time I (John) saw them my heart cried for the family. The children were all malnourished and weak and looked so sad. The children's aunt was working at the Sovana Poom Home with us and she asked their father if the children could come to live at the home also. It made me (John) so happy when they came to stay because I knew they would have enough food to eat, a safe place to live and an opportunity for a brighter future.

Now Taroad is growing into a happy boy who loves playing with the other children in the Home. Even though he is still young he learns in class with the other children in Khmer and English.

Unfortunately however the story does not end well for the children's older brother. Just a week before Christmas he got into a knife fight with another young man. This boy who could have had the same opportunity as his younger siblings, but instead went the way of the street was killed living the life he had chosen, at just 18 years old.

It is very sad for Taroad and his sisters. We can thank God however that these children are all learning to have a strong faith in God and know right from wrong. They are growing up with Christian values which will guide them as they mature into the Cambodian men and women of the next generation.

"Verily I say unto you whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein"

Mark 10:15