



Graduation House gets an Upgrade!

It's no secret that young adults love to socialise and our students at Graduation House in Phnom Penh are no different. And with a growing bevy of students on-site – with 10 new high school students joining the existing 10 university students at GH in September last year – we started to look around the property to see where we might be able to accommodate some more recreational spaces (we only have one rec lounge on the ground floor that gets a bit crowded with 20 young people gathering to socialise). We looked skywards – to the rooftop. It holds great potential for us to create another space for our students to relax, unwind and enjoy each other's company. To make it happen we needed some money, so we put together a grant proposal in late 2018 and waited with baited breath to see if we would be successful.



We were absolutely thrilled to find we had secured the grant in January. What a way to start the year!

We were quick to engage our former student Sokhua – a qualified architect – to draw up detailed plans for the rooftop renovation. It was amazing to be able to call on one of our student success stories to return to the fold to manage our building project.

The open areas on the north, west and south sides of the roof (and other sections of the roof which are exposed to the weather) are being enclosed. We are also creating a semi-fixed partition adjacent to the existing stairwell, this will allow us to close off or open this area for bigger functions (as needed). One side of the 'room' will house the table tennis equipment (the site of many a fierce, but good-hearted, battle!). A lounge and study area will occupy the other side of the room. We are also taking advantage of the magnificent view the rooftop offers over the city at night and installing glass windows across the north balcony to make sure our skyline views remain uninterrupted.

The design also allows for the staircase wall in the lounge area to be used as a screen for movies or during training sessions. A raked ceiling with new fans, furnishings and lighting will complete this recreational space for our hard-working high school and university residents.

We are incredibly excited to see this new space come to life – it will be an awesome addition to the existing facilities at Graduation House. In true Khmer fashion, once the works are complete we plan on having an opening event that will involve lots of food, dancing and laughter.



Our sincere thanks to Laurie and The Linden Family Foundation for enabling us turn an idea into a reality!

When you support Awareness Cambodia you change lives. Need proof? Look no further than Theara and Somnang...

Theara is preparing to ride off into the sunset!

Theara and his sister joined our Sunshine House project in 2005 when they left Svay Reing Province after their parents' death. Fast-forward 14 years and Theara is now a bright, intelligent young man who is pursuing his passion for mechanics.

After completing his high school exams, Theara wanted to get into mechanics, so we developed a vocational pathway for him and he began to study with the Automotive & Motor Scooter School (AMS) in Phnom Penh, where he is excelling.



Not only a natural when it comes to mechanics, Theara is also a self-taught musician, has learned HTML coding language, and manages his own website. We have often turned to him to help solve difficult computer problems and he was the ideal candidate to refurbish some PCs that had been donated to Graduation House. Theara took on a part-time job with our security camera contractor where he has been able to use his IT skills and save up to buy a scooter.

Theara will complete his final exam in August this year and is preparing to transition to independence from his years in Awareness Cambodia's care. He is well prepared for the next stage in his life, with a qualification and many other useful skills which make him highly employable. We are very proud of Theara – he has worked hard and is appreciative of the opportunities that Awareness Cambodia's student support programs have afforded him. His future is certainly bright and while he will soon head off on a new journey, he knows all roads will always lead back to Awareness Cambodia where he'll always be welcomed as one of our family!

Somnang's a triple threat!



A 'triple threat' is someone who can sing, dance and act – and that's precisely what Somnang is! The vivacious House of Progress student is an exceptionally talented young woman who has dreams of a singing and acting career. Inspired by her talent, but ever-practical, we are encouraging Somnang to finish her year 12 exams while we help her to identify an individual pathway to achieve her goals.

Originally from Kampong Cham in the north, Somnang came to Awareness Cambodia in 2002 where she was cared for and supported through our Sunshine House project. She has grown into an outgoing and warm young woman who can often be heard singing throughout Graduation House.

Somnang is highly-gifted – an incredible artist, singer and developing actress. During a recent Youth Group "talent show" she blew everyone away with her comical impersonation of a Japanese *Kabuki* singer. House of Progress students were runners up in this competition and all the girls, including Somnang, performed extraordinarily well.

Together with the other HOP students, Somnang attends a private high school and is achieving good results leading up to her year 12 exams. We have great hopes that she will achieve her dream of becoming a performer one day and Awareness Cambodia continues to support her in becoming a confident and capable young woman ready to take her place in the world – and hopefully on the stage!

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Awareness Cambodia Inc (ABN: 69 234 355 895)

email cambodia@awarecam.org.au **address** Unit 2/48 May Street, Bayswater, Western Australia

mail PO Box 3040, Bassendean DC, Western Australia **telephone** +61 8 9370 1457 **fax** +61 8 9370 4657

www.awarecam.org.au