

# LOTUS EDUCATION FUND

ENABLING ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR LAO ETHNIC GIRLS

ANNUAL NEWSLETTER: A WONDERFUL JULY 2017 - AUGUST 2018 IN SUMMARY



Grade 6 students from Nongkalong School

## INTRODUCING LOTUS STAFF: MS LANTA KETOUKHAM, SCHOOL SUPERVISOR

As a teacher and a female in Laos, Ms Lanta believes in the importance of education in empowering girls to achieve a brighter future and social equality. Growing up, she experienced similar problems to many girls in rural areas, in which many parents did not want their daughters to pursue higher education opportunities and would rather them stay at home and earn immediate income, so she would like to share her stories and guidance to the Lotus girls. She notes that such 'traditional cultural expectation of girls' is heavily in place in Laos



but is optimistic to see organisations working to provide girls with educational opportunities.

As the School Supervisor, Ms Lanta visits the school once a month to discuss the social and academic problems the students may be facing with the teachers.

## END OF SCHOOL YEAR UPDATE

In September 2017, 40 students started Grade 5 with the support of Lotus Education Fund. 26 of these girls have been sponsored. These girls are from three different villages with low socioeconomic areas in Southern Laos, Nongkalong, Khamken and Nonodee. During this school year, Lotus ran workshops in health, art and football for the girls in Grade 5 at Nongkalong school.

In September 2018, Ms Da, Lotus Coordinator and Ms Lanta, School Supervisor, registered 28 girls entering Grade 6 in Nongkalong school and 11 girls Lak 35 Secondary school. As transportation and distance from home to school is a problematic issue for some girls, Lotus is supporting the girls from Nonodee to travel to Lak 35 Secondary School by school bus.

In Grade 11 we have 21 students at Nongkalong school, nearing the completion of their education. These girls attended vocational training and life skills workshops in February 2018 and were equipped with new skills and knowledge in various areas such as dressmaking, agriculture and how to notice and report human trafficking cases in their villages. The students study a range of subjects, including English, Lao language, PE, Sciences and basic career planning sessions.



## SISTERHOOD: A MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

“Sisterhood” is a program which connects ‘little sisters’, Grade 11 students from Lotus Education Fund and ‘big sisters’ university students from the American Centre at That Dam in Vientiane, Laos. Through a mentorship program, the Lotus girls are guided through goal and career planning and have access to a older friend and role model, which they are able to communicate with via WhatsApp. To read more about the profiles of a big sister (Davy) and a little sister (Sompong) click [here!](#)



## SPONSORSHIP UPDATE

The Sponsorship program was launched as a way to raise funds and awareness on the significance of providing girls opportunities through education. We currently have 26 girls in primary school who are being sponsored on this program. The money from the sponsorship purchases new uniform, textbooks, backpacks, shoes, pens and pays for the school fees for the year. The girls really love receiving their new items and sometimes hair accessories or toys are included and their faces light up with pure joy.

## LOTUS'S EFFORTS TO ASSIST WITH THE JUNE FLOODING IN LAOS

On July 18th, due to high levels of monsoonal rains, the Xepian-Xe Nam Noy dam collapsed and the subsequent roof-level flood waters submerged and washed away several nearby villages, leaving 6,600 people homeless. Lotus Project Officer, Ms La Phetsavanh Somsivilay, assisted the three Lotus students Ms Ms Baysy, Onevisa and

Khamwand, with the purchase of goods and supplies at the local market. As many people are expected to be displaced and living in makeshift tents for the coming months, basic essential items were purchased and this included bottled water, canned fish, noodles, soap and shampoo.



Lotus staff and girls with donations



## EMPOWERING GIRLS THROUGH VOCATIONAL TRAINING

For girls who are vulnerable to dropping out of school, skills development can offer an alternative option to starting a family while they are young and assist them on a path towards a sustainable future. With the valued collaborative support of North Balwyn Rotary club, Lotus introduced the first VET program at Sengsavang, in Savannakhet. Ten Year 11 students from the Lotus program, who are studying at Nongkalong secondary school, participated in the six week program and learnt various important skills.

### SEWING

The girls learnt basic sewing skills and by the end of the program they could sew their

own sinh's. They realised they could borrow sewing machines from their relatives and sew and sell sinhs as a way to earn more income for the household.

### HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The girls participated in legal sessions which focused on building awareness on the legalities surrounding human trafficking. An estimated 90% of trafficking victims are girls 12 to 18 years old and girls from rural areas are especially vulnerable. Awareness of legal rights is crucial if girls are to make sound decisions that provide their life with better opportunities. The girls now know what to do when they see illegal activity in the village and how to report the incident.



The experience at Sengasavang has helped the girls understand that vocational training is another option for their future, after completing their education with Lotus.

## LIFE SKILLS WORKSHOP

In February 2018, the second Lotus Life Skills workshop was held with the generous support of professional volunteers (doctor, translators, teachers, and Lotus advisory board members) who travelled from as far as Madrid, London, Bangkok and Newcastle.

The 23 girls participated in creative and informative workshops, with sessions on dance, drawing and health-related workshops which taught the girls about their bodies, sexual health and the menstrual cycle.

Our translator, Ms Thipp, was kept very busy! The girls were fascinated by this educational introduction to understanding

their physical selves and the ways they could be responsible for their health.

Dr Denise, ingeniously designed a bracelet that the girls could make and wear, with multi-coloured beads to follow the pattern of their menstruation cycle so they could tell when they were ovulating and were most likely to get pregnant.

We observed stronger, more confident girls emerging, becoming young women who were being empowered to realize they could make choices in their daily lives and in their futures. This awareness is an essential step in a culture where women have had so little negotiating power.

