



Rotary Wheels for Learning 2020 post trip report - Cambodia

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ROTARY CLUB OF GRAVENHURST



ROTARY WHEELS FOR LEARNING POST TRIP REPORT 2020

Rotary Wheels for Learning Aim

The Rotary Wheels for Learning (RWFL) Program is an international humanitarian project which is led by Mike Cole from the Rotary Club of Gravenhurst, Ontario. In its tenth year, the project's aim is to provide a means for children to get to school, and make sure they remain healthy while attending school. We achieve this in two ways:

First, we build, repair and then distribute bicycles to impoverished rural children so they may have the opportunity to attend school. As many of the impoverished children in Cambodia have to walk three to five kilometers to school, they simply cannot attend without the aid of a bicycle. Shortcuts through fields and jungle offer the prospect of encountering long forgotten landmines, unexploded ordinance, or poisonous snakes.

Secondly, we identify and fund critical Education, as well as Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) projects at the rural schools so the children can remain healthy and stay in school. School infrastructure in rural Cambodia is either very old, in a state of disrepair, or non-existent. Without wells, latrines, and wash areas, the children have no way of using the washroom, cleaning their hands, or having water to drink during the day. This lack of critical infrastructure further disadvantages adolescent girls, who generally drop out of school once they start to menstruate.

Why Cambodia

Cambodia experienced significant turmoil in its recent history, and only since early 2000 has the country been at peace. During the Khmer Rouge years (1975-1979), life in 'Democratic Kampuchea' was strict and brutal. The party's aim was to establish a classless communist state based on a rural agrarian economy and a complete rejection of the free market and capitalism. To accomplish this, they abolished money, free markets, schooling, private property, foreign clothing styles, religious practices, and traditional Khmer culture. Public schools, pagodas, mosques, churches, universities, shops and government buildings were shut or turned into prisons, stables, re-education camps and granaries. There was no public or private transportation, no private property, and no non-revolutionary entertainment. While figures on the number of people who died during the Khmer Rouge's rule are disputed, most estimates say between 1.4 million and 2.2 million people starved to death, died of disease, or were murdered out of a population of just 8 million.

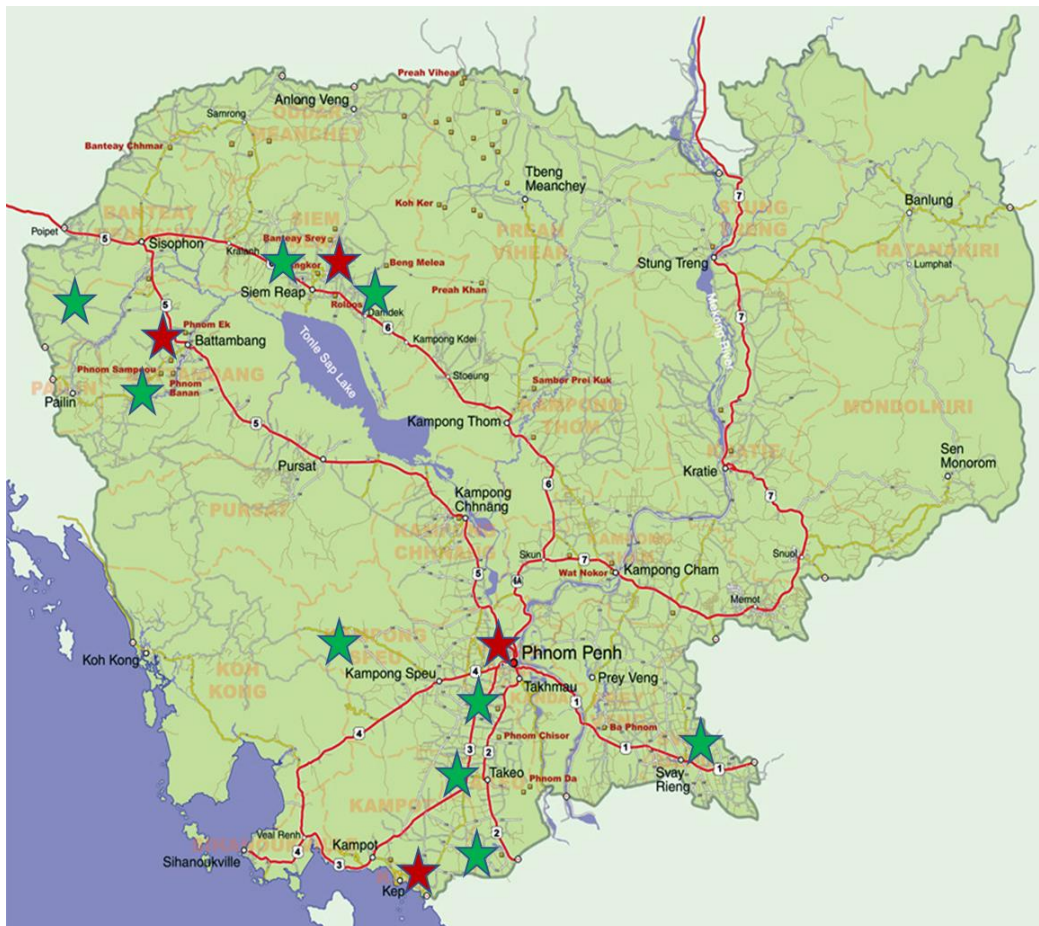
One of the significant long-term impacts of this genocide is a general lack of support in the rural areas of Cambodia. Where they exist, hospitals, clinics and schools are often located great distances from the villages making it very difficult for villagers to access them. Children that can attend school are often prevented from doing so as the distances to the school are significant. Rural children often have

important chores they need to accomplish at home, such as gathering fire wood, going to the local well or pond for the family's water, or working in the rice fields – all taking precedence over a formal education.

RWFL Team 2020 Bicycle Distribution

From 25 January – 16 February 2020, 20 Rotarians and Friends participated in the RWFL Project. This year's team was made up of Rotarians representing five clubs within District 7010 including Barrie Kempenfelt, Gravenhurst, Huntsville, Lindsay, and North Bay-Nipissing. Team members came from many corners of Canada including Victoria BC, Nunavut, London, and Kingston. We had teachers, financial experts, a retired Canadian Navy member, a Parole Officer, Business owners, a plumber, and even a Doctor. Although we all came with varied backgrounds and professions, each member of the team was focused on the project and worked extremely well together, forming lasting bonds of friendship.

The team travelled to six different provinces (Takeo, Svay Rieng, Siem Reap, Battambang, Kampong Speu, and Kampot) and covered more than 1200 km which equated to 26 hours of riding the bus. Eight of the nine distribution sites received 102 bicycles, while the ninth received 19 bicycles for a total of 835 bicycles.



(The red stars indicate our distribution hubs - where we have a hotel, while the green stars are the actual distribution locations)

The bicycles are purchased in Phnom Penh for \$37.00 US, and then transported to the actual distribution site via a local contractor. As the bicycles are gently used, we have a team of “bicycle mechanics” who conduct the repairs and verify the serviceability of the bicycle. Spare parts are purchased in Phnom Penh prior to the first distribution so that we are equipped to make all necessary repairs - typically 1 in 2 bicycles require some type of repair (tire change, tube repair, brake cable replacement, chain adjustment). Our goal is always 100 % serviceability for each bicycle so that every child receives a bicycle that is as close to new as possible.



Dan Watson installing pedals



Enjoying a local lunch



Preparing the baskets

After the bicycles are assembled and ready for distribution, we conduct a formal ceremony which local government officials and district school board members attend. At this point, we give a dental hygiene demonstration for the children and then provide each child with a new toothbrush and toothpaste. Once the formalities have been completed, we distribute the bicycles to the children, who for the most part have waited patiently for many hours in the hot sun.



Kim Strba and Kim Bruder demonstrating the proper method of brushing teeth



Waiting patiently for the bicycles....



The final product



Children about to receive their bicycle....



Rick Holder conducting repairs.
Note: the spare parts in the background



Theresa MacRory, 3-time returnee to Cambodia



Elizabeth Jeroy giving the speech



Recently retired teacher, Gerri Mar in her element



The Doc (Ciara MacRory) and Kim Bruder repairing tires.



“Gibby” (aka Carol) with husband Will Gibson



The Rotary Club of Lindsay girls, Carol and Lynda!!



Rob Foster, conducting preassembly



The team - Well done all!!

RWFL 2020 Projects

As previously mentioned, providing a bicycle to impoverished children is only one small part of the myriad issues facing the children who attend school in rural Cambodia. Over the years, we learned first hand the difficulties the children face – such as a lack of functional latrines, no access to clean water, and no wash areas.

Since 2018, the RWFL project has been sponsoring the building of WASH projects at the schools we visit. In 2019, we completed 4 wells, 3 wash areas, 2 playground renovations, a latrine renovation, a ton of rice to the Peoples Improvement Organization, and the distribution of 32 water filter systems to schools and villages.

This year, with continued support from Rotary District 7010, its associated Rotary Clubs and the Rotary Club of Niagara Falls, we set our goals even higher. The table below outlines the project, its location and associated sponsors.

Projects	Location	Sponsored
Wash Area Sokhal / Ceiling Fans for school	Svay Rieng	Rotary Club of Kirkland Lake
Water Filter System, Siem Reap (CSHD)	Siem Reap	Rotary Club of Peterborough Karwartha
2 Room School House (CSHD)	Siem Reap	Rotary Club of Gravenhurst / District 7010 Grant
Latrine and wash Area (Banyan Tree)	Phnom Sampov, Battambang	In memory of William Cole (Bill, Nancy, and Mike)
Well for village Battambang	Pich-Jongva Village, Padak Commune, Ratanak Mondul District, Battambang	Rotary Club of North Bay Nipissing
Renovate 7 toilets and install wash area	Kampong Speu (Multiple Projects at one school)	Rotary Club of Bracebridge
Water pump, water tank, pipes, electrical		Rotary Club of Collingwood
Drill 50 m well		Rotary Club of Lindsay
Refurbish playground		Rotary Club of Minden
Soap for 1 year for 6 schools and purchase school books for the library		Rotary Club of Niagara Falls Kay Godden Pat and Kim Bruder
2 tons of rice for PIO	People Improvement Org, Phnom Penh	Pat and Kim Bruder
Wash Station, Phceuk Chrum Primary School, Samrong commune, Tramkak District, Takeo	Takeo Gvmt School	Theresa McRory
Wash Station, Vihea K'pos Primary School, Bakot Village, Leaybo Commune, Tramkak District, Takeo	Takeo Gvmt School	Theresa McRory
2 filters per school plus 10 filters for village	2 filters per school	Libby and Curry Clifford

Water Filters: Local schools and 2 villages

Approximately 80 percent of all Cambodians living in rural areas have limited access to safe drinking water. This holds true in all of the schools we interact with - although they may have a well, the water still needs to be filtered, or treated to be made safe to drink. To address this issue, we distributed two water filter systems to each of the schools we visit, and provided water filters to 10 families in two separate villages located in Kep Province. In each of these villages, they were simply using ponds, which animals had access to as their drinking water.



Rotary Club of Gravenhurst President MaryAnne Marshall, demonstrating care and cleaning of the filter system to local teachers.



Villagers accepting their water filters from Sokhal Seng, our local coordinator and good friend.

Rice Distribution: People Improvement Organization, Phnom Penh

The People Improvement Organization (PIO) is a local NGO operating in Phnom Penh Cambodia founded by Phymean Noun in 2002. Children attending PIO are from families living in extreme poverty. PIO students receive school uniforms, school supplies, a daily meal, clean water and access to health care. In 2018, when we were giving out bicycles to the children, we were asked if we could support PIO through the provision of rice. Rice is given to the parents of the children, in exchange for an agreement to let the children come to school, instead of making them work to help make money for their family. In 2019 we returned to the school and were able to donate 1 ton of quality rice. This year, thanks to Kim and Pat Bruder, we donated 2 tons of rice – enough to last six months.



(Kim Bruder, (left, sitting on rice) and her husband have donated to PIO for the last two years. Kim and Gravenhurst President MaryAnne Marshall (right) accepting a small token of appreciation from some of the children at PIO.

Washing Station: Boeung Ray Primary School, Svay Rieng Province

Boeung Ray Primary School is located in Svay Rieng Province near the border with Vietnam. The school has working latrines and a well, but was lacking a hand washing station. As a result, children did not have a means of washing their hands prior to eating, or after using the washroom, causing many of them to get sick and miss school. Thanks to the Rotary Clubs of Gravenhurst and Kirkland Lake, they now have a modern washing station that can accommodate many children at the same time. In addition to the washing station, ceiling fans were purchased and installed to help ventilate the classrooms.



The wash area under construction – the left side has taps for handwashing, while the right side is designed to fill large containers.



The finished product.

Two-room Schoolhouse and Water Filter System: Rural School Village Program

The Rural School Village Program (RSVP) is a sub-component of Cambodian Self-Help Demining (CSHD). The organization was started in the 1990s by Aki Ra while he was demining in rural villages. These villages had no access to education so the village chief approached Aki Ra and asked him to build them a school. As a result, in 2011 the “Rural School Village Program” was established. Since that time 23 schools have been built in Siem Reap, Banteay Meanchey, and Battambang Province. This year, the Rotary Club of Gravenhurst, along with a District Grant from Rotary District 7010 funded the construction of a two-room schoolhouse at Krabai Riel Primary School in Siem Reap Province



These are the two classrooms the students were using prior to the building the new school.



The two-room schoolhouse under construction.



Installing the walls. This project employed up to 10 locals full time for 3 months providing much needed income.



The new schoolhouse will house close to 180 students (in two sessions) each day.
It will also be used at night for adult education classes.

Water Filtration systems - Krabai Riel Primary School, Siem Reap Province

The Rotary Club of Peterborough-Kawartha sponsored the installation of a water filtration system for the school. The school consists of 3 original buildings and the new two-room schoolhouse. Prior to receiving the new water filtration system, school children would draw water out of the pond (picture lower left) and have it filtered through small clay type filters. Besides being extremely time consuming, it could not generate enough water for the entire student body (close to 600 students attend this school). The new system (lower right) includes piping to the pond, a pump and two water stations that are continuously replenished with clean, safe drinking water.



School Infrastructure Renovation Project – Prambie Mum Primary School, Kampong Speu Province

This extensive project took place in Kampong Speu Province at the Prambie Mum Primary School. Prambie Mum Primary School is one of six primary schools in the commune and currently has 600 students with 12 teaching staff. The school infrastructure was in such a poor state, or simply non-existent, many children stopped coming to school as they were continuously getting sick. Sponsored by the Rotary Clubs of Bracebridge, Collingwood, Gravenhurst, Lindsay, Minden, Niagara Falls, and private sponsors Kay Godden, Kim and Pat Bruder, we were able to significantly improve the welfare of both the children and teachers at this school. The following are the project accomplishments;

- The renovation of two existing toilet blocks for a total of 7 washroom stalls.
- Drilling a 75 meter well to ensure water is available throughout the school year. The well project included the installation of a 5000 L water storage tank, an electrical pump, and piping to the toilets, wash area and garden.
- Renovation/construction of the wash areas which will include a year's supply of soap and cloth wash rags.
- Renovation of the playground to ensure a safe environment for the children who will use it.



Renovating the two washroom blocks. The middle stall (left picture) was renovated to accommodate children with disabilities,



The completed washroom blocks. Note the shower stall (center picture). As most of the teachers live far from the school, they stay at the school all week – the shower significantly improves their welfare.



The well and pump assembly (left picture), and the 5000 L storage tank which feeds the latrines, wash areas, and garden. The garden grows various fruits and vegetable for the children's school lunch.



The completed playground. The playground attracts the younger children to the school, sparking an interest in education as they watch the older children learning. A win win situation.



Team members from the sponsored Rotary Clubs with Mr Hem Tola, our friend and Project Manager.

Well – Pich-Jongva Village, Pads Commune, Ratanak Mondul District, Battambang Province

Sponsored by Rotary Club of Nipissing, this well was installed in Pich-Jongva Village instead of at the local school as originally planned. The villagers asked our coordinator to consider this option as none of the homes in the village had access to water. As a result, they would pay a contractor to truck in water from ponds and rivers where they would then store it in a pond outside the village. The villagers were charged .50 cents per 20 L of water which took up a significant amount of their monthly income. By installing the well in the village, everyone has access to clean water while paying a nominal fee - which goes towards sustaining the well and associated components. Thanks to Rotary, the villagers can now grow more crops, they have a bit more money to spend on food, and the children do not need to walk to the local pond to fetch water, allowing them time to attend school.



Theresa MacRory from Rotary Club of Nipissing (center picture) visiting the well site. The well has a flow meter (right picture) installed which measures the amount of water used by the villagers. To ensure sustainability, small fees are collected to maintain the well system.

Latrine and Wash Area – Banyan Tree School, Battambang Province

This school is an English language school built by Canadians and supported by the Banyan Tree, a NGO based out of Phnom Penh. Rotary Wheels for Learning have been supporting this organization for close to 10 years through the provision of bicycles and various WASH projects. This year, my family funded the building of a wash area and double latrine in memory of my father, William Lorne Cole.



The latrine and wash area under construction (left and center), with the final product (right picture)

Wash Stations - Vihea K'pos and Phceuk Chrum Primary Schools, Tam Kak District, Takeo

Sponsored by Theresa MacRory, from the Rotary Club of Nippissing, these two wash stations will serve approximately 550 students at each school. Identified as a critical requirement by the schools, the school principals reached out to Mr Tim Savin (Banyan Tree Operations Officer) who asked us if we could find a sponsor. Theresa, a three-time returnee to Cambodia, kindly stepped in to sponsor both schools on behalf of her late husband, Mr Jack MacRory, an Engineer from Dublin, Ireland



The wash area at Vihea K'pos Primary School under construction (upper left). Phceuk Chrum Primary School wash area completed less paint (upper right). Theresa and her daughter, Dr Ciara MacRory with the school principal and District Coordinator for Education.

Goals for 2021

With COVID-19 placing restrictions on movement throughout the world, its difficult to determine if RWFL Team 2021 will be able to travel to Cambodia for our 10th RWFL Bicycle Distribution. **In the event restrictions are eased, and the risk can be mitigated,** the RWFL Team 2021 will return to Cambodia in January 2021 to distribute 858 bicycles in eight of our target areas (table 1).

Table 1 – Bicycle requirements 2020

Distribution	# Bicycles	Location	Province
1	82	Free the Bears	Takeo
2	62	Kampong Cham	Kampong Cham
3	102	Rotary Club Siem Reap	Siem Reap
4	102	Rural School Village Program	Banteay Meanchey
5	102	Battambang	Battambang
6	102	Kampong Speu	Kampong Speu
7	102	Banyan Tree	Takeo / Kampot
8	102	Kampong Chhnang	Kampong Chhnang
9	102	Kep	Kep
All distributions			856 bicycles
Cost in Canadian Dollars for 856 bicycles			\$48,400.00

Table 2 – Projects 2020

Regardless of where we are at with the COVID-19 restrictions, Rotary Wheels for Learning plans to implement the following projects in September 2020, with a completion date set for November 2020 (table 2). This coincides with the start of the new school year in Cambodia, and will be a welcome surprise for the children who remain out of school until then.

Projects	Location	Approx Cost (Canadian)	Sponsored
Water Filters	Khos Chhvang Village, Kampot	\$1,500.00	No
	2 x ea school (8 schools)		
4 Tons of rice	Peoples Improvement Organization	\$2,000.00	No
Toilets and Washing Stations	Banteay Srey District and Pouk District	\$7,000.00	No
Well	Rural School Village Program	\$2,000.00	No
Renovate One Toilet Block (3 rooms)	Prey Mich Primary School, Kampong Speu	\$15,000.00	Partial - still require \$13000.00
Build new washing place			
Drill and cap well			
Generator and water pump			
Water storage tank			
Renovate playground			
Sanitation and hygienic materials			
School supplies / clothing	Battambang Province	\$2,500.00	Partial - still require \$2000.00
Rice and Food Stuff	Siem Reap	\$2,500.00	Yes
Wash area	Kampong Trach	\$2,800.00	No
Total Canadian Dollars		\$35,300.00	

Notes: 1. All costs in Canadian dollars at 1.3337 exchange (24 Apr 20)

2. The above table is an estimate as of 24 April 2020 and may change once detailed planning and budgeting have been completed – expected sometime in June/July timeframe.

Financial Support Needs

Fundraising for the bicycles will begin once we can determine the feasibility of returning to Cambodia in January 2021. I hope to be able to make a firm decision no later than September 2020. ***We are however, actively seeking financial support for the 8 projects in Table 2 above.*** If you or your Rotary Club can support the funding, or partial funding of any of these projects, it would be very much appreciated. We understand the impact COVID-19 has had on your club's ability to not only fundraise, but to provide the critical support to your local communities. I ask that you consider digging a bit deeper and supporting those much less fortunate than ourselves. It has always been in times of crises that Rotarians, and Canadians in general, have been leaned on to demonstrate leadership, compassion, and empathy.

One hundred percent of your donation goes towards the projects – our team members and local Cambodia volunteers are not paid. Only the actual workers (local contractors) that are hired to construct the projects and our Project Managers are paid. Individual donations are tax deductible as we are a registered charity with CRA.

RWFL Team 2020

If you would like to become a member of the RWFL Team that deploys to Cambodia in 2021, please contact me at rwflteam2018@gmail.com

A firm decision will be taken by September 2020 on whether the trip will be a go. NO financial obligations will be expected before then – simply a commitment that you want to be on the team.

Details for RWFL Team 2021

Location: Cambodia, SE Asia

Dates: 22 January – 13 February 2021.

Team Meeting Date: 12 September 2020

Approximate Costs: \$3300.00 Canadian (includes airfare, lodgings, meals, in country transport, spending). *Assuming no major increases to airfare as a result of the current crisis*

Team size: 18-20 members (Rotarians and Friends).

Requirements: No experience is necessary; we will provide the bicycle training and expertise

For more information: to obtain more detailed information please send an email to rwflteam2018@gmail.com

RSVP: Interested members should send a response as soon as possible.

Should you have any questions or need additional information, please feel free to contact me at rwflteam2018@gmail.com. Alternatively, you can view our past distributions on Facebook, simply type in **Rotary Wheels for Learning (RWFL)** under search and then request to join the group.

Thank you in advance for your interest in this very worthy cause.

Rotary - Making a difference, connecting the world and opening opportunities!

Mike Cole

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