



Together, building futures.

Friends-International:

ADAPTING OUR SERVICES TO SAVE LIVES
AND BUILD FUTURES IN THE COVID ERA

Summary Report





INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a devastating impact on the vulnerable communities Friends-International serves across Southeast Asia (Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar). The crisis is also impacting every level of our operations – from the closure of our social businesses dramatically reducing our income and the loss of human resources, to the need to rapidly adapt our projects, protocols and ways of working.

Whilst the health consequences of COVID-19 in our countries of operation have for the time-being been fairly minimal, with the exception of Indonesia, when compared with other parts of the world, the socio-economic consequences have been extreme. The main pillars of the countries' and communities' economies have been severely affected with the tourism industry essentially eradicated overnight

and dramatic impacts on the garment industry due to lack of raw materials. This situation is hitting those families without savings or safety nets first and worst. As COVID-19 cases continue to rise around the globe, Friends is responding to the emergency situations emerging in our target populations, including challenges related to health, education, child protection and employment.

MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS FROM MARCH TO MAY 2020 INCLUDE:

14,187

(Female: 9,279)

beneficiaries trained on COVID-19 awareness, prevention and protection measures across all Friends Alliance programs

798

(F 327)

community-based ChildSafe Agents trained and up skilled to support and extend the reach of our outreach teams

623

children (F 325)

supported with remote education

1,020

highly vulnerable families

received emergency support (tailored to their needs but including items such as food, hygiene materials and rent support), representing a total of 4,496 individuals (children, youth and caregivers)

126

(F 50)

children/youth reintegrated into family-based care

1,263

beneficiaries

protected by ChildSafe agents

123

(F 64)

youth/caregivers supported with employment skills and placement



677

ChildSafe hotline calls

responded to 37 child protection interventions/cases reported by programs, resulting in 44 children/youth being protected

194,487

targeted services

provided to 928 (F 304) high risk beneficiaries (sex workers, street living children and families, drug users)

246,581

people

reached with ChildSafe campaign materials for families in lockdown

FRIENDS ALLIANCE PROGRAMS





STAFF AND BENEFICIARY SAFETY

From the outset of this crisis, Friends' priority, first and foremost, has been to ensure the highest levels of protection and safety for our staff, volunteers and beneficiaries, while guaranteeing a minimal disruption in vital service provision to our beneficiaries. Therefore, we have established a dedicated multi-country committee who are responsible for staying informed on the latest developments referring to UN, WHO and country-specific Government recommendations and leading on rolling out of guidelines, new protocols and adapted/updated Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) accordingly. Information is regularly disseminated via briefings across all country programs and we have SOPs in place for all office-based and field staff (outreach and travel, Drop In Center, Transitional Home, etc.) All staff have received basic training about COVID-19 awareness, prevention and protection measures and we continue to coordinate and collaborate with multiple UN and NGO partners. The situation is constantly evolving and our procedures and actions will continue to evolve with it.

Ben's story:

Ben* is 13 years old and lives in Siem Reap with his grandparents and his brother Bouen, after his mother migrated to the capital Phnom Penh to find work. Prior to COVID-19, his grandmother sold vegetables at the local market and his grandfather drove a moto-taxi, but this did not generate enough money to support the family, a situation which has been made far worse since COVID began. Ben and his brother therefore supported their household by working as street scavengers.

In March 2020, Ben and Bouen were arrested while working on the streets as part of a 'street clean-up'. These 'clean-ups' often happen ahead of visits from high profile government officials or major events, and police forcibly move street families and night workers (e.g. sex workers, drug sellers/users) off the streets into prisons or rehabilitation centres. Fortunately, our team in Siem Reap has built a relationship with the police and so the police knew that as Ben and Bouen were vulnerable minors, they could refer them to our Family Reintegration services for support, instead of putting them in detention.

The boys were provided with safe accommodation in our Transitional Home, as well as psychosocial services, health and school support. Whilst the social worker was assessing if it was safe for the boys to return to living with their grandparents, it became evident that the family needed additional support. In preparation to reintegrate the boys to live with their grandparents, they received counselling, positive parenting support and financial support. It was agreed that the boys would continue to attend classes and receive education support from Friends, supporting their eventual reintegration into school.

The impact of COVID-19 has meant that the family's small income has been reduced to almost nothing. As such, they have received immediate emergency support including food and hygiene materials, as well as information on how to protect themselves and others from COVID. Our team have also contacted the boys' mother to see if they can support her to get a job placement closer to her sons through our FUTURES employment scheme.

Our social workers continue to follow up with Ben and his family and provide support to ensure the boys are safe, their education is supported and their grandparents have the means to care for them.

**Names changed to protect beneficiary's identity*



OUR COVID-19 RESPONSE

A. PREVENTION AND PROTECTION EDUCATION

798 ChildSafe Agents (our community-based volunteers) have been trained and equipped to disseminate COVID-19 prevention and protection information, and up-skilled to support and extend the reach of our field teams. In total, 14,187 beneficiaries have been provided with COVID-19 awareness, prevention and protection information across through the work of our ChildSafe Agents and field staff.

B. EMERGENCY SUPPORT

We continue to prioritize a multi-faceted, holistic approach to emergency support, looking at both immediate and long-term needs, tailored to the requirements of each family. Immediate support includes non-perishable food, essential hygiene materials, support with rent payment so beneficiaries don't lose their homes, prescription medication and basic healthcare/first aid or medical referrals. Wherever possible, and where funding allows, we seek to provide sustainable support, for example supporting youth and caregivers who have lost their livelihoods due to COVID-19 with market-aligned skills and job placements, or support to start their own small businesses.

1,020
families

received emergency support
representing a total of 4,496 individuals
(children, youth and caregivers).

A high number of emergency supplies were distributed by our team in Siem Reap, the gateway to Angkor Wat, as the loss of tourism has had a particularly severe impact on local families' income generation potential.



C. EDUCATION

While educational institutions have been closed due to Governments' executive orders to prevent and halt the spread of COVID-19, it was our priority to ensure that marginalized and vulnerable children were and are able to continue to access learning resources, and that the disruption to their education is kept to a minimum.

Unfortunately, the costs of internet credit and poor/no access to technology makes it very difficult or impossible for our beneficiaries to access E-learning initiatives which have been set up during school closures. To ensure that they can keep up with their education, our teachers and case workers have provided education support including preparing and printing homework from the Government Apps for distribution. We also invited children who did not have televisions at home to access televised government learning programs at our community-based Drop In Centres. In Laos, our team also created a WhatsApp group to support local teachers and share resources. For the children in our Transitional Homes, individual study support was also provided.

March to May

623
children (F 325)

supported with
remote education

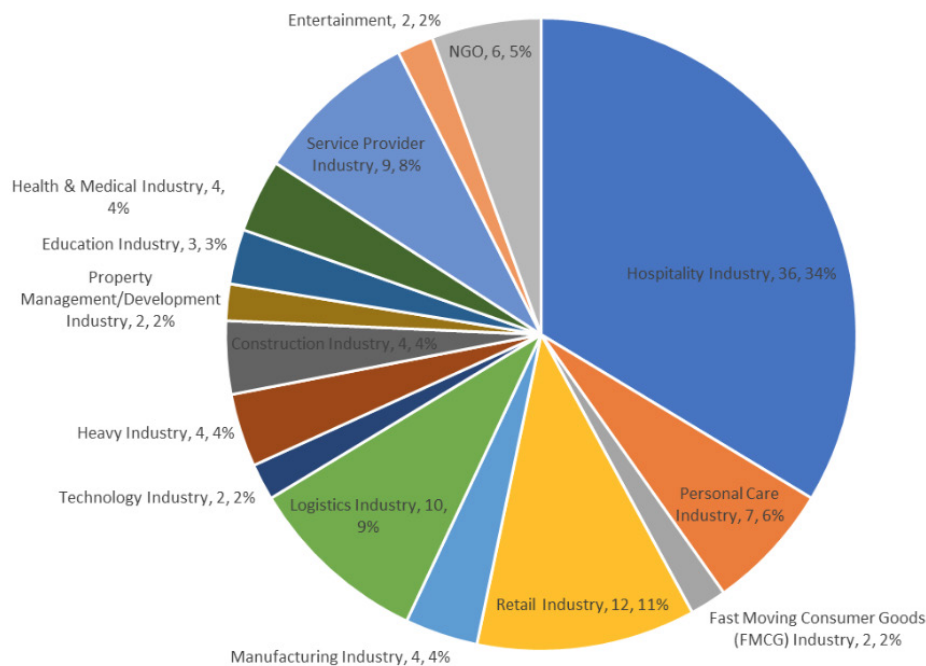
126
(F 50)

children/youth reintegrated
into family-based care.

D. SAFE LODGING

Our Transitional Homes in Vientiane, Phnom Penh and Siem Reap continued operations, but admissions had to be paused from mid-March following Government instructions. Children and youth were supported to temporarily and/or permanently reintegrate into family-based care where this was assessed by our social workers as safe. Short term foster care services in Cambodia and Laos were able to continue, with foster care families supported with information on COVID-19 prevention and material support to meet their essential needs. From March to May, a total of 126 children/youth were reintegrated into family-based care.

total job placements per industry



E. EMPLOYMENT

Unemployment has seen a dramatic surge across the region since the start of the pandemic (with up to 65% job losses among our database of FUTURES employment beneficiaries), and for families without savings or safety nets to fall back on, the consequences can be extremely serious, with families losing their homes, and having no choice but to turn to dangerous or illegal means of earning money to survive.

Friends' FUTURES employment services have remained available to support beneficiaries in finding new income generating opportunities at this critical time, with key services developed or adapted to be accessible online. Our employment teams are identifying new and more stable job markets, building partnerships with companies and employers who are emerging or expanding in the new context (e.g. supermarkets, delivery companies) and who are able to recruit. We also provide support for self-employment / entrepreneurship, providing the skills and start-up materials needed for youth and caregivers to open community micro-enterprises (e.g. food trucks, small restaurants) offering products and services for the local population.

March to May

123
youth/caregivers

supported with
employment skills
and placement



Let's Eat team in Phnom Penh getting ready for reopening

F. TARGETED SERVICES FOR HIGH RISKS POPULATIONS

Friends continued to maintain protection services for our more at-risk populations including people living on the streets, drug users and sex workers. Our mobile Night Bus in Phnom Penh reopened in April to provide support services to sex workers, both existent beneficiaries and individuals who have newly taken up sex work during the COVID-19 crisis due to loss of income. A total of 928 individuals identified as high risk were provided with 194,487 targeted services including 83,958 condoms distributed.

G. ADAPTING OUR SOCIAL BUSINESSES

We know that for the remainder of 2020 and likely well into 2021, we will no longer be able to rely on tourism as a core market for our social businesses, so we are looking at how we can rethink, reinvent and adapt our existing vocational training businesses to make sure they remain relevant in the new context. We are developing strategies for how we will repurpose our training restaurants, shops, beauty salons and other businesses to cater to new market conditions, looking at a predominantly local and Asian clientele and the expat community.

Since June, some of our restaurants and snack bars, our Friends'N'Stuff shop and other training businesses have gradually reopened with revised training curricula, enabling us to resume adapted training of students in skills tailored to new market needs.



LONG-TERM RECOVERY AND REBUILDING

In responding to COVID-19, our next steps focus on preparing for long term recovery, re-opening and re-building. Despite ongoing challenges, we have rapidly adapted our offering to ensure we can safely continue with our social service delivery in this new context, prioritizing the most at-risk populations (including sex workers, drug users and people living with HIV). Provision of follow up for beneficiaries and distribution of emergency support as needed remains ongoing. Having said this, we are prioritizing sustainable support wherever possible. When we've identified families in need of immediate emergency support due to loss of income-generation potential, we've sought to couple immediate relief with referral to vocational training opportunities, employability skills and job placement or support to set up their own businesses.



NEXT STEPS INCLUDE:

- Resuming vocational training services and reopening vocational training businesses, including returning students to dormitories and group homes where possible
- Continued support for remote education including expansion of homework distribution
- Continued roll out of online training, expanding employment support in new markets and increasing support towards self-placement / entrepreneurship
- Reopening admissions to safe lodging, and continuing family assessments and reintegration processes where safe
- Dissemination of prevention and protection measures and ongoing capacity building for staff and beneficiaries is ongoing
- Restarting some activities is dependent on individual country regulations which continue to evolve.

Whilst COVID-19 has had a terrible impact on the communities we serve and our own capacity to support them, we firmly believe that with the continued generosity of our loyal supporters together with new partners, we have the right team, expertise and capacity for innovation to adapt our social businesses to weather this crisis and re-build Friends' financial and social sustainability in the years ahead so we can continue to provide vital services to save lives and build futures for children, young people and families.

So, let's, together, look to the Future!
Thank you!