

Friends-International:

SAVING LIVES AND BUILDING FUTURES IN THE COVID ERA

Progress Report | December 2020





INTRODUCTION

As of mid-December 2020, the health impacts of COVID-19 in three of Friends' countries of operation have significantly deteriorated. In Indonesia, confirmed cases are over 600,000, making it the worst affected country in Southeast Asia. Proportionate to its population, Myanmar is on a similar trajectory, with over 100,000 confirmed cases. And, whilst Cambodia's number of confirmed cases remain comparatively low, the first cases of community-based transmission were confirmed in late November, resulting in the renewed closure of schools and some businesses as the government enacts mass contact tracing efforts in a bid to contain the virus.

From a health perspective, Laos and Thailand are faring better, with just 39 reported cases in Laos and no new cases since July, and a stabilization in case numbers in Thailand since June. However, across all five countries the socio-economic consequences remain dire, and they continue to be most extreme for the marginalized communities Friends supports.

With your support, we are identifying and providing services to those families who do not have savings or safety nets to fall back on, who are at risk of, or have become homeless, and who face impossible choices including putting their children to work or turning to dangerous occupations to meet their basic needs.

Since the onset of COVID-19 in Southeast Asia, Friends has been working to provide immediate protection and emergency support to meet the needs of these children, youth and families, coupling this with support to build their long-term resilience to COVID and future socio-economic shocks. The below figures reflect key beneficiary reach and achievements between March and September 2020, with the narrative update that follows detailing progress made between our previous COVID report and the present one.



ACHIEVEMENTS FROM MARCH TO SEPTEMBER 2020 INCLUDE:

21,054
(Female 11,008)

beneficiaries trained on
COVID-19 awareness, prevention
and protection measures across
all Friends programs
(Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Indonesia and Thailand)

1,330
(F 505)

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

2,390
children (F 1,261)

supported with remote
education during the
shut-down of schools

3,050

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 12,158
individuals (children, youth and caregivers)

169
(F 65)

children and youth
supported to reintegrate
into family-based care

5,039
(F 2,861)

beneficiaries
protected by
ChildSafe Agents

343
(F 192)

youth and caregivers
supported with
employment skills
and job placement



1,831

ChildSafe hotline calls
responded to

453,100
targeted services

provided to 2,004 (F 851)
high-risk beneficiaries (sex
workers, street living children
and families, drug users)

444,877

people reached with ChildSafe
campaign information for
families in lockdown

FRIENDS ALLIANCE PROGRAMS





MALEE'S STORY

**Name changed to protect beneficiary's identity*

Malee* is an amputee and mother of three living in a marginalized community in Bangkok. Her disability means she is unable to work to support her three children. Her two younger children were in school prior to COVID, and her youngest also has a disability. Her oldest son tries to support the family by scavenging.

Before the pandemic, Malee had also relied on community structures including food and other support from the local temple to meet her family's needs, but hers is an example of how the restrictions of movement during COVID pushed her family into extreme vulnerability, as they were no longer able to access this support, and could not meet their basic needs.

Friends-Thailand met the family and following an assessment, were able to provide immediate emergency support including food support to Malee and her children. The team provided school

materials and support for the younger children so they could continue their studies during the pandemic. They are also working with the older son to support him to find a safer alternative to his current work and lifestyle.

Finally, they brought Malee to a hospital to explore getting a prosthetic fitted, which would make life much easier for her and her family and hopefully enable her to get into work.

OUR COVID-19 RESPONSE

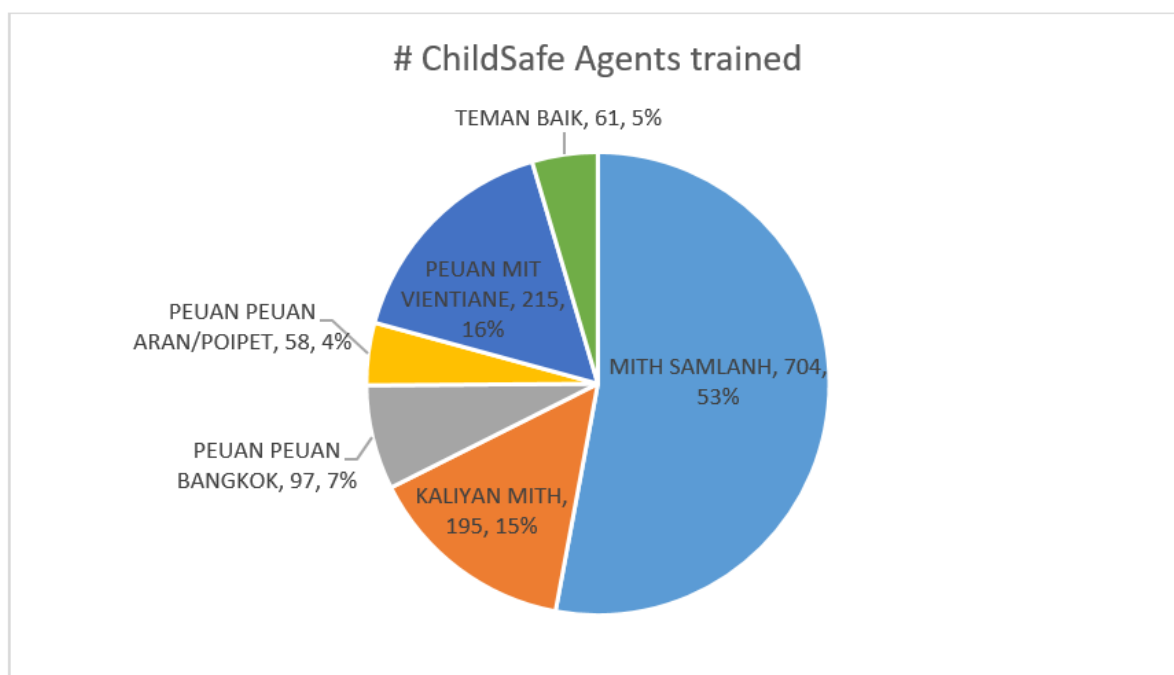
A. PREVENTION AND PROTECTION

1,330 ChildSafe Agents (our community-based volunteers) have been trained and equipped to disseminate COVID-19 prevention and protection information and upskilled to support and extend the reach of our field teams, enabling us to provide 21,054 beneficiaries with COVID-19 awareness, prevention and protection information between March – September. Our ChildSafe Agents also protected 5,039 beneficiaries at immediate or imminent risk of harm.

	Total	Female	% Female
Children & Youth	8,347	4,011	48%
Caregivers/Adults	12,707	6,997	55%
	21,054	11,008	52%

TOTAL NUMBER OF BENEFICIARIES TRAINED ON COVID-19 AWARENESS, PREVENTION AND PROTECTION MEASURES

NUMBER OF CHILDSAFE AGENTS TRAINED PER PROGRAM



Note: ChildSafe Agents are not currently operational in Luang Prabang and in Myanmar. With further funding we hope to roll out ChildSafe Agent networks in these locations.

The work of ChildSafe Agents is complemented by our ChildSafe Hotlines, emergency child protection hotlines staffed 24/7 by trained social workers ready to respond and attend the scene of child protection incidents. Our hotlines have stayed operational throughout the pandemic and responded and dealt with 1,831 calls about concerns for children and youth's safety and wellbeing between March - September. The majority of calls related to emergency support needs including lack of food, shelter and health needs or advice.

B. EMERGENCY SUPPORT

The assessment and provision of emergency supplies to those in need continues across all programs. However, our focus is increasingly on providing sustainable support, coupling immediate relief with referral to vocational training opportunities, employment readiness and job placement, or support for small business start-ups. Emergency cases in Cambodia remain particularly high, a situation which has been compounded by extensive flooding in September and October and an outbreak of Chikungunya virus in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh.

Emergency needs at the Aran-Poipet border with Thailand have increased, due to the continued border closure dramatically affecting income generation opportunities and employment. A new migration policy is also coming into effect, which will increase fines for illegal crossings, pushing many families into greater vulnerability as they rely on the border crossing to earn a living. In response, Friends' teams are working to improve and disseminate safe migration campaign materials and advice, including collaboration with local authorities.

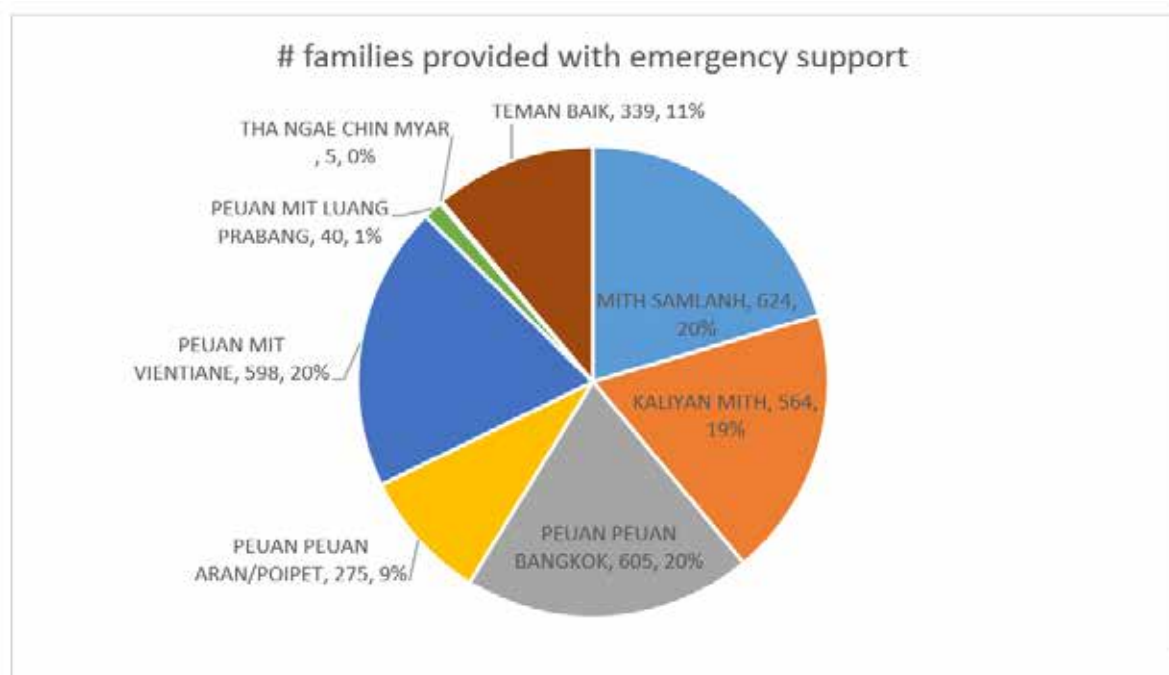
From March to September

3,050
families

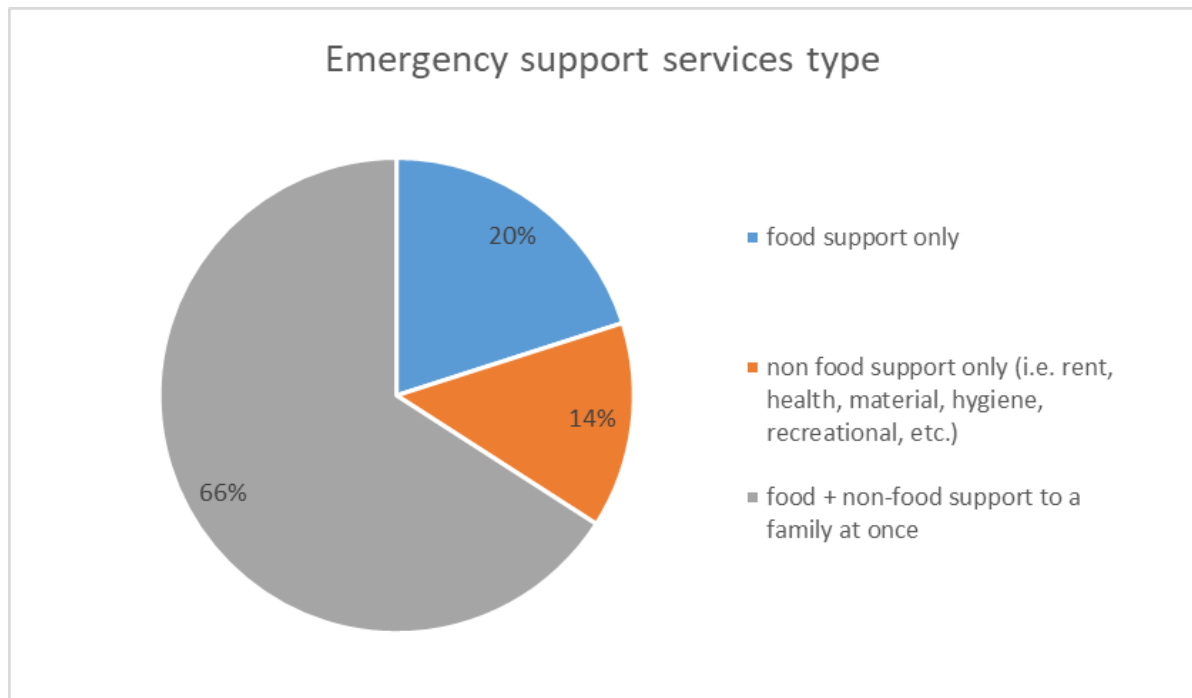
provided with emergency support
representing a total of 12,158
beneficiaries.

Our teams also continue to facilitate referrals to services provided by private businesses, governments and other NGOs, such as the ID Poor scheme in Cambodia, which allows families living in poverty to register for ID Poor status so they can access social services and emergency support provided by the government.

NUMBER OF FAMILIES PROVIDED WITH EMERGENCY SUPPORT PER PROGRAM



EMERGENCY SUPPORT SERVICES PER TYPE OF SUPPORT

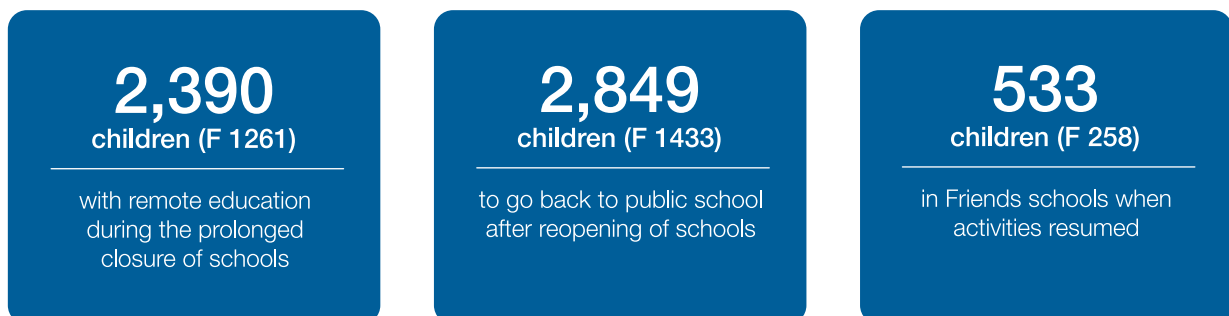


C. MAINTAINING EDUCATION ACTIVITIES FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Staff across all programs continue to assess the needs of children and families and provide support to maintain access to education, and when possible, facilitate the return to school. Key activities include remote education, distribution of school supplies and support for caregivers to ensure they can afford to support their children's education.

In Indonesia and Myanmar, schools remain closed due to COVID-19. In Cambodia, after a prolonged closure, schools progressively were reopening in September when the first cases of community-based transmission were reported, and they have since been closed again, so our focus continues to be on supporting remote education to ensure children do not fall behind the curriculum, increasing their risk of permanent drop out. In Laos and Thailand, schools reopened in June and July respectively.

From March to September, we supported





D. SAFE LODGING AND FAMILY REINTEGRATION

Our Transitional Homes in Vientiane, Phnom Penh and Siem Reap continued operations (while moving to other locations to save on rent). Short Term Foster Care services in Cambodia and Laos also continued, with foster care families trained on COVID prevention and protection and provided with hygiene materials and other support as needed. To prevent the spread of COVID-19, new admissions were paused from mid-March following Government instructions, but have resumed progressively across programs from May.

57
(F 21)

new children/youth placed in
FI safe lodging from mid-May

169

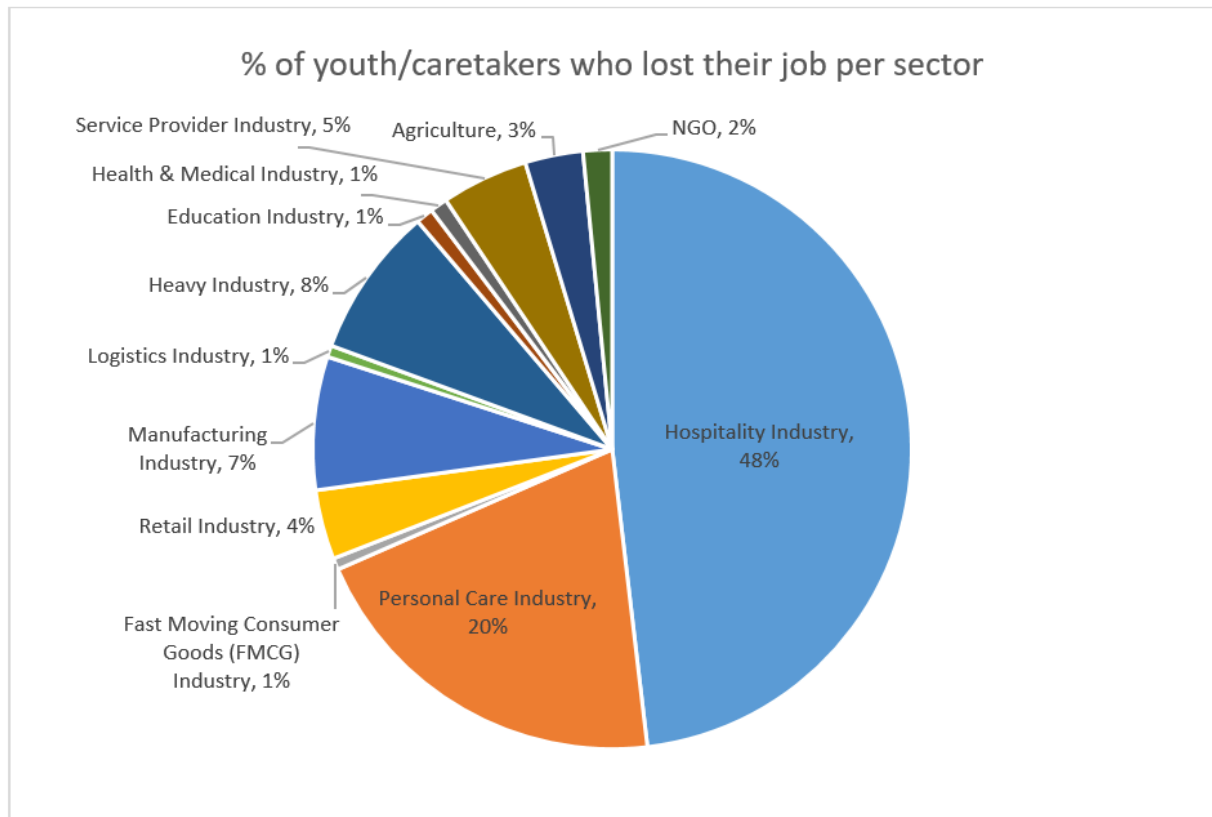
children (F 65)

from March to September, were supported
to reintegrate into family-based care.

E. EMPLOYMENT

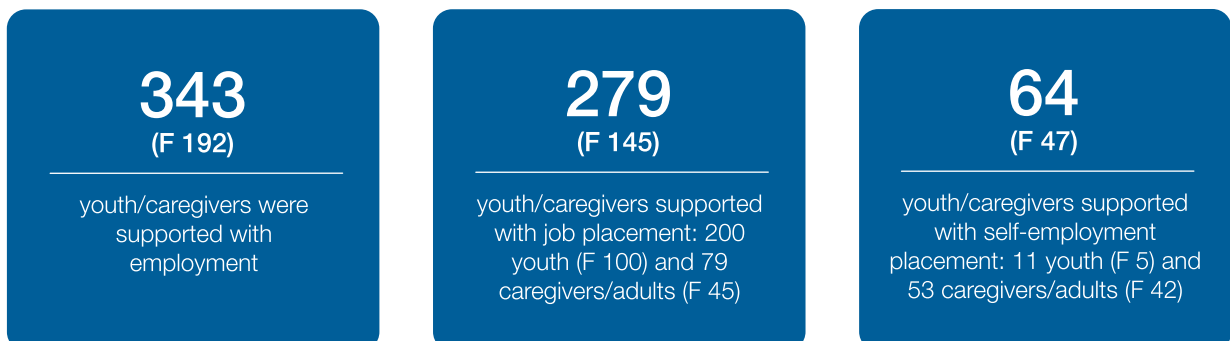
Rapidly rising unemployment continues to be a major cause for concern across our country programs, and challenges to employment placements are also reflected in the decrease in salaries available to our graduates. From March to September, among the 771 active beneficiaries in our Futures employment databases, 42% lost their job. This is 10% more than in May 2020. The sectors most heavily impacted have been the hospitality industry and the beauty and personal care industry.

BREAKDOWN OF YOUTH/CAREGIVERS WHO LOST THEIR JOB PER INDUSTRY COMPARED TO THE TOTAL NUMBER OF YOUTH/CAREGIVERS WHO LOST THEIR EMPLOYMENT

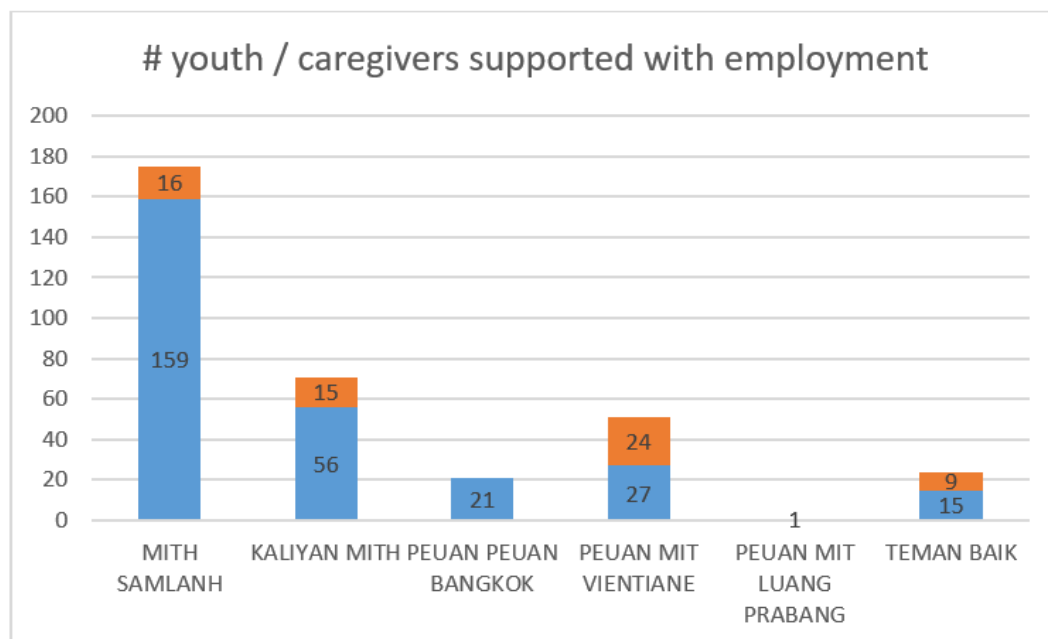


We continue to work with these beneficiaries to find them alternative job placements in more stable industries and provide emergency support as needed, while also identifying and supporting new cases of vulnerable youth and caregivers who need employment support.

From March to September



NUMBER OF YOUTH AND CAREGIVERS SUPPORTED WITH EMPLOYMENT PER PROGRAM



Our employment teams also continue to build partnerships with companies and employers who are emerging or expanding in the new context and are offering increased support for local entrepreneurship, providing the skills and start-up materials needed for youth and caregivers to set up small businesses.

We have adapted our job readiness/soft skills training to an online format in response to restrictions on travel and the need for social distancing. Developed in April and piloted by our team in Phnom Penh in May, online soft skills training has now been rolled out across all programs.

FROM MARCH TO SEPTEMBER, 394 (F 200) YOUTH AND CAREGIVERS PARTICIPATED IN ONLINE TRAINING, OF WHICH:

	Total	Youth	Caregivers
Soft Skills	292 (F 156)	228 (F 108)	64 (F 48)
English Lessons	102 (F 44)	102 (F 44)	0 -
	394 (F 200)	330 (F 152)	64 (F 48)

F. ADAPTING AND REOPENING OUR TRAINING BUSINESSES

We have been able to reopen the majority of our Vocational Training Businesses (VTBs), with business plans and marketing strategies adapted to the new context, and we are gradually seeing customer footfall increasing. However, given the sustained absence of tourism, VTBs including Marum in Siem Reap and Friends the Restaurant and Romdeng in Phnom Penh, remain closed indefinitely. Students from these programs have been offered enrollment in alternative Friends vocational training programs, referral to vocational training programs through partner NGOs, or support for job placement.

	Total	Female	% Female
Youth	85	29	34%
Caregivers	19	4	21%
	104	33	32%

	Total	Female	% Female
New Beneficiaries	31	8	26%

FROM THE REOPENING OF OUR VOCATIONAL TRAININGS (JUNE IN LAOS AND JULY IN CAMBODIA) TO SEPTEMBER, 104 (F 33) YOUTH AND CAREGIVERS, INCLUDING 31 (F 8) NEW BENEFICIARIES, WERE ABLE TO RE-ENROLL IN TRAININGS:

Friends reorganized all its VTBs to respond to the new market realities, with a focus on a local clientele and job placement either in growing sectors (e.g. retail and supermarkets) or community-based self-employment. We had to close trainings that are no longer relevant to market needs (the traditional restaurants, sewing), revise existing ones with new curricula and new marketing strategies (including our beauty salons, barbers and Let's Eat noodle restaurants) and, funding permitting, we have launched some new initiatives, including new local canteens and retail outlets.

Despite encouraging early successes in the reopening of our adapted VTBs, including a recent outdoor market event which generated \$1,900 for Let's Eat! noodle restaurant and our FnS shop in one day, our training business income will, for the foreseeable future, be considerably lower than pre-COVID. This is due to the disappearance of tourism, and the fact that the new price range targeted to local customers cannot provide the same profit margins, resulting in reducing our self-funding capacity. This of course has important implications for Friends' financial sustainability, and we anticipate a greater reliance on donor support throughout 2021 for this reason.

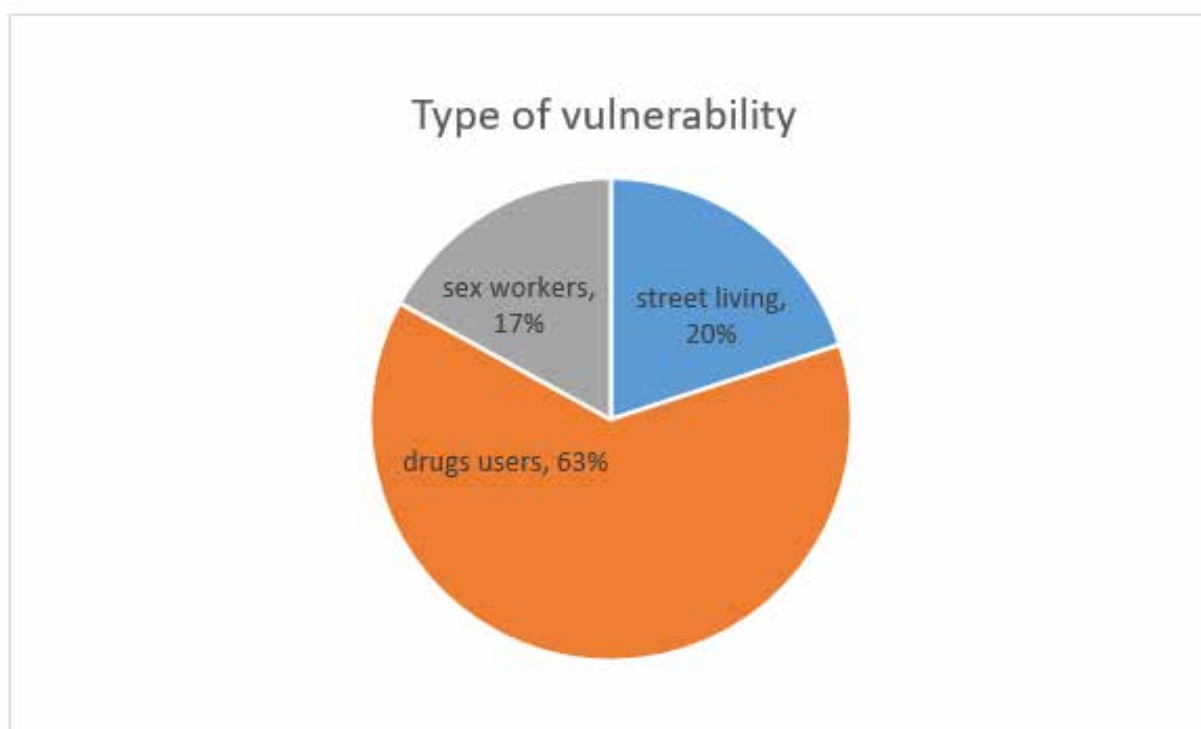
G. MAINTAINING TARGETED SERVICES FOR HIGHEST RISK POPULATIONS

Friends continued to maintain protection services for high-risk populations including people living on the streets, drug users and sex workers.

FROM MARCH TO SEPTEMBER

	Total	Female	% Female	Distributed
Children/Youth	1,360	581	43%	214,738
Caretakers/adults	644	270	42%	Condoms
	2,004	851	42%	453,100
				Targeted Services

NUMBER OF CHILDREN/YOUTH AND CAREGIVERS IDENTIFIED AS HIGH RISK PER TYPE OF VULNERABILITY



Our social workers have observed an increased number of sex workers in Cambodia and Laos and increased alcohol use in Cambodia, a trend likely to be emulated across other Friends program locations, due to the sustained impact of COVID-19 on marginalized communities across Southeast Asia. As a result, we are expecting the number of targeted services needed to also increase and potentially expand in response to evolving needs.

Welcome to the 7 Tips for Families During Lockdown

At ChildSafe, we know that for many families, including our own, 'lockdown' and/or the restrictions on social activities and interactions during the current pandemic poses a range of challenges, particularly when it comes to keeping our children safe and happy.

We want to support you as you guide your children through these unusual, and for many of us, challenging times, so we have created another in our '7 Tips' series to help you do that.



H. CHILDSAFE CAMPAIGN: 7 TIPS FOR FAMILIES DURING LOCKDOWN

With the onset of COVID-19, we rapidly worked to create a child protection support campaign focused on the new and evolving context - 7 Tips for Families During Lockdown. The campaign also included 7 Tips for Kids.

Developed and launched in the latter part of March 2020, the campaign focuses on 7 key areas of support for families and provides links to existing external online support content, with collated materials collected on a dedicated Family Campaign webpage on the ChildSafe website.

FROM MARCH TO SEPTEMBER

The total reach of ChildSafe campaign materials
for families in lockdown was

444,877
individuals

Content was initially developed in English for online sharing, however as the campaign rolled out, the Tips were also translated in French, Khmer and Thai for sharing on local language platforms with locally relevant links and information. Tips were shared across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (ChildSafe Movement as primary source, shared on through other program pages). As well as being disseminated online, campaign messages were disseminated in communities by staff and ChildSafe Agents, helping families with tips to keep their children safe and happy while schools were closed and social interactions and activities restricted. A limited number of hard copy materials were created and used by local language teams (Khmer, Thai), distributed in Cambodia and Thailand. Puzzles and coloring-in posters were also created.



I. SUPPORTING OUR PARTNERS

In response to the challenges faced by partners in our ChildSafe Alliance (CSA) and 3PC Cambodian child protection network, a series of meetings and sharing systems were put in place, to ensure ample opportunity for collaborative responses and support. This included facilitating regular Directors' Meetings to discuss the situation and response strategies, and Specialist Groups (including Safe Migration, Alcohol/Drugs and Violence against Children) with a focus on how the thematic area was affected, and programming adapted.

All Friends internal trainings, SOPs and associated materials were shared with upwards of 20 partners, including regular distribution of updates. We also distributed UNICEF IEC materials and Friends also received requests for materials by UNICEF Cambodia and UNICEF Vietnam.

In South Africa, our ChildSafe Alliance partner was supported to develop the first ChildSafe campaign on the continent. The '7 Tips to protect children on the beach', targets domestic travelers in the high season. The campaign is promoted directly on the beaches and social media with active participation of over 100 youth beach stewards, in partnership with local municipalities. And, despite the restrictions on international travel, a new ChildSafe Alliance partner was on-boarded in Malaysia, with distance training and sharing meetings continuing with partners in Vietnam, India, Nepal, Kenya and Thailand.



LOOKING TO 2021

As this turbulent year draws to a close, we can proudly reflect on the many important achievements made together for marginalized children, youth and families. 2021 will no doubt bring new challenges, and we are thankful to have your solidarity and support as we continue to navigate the months ahead, together. Priorities include:

- Ensuring children return to school: As schools start to reopen across the region, our teams will work with marginalized communities to ensure that caregivers understand the importance of their children returning to education, and that they have the financial means to support them to do so.
- Building families' resilience: We will continue to prioritize ensuring vulnerable youth and caregivers have access to soft and hard skills and employment placement or business start-up opportunities, in order to reduce their long-term reliance on emergency support from Friends or other NGOs during this period of huge unemployment and economic disruption. Our Futures employment teams continue to build partnerships with companies and employers who are emerging or expanding in the new context.
- New/adapted vocational training businesses: Our teams continue to explore new and emerging employment opportunities and identify potential vocational training models which will strengthen beneficiaries' employment/self-employment prospects in the new context. New training opportunities being developed for 2021 include a farming VTB on a tract of land donated to Friends near Phnom Penh, an air conditioning maintenance service and various retail training options in a selection of new shopping outlets.

- Building our Myanmar program: Friends' Myanmar program formally commenced operations just months before COVID hit the region. With a 'stay at home' order still in place in Yangon, this has limited our ability to build our services and expand our beneficiary reach, and this will be a priority for 2021, as marginalized communities' vulnerabilities increase due to COVID. This will include establishing and building a ChildSafe Agent network in Yangon.
- Friends Futures Factory: the Friends Futures Factory (F3) will be reinforced and developed with a stronger incubation program that will support young Cambodians in the creative fields (fine arts, performance, design and fashion in collaboration with Creative Generation), in starting their own business including retail, find employment, start an NGO or Social Enterprise. This will lead to a series of collections sold in the Friends shops, events and exhibitions that will attract more customers to our Vocational Training Businesses and increased training opportunities for young people. The model will be replicated in Siem Reap as a first step.

All the work described in this report was made possible thanks to your generous support and solidarity.

Thank you!

