Friends-International:  
SAVING LIVES AND BUILDING FUTURES IN THE COVID ERA

Over the course of 2020 and into 2021, Friends-International has risen to the many challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis, adapting our services and providing emergency relief for over 19,000 vulnerable children, youth and caregivers, training more than 36,000 beneficiaries on COVID-19 protection and prevention measures, and providing adapted education, vocational training and employment services to build longer-term resilience to the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic.

36,408 beneficiaries trained in COVID prevention & protection

19,047 children, youth and caregivers received emergency support

605,927 people reached with ChildSafe campaign information
In 2021, we face continued rising needs, while our finances remain constrained due to the suspension or closure of our social businesses, with a loss of over $1.8 million in social business income in 2020, projected to be even higher in 2021.

Moreover, as countries around the world are gradually starting to ease restrictions and open up their economies, the opposite has been happening across much of Southeast Asia. Cambodia, Thailand, Laos and Indonesia have all seen COVID-19 cases surging in recent months. In Myanmar, the instability wracking the country since the February 2020 coup mean its people face the double threat of both COVID-19 and immediate physical danger from gunshots and airstrikes. Friends is one of the few NGOs on the ground in Yangon providing life-saving services for children and families right now.

We continue to pivot our services to fast-changing realities on the ground and in just the last month, have transformed our Hospitality Vocational Trainings in Yangon, Phnom Penh and Vientiane into Emergency Soup Kitchens, where our staff and students are preparing and distributing meals to children and families who no longer have access to enough food.

We could not have achieved any of the work described in this report without the incredible generosity and flexible giving of our supporters.

Thank you!
One year on:
OUR ACHIEVEMENTS IN NUMBERS

The pandemic began to impact our country programs and beneficiaries in March 2020. With your support over the next 12 months, we achieved the following across Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Indonesia and Myanmar:

- **36,408 beneficiaries** (Female: 19,546) trained on COVID-19 awareness, prevention and protection measures

- **19,047 children, youth and caregivers** received tailored emergency support (e.g. food, hygiene materials, rent support)

- **4,065 children** (Female: 2,083) supported with remote education during the shut-down of schools

- **314** (Female: 113) children and youth supported to reintegrate into family-based care

- **870** (Female: 497) youth and caregivers supported with employment skills and job placement

- **2,328** (Female: 995) community-based ChildSafe Agents trained and upskilled to support and extend the reach of our outreach teams

- **8,939** beneficiaries protected by ChildSafe Agents

- **802,389** targeted services provided to 4,373 (F: 1,922) high-risk beneficiaries (sex workers, street living children and families, drug users)

- **605,927** people reached with ChildSafe campaign information for families in lockdown

With the pandemic’s impacts across much of Southeast Asia getting worse rather than better, our work continues apace, and we continue to evolve our services and develop new initiatives to respond to beneficiary needs and the changing contexts on the ground.
SPOTLIGHT ON YANGON:

Transforming our training restaurant into an emergency soup kitchen

Following the coup in Myanmar in February 2021, children and families already suffering the economic and health impacts of COVID-19 now have to contend with the daily threat of gunshots and airstrikes.

With much of Yangon still under martial law, the most vulnerable are now going hungry and resorting to desperate measures to survive.

Friends reacted fast, transforming our vocational training restaurant for marginalized students into an emergency soup kitchen, using the model we had already developed in Phnom Penh. Not only does this mean we are providing meals for children and families who would otherwise not have enough to eat, but it also provides the opportunity for our students to continue developing their culinary skills in preparation for placement in gainful employment or self-employment when this becomes possible. Right now, we are distributing over 30 meals a day for street-living and vulnerable families, but this number is climbing. As children and families come in, this is also an opportunity to provide them with important child protection information and how to keep themselves and others safe from COVID-19.

Our team are also providing non-formal education for out-of-school children, providing them with some semblance of normality during this crisis and ensuring they are able to keep up with their education.
SAVING LIVES DURING LOCKDOWN IN LAOS:

Lani’s story

Lani* is 27 years old and has a baby daughter. At the start of 2021, her husband moved from their home in the north of Laos to the capital Vientiane to work for a mobile construction company.

In April, having not heard from him for some time and needing money, Lani and her daughter travelled to the capital to search for him. She booked into a guesthouse and spent the next several days looking for him without success, unaware that COVID-19 was now spreading in the city and a lockdown was imminent.

On 23 April, after spending the day searching for her husband, Lani returned to the guesthouse and was told by the owner that due to the lockdown she could no longer stay there. Thinking she would return home, she headed to the bus station, only to find it was closed and there was no public transport available. She wandered the city until she met with some police officers, who suggested that she go to Friends’ Drop-In Centre for help.

Arriving at our Drop-In Center, she met with a Friends social worker who arranged safe accommodation for her, since she had run out of money. Our staff also contacted her family to inform them that she was there and safe. However, the next evening her daughter became unwell. The team brought mum and daughter to the hospital, where she received full support for a two-night stay, including all the medical costs.

Our team contacted her family in the provinces again and learned that that they had heard from friends that her husband had been arrested during the Lao New Year. Our team contacted police stations around the city to locate her husband. He was eventually found, but will have to remain in prison to complete his sentence.

Lani wanted to return home with her baby, but had to wait in Vientiane under the care of Friends until the second phase of lockdown began. The authorities would allow her to go back home after the first two weeks of lockdown ended. Her relatives traveled to meet her, and eventually Lani and her baby began the journey back home, with further support from Friends.

Every day, across all our programs the many challenges posed by lockdowns, curfews and restrictions on the most vulnerable are being met by our teams, the #everydayheroes of Friends.

*Name changed to protect beneficiary’s identity
Hunger on the rise:
FOOD SUPPORT FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE

Recognizing the terrible impacts of lockdown on the most vulnerable in Phnom Penh, we set up an emergency meal distribution service, which now provides over 400 meals a day to street-living and vulnerable children and families, while also providing skills training and work for our vocational training staff and students. We have also rolled out this model in Yangon and Vientiane, and continue to provide emergency relief to the most vulnerable families across all program locations.

“I’ll die of hunger before I die of COVID-19”
— these were the bleak words of one woman speaking to our Founder and Executive Director Sebastien Marot about the impacts of COVID-19 on her ability to make ends meet.
Rising to the COVID challenge:
ADAPTING OUR TRAINING AND EDUCATION SERVICES

With all our country programs experiencing intermittent lockdowns, many of our vocational training and employment readiness trainings have been adapted for online delivery to ensure we can continue to support our students during periods of restricted movement. Our outreach teams and ChildSafe Agents are also delivering homework to children in the community to ensure they keep up with school during closures.
Innovative solutions: LIVESTREAM SHOPPING EXPERIENCE AND JOB CREATION

Following the closure of our Friends ‘n’ Stuff shop due to lockdown and restrictions on businesses, we are now livestreaming product sales on social media, with our ChildSafe Agents earning an income when they deliver products to our customers. This means continued employment for our home-based producers, income for our Agents and all profits reinvested back in Friends’ work! Sales have increased over 1,000% since shifting online. We also support our ChildSafe Agents through employing them to deliver emergency support to families and delivering take-away meals from our vocational training restaurant Let’s Eat to customers.

1,064%
Increase in Friends ‘n’ Stuff product sales since we started livestreaming
Friends at the border:  
SUPPORTING MIGRANT COMMUNITIES

On the Thai-Cambodian border, families have been massively affected by the border closures due to the pandemic. Our team are there distributing emergency food and other provisions to families who have lost their income and cannot meet their basic needs.
Everyday Heroes:
WORKING DAY AND NIGHT

Throughout the day our outreach teams and ChildSafe Agents are delivering emergency support to families, distributing homework during school closures, and providing other essential services. But their work doesn’t stop when the sun goes down. COVID-19 has forced caregivers to make impossible choices to ensure they can afford to take care of their families – for some turning to sex work has seemed their only option. That’s why, across our country programs, our teams also visit known sex worker locations at night (although during curfews this had to be changed to late afternoon), to provide immediate services to support them and provide alternative livelihood options.
Stay safe, stay healthy:
PROTECTING BENEFICIARIES, STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

From March 2020 - 2021, we provided COVID-19 prevention and protection awareness training to over 36,000 children, youth and caregivers, as well as providing regular training and refreshers to staff and volunteers. All our activities are delivered with strict safety protocols in place.

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

Thank you!