



Together, building futures.

Friends-International:

SAVING LIVES AND BUILDING FUTURES
IN THE COVID ERA

Progress Report | December 2021



SAVING LIVES AND BUILDING FUTURES, TOGETHER

As 2021 draws to a close, we would like to take a moment to reflect proudly on all that has been achieved with your support. In this report you'll see some impressive numbers: almost a hundred thousand meals distributed to street-living families, which provides a crucial entry point to identify needs and provide sustainable support; tens of thousands of homework sheets distributed and graded for out-of-school children; hundreds of youth and caregivers without income placed in safe employment or self-employment, to highlight a few. Behind all these big numbers are individual lives that have been touched by your support, and we cannot thank you enough.

As schools are now reopening across Southeast Asia, this report has a particular focus on Friends' education services and the children we're supporting to get back into school as soon as possible. We hope you enjoy seeing and hearing from them.

At the same time, with new COVID variants threatening future restrictions and lockdowns, and many countries continuing to prioritize domestic spending to the detriment of poorer nations, we thank you for your support to date and are grateful for your continued solidarity in keeping up this vital work in 2022.





Emergency meal distribution by our ChildSafe Alliance partner KCDI in Kampot



Staying safe at our newly-reopened Education Centre in Phnom Penh



In Siem Reap our team supports street-living populations to get registered for vaccinations



Registering children to return to school in Bangkok



Education support in Siem Reap



Community campaigns on keeping safe from COVID in Siem Reap



Supporting education during school closure in Yangon

2021

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS IN NUMBERS

With your support, we've been able to make a tangible difference for those hit hardest by the pandemic across Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Indonesia and Myanmar. Some examples of what we've achieved together between January and September 2021 include:

97,756
meals

distributed to street-living and vulnerable families by Friends-International (90,418) and our NGO partners in the ChildSafe Alliance (7,338)

24,913
children, youth and caregivers

received tailored emergency support (e.g. food, hygiene materials, rent support)

24,913
beneficiaries
(Female: 12,909)

trained on COVID-19 awareness, prevention and protection measures

3,591
(Female: 1,888)

children supported with remote education during the shut-down of schools



835
(Female: 385)

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

139
(Female: 61)

children and youth supported to reintegrate into family-based care

1,026
(Female: 591)

youth and caregivers supported with employment skills and job placement

6,828
(Female: 3,701)

beneficiaries protected by ChildSafe Agents

¹ Please note that as per Friends' standard data collection processes, data collected at the start of each new year includes new beneficiaries and existing beneficiaries who continue to receive services. As we have added 2021 data to our ongoing COVID response numbers from 2020, we acknowledge there may be a small margin of overlap of beneficiaries counted.

² Friends' emergency meal distribution service has been provided from April-May 2021 in Phnom Penh, Vientiane and Yangon. The service is ongoing in Phnom Penh and Yangon.

Image: Learning at Friends Transitional Home during lockdown in Laos





SPOTLIGHT ON:

Back to school across Southeast Asia

Children like Kuu Kuu (read her story below) across Southeast Asia have been out of school for nearly two years. For the most marginalized, this can mean that they no longer receive any education at all. Perhaps they don't have internet access to study from home, perhaps their parents lack the education to support them in their home studies, or perhaps they have to start working to help their family meet their basic needs.

Friends started in 1994 as a service to get children off the streets and back into classrooms, and this has always been an integral part of our programs. As with all our services, the pandemic meant we had to evolve our approach to reach out-of-school children during prolonged school closures and restrictions on movement. Our teams have stepped up to this challenge by:

- Establishing community-based homework distribution models, whereby our ChildSafe Agents, community-based volunteers trained by Friends to complement the work of our outreach teams, deliver and collect children's homework, which is both prepared and corrected by our teachers
- Setting up Education Hotlines for children and caregivers to call with questions about their homework or studies
- Providing access to distance learning programs at our community-based Drop-in Centres, where children can access computers or TVs to follow Government education programs
- Lending mobile phones to children to enable them to access distance learning and other study materials from home.

Image: Receiving education support from Friends in Siem Reap



Since October, we have seen the tentative reopening of schools across the region, which is fantastic news. Even so, we are concerned by the significant number of children who are not returning to school. For example, our team in Siem Reap observed a 30% reduction in children re-attending one local school compared to pre-pandemic. This highlights the particular importance of community sensitization and specific assessments and support to caregivers to ensure that they are able to support their children's education. This will be a big priority for our teams in the months ahead. Right now, they are focused on:

- Reducing COVID-related school drop-out: our teams are resuming community campaigns to inform caregivers about getting their children back to school and facilitating the reintegration process as needed
- Minimizing the risk of future drop-out: Many children fell even further behind with their studies during the pandemic, so our teachers will be providing in-person support classes to supplement their learning at school to reduce the risk of future drop-out
- Ensuring that children who are not yet ready for public school reintegration are supported to do so as soon as possible: Our teachers provide in-person education at our Friends Remedial Schools
- Helping children's caregivers to support their education and other basic needs: Support is needs-based and varies from family to family, but may include: emergency support, provision of uniforms and other school materials, training in hard skills and job placement or support to start their own small business.

220

The number of children who have not returned to one of the schools we work at in Siem Reap since it opened in November 2021, around 30% of the total student body.



Stories from Myanmar and Cambodia ^{1/2}



KUU KUU'S STORY

"I can't learn online as we don't have internet"

"Mingalaba!

My name is Kuu Kuu³, I'm 14 years old and I live in Yangon city, in Myanmar.

My mum and dad are vendors, but now they are getting emergency family support every month from Friends-International as things are difficult at the moment.

I like school. My favorite subject is Maths - I find it so interesting. However, my school has been closed for two years now, because of COVID and also the security situation here.

I miss my friends and my teachers. I miss my school life and I feel quite lonely. I don't know how to do online learning and I have no access to the internet anyway, so I'm very happy that Friends support me too.

The Friends teacher calls me by phone three times a week and also brings me text books and checks my homework. They will also help me go back to school when it re-opens and will help with my school fees."

Image: Friends is providing education support for children in Yangon

³*All names changed to protect beneficiaries' identities



Stories from Myanmar and Cambodia ^{2/2}

MS. THEARA'S STORY

Getting children out of work and back to school

Just two years ago, Ms. Theara , a widow and mother of five, was one of many snack sellers operating around the famous Angkor temple complex, just outside the bustling tourist destination of Siem Reap, Cambodia.

That stopped abruptly in March 2020, as the global impact of COVID-19 effectively ended international tourism. With no tourists to sell to, there was no income. The family soon began to struggle to have enough food to eat each day.

Ms. Theara found the family seasonal jobs as potato collectors. Together, they could make up to \$5 a day, and when there was no work collecting potatoes, they undertook the risky activity of going out into the forests to illegally collect fruits, nuts and vegetables to sell at the local market.

Fortunately, the family were referred to Friends' team in Siem Reap by the local authorities. Following a comprehensive needs assessment, a tailored support plan was created for them, with the first step being helping them register for an ID-Poor card, which would make them eligible for government cash transfers. From that point, the basic food needs of the family could be met without the younger children having to work.

Next, our team started providing remote education support to the three younger children to prepare them for school reintegration. Meanwhile, Ms Theara and her older children were provided with employment support, eventually equipping her with the training and start-up materials to set up a small business selling fruits and second-hand clothing.

Gradually, Ms Theara's business started to make enough income to support the family, and our Futures team are working on job placements for her two older children. The family now has a stable income without relying on emergency support, and Ms Theara's youngest three children don't have to worry about working for a living and can instead enjoy studying again.

⁴*All names changed to protect beneficiaries' identities





A young person works on a homework sheet provided by our teams



In-person vocational training resumed in Phnom Penh in November 2021



Moto mechanics training in Phnom Penh



Receiving education support from Friends in Siem Reap



Socially distanced Beauty Training in Siem Reap



Class resumes at our recently re-opened Education Centre in Phnom Penh

Kids' Art Gallery

For our current 'My Education, My Future' fundraising campaign, we asked children we've supported during school closures to draw about their education. Below you'll find a selection from our young artists - the common themes were missing seeing their friends and wanting to get back in the classroom!



From top left in clockwise order:

1. "I miss my school and my teachers - I want to graduate", by Khin Khi from Myanmar
2. "Staying safe from COVID", by Bourey from Cambodia
3. "I miss school", by Sim from Laos
4. "I want to study, I miss my friends, school feeds me with knowledge", by Mean Sanbath from Cambodia
5. "I miss school, I want to learn", by Gawa from Myanmar
6. "Thank you to all the Transitional Home mothers and fathers", by Mean Sambath from Cambodia
7. "Because of COVID we cannot go to school", by Sim from Laos
8. "My friends", by Chanthou from Cambodia



SPOTLIGHT ON:

Safer futures for Sex Workers and their Families



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Street-based sex workers and their children supported with community-based accommodation by our team in Phnom Penh between July – October 2021

Prolonged curfews, lockdowns and other restrictions throughout the pandemic hit the young women, men and transgender people who work as sex workers in Phnom Penh particularly hard. For many of them, the situation became critical very fast as they couldn't even afford food for themselves and their children.

Our night outreach social workers adapted their schedule and activities respecting changing constraints during curfews and lockdowns, using motorbikes to travel around rather than the Night Bus, for example. This allowed our social workers to maintain contact with and provide support to vulnerable sex workers and their families, with services including counselling, parenting skills and harm reduction.

The social workers conducted rapid individual assessments to understand the needs and challenges these young people were facing; these were primarily related to a need for food support and concerns over personal safety on the streets due to police arrests and 'clean-ups' of street-living populations, which have become more common throughout the pandemic.







Between July and October 2021, 74 sex workers and their families were identified as being in need of urgent support, including food support. They were all referred to receive meals from our emergency soup kitchen. To address concerns around safety on the streets, we were able to move 48 street-based sex workers and their children into group homes in the local communities, providing additional needs-based support as required. To date, five of the sex workers have successfully been placed in safer employment by our Futures team. For others, employment placement is ongoing.

Image: As COVID restrictions have loosened, we have been able to relaunch the Night Bus with strict safety protocols in place



LOOKING AHEAD TO 2022

It is already clear that COVID will remain with us into 2022 and an ability to quickly adapt and evolve services and approaches to changing contexts and needs will remain central to our work. It will undoubtedly be another busy year and we are thankful for being able to count on your support. Some of our key priorities for the coming months include:

-  Responding to emergency needs as they appear, including food distribution and emergency support for children, youth and families to ensure that families can survive this difficult time and children are safe
-  School reintegration: as schools continue to open, we will be focusing on community campaigns around the importance of returning children to school, and supporting caregivers to reintegrate and keep their children in education
-  In-person training: restrictions are also loosening on the provision of in-person vocational training, and our teams are starting to welcome more students back into the kitchens, salons and workshops in a way that is safe for staff and beneficiaries
-  Preparing for the return of tourism: tourists are now back in Thailand, and with quarantine measures recently lifted in Cambodia, we can expect more international travelers in the months ahead. This means we need to mobilize our teams again to protect communities from both new and re-emerging risks related to tourism including child abuse and sexual exploitation, a risk that Covid has exacerbated
-  Jobs: a central part of supporting families' sustainable recovery will be getting caregivers and youth (back) into safe employment. This remains extremely challenging, and we will need to continue to diversify and identify new employment markets and opportunities for work and pilot new solutions
-  Supporting our partners and scaling solutions: throughout the pandemic we have provided both technical and financial support to our NGO partners (ChildSafe Alliance partners) to enable them to replicate successful solutions such as our emergency soup kitchen model. This will remain a priority in 2022, with a particular focus on employment.



ALL THE WORK DESCRIBED
IN THIS REPORT WAS MADE
POSSIBLE THANKS TO YOUR
GENEROUS SUPPORT AND
SOLIDARITY. THANK YOU!



Together, building futures.

