



# HELPING HANDS CAMBODIA NEWSLETTER

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## SET'S STORY by Meaghan (a volunteer from America)



*Chanty and I have spent many days roaming the village on foot. Our goal has been to create a community map, which is more than just a map showing physical structures such as houses and roads. Our community map details the different kinds of houses, which are a good indication of a family's income level. It shows locations of cement wells, water pumps, and open ground water holes. It indicates homes of single parents, our eye patients, and children who do not go to school. It shows little, medium-sized and impressive vegetable gardens. It also highlights areas of interest, such as the home of a landmine victim who has a sewing machine from another organization, and an amazing crocheting skill, Mr Boon's mango plantation and a family's unique duck farm.*

*We have found many treasures in the village. Our goal is to build upon these existing assets to continue our sustainable development approach. We have also seen extreme poverty, vulnerability, and desperation.*

*One day we met a single mother called Set. This is her story.....*

Set looked Chanty in the eye and answered his questions. She shared stories, some painful ones and some hilarious ones. We sat crouched on the ground as time flew by.



Set revealed how her husband had worked in slave-like conditions in Thailand (fishing and on construction sites) and returned home after four years with no money and infected with AIDS. He passed away. Set animatedly explained how she fainted while she and her children were tested. Neither mother nor children are infected.



Set was struggling to feed and clothe her three children, and with tears in her eyes and her parents sitting at her side, she asked me to take her children and put them in an orphanage. The children reacted to her words by screaming in fear and anger and hitting her.

I quickly asked her if she had any skills, explained to her about our community mapping, and inquired if she could assist us with it.

The conversation spun from desperation to opportunity. Set said she could grow vegetables and we also thought she could help us with the community mapping. We decided to give Set a job at our school looking after the vegetable garden.

Now, every day Set is at our school, with a baby on her hip, a smile on her face, and sweat running down her face as she works the soil and waters the plants in the school vegetable garden. She works two hours every day for which we pay her a modest salary. Her oldest boy just started school for the first time.



When Set received her first salary she was a bit confused. She had never seen a dollar before, and with no math skills, could not figure out the value of it. This weakness planted the seed of creating numeracy classes for adults.

Set gazes up from watering the garden and scans the schoolyard for her baby and son. The baby is sleeping peacefully in a hammock and her son is peeking in on the English class. A smile erupts on Set's beautiful face, stretching from ear to ear. She steals a few moments and just watches him. Her eyes are full of love and

pride.

It is difficult to remember how, just a short time ago, this mother felt so desperate, how she thought that the opportunity for healthy meals and education was better than her love. She loved her sons so much that she was will to give them away.



Now they can have both, her love and an education and healthy meals. She can give them a future.

*Thank you for taking  
the time to read this  
and thank you for  
caring.*

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