KNOWLEDGE AT YOUR FINGERTIPS
Cambodia
Bucknell University
Kimseang Am

Summary

A two-sentence summary of your project
We bring knowledge to the students’ fingertips by constructing a library at “Coconut School” in rural Cambodia, purchasing eight new laptops and training students basic computer skills.

Project Description

How did you decide what issue(s) you wanted to address and what approach(es) or strategies you chose to implement in your project?
This project started because I love libraries. As I grew up, home was not a comfortable place to focus and study. When I came to the United States, I was very impressed with the fact that everyone has access to free public libraries. I want the same for students back in my home country - Cambodia. There are so many opportunities available out there but those students are not able to see or apply just because they do not have access to the computers and internet. These computer skills they are acquiring will close those gaps.

Why did you choose your host site? In what ways did local relationships support you or contribute to the project?
I chose “Coconut School” because it is a school that is on a rural mountain in Cambodia and it provides free education to students in the village. Coconut School is known for using trash to build their classrooms. They use recycled materials such as glass bottles and old car tires for their classrooms’ walls. In the past, the Coconut School director had asked the Ministry of Education to build a public school on the mountain, but the proposal was rejected because there were not enough students. Even though the number of students was not a lot, they still should not be neglected.

What changes or adjustments did you make to your original plans, and why?
The major change to my project is allocating a big portion of the fund to the library construction. The library was only about 30% finished in May when I started the project. Because the school runs on donations, it was very unpredictable that it would be finished by the end of the project timeline (August - when I would bring the computers and teach the students). Therefore, I used some of the funding for the library construction. For the sustainability of the project, I also allocated some funding for a teacher’s salary to continue teaching the computer skill to the students.

Did other fundraising efforts contribute to your project? What were they?
I am a SHE-CAN scholar. SHE-CAN stands for Supporting Her Education, Changes A Nation. I applied and received a $2,000 from SHE-CAN “Make A Change” grant for this project as well.

Reflection

How do you define peace?
I define peace as not leaving anyone behind. As our society progresses, not many people are privileged enough to follow the quick change. Those young kids on the mountain are also human resources of Cambodia, they should receive education and skills as everyone else.
In what ways might your project contribute to peace? What changes occurred? Short-term?
Long-term?
By not leaving anyone behind, we -as a society- will progress together. In the short-term, once they have proficient computer and internet skills, they should be able to teach themselves and be educated on what's happening in the world, not only just in their village. In the long-term, they will be able to teach the younger students on what they have learned, pursue higher education, and make a bigger change in their community and beyond.

Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has the project changed, challenged, or inspired you?
This project has made me even more humble. I talked to a student during the break time, she told me she is 12 years old and she is in grade 2. She should have been in grade 6. The pandemic has caused a lot of disruption to this community. There was no online learning like the majority of American students have access to. Again, it proves that my worries were right. They were left behind.

Personal Statement

A brief statement, suitable for use as a quotation, addressing the value of this project and what you have learned. Indicate the student’s name (yours or your teammates’) for quote attribution.
“To a lot of people outside of this community, it seems simple to just learn to type. However, some of the students at the Coconut School have never seen or touched a laptop before. So learning to type the laptops brought them so much joy and hope. It made me realize that we have taken the things we have access to and use in our daily lives for granted. They have made me even more humble and grateful.”
- Kimseang Am