



BUILDING coffee dreams IN CAMBODIA



WHEN STEVE MCGINNESS SAW THE SITUATION ON THE GROUND IN CAMBODIA, HE KNEW HE HAD TO PITCH IN WITH HELPING THE COUNTRY'S POOREST CHILDREN.

Feeding Dreams Cambodia is a community school that gives free education and daily meals to the poorest children in Siem Reap. The aim is to give children the skills to lift them out of poverty into solid employment in Cambodia, a huge outcome in a country where nearly a fifth of the population lives below the poverty line.

Steve is well known in Australia through his innovative work at Melbourne's Beans and Bagels and with Beans Coffee Roastery, and was on a holiday in Cambodia 18 months ago when his good friend Roger Benedetti asked him to visit a school in Siem Reap. "On arrival," Steve says, "I met a wonderful Australian lady, Kerry Huntly and I saw firsthand the magnificent work she, co-director Arlene Gormley and their dedicated team do while working with limited donation-based resources to change the lives of many disconnected families – families that battle to survive each day often without the basic necessities of life."

Feeding Dreams Cambodia was established in 2012 to break the poverty cycle by providing education, a health program and meals for over 800 children each day. This is especially critical in Cambodia because the education of young children is a secondary concern, with most children sent to work after only achieving a second or third grade level of education.

"These kids are always smiling, energetic and enthusiastic," Steve says. "It wasn't until I went to the villages that it hit home the conditions these kids live in day to day. Most have a life story we find hard to believe including poverty, hunger, abuse and violence, and death is a real, common and every day risk."

Steve immediately sponsored the school's football team with uniforms and boots, and returned to Cambodia with his 18 year old son in January this year. The duo shadowed different teachers at the school to learn their methods, and ended up helping to teach English to the younger children.

During this visit, co-director Arlene explained the future for Feeding Dreams Cambodia, the establishment of a vocational training centre. Siem

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Reap's tourism industry is booming and that's created significant demand for skilled workers. "And then Arlene mentioned they were opening a training centre to offer a pathway for local youth: where older teenagers are taught hospitality skills in an accredited program recognised by the Ministry of Education and Department of Tourism.

"Arlene went on to explain that they wanted to do barista training, but had no budget left for equipment or had any expertise in this area. After some quick deliberation, the team at Beans Coffee Roastery decided to help and donate an espresso machine, grinder and tools needed to start the barista training program."

More than two years of planning came to fruition on June 6 at the grand opening of the Feeding Dreams Vocational Training Centre with dignitaries including Siem Reap's Deputy of Tourism Suvith Yea, the Deputy of Labour Law and Vocational Training and Commune Chief Sala Kamrek attending.

The training centre will open doors for a new generation of young people who otherwise would have been left behind. Coffee's on the menu, thanks to Steve and the Beans Coffee Roastery team, and it's there to stay.

Steve is urging Australians to consider supporting Feeding Dreams Cambodia as a volunteer, by making a one-off donations, or sponsoring a child or teacher.

"Once you walk through the front gates you feel like you are part of the FDC family. The kids will greet you with high fives and hugs and the team are always upbeat and happy to see you. It showed me how a small offering can make a big difference to someone's life in Cambodia. It opened my eyes to how lucky we are and made me rethink what is really important."

If you would like to help, please contact:

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