

SUCCESS STORY

Realizing Dreams through Dedication and Community Service Learning

California State University, Fullerton/Paññasastra University of Cambodia/California State University, Long Beach



HED photos

Two students, Sayorn Chin, right, are among the many youth who have gained access to education and a place to call home in Cambodia.



Orphans at the Hope of Orphanage Association. HOA benefits from the Paññasastra University of Cambodia's student volunteers through a service-learning program.

Sayorn Chin dreams of one day attending Stanford University to study math or engineering. Thanks to a partnership with California State University, Fullerton and Paññasastra University of Cambodia (PUC), he may realize that dream. The partnership is supported by Higher Education for Development (HED) and funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

The 14-year-old orphan, whose parents died from HIV/AIDS, was living on the streets of Phnom Penh just a few years ago. But today, the prospect of attending Stanford doesn't seem as far fetched. "CCH [Center for Children to Happiness] changed my life!" he said. "Now I believe anything is possible."

Through a community service learning program, PUC students earn course credit for voluntary service at non-government organizations, the result of a higher education partnership established with California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) in 2003. Higher education students serve their communities and their behavior shows that education is critical to developing opportunities.

Sayorn is just one of hundreds of children benefiting from the leadership and dedication of locally run NGOs in Phnom Penh. Organizations such as CCH provide a haven for orphans and abused or neglected children. Sayorn was discovered by Mech Sokha, an orphan and founder and director of CCH. Sokha brought him to the orphanage where he could live and become part of an extended family. PUC students also mentored and taught Sayorn English, math, and other subjects.

Inspired by Sokha's example, Sayorn dedicated himself to his studies and earned an internationally recognized baccalaureate degree from United World College that resulted in a scholarship to study in Singapore. Today, his community and extended family hopefully await his admission to Stanford and the realization of his dreams and others like him.

PUC students are also joined annually by counterparts from California State University, Long Beach, who were inspired by the original collaboration to volunteer 20-25 hours at an NGO in Phnom Penh and to raise funds to support locally run organizations. Together, they volunteer on behalf of numerous Cambodian NGOs that participate in the PUC service learning center to reach and support orphans and those in need. Their inspiring work is an important and ongoing result of the initial partnership.