

A Cambodian education

As the first Cambodian foundation dedicated to the education of deaf children, Krousar Thmey is now 21 years old. Julie Carcaly sheds some light on its work

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Krousar Thmey is the only Cambodian organisation for the education of deaf children. Created in 1991 in the refugee camps of Thailand, the foundation, run by Cambodians for Cambodians, works towards the integration of young deaf people into society. Ever since the repatriation process that took place in Cambodia in the 1990s, Krousar Thmey has been assisting underprivileged children, providing solutions adapted to each individual child. Schools for blind or deaf children have been built; structures to welcome children who are victims of poverty, human trafficking or difficult family situations have been developed and a programme to help Cambodian children, appropriate to their own culture, has been initiated.

Special education lies at the heart of Krousar Thmey's work. In Cambodia, disability is thought to be the result of 'bad karma' and leads to social exclusion. Blindness and deafness are the most prevalent disabilities among Cambodian children and there are approximately 250,000 deaf people in the country. The first school for deaf children built by Krousar Thmey in 1997 is situated in Chbar Ampov, in the suburbs of Phnom Penh. Today, four other schools have been opened – in Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, Battambang and Kampong Cham. They cater for a total of 497 deaf pupils from kindergarten to A-levels, including 221 girls.

Furthermore, Krousar Thmey has recently created a new department of vocational training to help disabled young people find their way in higher education or find a job that suits them. This department currently supports six deaf students at university (three of whom are girls) and ten students following a vocational training (including four girls).

At school, deaf children stay full time in one of Krousar Thmey's special schools until grade 4, when they then go to state schools on a half-day basis to facilitate their integration. Moreover, 29 integrated classes have been introduced in state schools so that deaf pupils living too far away from a special school can still access an adapted education without having to leave their families.

Having developed Khmer Sign Language, a sign language committee works on perfecting the adaptation of academic textbooks and on the distribution of a specialised dictionary. The committee also provides sign language translations of the news on two national television channels.

Finally, Krousar Thmey's work includes a campaign to raise awareness among the Cambodian population about the education of deaf and blind children, and to facilitate the integration of disabled people into society.

Core trainers for Teachers for the Deaf and deaf teachers

The difficulty faced by Teachers for the Deaf is how to explain a concept in class. It is easy to explain what a car is: the teacher signs the name in Khmer and shows the picture to the children, but it is hard to explain concepts like a feeling or an image with a language that is new and therefore still a little limited. Here lies the need for the teachers to follow training adapted to education for deaf young people, with the support of the Government.

Krousar Thmey's goal is to hand over the programme of special education to the Ministry of Education. With this in mind, the Cambodian foundation has, from the



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Miss LAO Kaliyan, one of Krousar Thmey's core trainers

Krousar Thmey – key figures for 2011

- 4,000 children supported
- A team of 400 Cambodians
- 62 teachers for deaf pupils, including 31 women
- Activity in five of the biggest cities in Cambodia and in 14 provinces
- Less than 4% administrative costs
- First deaf pupils were awarded their A-levels in 2009.

beginning, worked with the Government in order to adapt the national curricula for disabled children.

Core trainers are being trained to teach Teachers for the Deaf. There are currently 14 core trainers (six women) in the five special schools. The training of core trainers has two distinct steps:

- The core trainers selected by Krousar Thmey follow training sessions with the National Institute of Education (NIE) (part of the Ministry of Education) to learn about lesson planning, research strategy and teaching methods.
- Specific training sessions in sign language are provided, paid for by Krousar Thmey and taking place with the NIE as well. These sessions are slower because they only take place in silence and help the core trainers learn how to explain different concepts to the teachers so that they can instruct deaf children. These training events usually take place once a year.

However, when they feel that they need an update, the core trainers call the Ministry and arrange a meeting to consolidate their knowledge. The Ministry's personnel also come, on a regular basis, to monitor the teachers in action and make them adjust some of their teaching methods.

Core teachers then organise training sessions with the Teachers for the Deaf. These training activities take place during the summer vacation. All the teachers from the different provinces of Cambodia come to Phnom Penh to be taught by the newly trained core trainers.

The work with the Ministry of Education does not end there. Indeed, Krousar Thmey, as the founder of education for deaf children, acts as a reference on which the Ministry relies when it comes to adapt the national curricula to special education.

Finally, it is important to outline that Krousar Thmey employs 13 deaf teachers, including four women. Having received an education in one of the foundation's special schools, some students decide to stay and teach deaf children themselves. These teachers go to the same training sessions as their colleagues.

Julie Carcaly is the Communication Officer for Krousar Thmey (www.krousar-thmey.org). For information about the education of deaf or hearing-impaired Cambodian children email communication@krousar-thmey.org.



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