

# SAVONG FOUNDATION ANNUAL REPORT 2019



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*Phil Caldwell CEO  
Jenny Lau Treasurer  
Eddie Lamborn Scholarship Manager  
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[www.savongfoundation.org](http://www.savongfoundation.org)

501(c)(3) non profit for  
Cambodia

# LETTER FROM THE CEO



We strive to find financially underprivileged students with big dreams who are motivated to pursue professional careers.

*Phil Caldwell CEO*

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When the Savong Foundation was in its infancy many years ago, I read a blog called “*Lessons I Learned*” by Daniela Papi. At the time, she was the director and co-founder of Pepy, an education NGO working with underprivileged students. Her raw insights into the world of helping the Khmer people taught me a lot about what worked and what didn’t. She wasn’t afraid to say that she had made some mistakes but was determined to move forward and learn from them.

Our NGO is now entering its ninth year and despite all the information I absorbed from Daniela’s blog, we also struggled during the early years and I wondered whether our nonprofit would even reach its second birthday. We battled with difficult students, unfocused goals, cultural misunderstandings and sometimes very little funds to do what we wanted to do. Despite the hurdles, the Savong Foundation survived and I can look back and share some of the rules that were forged through trial and error. Some of them may sound cliché or stereotypical but they have served us well and ultimately have benefited our projects, our students as well as our donors.

Here they are:

## **NEVER CONFUSE WANTS WITH NEEDS**

Everyone wants something, right? It’s human nature but when you’re running an NGO and want to keep costs to a minimum, you must sort out what is really needed vs. just wanted. In Cambodia, Western and Khmer value systems often do not align and what many Westerners may believe is “needed” just isn’t the case in Khmer communities, and vice versa.

For example, I remember setting up the Savong Student Center which was envisioned to be a student living/learning center. The students would sleep there but there would also be a classroom where the students would learn English and computers. A refrigerator was requested which at the time made a lot of sense. If I can't live without a refrigerator, how can our students?

So we bought a fridge and paid for the monthly electrical bill. However, as we later figured out, they didn't need it. Most Khmer people can happily do without a fridge because they buy their food fresh from the market every day or eat from street vendors. Sure, the fridge was nice and I'm sure the students enjoyed it while they had it but it was a completely unnecessary expense.

## **QUID PRO QUO**

You help me and I'll help you. In the earlier years, our student vetting was nowhere near as strong as it is today. If a student needed help to go to school, then we would support him or her and in many cases, we supported students unconditionally. If they skipped classes, failed their classes or even lied to us then we still supported them because we know they needed the help and like a tolerant parent, we were there to provide it.

This approach only caused us frustration and gave the students wide latitude with their behavior. We had to set up a strict set of standards for our students and let them know that we were happy to support them but in return we expected them to work hard at school and take it seriously. With this different approach, we had to stop supporting a few students but I'm happy to say we now have the most motivated and successful students that we've ever had.

## **THEY THINK WESTERNERS ARE RICH SO STOP REINFORCING THIS BY BEING SANTA CLAUS**

One of the biggest mistakes we made back in the day was bringing toys back from the States to share with our younger students. It seemed innocent enough; the kids didn't have anything to play with and we thought it would be a nice gesture. There were a couple of problems with this way of thinking. It definitely fostered the idea that westerners are basically walking ATMs and money had no value for us. The other problem is that students didn't appreciate the free gifts because they didn't ask for them, they certainly didn't pay for them and it was easy come, easy go.

One of our board members donated a very large number of electronic skipping ropes one year and I brought them over in a huge cardboard box. The students loved them the first day, the second day not so much. A year later, the only skipping rope I saw was on the roof of one of the buildings. All the others had disappeared.

## **KEEP IT SIMPLE**

The KISS principle definitely applies to any work done in Cambodia, especially if you're dealing with a relatively low budget and minimal resources. When I went back to Cambodia for the second time in 2009, I wanted to help with the dire water situation. Families in the countryside were drinking the most polluted water you could imagine. Small water pumps were easy to build, relatively affordable and could make the whole family healthier. I also realized that a lot of great students were missing out on their education because they couldn't afford to go to school so we started focusing on scholarships. We had students at various high schools and sometimes we received report cards and sometimes we didn't. Trying to keep track of all the students at various locations was a huge headache. Then we decided to support the Savong Student Center and we had ambitions to provide free English and computer classes to the surrounding neighborhood. On top of that, I was trying to find ways of raising more money so we tried our hand at jewelry design and selling t-shirts. There was a lot going on and it was just too much.

The solution was to simplify: Now, we send our high school students to either Future Bright International School or IQ International School, both of which have great reputations and keep us well informed about how our students are doing. The water pump project was discontinued and the student center was closed. The last jewelry was sold off and no more supplies were bought. I still have some t-shirts however if anyone wants to buy some. It's important to keep it simple. Costs are under control, we can manage our students better and we are much more sustainable for the long term.

## **ENJOY THE HIGHS BUT EXPECT THE TERRIBLE LOWS**

We are finally seeing our students graduate and start their careers. This is why we do what we do. I'm incredibly proud that we have a team of board members and donors who have allowed our students to work hard and achieve a healthy future for themselves and their families. Without their support, many of them would have followed in their family's footsteps and had to become farmers, market vendors or very young brides. Now we have students who will graduate with business, law, pharmacy and global affairs degrees. I can't wait to see the long term positive impact.

On the other side of the fence, the Savong Foundation has certainly faced its struggles to get where we are today. Forged tuition receipts, low donor funds, students dropping out, board member disagreements and most importantly, riding the steep learning curve to understand the Khmer culture have all contributed to our headaches over the years. Even getting to Cambodia can be a hazardous adventure. Two years ago, our flight to Asia was cancelled while we were sitting in our seats awaiting take off and we very nearly had to cancel the whole annual trip which had been carefully planned. As they say, it ain't easy but we do it anyway.

I hesitate to use the words “Cruise Control” but the Savong Foundation seems to be humming along nicely and 2019 was a very positive year. We stayed true to our mission statement and were able to navigate the unexpected obstacles thanks to all our accumulated experiences over nearly ten years.

Of course, we give our big thanks to our donors without whom we never would have come this far. In a world which is craving for nonprofit dollars for everything from Australian wildfires to sharks in China, we are humbled and blessed that our donors have believed in our goals and stayed by our sides. Thanks to them, we will continue to grow, evolve and most importantly learn from our mistakes and make the Savong Foundation even more successful in 2020.

Akun!

Dr. Phil Caldwell  
January, 2020

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# OUR MISSION

Our mission is to support underprivileged students in northern Cambodia through education, shelter and healthcare.



We believe in giving our students the best quality education that we can find.

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We match donors to students and we encourage them to communicate via email letters--although we discourage direct communication.

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We are not a "charity"; we provide our students with opportunities but we expect them to work hard for themselves and their families in return.

We have two main areas of support:

## OUR PROJECTS



### Scholarships Program

We provide tuition at the Future Bright International High School and the IQ International School in Siem Reap and at top universities in Siem Reap as well as Phnom Penh. Depending on the need, we provide school supplies, including laptop computers and transportation which is usually a bicycle. We track student grades and attendance and have a scholarship and student managers in Cambodia to address any issues that arise.

Scholarship sponsorship starts at \$25/month and can go up to \$100/month or more. Any donation amount is of course, deeply appreciated.



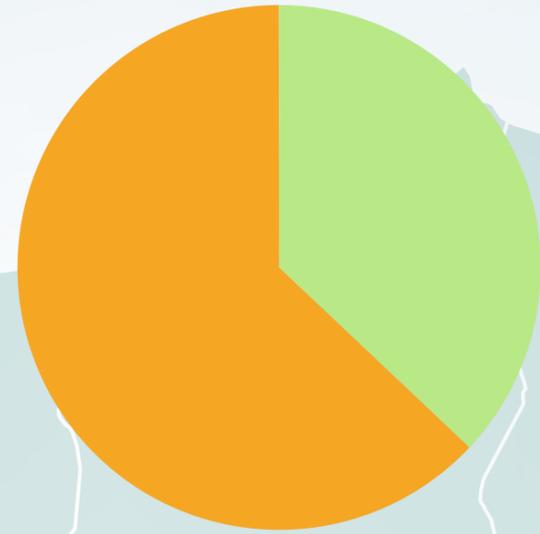
### Music Program

The Nimita Composers Institute is dedicated to nurturing the next generation of Cambodian composers in both the Khmer traditional and Western art music genres. NCI also encourages the cultural exchange among nations in the region and within the global community.

# 2019: A YEAR IN NUMBERS

# 27

Scholarships awarded at the start of 2018/19 school year (1 of them was new)



Young Men Scholarships (37.04%)  
Young Women Scholarships (62.96%)

# 12

Students in Grades K to 12



# 15

Students in University



2019 Graduates from High School

# 3



Total Contributions  
**\$33,027**

from

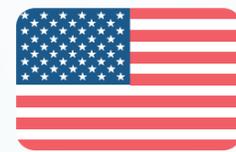
Canada



Japan



**UNITED KINGDOM**



**USA**

Australia



Over 94% of your donations went directly towards supporting our education and community programs!

# OUR WISH LIST

Since we are a grassroots non profit, we rely on even the smallest donations to make our programs successful. However, even small non profits can dare to dream and we hope to turn these dreams into reality for the upcoming year. Can you help?



## ***High School scholarships in Siem Reap***

Cost: \$25 to \$100/month

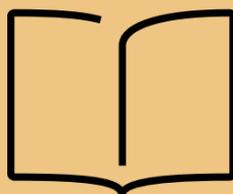
We are always looking for funds to cover tuitions for new students. We handpick our students based on academic ability as well as financial need and we send them to the Future Bright International High School.



## ***University Scholarships in Phnom Penh***

Cost: \$100 to \$200/month

We would love to have all our students study in Phnom Penh to pursue advanced degrees. It is simply not possible for our students to pursue many professional careers if they stay in Siem Reap.



## ***School Supplies for High School students***

Cost: \$100/year

At the start of the school year, I travel to Cambodia to purchase school supplies. These may include school books, notebooks, pens, backpacks and uniforms.



## ***Laptop computers for University students***

Cost: \$250 to \$400/computer

We provide laptop computers to our university students if they don't already have one. We prefer to purchase locally to support the local businesses in the Siem Reap or Phnom Penh community.



## ***Music Project***

Cost: Any donation will help!

The Composers Institute organizes workshops to nurture the next generation of composers in Southeast Asian countries such as Cambodia. The donations will go directly towards funding these workshops.

# THE STORIES OF OUR STUDENTS

All our students are hard working and every one of them has a story to tell. These are three of our students who deserve special recognition for their achievements.

## Kimsan

A true example of what dedication and motivation can do, she is soon to be graduating from the University of SouthEast Asia and hopes to teach English at the University level.



## Cheat

Cheat has always inspired other students to reach their goals. He was one of our first students to move to Phnom Penh and find a job to support his living expenses. He will be graduating next year from the University of Cambodia with a degree in Marketing.



## Boramy

Boramy has excelled throughout her academic years and will be graduating soon with a degree in Global Affairs from the American University of Phnom Penh. She was recently awarded a scholarship to spend a term studying in the United States.



# OUR BIG THANKS

Nearly nine years ago, we were excited about getting a \$20 donation and we still are! It's true that we make every donation go as far as possible but it costs a lot of money to provide full scholarships to the best schools and employ the people to make all this happen. We are so thankful for the ongoing support that we have received and we look forward to your support for years to come.



## Individual donors

Through our scholarship program, we pair up a student with a donor (or donors). These donors give us a yearly lump sum or donate every month. The students communicate to their donors (via the Savong Foundation) every three months through letters or videos. .

We are always looking for supporters who would love to help our students and since the Savong Foundation is a 501(c)(3), your contributions are tax deductible in the United States.



## Corporate donor

**iHerb<sup>®</sup>**

We are very thankful to iHerb.com for their continued generosity. They have been a huge sponsor for our students and we are honored to be in partnership with them.

# GET IN TOUCH WITH US



Siem Reap, Cambodia



[phil@savongfoundation.org](mailto:phil@savongfoundation.org)



[www.facebook.com/savongfoundation](http://www.facebook.com/savongfoundation)



[@savongfoundn](https://twitter.com/savongfoundn)

# OUR FAMILY PHOTO ALBUM



# THE FINANCIALS

## THE SAVONG FOUNDATION, INC.

Statement of Income and Expenses  
January to December 2019

<b>Income</b>			
<b>Contributions</b>			\$ 33,027
<b>Fundraising</b>			
<b>Interest</b>			<u>2</u>
<b>Total Income</b>			<u><u>\$ 33,029</u></u>
	<b>MGT/GENERAL</b>	<b>PROGRAM</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>Expense</b>			
<b>Grants to other Nonprofit Organizations</b>			\$ -
<b>Direct Program Expenses</b>		29,121	29,121
<b>Advertising &amp; Promotions</b>	\$ 47		47
<b>Professional Fees</b>	1,013		1,013
<b>Office Expenses</b>	1,084	1,082	2,166
<b>Travel Expenses</b>		2,908	2,908
<b>Total Expense</b>	<u><u>\$ 2,143</u></u>	<u><u>\$ 33,111</u></u>	<u><u>\$ 35,254</u></u>
<b>Net Income (Loss)</b>			<u><u>\$ (2,225)</u></u>

### Program Breakdown:

	<u>\$</u>	<u>%</u>
<b>Outreach Scholarships</b>	\$ 24,334	73%
<b>General Cambodian Program</b>	4,030	12%
<b>Cambodian Salaries</b>	2,790	8%
<b>Community Medical Outreach</b>	\$ 177	1%
<b>Student Living Expenses</b>	1,004	3%
<b>School Supplies</b>	776	2%
<b>Total:</b>	<u><u>\$ 33,111</u></u>	<u><u>100%</u></u>

Percentage Administrative vs. Program

6%

94%

Note: Government guidelines suggest that administrative costs vs. program costs be no more than 25:75 while nonprofit grading scales allow the top rankings for organizations with a ratio of 15:85. The Savong Foundation's ratio of 6:94 gives them a high ranking among nonprofit organizations.

Some Management/General expenses were covered by board member contributions.

Over 94% of 2019 public contributions went to program expenses.

This report was prepared by Johnson's Bookkeeping, an independent bookkeeping service specializing in nonprofit compliance.



All travel expenses were paid by the individual board members.

We are very proud of our platinum level GuideStar participant award which means that we are committed to transparency!

<http://www.guidestar.org/profile/27-3567820>



  
the SAVONG  
foundation