

# A Healthy, HELPING HAND

The collaboration between Caring for Cambodia and International Medical Clinic (IMC) has seen nearly 2,400 Cambodian children receive health screenings to date. American expat KATHRYN SAMS, an administrative assistant at IMC, tells us about her experience with the programme in Siem Reap.

## How long have you been involved with CFC?

About 18 months. Being a former educator, I started working with the Education Committee making the teaching materials for the schools. I then joined the Health & Dental (H&D) Committee in September 2010. It seemed like a better fit since I was working at IMC, although I have no official healthcare training.

I was originally attracted to CFC because a friend of mine was leading a committee and needed some help. However, once my foot was in the door, I fell in love with all that CFC offers and believes in. The main selling point was when I learned that 100 percent of the donations are accounted for and given directly to the schools, teachers and children. The fact that CFC uses Cambodian resources and staff was just icing on the cake.

## Tell us about your experiences on one of the screening trips to Cambodia.

I went to Siem Reap in March of this year with some members of the H&D Committee and some IMC staff. Our first exposure to the schools

was early Monday morning when we participated in the Food for Thought programme. We sat with the children and served them their first – and, for some, *only* – meal of the day. They were polite and grateful, always thanking us with a bright smile.

Over three days, we conducted height and weight measurements, as well as vision screening at two different CFC schools. The team calculated “Z scores” from the children’s data and compared them with the World Health Organization’s metrics. These screenings helped us identify any severely malnourished children. The vision screenings of 12 classes resulted in 30 children being referred to the eye clinic at Angkor Children’s Hospital for further testing.

When we were there, there was a saying written on one of the boards in the classroom: “Do what makes you come alive because the world needs people who have come alive.” To me this best describes my experience with CFC and IMC’s trip to Cambodia. Helping contribute to the wellbeing of the children made me come alive!

## What are some of the health concerns facing the children?

The major ones are those that directly result from poverty, poor education, poor sanitation and unclean water – specifically, malnutrition, pneumonia, diarrheal illnesses, malaria and dengue fever. In Cambodia, these are not so easily prevented or treated, but we can make significant progress. It’s more



difficult to effect changes at home or in the village, but we can have an impact at the schools. Each Caring for Cambodia school has filtered water and toilets, and now provides two meals a day for the children. CFC is currently looking to hire a Cambodian nurse to work at the schools, and IMC will look for ways to help train and support that nurse. We’re very excited about this.

## What is the reaction of the children to the programme and to the volunteers?

At first they were a bit apprehensive as they lined up for the vision

screening. They were trying to figure out if anything was going to hurt. We helped prepare them by creating a book outlining the process and showing how to hold the occluder over their eye. It took a while to get the first child through the vision test but once the classmates saw how it was done, the process sped up very quickly and the smiles started appearing. The children loved seeing the volunteers and soon became very comfortable with everyone who was sporting a bright orange CFC shirt.

During the trip, we identified two children who were deaf. Of course, the teacher knew that these children had very serious hearing problems, but they were not receiving any treatment. In fact, they didn't know help was available! As a result of our visit, CFC was able to locate another NGO that works with the hearing impaired in Siem Reap. These two children are now attending a special school for the deaf. Another child came forward saying that he couldn't hear; he now has a hearing aid.

### Tell us a bit about the aim to improve nutrition.

Rice is the mainstay of the diet. When we first visited Cambodia in December 2010, CFC was serving one meal a day – breakfast. This was rice porridge. For protein, some pork or a little fish was added. Some greens were included as well, and some type of sprouts were available if the children chose to add them. The meal was enjoyed by all, including teachers, parents and younger siblings. While we could see that the children were small, we did not realise how small until we looked at their heights for their ages. These children are not just small; their growth has been stunted. IMC has been meeting with the nutrition specialist at Angkor Hospital for Children to explore ways to enhance the porridge while keeping it palatable. CFC is now including more vegetables in the porridge and reducing the sugar content. Best of all, CFC is serving two meals per day at the schools.

### How many people from IMC are involved in the project?

All IMC staff are encouraged to participate or contribute in whatever way they can. To date, 13 staff members have participated in the health-screening trips, and we actually have a waiting list of staff members who would like to join future trips. We also have staff members who contribute to the project behind the scenes here in Singapore. 🇸🇬

IMC is located at Camden Medical Centre (6733 4440) and Jelita Shopping Centre (6465 4440).

[www.imc-healthcare.com](http://www.imc-healthcare.com)  
[www.caringforcambodia.org](http://www.caringforcambodia.org)

