



Developing ripples of sustainability through community water projects

Fall 2017 Newsletter

A Year End Review of Trailblazer Foundation's activities during 2017

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Note from the Executive Director	Page 2
Health Program – The Core of Our work	Page 3
Food Security Program – Training for a Better Diet	Page 4
Education Program – Secured Funding for 2018	Page 5
Economic Development Program – Diversifying Income Streams	Page 6
Volunteers – Keeping Costs Down, and Productivity Up	Page 7
Other News – Join Trailblazer's First Supporter Trip to Cambodia	Page 8

(Cover Photo of Students Walking and Biking Home From School in Rural Cambodia)

Striving For Comprehensive Rural Community Development

A Note From Trailblazer's Executive Director

Hello Trailblazer Supporters,

Back in 2004, when I co-founded Trailblazer Foundation, we adopted the tagline *developing ripples of sustainability through community water projects*. We chose this tagline because – as we explain on page 3 of this newsletter – bringing abundant clean water to our partner villagers has been at the core of our rural community development work since day one.

I suspect this branding has played a role in why Trailblazer is most well known for providing water filters and wells to poor, rural Cambodians. This public perception is reflected in both our expense budget, and the number of people we directly benefit through our work.

For example, as of the beginning of December, thirty-six percent of our 2017 expenses have been devoted to water filters, wells and latrines (the products of our Health program). The other sixty-four percent has been allocated between our Food Security, Education and Economic Development programs, and our administrative and fundraising overhead.

Meanwhile, the number of people who have directly benefited from our work in 2017 equally tilts toward our Health program: 3,155 people through our Health program, 1,350 through our Food Security program, and 225 people through our Economic Development program (as you will read on page 5, we postponed our school construction and student bike deliveries until 2018).

What is misleading about these figures is that, in many ways, providing clean water to Cambodian villagers is the easiest part of Trailblazer's rural community development work. This is because it takes a lot less time to distribute products (filters, wells, latrines) than it does to offer services (agricultural trainings and economic development opportunities). This is especially true if the services require changing practices, even more so if they require changing attitudes. Trailblazer's challenge in this regard is highlighted on page 6.

I point all of this out for two reasons. First, I think it is important to remember that, although our distribution of water filters and wells is what Trailblazer is most well known for, it is only part of our overarching strategy to improve the lives of rural Cambodians. To be sure, helping these villagers get healthy through the use of clean water is the foundation upon which all of our other activities can occur. But, these poor communities need more than clean water. And that leads to the second reason.

In this newsletter, we offer a review of our 2017 accomplishments, as well as a look at our programmatic objectives for 2018. As you will read, the long-standing core of our work – the Health program – continues at a pace we have held for years. Meanwhile, our critical work for 2018 is to continue refining the strategies for our other programs, so we can better meet the remaining needs – food, education, and work opportunities – of our partner villages. And we need to secure the funding needed to fully implement the full complement of our rural community development work. I hope you will help us reach this important goal.

Kind Regards,

Chris Coats
Co-Founder and Executive Director



Health Program

Trailblazer's Health Program – The Core of Our Work

The Buddha once said, “Without health, life is not life; it is only a state of languor and suffering.” Our own Chris Coats, Trailblazer’s co-founder and executive director, said of the first Cambodian village we worked in, “When Trailblazer arrived in Sras village in 2004, the situation was dire. There were few sources of water, and those that did exist were filthy pit wells. Malnutrition was obvious, as many of the villagers had distended bellies, bad teeth, and parasitic infections.”

These two truths explain why Trailblazer’s first priority is to the health of our partner villages. Since our founding in 2004, our goal has been to help rural Cambodians shift from a life of survival to one of sustainability. During those fourteen years, we have found that providing clean water is a great place to start this process. Complementing the role clean water plays in good health is good sanitation, which is why Trailblazer also engages in the unglamorous work of building latrines with our village partners.

Constructing and delivering water filters, drilling deeper wells, and building latrines is at the core of what Trailblazer does. In fact, our health program accounts for 36% of our expenditures thus far in 2017 (the remainder going to our food security, education and economic development programs, and our administrative and fundraising overhead).

So, what have we done in 2017 with that 36%?

We constructed and delivered 460 water filters, one per family, and ten more than our goal. We conducted trainings for the recipients of these filters, on how to use and maintain the filters, and how to maintain basic hygiene. This included reaching our goal of 34 group trainings, and 460 individual trainings.



Recipient of a water filter, donated by a volunteer (see page 8)

Next, we drilled 117 wells, seventeen more than our goal. Each new well owner participated in one of our twelve planned group trainings, where we taught them how to maintain and repair their well.

Also, we constructed fifty-four latrines, four more than we had planned to build. And we conducted eight trainings, for the 54 latrine beneficiary families, on latrine use and sanitation.

Finally, we raised the \$20,000 needed to purchase new well drilling equipment (our existing gear was seven years old). In many ways, this was our biggest Health program success in 2017.

In all, these efforts directly benefited 3,155 rural Cambodians (each product going to one family, with an average family of five). And they laid the groundwork for the work outlined in the next three pages.

For next year, we have budgeted to deliver 450 more water filters and drill 100 more wells. If this year is any indication, in 2018 we will meet, and probably surpass, our goals. And, if this year is any indication, your support will again help make all of this possible.

Food Security Program

Training for a Better Diet

On the previous page, we discussed how our Health program is at the core of Trailblazer's rural community development strategy. As we explained, from clean water and good sanitation, all other advancements flow. This is the progression Trailblazer pursues, as we strive to establish a higher quality of living for the rural villagers of Cambodia's Siem Reap province.

Harkening back to the first village Trailblazer worked in (Sras Village, circa 2004), Chris Coats, our co-founder and executive director, wrote that, "Malnutrition was obvious... We saw people eating grubs wrapped in banana leaves."

This on-the-ground reality inspired Trailblazer to add a Food Security program to our overall rural development strategy. By training Cambodians on better agricultural practices, we help them attain better nutrition through an increase in the types and quantity of food they grow.

Over the years, we have offered trainings in soil management, horticulture, composting and organic pesticides, mushroom production, raising poultry and fish farming.

In 2015, we trained twenty people, a low number that forced us to evaluate whether or not we wanted to continue this effort. The feedback we received from our partner villagers was two fold. First, there was no desire for more trainings on growing mushrooms. So, we dropped that course. Second, there was a call to increase the number of trainings we offered for the remaining courses.



Responding to that call, we increased the number of agricultural trainings we provide annually. Having hosted six trainings for 100 people in 2016, this year we held twenty-two trainings for 270 trainees.

Looking forward to next year, we have made some important strategic changes in our Food Security program. Again, these changes resulted from feedback we received from our village partners.

For 2018, we will no longer provide trainings on fish farming. The logistics of maintaining these farms proved to be unmanageable at the scale of production we taught. Second, we transferred our poultry raising training to our Economic Development program, where we are launching a pilot project to help rural villagers start poultry raising businesses.

Most important for 2018, we will combine the remainder of our agricultural trainings into a comprehensive "Homestead Garden Training," which will focus on the basics of growing crops for personal/family consumption. These two-and-a-half day trainings will include segments on horticulture, soil management, composting, earthworms, and organic pesticides and fertilizers. We plan to hold ten of these trainings, for a total of 100+ attendees (a decrease in overall numbers, but a more encompassing agricultural training for those who attend).

Education Program

Secured Funding - A Great Start For The New Year

Some things are worth waiting for. Such is the case for Trailblazer's next school, which we now plan to build in 2018. The very good news is that we already have initial verbal funding commitments totaling 75% of the construction cost. That is a great start for the new year.

As we reported in our last newsletter, it has proven to be a challenge to raise the funding needed to build a school in 2017. As we explained, school construction is Trailblazer's biggest single expense. The construction cost is now \$75,000 (up from \$65,000 in 2016), and all other associated costs can increase the total cost by \$10,000-\$15,000. Adding to this challenge, two of our major funding sources – philanthropic foundations and Rotary clubs – typically do not fund this type of infrastructure project.

So, as much as we hated to, we put off our next school construction project until 2018. Doing so provided us with more time to secure the necessary funding, and it was a decision that appears to be paying off. Most recently, we received news of a \$10,000 grant for our 2018 school. This grant complements the existing \$50,000 in verbal commitments we received in the last few months, from existing donors (those who have funded past projects).



Ribbon cutting ceremony for new school in 2016

This recent grant comes from INTO Giving (a new donor to Trailblazer), by way of our internship partners at the Oregon State University affiliate of IE3. INTO Giving is a United Kingdom-based organization that supports disadvantaged children's education and their teachers across the globe. IE3 provides high-quality internships and experiential learning opportunities to college students. Trailblazer has had a number of interns come to us from IE3, and it was IE3 who recommended we apply for the grant. It is great to see how a collaboration focused on volunteers can evolve into substantial funding, thereby providing both financial and human resources to our work.



Students and their families enjoying their new bicycles

Better yet, the grant includes another \$2,750 for bicycles, which we will distribute to Cambodian students in 2018, so they can travel to school. These bicycles will help reduce another barrier to education – one of transportation. This is particularly true of students in secondary school, as not every village has one (these schools are often shared between villages). Without a bike, many students would simply drop out because their school is just too far away.

With this new funding from INTO Giving, we can purchase fifty bikes, half of our student bicycle goal for next year. This is another great start to 2018.

Economic Development Program

Diversifying Income Streams During 2018

Later this month (December), Trailblazer will hold its second ceremony in 2017 to distribute sewing machines to graduates of a six-month training, hosted by the local Women's Development Center. We will give a machine to nine women, so they can start a sewing business with their newly developed skills. Our earlier ceremony was in October, when Chris Coats, Trailblazer's executive director, was in Cambodia. Chris and our local staff distributed sewing machines to twelve recent graduates.

All twenty-one of these sewing machines were paid for by our supporters, those people who earlier this year participated in our first ever raffle. Trailblazer is pleased to pay that support forward to these twenty-one graduates, each of whom can now make a living with their new sewing skills and machines.

Meanwhile, as you may recall, earlier this year we launched a *Farmers Community Group* pilot project. The project is designed to support village farmers as they grow crops to sell at higher end markets in nearby Siem Reap City. During this first year, we were reminded of a truth about humans - that change can be both exciting and unsettling. The initial excitement many of our participants expressed waned when they realized what it would take to grow the types of crops that would sell well in Siem Reap City.



Graduates receive their sewing machine during a ceremony at the Women's Development Center

Generally speaking, the most marketable crops are different from those rural farmers traditionally grow. Some farmers decided they didn't want to diversify their crops. Yet, a few were happy to expand their selection of crops. These are the farmers Trailblazer will continue to work with in 2018, with the belief that once other farmers see the success these committed farmers are having, some – or even many – will want to adopt these practices and diversify their crops.



A member of Trailblazer's Farmers Community Group planting a crop of eggplant

This phenomenon is no different than other new products or technologies, which typically start with "early adopters" using the technology. Over time, others see that the technology works, and they come onboard. In fact, Trailblazer has seen this progression take place when we introduce our water filters to Cambodian villages. Our expectation with the Farmers Community Group is that many of the initial farmers will re-engage when they see how the early adopter farmers are making an income.

We expect this same phenomenon to happen when we launch another pilot project next year. As mentioned in the Food Security article, Trailblazer is

transferring our poultry-raising project to our Economic Development program. In 2018, we will enlist three farmers in each of three villages to start raising chickens to sell. As we help these farmers start a viable small-scale business, we expect other farmers will adopt this new business model in future years.

Volunteers

Keeping Trailblazer's Costs Down, And Our Productivity Up

To quote an often-used phrase, Trailblazer's volunteer program in Cambodia is a "win-win" situation. Trailblazer wins because of the manual support we receive from 100+ people every year. This helps keep our costs down, and our productivity up. Our volunteers win because of the experience they have.

As an example of Trailblazer winning, as of the end of November, we have had 110 people from thirteen countries volunteer in Cambodia. Most people helped construct water filters, which we make at our worksite in Siem Reap City, and then deliver to our partner villages throughout the province. Also, we had three people volunteer for us in the states, each for a number of months.

In terms of the number of days worked, we have records for seventy-eight of our 2017 volunteers in Cambodia. Collectively, they donated 375 days of work to Trailblazer, the equivalent of seventy-five work weeks. Therefore, on average, each of our 2017 volunteers worked for 4.8 days.

And by all indications, these volunteers both greatly enjoyed their time with Trailblazer, and felt honored to support our efforts. In many cases, after all the time and sweat they gave, volunteers also donated money for one or more water filters or wells. One such hard working human is Justine Auton, who hails from Wellington, New Zealand. Justine worked for two weeks, and then donated enough money for fifteen water filters. She refers to her time with Trailblazer as her Revenge Tour. Here is her story:

It all started with a mouthful of lettuce four years ago, and ended with two weeks of hard work making bio-sand water filters. The lettuce my friend ate while we were in Siem Reap had likely been washed with local, unpurified water, and hours later she got sick. For four days. Upon my return home, I resolved to get even with that water, and my payback was a two-week stint volunteering with Trailblazer.

In the months before leaving on what I referred to as my Revenge Tour, I ask my friends for donations to fund my idea of taking toothbrushes to the kids. With 1,500 toothbrushes in my luggage, this past October I headed back to Siem Reap.

My first few days were an eye opener. Soon after a briefing by Trailblazer's amazing staffer Caitlin, I was on one end of a huge sieve, see-sawing back and forth, sifting gravel. My natural tendency as a public servant is to find ways to make businesses more efficient. So, I found myself itching to do some systems re-engineering around Trailblazer's workplace. However, as time went by, and I decompressed from my world into theirs, I started feeling surprisingly Zen with my bucket of sand and water hose, thinking instead about how many bags of sand I could clean by the end of my shift.

Equally impactful was my day trip to a rural village to install water filters I'd help construct. I was humbled by the fact that these families were surviving on water I wouldn't put my feet into. Having helped provide those families with water filters (and toothbrushes), I wanted to do more. I still had some of the money my friends had donated, so I decided to invest it in ten water filters. I then paid for five more. It's magic seeing your name on a water filter, surrounded by a family whose life you've changed.

I'm doing another revenge tour next year, having discovered it's an antidote to the stress of life here at home. I hope to see you there!



Volunteer Justine Auton sifting sand at Trailblazer's worksite in Cambodia

Supporter Trip To Siem Reap, Cambodia

Join Trailblazer's Chris Coats for Six Days of Adventure and Learning

Next September, Trailblazer is offering our supporters the opportunity to join Chris Coats, our co-founder and executive director, on a six-day tour of Cambodia's Siem Reap Province. This is Trailblazer's first-ever organized supporter trip to Cambodia, and Chris looks forward to sharing this unique and diverse experience with you. The tour is scheduled for September 14-19. Highlights include:

- Tour Angkor Wat and other temples of the world-renowned Angkor Archeological Park
- Experience the floating villages of Tonlé Sap, Cambodia's largest lake
- Visit Trailblazer's worksite, and help our Cambodian staff build water filters
- Join Trailblazer's Cambodian staff as they deliver water filters to one or more rural villages

As your host and personal guide, Chris will introduce you to our Cambodian staff, work along side of you for a half day at Trailblazer's worksite, share lunch with you in one of our partner villages, join you in touring and shopping at the local Women's Development Center, and be with you for almost all other activities as well.



During your down time in Siem Reap, you can explore the small city, known for its many markets, cultural museums, artisan shops, smaller active temples, and vibrant Pub Street.



Other commercial travel tours to Siem Reap see the typical sites: Angkor Wat and Tonlé Sap. With Trailblazer, you will see much more, as you experience firsthand our rural community development program.

Better yet, for those who choose to, you can coordinate with Friendly Planet Travel – one of Trailblazer's funding partners – to extend your trip. We are pleased to have Friendly Planet Travel's support in coordinating your adventure. As experts in world travel tours, you can look to Friendly Planet for help in scheduling all your travel plans – both to join Trailblazer on our tour, and to visit other parts of Cambodia or neighboring countries before and/or after your time in Siem Reap province.

This is a trip of a lifetime. Not just because you will experience the temples of Angkor Wat and the floating villages of Tonle Sap. Better yet, you will visit Trailblazer's worksite in Siem Reap, and one or more of our partner rural villages.

We will announce the full cost and itinerary of this six-day program, as well as pre- and post- trip options with Friendly Planet Travel, by the end of January.

Stay tuned for more details about this tour, and we hope to see you in Cambodia in September.