



QSA Notes

Support and assistance to enable people living with disabilities join KCD programs

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Home visits in Kandal Province to consult with people living with disabilities (Source: KCD)

In June 2020, one of QSA's project partners, Khmer Community Development (KCD) launched an innovative project to learn more about the situation of people in their target area in Kandal Province who are living with disabilities. The aim was to improve their quality of life, motivate them to participate actively in social events, and encourage them to join KCD projects. The project, funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and

Trade (DFAT) and QSA is working to improve the health, wellbeing and livelihood opportunities for everyone in the community, but KCD is aware that people with disabilities are often not represented.

There is a high prevalence of physical disabilities in Cambodia, a legacy of years of war and injuries caused by the landmines left behind. While landmine injuries have been reduced significantly due to clearance programs, high levels

of disability continue, more likely today a result of traffic and workplace accidents.

With little or no infrastructure or government support, people living with disabilities face severe challenges in their daily lives. Rehabilitation services are still limited in both the city and countryside, especially services that address the needs of children and women with disabilities.

A recent survey found 60 per cent



PPCIL and KCD team members visit people with disabilities in their homes (Source: KCD)

live under the country's poverty line, and the same percentage of disabled children are unable to attend school.

With 80 per cent of the population living in rural areas, the challenges facing disabled people are exacerbated by poor services and demanding home environments (think houses on stilts) and few mobility and other aids. Most depend entirely on their families, and without basic mobility aids, many do not have an opportunity to leave the house.

A recent survey of people living with a disability found most people faced psychological distress due to several factors, such as social exclusion, stigma and discrimination, as well as family conflict and lack of employment opportunities and access to education. Having worked with local authorities to identify people with disabilities in their target communities, KCD collaborated with Phnom Penh Center for Independent Living (PPCIL) to advise and assist people with disabilities and

help raise their voice to local decision-makers.

KCD and PPCIL met with people in their homes to assess their situation concerning education, mobility, social participation, health and employment challenges faced. They also wanted to evaluate their psychological situation and provide counselling and motivation. The PPCIL team members were in wheelchairs and had to climb stairs and ladders to meet some of the people in their homes. This enabled them to make a connection by sharing their personal experiences.

Some of the findings:

Low levels of education – 15 people assessed; only 3 had any schooling.

Mobility problems – there were two people with paralysis who had not left the house for more than twenty years.

Socially isolated – due to mobility problems, 80% were unable to participate in social events.

Poor health – most had poor health and were unable to access health care.

High unemployment – 75% were unemployed and had no income to support themselves.

A number of the people with disabilities required mobility aids, a total of seven wheelchairs, one set of crutches and one cane, all of which were provided by PPCIL. The team also identified modifications needed for home surroundings. For instance, they advised a lady with paralysis to have a room downstairs so it would be easier for her to go out after receiving the wheelchair.

Counselling was also a vital feature of the program, to help people build their self-confidence and motivate them to participate in social activities.

At the end of this work, KCD developed a set of practical plans to help overcome the challenges identified in education, employment, social participation and health, and to encourage people with disabilities to get involved with KCD projects.

QSA is a member of the Australian Council for International Development and is a signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct. The purpose of QSA is to express in a practical way the concern of Australian Quakers for the building of a more peaceful, equitable, just and compassionate world. To this end QSA works with communities in need to improve their quality of life with projects which are culturally sensitive, as well as being economically and environmentally appropriate and sustainable.

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