

BRINGING BACK THE SMILES TO THE VILLAGERS IN CAMBODIA

A country where more than 20% of people live below the poverty line, Cambodia faces a vast amount of social issues. One of these is oral health generally being overlooked and the quality of care lacking in many parts of the country.

Following a HIV outbreak in Battambang last year where 277 people allegedly contracted the virus after an unlicensed doctor re-used syringes, there has been a crack-down in the health sector. More than 200 illegal dental clinics have been closed in the capital of Cambodia this year alone by the Phnom Penh Municipal Health Department. The dentists at these clinics did not hold any dentist certificates or possess any technical skills, instead having been handed the reigns by their parents.

Aside from the issue of unlicensed, untrained dentists, there is also the problem that many people are unable to afford dental treatment and are lacking in education when it comes to prevention of dental diseases.

This is where Human and Hope Association come in. A grassroots organization in Siem Reap, Cambodia, they aim to empower Cambodians to create sustainable futures through grassroots projects run by a dedicated team of locals. Their education, vocational training and community support projects intend to lift their community members out of poverty not by giving direct aid, but by educating them to have the skills and knowledge necessary to improve their quality of living.



Human and Hope Association incorporate dental hygiene into their preschool class daily, with their five-year old students brushing their teeth at the start of every lesson. Education and Community Manager, Loeum Salin, says "One of the students had never brushed her teeth before. She cried and cried for many times, but now she loves to brush her teeth." Additionally, they run hygiene workshops every six months for their students, explaining the importance of dental upkeep, the problems that will occur if they don't take care of their teeth and the correct tooth brushing techniques.

Of course, their students still have years of damage already in place, so in July this year the Angkor Dental Association, a local clinic, visited Human



and Hope association to provide dental check ups for all their students and staff. "We are aware that in Cambodia access to oral health services does not exist for the people living in the villages. Teeth are often left untreated or extracted because of pain or discomfort. We are pleased to be able to fund this project to assist the people of Cambodia to live a healthier life", said Robyn Leeman from the Beleura Retirement Village Social Club in Victoria who funded the clinic.

Operations Manager at Human and Hope Association, Australian Sally Hetherington says, "it is a long journey ahead to improve the dental health of our community. However with perseverance and educating the youth in our villages on this topic, we are sure to see a reduction in dental diseases."

Human and Hope Association need your support to continue their education and community projects, making villagers more aware of issues such as hygiene, domestic violence and child protection.

To make a tax-deductible donation, visit www.wra.org.au/1432hha.

To find out further information about HHA's work in Cambodia, visit www.humanandhopeassociation.org.

