



Deirdre Lew Service Award – House building in Cambodia

During July 2015 fourteen students (from Year 11 and 12) travelled independently (without adult supervision) to Cambodia to build houses with [Tabitha](#). Tabitha invites international volunteer building teams to Cambodia to finance the materials for the houses and these teams then work, under the direction of Khmer builders, to complete simple houses.

The students organised their own itinerary, booked all accommodation, flights and arranged in-country transport. In addition the students worked out insurance, health and safety risks and put in place measures that satisfied both the school and their parents.



To find out more watch the entertaining [video](#). Note the video contains some harrowing Killing Fields footage.



Phnom Penh was the starting point for the students' Cambodia adventure. They had fun exploring the bustling city and the area surrounding their basic hotel. The following day Tabitha founder Janne Ritskes provided an in-depth orientation briefing covering the recent history of Cambodia and the impact of the Pol Pot regime. The students also visited Tuol Sleng Prison (S-21) and the Killing Fields (Cheong Ek), to see first hand the sites of some of the atrocities. In Cambodia, the past 40 years of war, genocide and its aftermath have left people feeling disenfranchised from life itself. The lack of security, the loss of family members, and the loss of their original homes over so many years has resulted in a severe poverty that is both physical and psychological.



The students were taught about Tabitha's vision "to develop processes which will enable people to actively make their own choices and processes which will result in alleviation of poverty." To achieve this vision Tabitha runs a number of programmes;

- The family saving scheme - micro financing
- The water programme - the average distance to walk to a safe water source is 3 kilometres
- The cottage industry programme - creation and sales of a range of silk craft and home wares products
- The schools development programme - Tabitha builds and equips schools, and then passes ownership and the responsibility for the running of these schools, including the supply of teachers, to the government through the Ministry of Education
- The hospital programme – access to medical care for all Cambodian women - regardless of status or wealth
- The house building programme – building houses in collaboration with Cambodia's neediest families

Tabitha currently works in thirty seven areas within fifteen provinces in Cambodia providing programs that make significant changes/ development in the lives of the Cambodian people. Our students travelled down to Kep Province, which is the smallest province of Cambodia with a population of 40,000. From the turn of the century through the 1960's, Kep was Cambodia's premier beach town off the Gulf of Thailand. Over the course of two days our students worked in two teams of seven students alongside Khmer families to build simple houses on stilts. This basic housing is a major step up for the selected poor families who have to own the land and contribute USD 25 towards the building materials. The frames of the houses were already in place and the students were tasked to hammer in the floor boards and to attach the corrugated iron sides.



The students commented: *"This project was an in depth and meaningful experience that was not only thoroughly fulfilling for us, but also helped the Cambodian community immensely. The fact we worked with the local Cambodian people who taught us the skills we needed, allowed us to really integrate into the community. It was quite challenging to overcome the language barrier, however it was all part of the experience. This trip allowed all of us to develop our cooperation and team building skills, especially because we were working with a group of students who did not know each other very well."*



Some of the students were NYAA Gold candidates and with sufficient pre-planning, this experience counted as their Residential Project.

The Deirdre Lew Service Award is available to encourage and enable students to take part in a service trip or activity outside of school hours. Students can apply for an individual or group grant of up to SGD 500 per student funded by the [TTS Foundation](#). The aim is to encourage students to learn more about the world they live in, make a positive contribution and exercise responsible citizenship. Find out more about the Deirdre Lew Service Award on the [TTS Portal](#).