

The Cambodian Family News

We welcome you to the first edition of *The Cambodian Family News*. Please enjoy, And become a Friend of our Agency.—Rifka Hirsch, Executive Director

Let's Celebrate Cambodian New Year!

Did you know that the traditional Cambodian New Year celebration lasts three days?

The first day of New Year, called *Moha Sangkran*, is when the New Angels come to take care of the world for the year. People clean and decorate the house and prepare fruits and drinks to welcome the New Angels. Elderly people like to meditate or pray. People prepare food to offer the monks at the temple. It is a great time for boys and girls to play traditional games together.

The second day of New Year is called *Wanabot*, a day of offering gifts to the parents, grandparents and elders. People like to offer gifts to employees and also donate money or clothes to poor people. In the evening, they go to the temple to build a mountain of sand



The Cambodian Family Dance Group prepares for New Year

and ask the monks to give them a blessing of happiness and peace.

On the third day, called *Leung Sakk*, the ceremony is performed called "Pithi Srang Preah," which means giving a special bath or a special shower to Buddha statues,

monks, elders, parents, and grandparents. This ceremony is an opportunity for everyone to have fun by splashing water on each other.

For Cambodians, new year is a time to honor parents, set aside old grievances, help those less fortunate, and serve the community.

Successful Kickoff to Our Next 25 Years

Last November, The Cambodian Family capped off its first 25 years of service with a celebration held at UC Irvine. 160 guests, including old friends and new, were on hand to reminisce, network, and be entertained.

Performers included Aaron Ngo, a professional singer from Vietnam, who is a former refugee client and former staff member of The Cambodian Family. Our own Luis Navejas, singer and guitarist, performed an original composi-

tion. Guests also enjoyed two dances performed by members of The Cambodian Family Dance Group.

Guests represented Santa Ana schools and city government, as well as County agencies.

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Did you know?

- The Cambodian Family serves approximately **1,000** clients each year.
- In the past 10 years, we have served clients from **41** different countries of the world.
- In the past 10 years, we have found jobs for over **4,000** clients.
- **97** of our Youth Program participants have already graduated from high school.
- **88** of our Youth Program alumni have gone on to attend college.

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Employment Barriers Can Be Overcome

Vanna desperately needed a job. This 37-year old refugee from Cambodia was a single mom with four kids, all dependent on welfare. Our Employment Services staff was ready to help.

Within a few months we had placed her in three different jobs, but she quit each job after only a few weeks. She explained that she had family problems that made it difficult for her to work. When we learned about her domestic situation, we brought her to court for a restraining order against her husband. She was also concerned about finding time for her children and arranging adequate transportation. Our

Family Coach counseled her on taking better control over her life and organizing her time. She bought a used car so she would not have to rely on public transportation. She then said she was ready to try another job.

The fourth try proved to be a success. We found her an assembly job. After a few months, she received a raise, and soon after was promoted to Assembly Leader. She later changed her schedule to 3rd shift so she could bring her children to and from school. She has terminated welfare, reunited with her husband, and appears to have successfully rebuilt her life.



Securing a permanent job is the first step toward family self-sufficiency.

Serving Young and Old



School Readiness Program

Our School Readiness program promotes development for children 2–5 years old while parents attend class at our center. Our Pre-K program, in cooperation with Santa Ana Unified School District, prepares 4-year olds for school.

The Change program is an innovative approach to helping Cambodian and other trauma survivors gain the tools and resources to improve their emotional and physical health.



Change Program

New Year in April?

Cambodian New Year originally began on the first day of the lunar calendar, which usually occurs in December. But a new tradition was established by King Jayavaraman VII in the 13th Century – he moved the beginning of the new year to the 5th month of the lunar calendar, which is April.

The king had a practical reason for changing the date. Cambodia then, as now, was a primarily agrarian society, and the

months from November through March are the busiest time of the agricultural cycle – this is when the rice harvest occurs. By April, the farming season is over and people are ready to celebrate a 3-day New Year festival.

That's why we greet our Cambodian friends with "Happy New Year!" on April 14th.

Enjoy "The Year of the Dog!"



Cambodian New Year celebrates an ancient tradition and civilization.



One Youth on the Road to Achievement

Tina is a seven grader, the oldest of three children. She comes from a divorced family, and stays part of the time with each parent. When Tina enrolled in our Youth Program last year she seemed very reserved. She didn't say much and she didn't ask questions during our tutoring sessions. Her school grade point average was a very low 2.16.

Gradually, our Youth Program staff were able to help her open up. She began to share her feelings, discuss her family situation, and tell us what was bothering her. To spend more quality time with her, our staff enrolled her in our traditional Cambodian

dian dance class. We kept a close eye on Tina, counseling her when necessary. Tina began to do better in school, her confidence grew, and she became much happier.

In her October progress report, Tina had earned a grade point average of 3.33 and in her November progress report, she raised it to a 3.83 – that's five A's and one B! Tina told us that she is working to get straight A's and get a 4.0 GPA.

We are very proud of Tina's turn-around. We are working hard to ensure that she and other youths develop their full potential for future achievement.



Education is a high priority for our youths.

Family Childcare: Good for Kids and the Economy

Children need care and adults need jobs. One way to address both needs is through the creation of family childcare businesses. The Cambodian Family offers a 15-week training program that helps women (and men!) open and operate their own family childcare businesses. Participants develop skills in guiding child development, as well as business skills needed to become successful. Families can thereby provide quality care for their children while sup-

plementing their family incomes. So far, our training program has had five graduating classes, and several people have gone on to start their own businesses. Currently, bilingual classes are offered in Cambodian and Vietnamese.

Everyone benefits from quality childcare. As noted by the 11th Annual Report on the Conditions of Children in Orange County, "Quality early care improves children's

"Quality early care improves children's well-being and promotes our economy."

well-being and promotes our economy." Those interested may contact The Cambodian Family for more information.

Successful Kickoff... (continued from page 1)

Awards were presented to Mr. Heat Leao for his many years of service to the Cambodian community in Orange County, as well as to Ms. Leila Hart, for the contributions that she and her late husband have made to our agency. In addition, our Executive Director, Ms. Rifka Hirsch, recalled the work of our late board member, Ms. Sunly Winkles, who passed away last year.

The event was made possible by support from the Orange County United Way, and

the Freeman Foundation of Orange County. Contributions from our guests made the event a financial success. Rifka Hirsch concluded the evening with comments that looked toward the future of our agency and its services.



25th Anniversary guests enjoy participating in Cambodian dance.



Become a Friend of our Agency

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A Multiethnic Human Services Agency Promoting Social Health



The Cambodian Family is a nonprofit organization, founded in 1980 by Cambodian refugees to serve newly-arriving refugees in Santa Ana's Minnie Street Neighborhood. Over the years, in response to critical needs of other uprooted peoples, we evolved into a multi-ethnic organization offering a comprehensive set of human services to immigrants and refugees from all over the world.

The **mission of The Cambodian Family** is to promote social health. We do this by providing opportunities for refugee and immigrant families to develop the knowledge, skills, and desires for creating health and well-being in their lives.

We currently offer an after school Youth Program, as well as provide services in community health, employment, school readiness for young children, human trafficking intervention, and a training program to help refugees and immigrants open their own family childcare businesses. Our clients come from many countries, including Cambodia, Vietnam, Mexico, Iran, Afghanistan, Russia, Ethiopia, and Somalia.



A Simple Message to our Supporters: Thank you!



Youths explore California's wilderness thanks to support from our generous donors.

You may have wondered where The Cambodian Family gets its funding. For many years, the Federal government provided most of the money for our

agency's programs. Today, as Federal funding shrinks, private donors have stepped in to make up the difference.

Our *Youth Program* has benefited from the support of the **Orange County Community Foundation** and the **Draper Family Foundation Fund**. Others providing major support for our youths include: **The California Wellness Foundation, Wells Fargo Foundation, Edison International, Union Bank, and the Orange County United Way.** *School Readiness* is supported by the **Merage Foundation**.

Our *Employment Services Program* has seen major cuts in federal funding offset in part by generous grants from **The Freeman Foundation**, which is located in Stowe, VT and managed by the **TCC Group** in New York.

Our *Healthcare Accessing* is a needed service that no longer receives federal support, but it does receive backing from the **Sisters of St. Joseph Healthcare Foundation**.

We also owe a debt of thanks to the **Sisters of St. Joseph** for supporting our work with *human trafficking victims*.

We have so many people to thank for their support in the past year. We gratefully acknowledge the following year-end donations:

John H. Gilbert
Dr. Noland Soo
Richard Hall
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Serey Ky
Gillian Lobo
Patricia Krone
Anna & Thomas Toyama
Gordon & Debbie Colburn

Dr. Howard Hirsch
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