



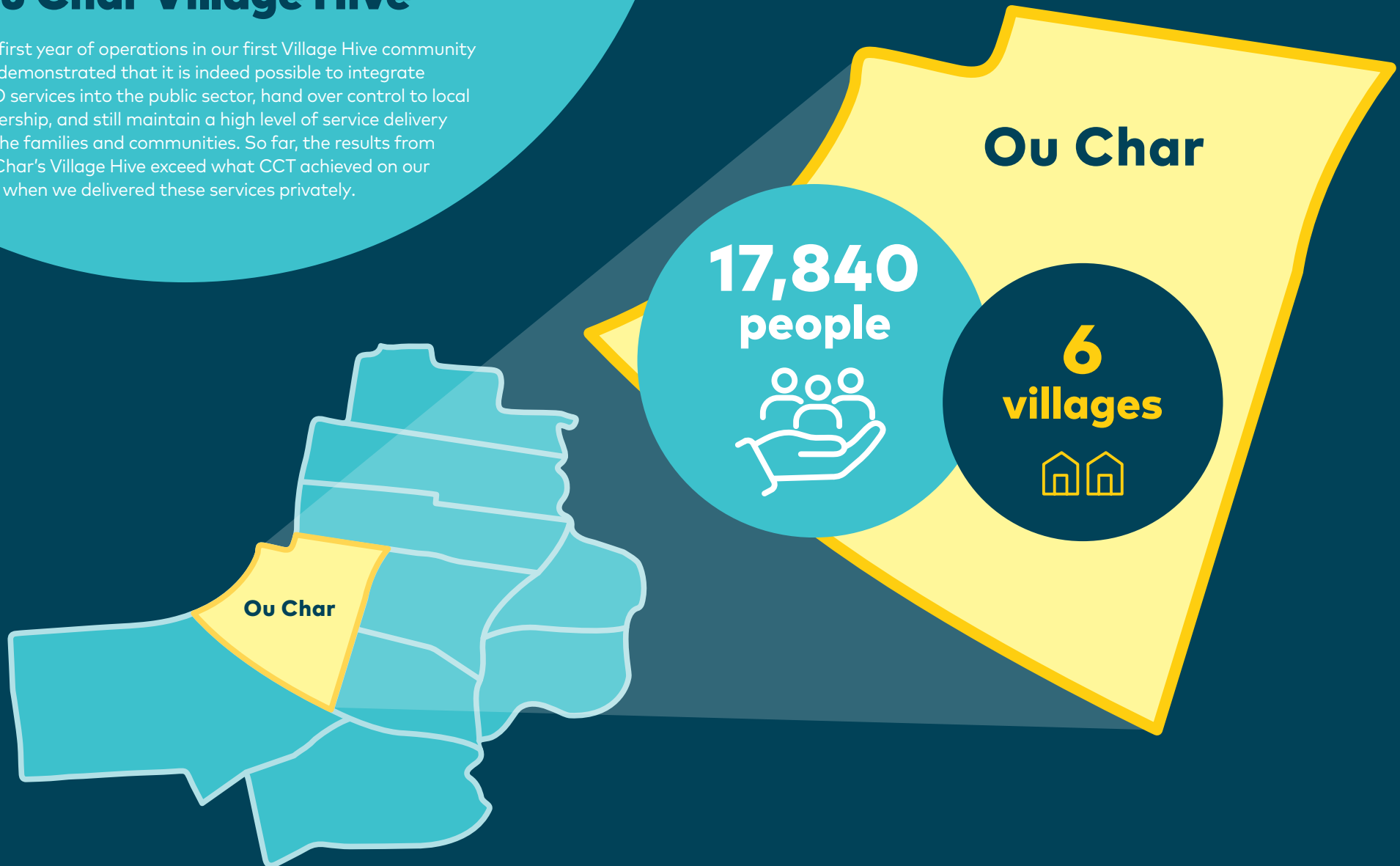
Cambodian
Children's Trust

Ou Char Village Hive 2023



Ou Char Village Hive

The first year of operations in our first Village Hive community has demonstrated that it is indeed possible to integrate NGO services into the public sector, hand over control to local leadership, and still maintain a high level of service delivery for the families and communities. So far, the results from Ou Char's Village Hive exceed what CCT achieved on our own when we delivered these services privately.



We bring you a report from Ou Char's Commune Chief, **Em Sophal**

I am very honoured that CCT invited me to share my thoughts about Ou Char Commune's Village Hive.

Our Village Hive is a collaboration between Ou Char and CCT. The formal handover from CCT to Ou Char was in December 2022, but we have worked together hand in hand for quite a long time before that, nearly two years, since October 2020.

I am sure you already know about CCT's mission not to run their programs privately but instead, integrate them into the local public sector so the Ou Char Council can take responsibility and lead our own social services programs.

The Village Hive in Ou Char Commune has one primary social worker who leads the social support services programs. She represents the Commune Council for Women and Children (CCWC). She is leading our Village Hive team. However, when there are high-risk cases, I and other council members join in to help and provide solutions to the cases. The Ou Char Council teams, all Village Chiefs, Police Chiefs, and many more teams are involved and work together for our Village Hive.

We have so much joy and happiness that CCT has provided us with more human resources, funds, and activities to create the Village Hive that supports people in our Ou Char community.

We now have a community centre in our public school that supports children in crisis who lack education. Through that program, we provide support to children who are in need. We currently have **41 children** enrolled in that program.

They come to get an education, and if they are absent, we have Project Officer Mrs Nov Leakena from CCWC, who investigates and assists those children back into the program.

We are on track and preventing every possible risk for those vulnerable children. We find the reasons why they are missing school, and if they face any problem in life or their family, we can now help them resolve it.

If children are falling behind in their studies and cannot catch up to their peers, we have staff who keep track of them and support them in every lesson they need. We now have staff in our public school who help vulnerable children with homework and after-school care until 4 pm when they return to their homes.

The Village Hive is such a huge benefit for our community. As Commune Chief, I am so happy and full-hearted.

I am passionate about giving all my energy and full cooperation to our Village Hive.

We are the Ou Char leaders and are determined to serve our people with all the benefits they deserve.



Recently, we were informed about a family who has HIV and immigrated to Ou Char Commune. The family hid their illness, and so no one knew about their struggle, which made their health worse.

After we heard about their case, our team took the family to the local hospital just in time. Since then, we have helped them with house rent, water and electricity, and school enrolment for their kids at our community public school centre.

This system is essential and has many benefits for our community, especially vulnerable families. Our Village Hive also has a housing program and construction team. This service has been offered to families in our community.

Every family with a problem with their home can report it to us, and we can refer their case to our Village Hive team and help in every way we can.

In some cases, we're spending our council budget, and in some cases, we're spending our Village Hive budget. We've received some emergency cases like the Som Rorn family. One day, their house burnt to the ground, and they became homeless.

After we heard about their case, we used funds from our Village Hive social support service budget plus some funds from our government budget.

We put six trucks of farm soil into their submerged land. Our Village Hive team then built a new house for them.

I want to let you all know that it's because of CCT that we have our Village Hive. We believe our people will surely get as many benefits as they deserve, and we are doing our best to provide as much support as possible.

Without the Village Hive, we wouldn't be able to provide enough support to our people. CCT is trying hard to find more funding to support our Village Hive. They are doing their best, which is a privilege for us that we cannot forget.

I wish for our neighbours in Svay Pao Commune, who have just established their Village Hive, to be as successful as we have been in Ou Char.

The more success we all achieve, with good outcomes for our people, the more prosperity we will have in our communities. It will show international donors that the Village Hive Project is an effective strategy to support our communities. In the years to come, when they see the impact, I am sure we will have more support to keep on working.

I will continue to encourage our Village Hive team to keep up their hard work for our

people and communities. The safety net we provide for our vulnerable children and families means all people in Ou Char can live fairly with the quality of life they deserve.

Sincerely,



Em Sophal
Ou Char Comune Chief



Ou Char Village Hive Impact Report

Since 2007, we have been helping vulnerable children in Battambang District. As CCT grew and developed, we tried our best to reach every vulnerable child in the region.

But despite our best efforts, some of the most vulnerable children or families in the community were still slipping through the cracks. In response, we instituted initiatives which we hoped would prevent any vulnerable child from being overlooked.

We brought in village-based social workers who knew their communities intimately and were better placed to uncover hidden risks. We established Child Protection Networks in the communities whose role was identifying and referring all vulnerable children and families for support.

These measures were effective to varying degrees – we saw an uptick in cases, but ultimately, the whole community was not engaged and we weren't reaching many of the most vulnerable.

This is because many families hesitate to seek support from NGOs for numerous reasons. Some lack trust in NGOs, while others are reluctant to work with them due to negative past experiences.

The stigma of being supported by an NGO in the community is also a deterrent to many families.

Many families lack understanding of how to request support from a NGO. Others state that the lack of an open-door policy, with NGOs mostly recruiting their own beneficiaries, leaves many families feeling unable to ask for support directly.



Since embedding the Village Hive into the public sector and making it easily accessible to all people in Ou Char Commune, we are finally seeing widespread community engagement.

The number of calls made directly to the Village Hive Hotline by the community members reflects the dramatic increase in the reach and engagement of the Village Hive operating through public facilities.

In 2023, the Village Hive in Ou Char saw a 537% increase in the number of calls directly from the community compared to the year prior. 172 calls were made to the Hotline in 2023 from community members advocating for themselves versus 27 calls in 2022.

The Village Hive has also received more calls that are categorised as 'crisis cases'. In 2022, just **3%** of cases were classified as crisis, while **13%** were deemed crisis in 2023. Most of these cases involved child labour, with children working instead of regularly attending school.

In response to the uptick in crisis cases, an additional social worker was transferred to Ou Char from CCT to manage the increased caseload effectively. In 2023, 64 new cases opened and a total of 152 cases were active in Ou Char. 58 cases graduated from the Early Intervention Journey seven-step program and are now self-reliant and able to meet all their needs without welfare support.

We suspect that the cases in Ou Char will be temporarily raised in 2024 while the underlying vulnerability is addressed. After this time, we expect to see a reduction in both early intervention and crisis cases.

Our monitoring and evaluation team will continue to track the progress in Ou Char over the next eight years as we establish a Village Hive in all eight remaining communes in Battambang District. This data will enable us to monitor longitudinal trends and will inform the ongoing development of the Village Hive.

As well as supporting Ou Char leadership with the first year of Village Hive operations, a number of further developments occurred in Ou Char throughout 2023.

An income-generating activity for the public school was established in Ou Char. CCT's youth centre service was transitioned into the school in 2022, becoming a free after-school care service for vulnerable students. In 2023, an income-generating activity for the public schools was created when the schools opened the after-school care service to all students at the school for a small fee.



While the after-school care service is still free for low-income families until they graduate from the Early Intervention Journey, it is proving to be a valuable resource for families with the means to pay.

Even though the cost to access the after-school care service is low at USD 19.50 per month, the schools are delighted to provide a valuable service and generate additional income to support the school and subsidise low-income families.

Ou Char Commune shares its village health clinic with an adjoining commune called Chamkar Samraong. 36,094 people access the clinic for primary healthcare services from 11 villages.

In the first quarter of 2023, the roof of the clinic was strengthened to address leaking in the rainy season.

We supported clinic staff to provide several trainings and workshops to 36 village health volunteers on clinic services, the role of village health volunteers, identification and referral of families, women's health, and outbreaks of infectious diseases in the community.

Following the training and upskilling of the village health volunteers, we supported the clinic staff and commune leader to provide 12 community outreach workshops on preventative health to people in all six villages in Ou Char Commune.



The home nursing program that was established in 2022 in Ou Char assisted 34 families, comprising 184 people, with home healthcare services, and 36 people were supported to access public hospitals and specialist healthcare providers as a result of those visits.

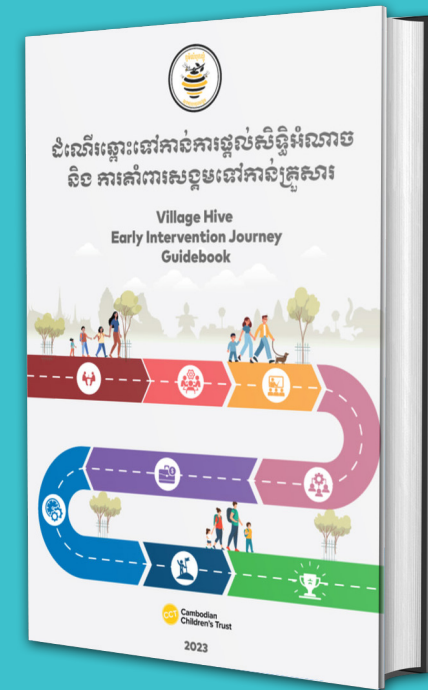
A lesson learned from Ou Char's first year of operations came from the Village Hive workforce. They had been using our Early Intervention Journey and highlighted the need for a guidebook and for the journey to be revised to include a new step.

The six steps in the previous version of the Early Intervention Journey assumed that families would have a rough idea of how much they were earning and spending each month and, therefore, could estimate their shortfall. However, because most families in Ou Char are self-employed and not on salary, they didn't have the data to complete their financial assessment and create a financial goal.

As a result, a new step was added to the journey. The updated seven-step journey now includes a step to enable the family to use a ledger to record their daily income and expenses for one month.

This step has allowed families to create a more accurate financial goal, which avoids complications as they progress through the Early Intervention Journey.

The first publication of the Village Hive Early Intervention Journey Guidebook with the updated seven steps is due to be published early in 2024 and rolled out across all Village Hive communes. An updated edition of the Guidebook will be published each year as the program evolves based on the learnings from all Village Hive communes.



454

(216 girls) students benefited from improved infrastructure in public schools in Ou Char Commune

8

(3 girls) children attended preschool classes at public school in Ou Char Commune

9,083

nutritious meals were served in the public school feeding program

77

children accessed after-school care services from their public school, which included extra curricular life skills and remedial tutoring classes

18

public school teachers were provided with child protection training on managing difficult behaviours

33

new families, comprising **173 people**, were referred for early intervention services in Ou Char Commune

54

families, comprising **266 people**, received emergency support and were connected to public services in the community

38

families completed a financial assessment and completed the first half of the Early Intervention Journey

51

people attended financial literacy training

27

people participated in the community savings groups

Ou Char Focus Group 2023 Results

Two annual focus groups were conducted with local stakeholders, including Ou Char leadership and participants from the wider Ou Char community, who have directly and indirectly received services and support through the Village Hive. Forty-three participants were asked to reflect on the observations in their community since launching the Village Hive one year ago.

CCT's Director, Pon Jedtha, attended both focus group sessions. He said,

"It was an honour to listen as they talked about their lives and the Village Hive Project. It was evident from their reflections that they were gaining knowledge and changing the way they raised their children and interacted with one another. The community believes that their public services are improving and trust is growing, and as a result, families are asking for help when they need it. All who attended mentioned feeling proud of using public services in their community. They now know about their rights, and their confidence in the Village Hive Project shines through."

Participants stated that despite slower economic growth and inflation, they "know how to save money and are aware of spending on things they don't need" and "have paid their debt". They are also more aware of healthcare services and how to access support from public services in their commune.

They noticed many improvements in their community, including
"improved services from the health centre,"
"good quality education", "the commune provides good services and responds quickly", and the "Village Hive staff provide good service and are helpful".

They commented that the public schools are "clean, have flower gardens, are not allowed to sell energy drinks anymore, and have regular meetings with parents". The health clinic was
"reasonably priced, fast and flexible and now has enough medicine to support the community."

Participants also noted improvements they experienced in their families as a result of the Village Hive, saying, "My kids can go to school, and I have time to work or earn a living", "I've improved my standard of living", "My children helped more with household chores, have life skills and are more engaged to do their homework".

Participants reported an 87% improvement in their family's situation due to the Village Hive.

In the future, participants want the Village Hive to "continue to provide school materials for children", "would like a resident doctor at the health clinic", "want a waiting room at the health clinic", "want the NGO school in the commune to be like the Village Hive public schools and stop requiring children to pay for certain classes", "want the schools to provide English classes", "want the commune to continue to provide support for families", and "want to understand how to create a more prosperous business".

Village Hive leaders stated that they had more confidence to deliver services to the community as they had a clear plan and regular meetings, were working effectively together as a team, received technical support when required, had clear policies, budgets and guidelines and could see the benefits for children and families in their community.

However, the most significant change is the way that local leaders want to interact with NGOs, requesting that projects be "handed over to local leaders rather than NGO lead" and "would like to see other organisations doing activities or projects like the Village Hive that are implemented in the local community".

They have noticed many changes in the community, such as "families engage with teachers and schools", "parents set a good example for their children", "parents encourage children to go to school regularly", "families get jobs and vocational training skills", "violence is greatly reduced", "the family has the authority to decide their own affairs", "families understand the services they can receive", "families have stable jobs and income and migration is prevented", "every child can access education", and "alcohol consumption has reduced".

When asked why the number of families accessing services from the Village Hive has increased, they stated, "Families share information with their neighbours", "there is promotion of the Village Hive in the community", "there is increased trust in the community", "the commune has public services and clear solutions are provided to families" and "the Village Hive helps improve the standard of living".

Local leaders stated that there was an 81% improvement in public services in their community since the implementation of the Village Hive.



When asked what improvements they want their Village Hive to focus on in 2024, participants stated they wanted:

"More health education workshops in the villages"

"More funding for Village Hive implementation to meet current needs"

"To see the family continue to have a better standard of living and having the ability to solve problems on their own"

"To see other organisations doing activities or projects like CCT and the Village Hive that is implemented in the local community"

"More local volunteer teachers for children who are in need"

"An after-school care program in all schools"

"A wheelchair for the elderly patients at the health clinic"

"To develop their knowledge of the Village Hive and promote the Village Hive services in their community."

The insights from the focus group go beyond merely offering valuable information to CCT to drive the growth and evolution of the Village Hive. They also provide value to the local stakeholders to implement the feedback and findings in their community.

Based on focus group discussions held with the public schools, commune council, and the local community in 2023, the public primary schools in Ou Char Commune and the Department of Education developed a work plan to continue improving the schools' facilities. Some activities were funded from the school budget, and additional funds were raised in the community.

This demonstrates the importance the Ou Char community places on their children's education and that the community can be mobilised to fund its own development as a result of the operational guidance provided through the Village Hive Project.





Ou Char Stories & Case Studies

Sreyta's income soars from \$6 to \$50

Amid the global pandemic in 2020, Sreyta encountered significant challenges. Struggling to provide food for her children, facing obstacles in sending them to school, and having her electricity and water services cut off, she persevered through these hardships with resilience. She maintained a positive outlook, determined to forge ahead.

Sreyta worked at the local market, selling fruit and vegetables. Despite a complete absence of customers due to widespread isolation, she showed up at work every day. We asked Sreyta how she got through the pandemic without customers or income. She shared, "When I think back to those hard times, sometimes I would look at the sky and wonder why I was struggling so much. But still, I had to keep walking. Even when my life was so difficult, I kept going. If I fall, I get up, and I keep walking."

Not only did Sreyta keep walking, but she also established a thriving small business selling second-hand clothes after partnering with the Village Hive.

Her daily earnings have sky-rocketed from \$6 in 2020 to \$50 in 2023. As a result, she can now meet her family's needs, including food, bills, and healthcare, while independently ensuring her children's education.

Sreyta says she thinks she would have died without CCT's assistance during the pandemic. But now things have changed. "Because I work hard and have CCT supporting me, my life is just getting better and better!"



Makara's unwavering determination to bring her child home

Makara, a devoted mother of three, did everything possible to keep her children close. But juggling work demands, health issues, and her children's education as a single parent was challenging. "I remember there was one time that both my children were sick," Makara shared.

"One had dengue fever, and the other had the flu. It was so stressful because I didn't have any money. But I'm lucky. I had my mum and brother to help me. If I didn't have them, I think my children would have died."

Struggling to manage everything independently, she had to send her oldest son to live with her mum, who was also grappling with financial challenges. After meeting the Village Hive team, Makara expressed that her top priority was bringing her son home. Social workers co-created a plan to help Makara establish a successful business that would allow her to cover her family's expenses. "CCT helped me to buy a sugar cane machine, a cart and a freezer. When I got the sugar cane machine, I was so happy. Before, I had no hope. But after starting the business, I felt so relieved."

Shortly after establishing her business, Makara felt ready to bring her son home. "Now that I'm selling the sugar cane juice, I have more time, and my children live with me."

The money that I get from the sugar cane goes towards my children. It means they can go to school and buy food. If I have anything left over, I invest in my business to earn more money."

Now that her family is back together, Makara's joy comes from the simplest pleasures. From saying, "It's time to go to school," to calling out, "It's time to take a bath," Makara cherishes the little moments with her children that make life meaningful.



Watch Here

How community-centric healthcare transformed Sothea's journey with HIV

After Village Hive social workers in Ou Char came across the story of a woman grappling with the harsh reality of an HIV diagnosis, we encountered Sothea. Her experience stands as evidence of the profound impact of community-centric healthcare.

Sothea felt frightened when confronting the impact of her diagnosis while in hospital. Her family's financial situation intensified her struggles, and she felt compelled to run away from the hospital to provide for her mother and young son. "The doctor asked why I was leaving if I was still so sick," she recounted. "He removed my IV drip as I told him I needed to go and earn money. I'd return to the hospital once I'd made enough money. It kept going like that for so long."

Sothea's intervention unfolded with a strategy that included emergency health care and income generation activities. Sothea was connected to free services at her local health clinic in Ou Char Commune, where she received proper treatment and medication for her HIV diagnosis. Previously unable to afford the necessary medication, her health had been declining. But she soon experienced a marked improvement from accessing the public system.

"This is why our Village Hive model strengthens and improves public health clinics," social worker Malika said.

"It's so important that vulnerable people like Sothea can access free quality health care from within their own communities. Access to healthcare changes everything."

Sothea also received a monthly support payment of US\$50 for eight months, offering a lifeline during a critical period. Beyond financial support, she was assisted in launching a mushroom farm equipped with 300 grow bags and all necessary farming equipment. This allowed her to transition from earning \$5 - \$7 a day to generating over \$20 a day.

After establishing her own business, Sothea implemented a savings plan. Soon, she no longer required any welfare support payments as she cared for her mother and son independently. The success story of Sothea, facilitated by the Village Hive, demonstrates how strengthened healthcare systems, combined with targeted economic empowerment, can uplift individuals from the depths of hardship to a secure and stable future.



Village Hive support shapes a new future for Poug and her children

The reality of poverty means parents often feel they have no choice but to make the heart-wrenching decision of leaving their children in pursuit of employment. This was a situation single mum Poug found herself in. "If I didn't leave to go to work, we wouldn't have been able to eat," she shared.

"I couldn't take my children with me. So I had to leave them with my mum. But when I got to the new job, they never paid me. I didn't have a salary for 4-5 months. So I left the job and returned with nothing. It was so difficult, and I didn't have a home. My children didn't have enough. I felt so bad for them."

Poug would hug her children to sleep at night and cry as she wondered why she couldn't give them a better life. When they were unwell, she was unable to take them to the hospital. Even if medical treatment was available at no cost, the financial strain of transportation and the necessity to purchase food and water during overnight stays was too challenging.

The turning point came when a compassionate neighbour alerted the Village Hive about her family's circumstances.

The Village Hive team co-created a strategy to assist Poug, encompassing income generation through a new business, educational support for her children (including books, uniforms, shoes, and bicycles), provisions of food supplies, a renovation of her house, and the provision of a motorbike.

This support altered Poug's life, inspiring her to persevere and shape a new future for her children.

"Now that I have my own motorbike, I can take my children to school by myself. After I take my children to school, I go to work. I have a beautiful new house and a new bathroom. I'm so happy."



Watch Here

Mao's journey from struggling to afford water to saving \$400 per month

Mao, a new mother, was unable to afford basic necessities like food or water after giving birth. She was staying in a hospital when she faced the stark reality of having two kids while living in deep poverty. "I looked at the people around me; they all had food, but I had nothing. I felt so sad," she shared.

Mao was also struggling to send her daughter, Lyza, to school. She couldn't afford school materials, and Lyza fell behind her peers. Mao remembered a moment when Lyza returned home, asking if she could quit school and start work to help the family. Mao firmly responded, "No. Even though we're poor, you have to study. You must get an education so you're not illiterate like me."

Mao was fed up and knew she needed to take control of her family's life. She visited the commune office in Ou Char Commune, seeking assistance. The Village Hive team responded by organising a financial assessment and literacy training session. Following the training, a collaborative effort led to the creation of a business plan. Today, Mao sells fruit and vegetables at her local market, and she consistently saves between \$13 and \$14 daily. "I can't believe I have the opportunity to start my own business. I feel so happy that it makes me cry."

Thriving at public school, Lyza shared, "Since the Village Hive helped my mum start her own business, we have enough money to pay for my schooling. Our lives are a lot better than before."



How a widowed mother's business led to daughter's thriving education

Ratana found herself at a crossroads when her husband passed away, leaving her as the sole provider for her family. The emotional toll of the loss, coupled with the physical demands of caring for her ageing mother, who frequently experienced falls, created a sense of hopelessness. Ratana struggled to make ends meet, unable to afford basic necessities and facing the daunting challenge of providing for her children's education.

"I didn't know what to do. I didn't have money to pay our bills or send my children to school," shared Ratana. "I went to the Ou Char commune office. Before that, I had no idea the local council could help me."

The collaboration between Ratana and the Village Hive in Ou Char aimed to assist her in establishing income-generation activities to ensure she could support her family independently.

After completing financial literacy training, Ratana co-created a business plan for launching a small restaurant and food stall. Before long, Ratana witnessed a considerable increase in her daily income.

Reaksmeay, Ratana's 14-year-old daughter, attested to the positive impact of working with the Village Hive, stating, "My family's situation has improved a lot. My mum has her own business, and my school results are better because now I have school materials, clothes and enough food."



Landmine explosion survivor empowered to lift entire family out of poverty

"I'm disabled. I got injured by a landmine when I was young, which damaged my hands, legs and eyes. Life hasn't been easy since then. I was sad and didn't know what to do. There was nothing I could do. I just had to accept that I couldn't have a good life like others.

I am a flower farmer. I'm the breadwinner for my family. My two siblings and nephew are all my responsibility. Before my two siblings became ill, our situation wasn't so bad. They were both working, and even though we had low salaries, we were okay. But after they fell ill, all responsibility fell onto me. I grew flowers to care for my family while working from home. I've been working with Ou Char Village Hive for the last eight months. They've helped me to change my mindset.

Now, I can work to earn a better living so we can have a better future. They've also ensured my nephew can access his local public school. And all the education fees were covered.

Now, my nephew is going to after-school care, and I don't have to worry if he's safe because the teachers look after him very well. And now I have time to work while he's getting extra education.

They have also taught me to manage my money, start saving, and stop wasting money on unnecessary things.

Now, I can make \$25 a day from selling flowers. My life is so much easier than before." – Kunthea.







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