

**Informal Education Program**  
**of Women's Network for Unity**  
**Six-Month Activity Report**  
**April-September 2006**

**Background**

The Women's Network for Unity (WNU) is a grassroots collective that encompasses sexual minorities, who are mainly engaged in sex work, and actively works for the *empowerment* of these groups to fight HIV/AIDS, violence, and discrimination. The network centers on building solidarity, assertiveness and self-empowerment among the community of sex workers- one of the only successful proven strategies to minimize HIV/AIDS. The network provides a space for women to come together, share ideas and discuss the challenges they face and how to solve them collectively.

There are six areas of Phnom Penh where the education program is carrying out. Some are long-time squatter neighborhoods, and others are areas around the city known for sex work. Poverty and violence are endemic. The squatter areas are often unsanitary. There are no government services and the government schools require fees that are prohibitive for the desperately poor sex workers who are members of WNU. Most WNU members sell sex for from 5,000Riel (1.25\$) up to 5\$ and are driven by desperation and poverty. *The WNU research into violence and sex work* indicates that many of the girls who leave home do so to try to support extended families, many of whom have lost their land because of debt and who can no longer even grow rice. Sometime the sex workers do not have enough money to feed their families.

Most of their children who have been to school started late and are not up with their age group. Many have never been to school because their parents could not

afford the fees and transportation, in turn condemning these children to lives of poverty without any job opportunities. Some of the children will expand their opportunities and not be forced to accept unhealthy, dangerous and poorly paid unskilled work.

### **Program Activity**

In the last six months, the education program is delivered to four designated areas: Phsar Touch, Train Station, Building and Svay Pak. In the four areas, the program provides three different classes for the children namely the Basic English class, basic numeration and break dancing.

The total number of children attend the English and basic numeration is 97, 39 boys and 58 girls, and the number of children attend the break dancing class is 70, all boys for the moment.

**Table 1: Number of student by area**

Project Area	Initial No. of kids	Current No. of kids	Sex		Study schedule	No of students increase	No. of dropout
			M	F			
Svay Park	70	43	21	22	Sat		15
Psar Touch	15	20	4	16	Mon-Tue (noon)	7	
Building	15	9	2	7	Mon-Tue (late afternoon)		8
Train Station	15	25	12	13	Wed-Thur	2	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>58</b>		<b>9</b>	<b>23</b>

### **Basic English and numeration:**

For Basic English and numeration class, students are divided into two different classes:

- The first class contains of students whose age is below 10 years old and they study basic consonant (starting with ABC).
- The second class consists of students that are from 10 years old up. These are children who have been to school before and have abandoned because their family can no longer afford their education. Their class following the course book called English for Children.

### **Break dancing:**

The break dancing class aims to build self-esteem for the kids. In this class, students are coming from the Basic English and numeration class and there are also students in one area, Building, who only come to study break dance.

**Table 2: Number of children by teaching curriculum**

<b>Project Area</b>	<b>Basic Consonant (ABC)</b>	<b>English for Children</b>	<b>Break Dance</b>
Svay Park	23	32	30
Psar Touch		22	15
Building	7		15***
Train Station	13	4	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>70</b>

\*\*\* All students in the break dancing class in Building area only come for the dancing class and not in the literacy class.



***\*Break Dancing practices in different areas***

### **Student Enrolment at Public school:**

Among all the students who are studying in the class, there are 44 of students that the project will enroll them for the coming school year of 2006-2007 ( start on Oct. 2006 )

Table 3: student enrollment

<b>Project area</b>	<b>44 of student to be enrolled in public school</b>	
	<b>Girl</b>	<b>Boy</b>
Svay Pak	4	5
Psa Touch	12	9
Railway Station	9	5
Building	3	6
<b><i>Subtotal</i></b>	<b>28</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	

### **Progress of the students:**

- Reading
- Writing

Basic numeration, the students have been learning are: add, minus, multiply and divide depends on the class. The students have improved their ability very well in the numeration class.

Break dancing class requires students to have both talents and patience in practicing. Since the commencement of the class, students have improved their skills significantly and there are outstanding students who are been able to perform in public. The most outstanding students are from Phsa Touch area and

they have been able to performed in public for four times, two times at the cultural events of two Oxfam's students exposure trips from Hong Kong, one at the workshop of Every Child Organization and lastly joint in the break dance competition held at the Korsang Introduction workshop, which was held at WAC boat office.

The evaluation from dancing teachers show that the students in some areas still needs more practice to overcome the basic class of break dance. However, the project aims for the students, at the minimal, finish two to four dancing styles at the end of the year.

The teachers envisage that some very talented students, if they are able to regularly join and practice in the class, they will be fast learners and far better in their skills.



*\*Picture of children studying English in Svay Park, Phsa Touch and Building.*

### **Achievement:**

- 1- The program has drawn a lot of interest from the students. In some areas like Svay Pak, students have some two hours before the classes commence and be waiting for learning to start.
- 2- Students express that the informal education program beside helping them to gain knowledge they need, it also makes them form their vision and goal for life in their future.
- 3- The program has transformed some students in the target area to stop involving in drug use, like glue sniffing and taking Yama.
- 4- The parents of the students are very happy that this program is on-going because they can see the improvement of their kids. Some students have

read for their parents and some other whose parents are illiterate, helped teach their parents.

*“After I join in this informal class for about a month, I know how to read but I can not write very well. My parents are very happy that I take this class and can read English and they encourage me to read every night,”* said Sokline who is 14. She has never been to school before and is a waste picker during the day and evening.

- 5- The local authorities in some areas are very satisfied that this informal education program is conducting by the Women’s Network for Unity in their areas. They are supportive to the program but they could not help provide the place.
- 6- The informal class has contributed to behavioral change of the community toward the children of sex workers.

*“My neighbors never talked to me. But the informal class changes their attitude toward me. They ask me what do I learn and when I tell them that I study English, and numeration, the neighbors admires me that say that I am better than before.*

*During free time when I meet my friends, we practice English by chatting with each others and my parents are so surprised that I speak English. I never did before,”*

### **Challenges:**

- In some areas like Building situated in the slum area and the government mobilization program of the family from slum areas to the outskirts, new development place, have had impact on the program because students have to move with their family to new area.
- In some particular area, like Svay Pak, the number of students taking the classes fluctuates due to their family economic situation and location.

Some kids need to sell cakes their parents make in order to earn income around the garment factory areas and some others are helping their parents in the household chores or reparation when the flood come in their community. Thus there are certain numbers of students who keep coming in and out of the classes.

- There is another organization working with the street children called Mith Samlanh (FRIENDS) who run similar program to this Informal Education program and they have transportation mean to pick up students from home to go to school and come back.
- The small space for the class in some areas make the teaching atmosphere facing difficulties especially for the break dancing class as it requires big firm space for practicing.

### **Cooperation:**

WNU, WAC has had good collaboration with Korsang organization and children break dancing group called Tiny Tune. The teachers for the Basic English class and break dancing come from Tiny Tune and Korsang. Our collaboration with Korsang, who is group of abandoned people by the American's government, and Tiny Tune not only help them to have employment opportunity but provide them chances to help teach and build capacity of the children of the sex workers who are socially excluded and discriminated against like them. In addition, the teachers of the break dancing class express that their involvement in the program teaching the kids benefit them and keep them away from gambling and other activities that can have bad influence on them.

This program brings good collaboration between WNU and Every Child organisation. This organisation recognize and appreciate WNU for creating this program for the children and they have had meeting with the parents of the children to understand the difficulties of the parents and later conducted a workshop to work out the strategic planning on an Assessment of Violence Against Children in Cambodia.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation:**

- The monitoring of the progress of the students and the relationship between teachers and students takes place regularly. Classes in two areas are monitored regularly every day by the WNU because one takes place at WAC/WNU office and the other class takes place at a secretariat's house. WAC has made four visits to the project areas.
- For the evaluation of literacy class, tests have been conducted on alphabets to check the memory and pronunciation of the students. There are two kinds of test; written test and pronouncing test take place in each class of the four areas. However, there is no test on numeration yet. After tests have been conducted in all areas, the students are now moving to reading and writing skills.
- In break dancing class, the progress of the students varies. The method that the teachers use to encourage students for more practice and increase their efforts is by conducting group competition in the class. The winning group feels proud that they do better and the weak group is advised to make extra effort in order that they improve and can win in the next competition. The anger and commitment of the students push them to improve in their practices.
- There are five meetings took place so far between WAC, WNU, Korsang, and Tiny Tune group. The meeting aims to give reflection and feedback to the implementers, Tiny Tune in this case, and the teachers, after the visits and there are suggestions made in order for this informal education program to be better.

### **Field visits:**

- The, Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers, APNSW, a regional network of sex workers is very supportive of the program for the children of sex workers. They visited the students in the class and noticed the improvement of the students.



- The is another professor from University of Science in Philadelphia who visited the program and was very interested in making more effort to raise more funding for the program aiming to build proper school facility for these children.

### **Reflection from parents of the students**

WNU secretariats and team leaders in different areas made field visits to the projects site and talking to their members who have children participating in the project and ask them to reflect on this program. Below are the reflections form parents of the students.

#### **Box one: A mother who is a Karaoke girl**

*At the age of 38, I am working as a karaoke girl; I come from Kampong Cham province. I've one child and two nieces. All the three kids are now studying in the Sex Workers Informal Education program of WNU. They study English, break dance.*

*I am very happy that WNU has this program because since we were at the village, my child and nieces could finish only grade 1 at primary school. And when I moved to Phnom Penh to do this job, I do not have capacity to support education for my children because I earn very little income.*

*I see many changes in my children since they attend this class. They show me the book and read for me. I checked in their book and I see the scores, all are good scores. I think that my children try to study hard and I'm happy for them. They said the teachers teach very well.*

*I am very happy that WNU has this program. Thanks to the donor that provides funding for this project for without the funding my children would not have any chance to continue their education.*

**Box two: A mother who works in massage parlor**

*I am working in a massage parlor in Svay Pak area. I am 44 years old. All the three kids that live with me, one is my son and the other two are nephews are studying in the Informal Education of the Women's Network for Unity.*

*Since the setting up of this program, children of sex workers and children of poor people can go to study. I am very happy; I do not know how to express my happiness. I hope that in the future my children can enroll in the public school. I have already witnessed the changes since they all start attending these classes. They are in break dance and English class. They read for me and break dance to show how they have learned.*

*Thank you for creating this program. I hope the program continue for many years as without the program, my children would not be able to study.*

**Box three: A mother who works in massage parlor**

*In the future, I hope that my children can change to speaking a lot in English. I am very happy even though my living condition is very bad, but my children can study.*

*This program also contributes to the reduction of discrimination against poor people like us. Because we are poor, people in the community did not like their children to talk or play with my daughter. Since she goes to the English class, she can read English and teach to her younger siblings and they neighbours see that. They admire my daughter that she is clever and more kids are now playing together with her.*

*At night, she reads her textbook for me and sometime during the day when I go to work, she reads and teaches her siblings to write letter. She said the teachers pay good attention to the students.*

*My gratitude goes to the donors and WNU for setting up this program and supports the learning materials for students. I strongly hope that the program continue for long time and helped children of poor people like sex workers and massage girls. Many parents are in similar conditions like and we are not able to support our children.*

#### **Box four: Thank you letter from parents of the students**

*We the parents of the students would like to express our gratitude for the Women's Network for Unity that set up the education program. It brings us warm trust for the education of our children.*

*We support and will continue to participate in this program.*

#### **Participant Biography**

##### **At Phsa Touch area**

1-Leuk Chuon Srey Pich

2- I am 16 year-old

3- I am now a student of grade 8<sup>th</sup> at Wath Phnom

4- I have 3 siblings (2 brothers and 1 sister). I am the oldest sister in the family. I live with my parents at Phsa Touch area.

5- I want to learn English very much but I have no chance. So when my mother told me that there is a project of informal education at WNU for children, I was very interested in this program.

6-Since I attended the class, I know English quite well including speaking, writing and listening. I can communicate with my friends in my community by speaking English like daily communication. Moreover, my neighbors start talking with me more as they admired me about my capacity in speaking English. And my parents are happy to see my improvement.

7- I hopefully that I can reach my goal as since I started this informal education, It makes me to set my future's goal. I want to be an English translator.

8- It is very useful for my community because I and other children in my community can gain more knowledge. When we have education, we can work and earn money to support my family. It is also honorable to my family and my community that I and other children can find a good job.

9- This program changes me a lot especially the communication between my neighbors and my family. We become friendly and talk to each other a lot.

Additional information:

I would like to thank this project very much that gives me and other poor children the opportunity to learn. I hope this project will continue to support children longer. Just only providing this informal education, I feel very satisfy enough. And I think that most of the children joining in this informal education are also very glad because it is unique and special-the environment of class and the way of teaching that is different from school. It means all of students have more freedom in learning what we want joyfully.

### **Participant Biography**

#### **At Svay Park area**

1-My name is Sok Srey On.

2-I am 14 year-old.

3-Everyday I work for pay to tie up firewood. I work since 9 o'clock to 5pm a day and when I tied up100 bundles of firewood, I get 1500riels. Normally I can earn 3000riels to 4000riels per day.

4-I have 3 sisters and I am the oldest sister in the family. My mother is a massage girl. I live with her and I do not know where my father is.

5-My mother told me that there is program for children's education in my community and I am very happy to join this program as I am not able to go to school. This program is free, so I can participate in this informal education free without paying any money.

6-Even I cannot earn money for a day when I attend class, I feel very happy as I also want education and I am very happy while I meet other children who also come to study with me. My mother satisfies with this project as I can learn without paying money.

7-I think that this project can help me to reach my goal. Even though, I cannot attend the public school, I can also learn the informal education. I want to be a teacher as I want to teach other children to know reading and writing too.

8-For my opinion, this program is very useful for the children of poor people in the community who are not able paying the fee for school. This project helps children to reach their goal like me I want to study but I do not have opportunity to go to school. Before I studied at grade 4<sup>th</sup> but I stopped studying as my mother did not have money to support my education. So it is lucky that I can learn too.

9-My participation in this project changes my role in the community. Before my neighbors said that I am poor, I cannot go to school because I cannot even earn for a living. How can I have money to go to school! And now I can learn like others, so no one discriminate against me anymore.

Additional information: this project helps me to integrate in the public school but I cannot because if I go to school, no one earns money for my family and it is very hard when I have nothing to eat. My mother agrees with my decision whether I go to school or not depends on me. However I want to help my mother to earn money for the family. At last I thank very much to this project that gives me opportunity to learn like other children.