



# Carpets for Communities

EMPOWERING MOTHERS TO BREAK THE CYCLE OF POVERTY

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## CfC Mothers Master Impressionist Art

The next Monet may emerge from Poi Pet Commune, Cambodia, now that CfC mothers have mastered impressionist art.

In cooperation with Carpet Maker Thailand (CMT), CfC



A CfC mother demonstrated her mastery of impressionism in hand-hooking this wool area rug.

has developed a new style of area rug that involves the mixing of different colors of material to create an impressionist effect. The result is literally a work of art.

Translating CMT's design specifications and training CfC participants did not come without challenges. Even CfC local staff had never experienced impressionism, so training initiated with the CfC team comparing realist and impressionist paintings. The staff passed their new knowledge on to participants in a day-long training session. Each woman demonstrated her understanding by hand-hooking a small sample.

In addition to developing the new carpet style, CMT



Yuem Yet proudly displays an impressionist sample that she hand-hooked in a CfC design training session.

and CfC have qualified a range of materials, including silk, wool, linen, ramie, and twisted viscose, that will be used to hand-hook the designs. The style and material changes are driven by CMT's plan for market expansion.

## CfC Husband and Wife Devise Yarn-Cutting Solution

With the increasing complexity of Carpets for Communities' impressionist area rugs came a need to devise a more efficient and more effective yarn measurement and cutting tool. CfC participant Neang Ouch and her husband, Neang Chanthon, realized this need with Ouch's first impressionist rug. They have since engineered and replicated a solution that has been proliferated among all CfC mothers. The new tool, made from wood, nails, recycled bicycle spokes, and recycled hoses can be used to measure and cut all types and thicknesses of yarn to any specified length. The couple's invention has helped to improve the productivity of all CfC participants.



Chanthon demonstrates use of the yarn measurement and cutting tool that he and his wife, Ouch, designed.

## Sixty-Six CfC Children Head Back to School

After a three-month holiday from July through September, Poi Pet Commune public schools are now back in session. With the start of school, CfC social workers were busy preparing back-to-school kits and helping participant mothers enroll 33 new students, many of whom were formally working in Thailand's Rong Klua market, in formal education. For many of these children, it is their first opportunity at an education, what CfC hopes will be a turning point in their lives.

In addition to the new stu-

dents, 33 CfC children who were enrolled in 2005 returned to class this year. It's been a struggle for some,



New students Pisa, Rung, and Sovann don their new, CfC-provided school uniforms for their first day of school.

particularly those who have progressed to secondary school. Whereas each of the more than 20 Poi Pet Commune villages has at least one primary school, there are only 4 secondary schools in the area. That means students have to travel long distances to study, and in cases where the students don't have bicycles, getting to class is not feasible. CfC has granted a loan to one family for a bicycle, and where a loan is not possible, CfC is investigating other opportunities for secondary educational support.



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### Suntex Donation Fuels Cut-Off Rug Production

Suntex Pte Ltd, a garment manufacturer in Phnom Penh, kindly donated 500 kg of scrap cotton material to CfC in October. Suntex's generous support has provided work to 10 women the past 2 months as they hand-hook cut-off rugs for Trash Bags, a recycled products wholesaler in Australia.

Heun Kim-On, a new CfC participant, proudly hand-hooks her first carpet using Suntex's scrap material.



### Cambodia Celebrates Water Festival

In early November, thousands of people flocked to Phnom Penh, Cambodia's capital, to watch boat races in celebration of "Bon Om Tuk," the Water Festival. One of the most important festivals in the Khmer calendar, this holiday marks the natural phenomenon of the reversal of the current of the Tonle Sap river (with the onset of the dry season, water backed up on the Tonle Sap lake begins to empty into the Mekong). It also celebrates the epic victory of Jayavarman VII over the Chams who occupied Angkor in 1177.



An "om tuk" trolls up the Tonle Sap river following an intense race.

*Carpets for Communities makes education possible for vulnerable Cambodian children by empowering their mothers with secure incomes through the production and sale of one-of-a-kind, hand-hooked carpets. Carpets for Communities is a joint-project of the Cambodian Hope Organization (CHO) and the Millennium World Peace Foundation (MWPF). Both are not-for-profit organizations.*

## A "Beer Girl" Shares Her Story

It is far too common for young Cambodian girls to wind up in the sex industry, something that CfC aims to prevent. Sraynart, a 20-year-old "beer girl" at a Poi Pet pub, shares her story:

"I was born at Saiyto Camp along the Khmer-Thai border. My family was very poor. We moved to Phnom Penh in 1996 in hope of my parents finding work to support our family.

But, in Phnom Penh, our lives became worse. My father drank a lot. He beat me, my mom and my five siblings everyday. Eventually, he abandoned us for a second wife. Without a place to live and food to eat, my mother took us to live with my uncle in Kampot Province.

In Kampot, we sold noodles along the beach, earning just enough to live. About this time, fighting erupted in Phnom Penh, and my uncle

was killed. His land in Kampot, including the small plot where we lived, was seized by a powerful man. My mother fought back, but she was detained by authorities and spent 18 days in prison.

I remember those 18 days clearly. My siblings and I became beggars on

Sraynart tends to customers at a Poi Pet pub.



the beach. We had no shelter. We were so hungry. We all missed mom. We wanted to die.

Following intervention by a human rights group, my mother was freed and we moved to Banteay Meanchey, near the Khmer-Thai border. We had nothing. I watched my mother cry; she was hopeless in sup-

porting us children. It hurt.

I liked to study, but I grew up in a society that believes a girl's education is useless, so I quit school after passing grade nine. I wanted to help my mom support our family. I tried to find a good job, but all I could find was beer girl work in Poi Pet.

I have been a beer girl nearly three years. I work half of the day and all night to earn 1,500 baht [\$40 USD] per month. If clients are not satisfied with my services, the pub boss blames me. The boss and guests often try to abuse me. I feel frightened and tired with my job. You may hate me because I remain in this work, but I have no choice. I want to be a beautician, but it can only be my dream. I just think, if tomorrow will be another day... may there be changes for my life..."

— Seng Mongheng,  
CfC Field Operations Manager

## CfC Mother Sacrifices Income for Son's Education

Saw Ret, a 43-year-old mother of four children, joined CfC in June 2006. She claims her life has improved since she started hand-hooking carpets. "Right now I have work; I can earn money to support my family," she shared.

But, when asked about her family's combined monthly income pre and post-CfC, Ret noted that it's decreased nearly 30%. She explained that her 14-year-old son, Ponleo, used to contribute to the family's income as a



Saw Ret with sons Ponleo and Chanrut.

construction worker in Thailand's Rong Klua border market. Since Ret's had regular work through CfC, though, she's asked him to stop working and start studying. Ponleo says he wasn't happy

as a construction worker in Thailand. His work was irregular, and sometimes, he couldn't get any work at all. That left him without money and education.

But, now, Ponleo shares, "I don't work. I just stay at home and go to school. I study everyday. I am really happy because at school I can make friends with other students."

Sacrificing income for school shows that Ret and son Ponleo understand the true value of education.