

TEND. St George's 10th March 2024

Maree:

Last November all of us in the Walters family went to Cambodia to visit our friends Nay and Craig Greenfield for the first time. This is something I've wanted to do for 24 years so it was a real blessing to finally get there.

Many of you have heard me share the story of growing up with Nay Houy here in NZ since our church sponsored her to NZ, with her mother and younger brother as refugees when Nay was 5. Her father had been a policeman and had disappeared early in the Khmer Rouge take over. Nay had grown up here with a deep desire to go back to her country of birth and help tend to the huge human suffering there.

Nay married Craig and they went back to Cambodia in 2000. About 15 years ago they started Alongsiders with local Cambodian Christians.

Alongsiders is a Christian mentoring and discipleship movement whose by line is "walking besides those who walk alone". A young adult chooses a younger child in their neighbourhood to encourage and mentor. We are deeply thankful to God to see its amazing growth - The movement is now run by churches in 31 developing countries of the world with 40,000 youth and children. With an aim to reach 50,000 by 2025.

They are raising up a whole new generation of young people who really are TENDING – responding to human need in loving service. They are building hope and purpose in kids from vulnerable backgrounds, helping develop their emotional, mental and spiritual well being in a one on one mentoring relationship, supported by a solid curriculum and their church youth group.

The concept of Alongsiders is best explained with a short video. Lets hope our technology cooperates this time....

Daroth video. 2.46min. <https://youtu.be/iUnbe5HROf8>

Evan:

That was Daroth 10 years ago, and this is him now pictured here with his family, still faithfully serving, once a big brother, now one of the key leaders of Alongsiders International. Through the work he is involved with at the support center, his team creates a welcoming and familiar environment for youth to join in, not just locally but internationally as we discovered, when we visited on our first day in Cambodia.

We were shown around the facilities at the international support center, from high tech AI powered translating software for video production (14) to the cartoons used to educate the children everything from Gods love to Grief to Keeping ourselves safe.

That welcoming culture continued down at the camp, Shalom Valley, where we joined the 5 year celebration of the camps opening.

We then joined in all the fun of camp, with excited Alongsiders singing and dancing, the beautiful swimming pool and energetic worship! Led by the young people of course.

As always, fun and a common challenge unite people, and we took turns as teams crossing the water obstacles (19) and there was much fun falling in!

Fun in the water continued to be a theme. As a whole camp we swam in the sea, some for the first time, pure joy!

Plastic pollution is commonplace in Cambodia, with little to no waste management, so the campers were presented with a challenge to clean up a local beach, shining example of care for creation.

Now food! While iced coffee and Sprite, were a familiar taste and sight, here, crabs proved to be a fun challenge. Other new tastes included fish head and boiled eggplant. Make sure to ask Calum about how the local french patisserie was!

On our last night we had a BONfire and reflected on the symbol of one light spreading to many lights pushing back the darkness. (24) A very significant time was spent remembering a young boy who had jumped into flood waters to help save his friend and had ended up sacrificing his life for his friend.

And it's this faith and sacrifice of the big brothers and sisters that we learnt of, that caught me by surprise, I didn't expect it.

Take this young man we met, who worked 60 hrs a week in a clothing factory, ironing and spent his only day off with his little brother, taking him to church, through educational cartoons and genuine friendship. It's this dedication to discipleship, to tending, which is the hope and light of Christ in Cambodia's dark and troubled past, filled with decades of war, genocide and suffering. We were deeply impressed with their commitment and humility and their sacrifice.

Here's a quick snippet of the camp and celebration of 5 years of Shalom Valley camp. Also a thank you from Craig for your support of Alongsiders through St Georges mission giving.

5 year video 1.16min

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_9ByOf9p3_JNsQo3OFxjm6lyyM7Vm4Es/view

Yes thank you so much – AH KUN in Khmer -- for your support St George's and for letting us share today. You're welcome to talk to us more about our the camp and Alongsiders International. We have a table of resources at the back.

As we finish let us all remember that everyone has a part to play in responding to human need, being Gods hands and feet in this broken world. All of us do it in our daily life and work or study. Let's remember that Jesus is our example and if we are finding we are in nearing compassion fatigue then God will provide us the energy, resources and love to do this if we let him.

Let's renew our commitment to TENDING to the needs of people so that God's love may be known to all.

We have a minute to quietly reflect on these Questions

Who are the people in your life who God is inviting you to notice, risk reaching out to and offer something of yourself?

Do you need to open yourself up to the God who TENDs so that you have refreshment for all the TENDING that you do in your daily life? How will you do this?

Is there a new person or organization you have time / money / love you can offer?