

The Phnom Penh Post

Student of the week: Yang Leaphea

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Three years ago Yang Leaphea made the move from Banteay Meanchey to study and live in a dormitory supported by the Harpswell foundation in Phnom Penh. In order to get a spot in the organisation she needed to pass a rigorous series of interviews, and since being accepted she has made the most of her time in the capital. Her hard work and effort recently won her a spot on the Ship for South East Asia Youth Program, or SSEAYP. (see our article about this programme on the next page)

After graduating from high school, Yang Leaphea, like many students, started looking for a scholarship to continue her studies. Eventually she got two scholarships: one to study international relations at the University of Cambodia and another to study law at the Royal University of Law and Economics. In addition to her busy academic schedule, she is also a treasurer of the University of Cambodia's student senate, and works as a volunteer teacher at A New Day Cambodia, an orphanage and educational centre for children from the Stung Meanchey dump.

In October, Yang Leaphea will join SSEAYP for a month-and-a-half journey to ASEAN countries and Japan in order to learn, exchange experiences and compare cultures. While on this trip she will also discuss leadership skills and other important topics in order to develop relations between the countries.

Although Yang Leaphea spends the majority of her time on academic work, she is also involved in community service. In 2008, she joined a programme set up by University of Cambodia students called the People Improvement Organisation (PIO), which raises funds to buy food and school supplies for children who are living in the Stung Meanchey dump. She said that she had no money to help them, but she could give advice and encourage them not to give up hope and study hard. "I think they want to study, but they have no chance," she explained.

When Yang Leaphea first came to Phnom Penh she found it difficult to compete with other students, as she came from the provinces and had limited English language skills. Rather than feeling sorry for herself, she started taking extra courses in English and studied in her free time. As a result, she has overcome the obstacles that once stood in her way and has become one of the top students in her class, receiving A grades in almost all of her classes.

Yang Leaphea said that her achievements have hinged on three values: setting objectives; thinking about the benefits to herself, her family, and her country; and turning her ideas into action. "When we look at things in positive ways with a clear goal, we will get what we want," she said. In the future, Yang Leaphea says she wants to become an ambassador because she is interested in international law. She hopes to help improve Cambodia's relations with other nations in order to develop the Kingdom in a positive way.