As the summer winds down, we wanted to share some exciting updates with you. With your support, the Harpswell ASEAN Program in Women’s Leadership expanded to include 22 outstanding participants from 11 countries in Southeast Asia, plus Nepal. In June, we saw 21 Harpswell women graduate from our program in Phnom Penh and begin promising careers. We have added a capstone project to our civic engagement program, continue to host engaging leadership seminars at the dorms and will soon be sending our 2018/2019 Harpswell US Fellows to Tennessee and Georgia to begin their studies in the US. Read on to learn more!

HARPSWELL NEWS

Harpswell ASEAN Program in Women’s Leadership. We recently wrapped up the second successful leadership training program at the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) in Penang in partnership with the Center for Research on Women and Gender (KANITA). The 12-day training, attended by 22 accomplished young women, has doubled in size since last year’s pilot program and has grown to include participants from all ten ASEAN nations, plus Nepal. We also welcomed back four program alumnae who helped to facilitate discussions and to build out the alumnae network. The curriculum, taught by professors, scholars and business leaders, included critical thinking, women’s health, debate, leadership skills, civic engagement, Southeast Asian government and society, gender studies, and communications and technology.

We welcomed notable guest speakers, including former Chief Minister of Penang, Dr. TK Koh, former Minister of International Trade and Industry Rafidah Aziz, and entrepreneur Paul Flowerman. The Leadership curriculum was led by Penny Burtt, CEO of Asialink. Participants enjoyed community work on the island of Pulau Aman and a site visit to the Women’s Center for Change. Friendships flourished quickly among the participants as they learned and shared together—and the alumnae network is growing and active. Two of last year’s participants started their own women’s leadership programs in Myanmar and the Philippines, and this year’s participants are already discussing their own joint initiatives. The third program is scheduled for June 16 - June 27, 2019.

Class of 2018. On June 17, 21 members of Harpswell’s Class of 2018 graduated. Families, students, alumnae, staff and Leadership Residents celebrated with a morning of speeches, music and dance. Graduate Eng Davith’s speech captured the bittersweet sentiment of the day: “It is one of the happiest days in my life. I can reflect on my school and family memories, but one thing that I will carry on forever is the beautiful chapter that I have created with my Harpwell Family. Thank you friends and sisters who made this community feel like home and for always having each other’s back no matter what.”

Partnerships. Students and faculty were delighted to welcome Grant Rule and Sam Mellet, Co-Founder and Director of the Susan McKinnon Foundation (SMF), to the dorms on International Women’s Day in March. SMF’s continued support of Harpswell has allowed us to enhance and improve programming at the Dorms and expand our Alumnae Program.

Civic Engagement Program. The capstone project of Harpswell’s Civic Engagement Program is a project proposal competition. The challenge has yielded a number of successful and innovative projects, including the organization of high school leadership workshops, an elementary school education initiative, capacity building for a small NGO and a library and literacy program for street children in Phnom Penh.

Photography. International photojournalist Jodi Hilton visited the Harpswell dorms and worked with our students and staff in December and January. Many of her extraordinary photos documenting life at Harpswell are featured on our website and in this newsletter.
STUDENT NEWS

Len Sievlan graduated as Valedictorian from the American University of Phnom Penh (AUPP) with a degree in Global Affairs. She plans to study sustainable development this fall at Agnes Scott in Decatur, Georgia as a Harpswell US Fellow. You can read Sievlan’s valedictorian speech here and watch her graduation ceremony here.

Soy Sreyneh and Duong Sovathana participated in Perspectives Cambodia, the largest public speaking and debate event in Cambodia. Sreyneh and Sovathana won first and third place, respectively.

Students Ly Sokhana and Tan Bunhourn placed in the top 10 teams and received honorable mention for their “Eco-Plastic” project at the International Business Model Competition in Utah. Earlier this year, they won second place at the McKinsey Mekong Business Challenge in Bhutan and second place at the Cambodian Business Model Competition in Phnom Penh. Sokhana and Bunhourn have also received funding from a US investor (Harpswell Advisory Board member Jonathan Saunders), toured plastic recycling facilities in China and met with Cambodia’s Senior Minister of Transportation. Their innovative Eco-Plastic project aims to transform Cambodia’s plastic waste into durable asphalt concrete roads.

Leadership Seminars. In June, Arn Chorn Pond, founder of Cambodia Living Arts (CLA), gave a leadership seminar on his life and experience preserving and promoting Khmer culture and arts around the world and to younger generations. Earlier this year, students attended leadership seminars led by Neoh Sze Ming, Deputy Chief Executive Officer at CIMB Bank (Cambodia), and Nuon Sidara, Project Coordinator at the Cambodia Center for Human Rights. Mr. Ming spoke with students about the fundamentals of banking and finance and reflected on his academic and career path. Mr. Sidara’s seminar explored the discrimination and barriers faced by the LGBT community and discussed the importance of building greater acceptance of the LGBT community in Cambodia.

ALUMNAE NEWS

Alumnae Retreat. Harpswell alumnae traveled to the Cham Bok Community in June for the annual Harpswell Alumnae Retreat, organized by the Harpswell Alumnae Association. Alumnae spent the weekend sharing memories, team-building, hiking, and learning to make sticky rice and bracelets from members of the local Cham Bok community.

US Fellows Program. The 2017/2018 US fellows wrapped up a successful year in June. Ang Sivlong and Douern Seyha attended Christian Brothers University and were warmly welcomed by the Memphis community. Sivlong advanced her career in pharmacology by taking chemistry, biology and nutrition courses, in addition to advanced French classes. Seyha supplemented her degree in food tech and chemical engineering with biology, chemistry and global studies classes. At Agnes Scott College in Georgia, Try Sophane deepened her understanding of complex human rights issues by taking courses on Muslim relations, world politics and environmental leadership. Sophane hopes to return to Georgia to pursue a Master’s of Law. The upcoming 2018/2019 academic year has three bright fellows landing in the US at the end of August. Len Sievlan will be attending Agnes Scott College and Ly Nhokchin and Eang Davith will be settling down at Christian Brothers University for the year. Harpswell’s US Fellows Coordinator (and former Leadership Resident) Maggie Doyle Toran has done an outstanding job supporting the Fellows this past year.

Alumnae Achievements. Kaing Menghun (Class of 2011) was awarded the 2017 Presidential Award for Exceptional Performance from the Asia Foundation and promoted to Senior Program Officer. Menghun, together with fellow alum Eng Chandy, represented Cambodia at the Harpswell ASEAN Program in Women’s Leadership this summer.

Alumnae House. Harpswell’s first year alumnae and Harpswell Alumnae Association have moved to a larger and more modern facility, which was dedicated with a joyful housewarming celebration in late May.
RETURN TO HARPSWELL
Board member Elyse Lightman Samuels reflects on her recent visit to Cambodia. Photos by Jodi Hilton.

At the beginning of this year, I made a pilgrimage to Cambodia. After having spent much time in Cambodia at an earlier stage in my life, I had not been back since 2012. Now, two children later, it was time for me to return to reconnect with what feel like my roots.

On my way to the TT dorm, I drove through narrow dirt streets littered with plastic bags and discarded soda cans, an open-air beauty salon, a new internet shop with row after row of computers. And then I arrived at the gate, with the golden Harpswell plaque. Inside, I met a group of young women whom I had not met before but who felt familiar. Some had broad smiles and were warm and talkative, some were shy and contemplative. All of them have a story about how they managed to get an education in their villages and come, with their dreams, to Harpswell.

On this visit, I traveled with one of the current students, Kimhuoy, back to her village. It was a Saturday morning and it was wedding season, so on the way we passed traditional Khmer music playing and makeshift wedding tents assembled by the side of the road, one after another. We met Kimhuoy’s mother and sister, who is in high school, and her grandfathers from both sides of her family, as well as her grandmother. Kimhuoy’s sister cut into green coconuts with a machete and inserted straws while roosters scurried around us.

Kimhuoy’s parents are farmers, and her mom led us out a dirt path, through bamboo trees and streams, past fields and fields of vegetables. We met her father out there, and he smiled with delight at seeing Kimhuoy. She was wearing her pink Harpswell t-shirt and sunglasses. She wears her shirt with pride.

Kimhuoy said her parents decided to send her to university because they see many problems that happen to women. Her mom wanted to learn but had no opportunity to pursue higher education. She thinks only education can help her daughter, her family, her community, and her country. Kimhuoy studies engineering at university. She said she is proud of her English and how she can express herself, that she can communicate well with other people, even people she’s never met.

She said that before, she did not know how to cook but now when she comes home her mother tells their friends her daughter can cook, and that she is “really proud of me.”

While much has changed in Cambodia since the last time I was there, Harpswell continues to attract some of the most talented, thoughtful, curious, ambitious young women and we nurture and advance that potential. It is a joy and a privilege to witness firsthand and to be a part of.

LEADERSHIP RESIDENT NEWS
Our talented Leadership Residents have gone on to pursue educations and careers around the world. Kasia Nalewajko received her Master’s degree in Public Policy from the Hertie School Governance in Berlin and will pursue a PhD at the European University Institute in Florence this fall. Amna Yameen, assistant professor at Bahria University in Islamabad, published a case study on Harpswell and is now in Ghana to lead trainings to empower rural women. Gabrielle Fiore received her Masters of Philosophy at Cambridge and is now working for the Halo Trust in Cambodia. Jocelyn Labombarde, founder of the thriving Harpswell music program, works at St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital in Memphis, researching the influenza virus. Jojo Lam is now the Founding Director, Development and Administration of Teach for Cambodia.
In September, 2017 we launched our first capital campaign to raise money for the investment fund and the ASEAN program. We are delighted to report that we have already raised 90% of our goal, and we hope that we can count on your support to reach the rest of our goal by the end of 2018. We are deeply grateful for your support, and your continuing commitment to our mission.

With Gratitude and Best Wishes,

Alan P. Lightman, Chairman
Kara Lightman Anthony
Navin Moul
Katja Nelson
David Roe
Elyse Lightman Samuels
Yim Kalyan
Veasna Chea, Honorary Member

Announcements

Our website features beautiful new images from photojournalist Jodi Hilton’s visit to the Harpswell dorms in January. Please have a look!

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