

Case Study: Thyda

UWS Pea School | Cambodia



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Thyda



Meet Thyda

Thyda is an 11 year old girl from Pea village in Ratakaniri Province, Northeast Cambodia. 13 years ago, when Thyda's parents were her age, there was no school in the village and so they never learnt how to read and write. Her parents are now subsistence mountain rice farmers, working long hard days in the fields and returning late in the evening, hopefully with food for her and her siblings. Since Thyda was 5 years old she has collected groundwater for her family, and vegetables from the forest for her mother to make soup with. Thirty minutes away from her house there is an underwater spring which Thyda can only access through digging by hand. She will carry 25 litres of water back to her house in a basket that she carries on her head. She does this by herself, every day, before school starts.

Thyda first began school when she was 6 years old at the tiny school that is now one of five classrooms at UWS Pea School. She loves to read and, although she owns no books of her own, can now do this as much as she wants to. Her favourite books are Khmer fables and she dreams of becoming a teacher one day (so she can read more books!).





Championing Girls Education

In July 2017 our School Partnerships Associate, Susanna Worth, visited UWS Pea School alongside students from RGS Guildford who spent a week teaching there. She describes the experience as follows:

The first thing you notice when visiting UWS Pea School is the contrast between girls and boys. This is noticeable because, instinctively, the children will divide themselves into girls-only and boys-only groups even when encouraged not to do so. Thyda was just one of a large group of smiley, giggly, affectionate girls who took me into their circle, plaiting my hair, sitting with me in lessons, and braiding bracelets for me to wear which matched their own. I was told by our Building Director, Saveth, who was working as a translator for the school trip, that life for girls in these communities can be hard and their childhood short, with many finishing their schooling at 12 and 13 to marry and have children. Because their bodies are not fully developed, a high number of these girls will also die in childbirth, while a quarter of children born across the country will die before their 5th birthday. Cambodia has the highest infant mortality rate in Southeast Asia.

Spending time with Thyda and her friends I realised just how important it is for these girls to come to school, ask questions, have fun, be opinionated, access education and be empowered. Many women in Cambodia are still discriminated against due to their gender, but with more and more girls like Thyda attending school each day, there is the potential to create a different future.