

AUSTRALIAN KHMER:

thriving on the waves of change

KHMER INTERAGENCY INC

STATE CONFERENCE

1998

A celebration of the survival and determination of a remarkable refugee community.

An examination of the difficulties and challenges that have been and are faced by the Khmer community of NSW.

**held on Friday 7 August 1998
at Main Hall, Block C
GRANVILLE COLLEGE OF TAFE
136 William Street
GRANVILLE.**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Khmer Interagency Incorporated wishes to acknowledge the hard work and thank all those involved in organising the conference and who gave their time and energies on the day, thus enabling this conference to take place. We also wish to thank the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs for providing the funding, through the Community Settlement Services Scheme.

Chong Hean Ang
Jorge Aroche
Raquel Carvajal
Jan Collie
Merryn Dowling
Hong Ly Duong
Jacinta Dykes
Colin Gale
Soour Hai Gov
Sim Heang Hay
Ravy Heng
Velvy Holden
Vannak Ing
Darany Khiek
Sochan Kong-Ly
Teresa Leung
Wanny Leung
Chantha Lim

Chhayri Marm
Sorathy Pouk Michell
Phanna Pao
Rolando Ramos
Nola Randall-Teung
Philip Ruddock
Angela Saad
Theany Sayon
Sareth Seng

LyChantha Sok
Lay-Choo Sor
Rhonda Stien
Xuyen Tang
Meng Eang Thai
Chanboramy Var
Sophie Vartis
Por Heang Ya
Tek Heang Ya

This document has been collated and edited by Nola Randall-Teung and Sophie Vartis.

PROGRAMME

- 8.45 am Registration
- 9.30 am **Welcome address** - Ravy Heng, Deputy Chairperson
- 9.35 am **Aboriginal Welcome** - Mr Colin Gale, Darug People
- 9.45 am **Keynote Address**
Hon Philip Ruddock
Minister for Immigration & Multicultural Affairs
- 10.10 am **Khmer Family Issues & Social Relationships**
Mr Lychantha Sok
Co-ordinator, Khmer Family Welfare Services
Burnside Cabramatta
Mr Por Heang Ya
Multicultural District Officer
Department of Community Services
- 10.40 am **Power Dynamics between Khmer Workers, their Employers & Clients**
Mr Chong-Hean Ang
Manager, Burnside Cabramatta
- 11.00 am Morning Tea
- 11.15 am **Education and Buddhism**
Ms Nola Randall-Teung
Outreach & International Student Co-ordinator
Granville TAFE
Mr Sochan Ly
Assistant Researcher
Ettinger House
- 11.55 am **Khmer Women's Issues**
Ms Tek Heang Ya
Khmer Welfare Worker
Burnside Cabramatta
Ms Velvy Holden
Executive Officer
ANCORW
Ms Sim Heang Hay
Khmer Welfare Worker
Burnside Cabramatta

- 12.35 pm **Khmer Lunch and Video**
Screening of Videos about aspects of Khmer society
- 1.20 pm **Khmer Women's Issues (cont.)**
Ms Ravy Heng
Multicultural Health Liaison Officer
Fairfield Community Health Centre
Ms Vannak Ing
Ethnic Obstetric Liaison Officer
Fairfield Hospital
- 2.00 pm **Torture and Trauma**
Mr Meng Eang Thai
Khmer Bicultural Counsellor
STARTTS
- 2.20 pm **Khmer Elderly Issues**
Ms Lay-Choo Sor
Khmer Resident
(Written by *Lay-Choo Sor & Lucy Abbott*,
Ethnic Project Co-ordinator, Fairfield MRC)
- 2.40 pm **Khmer Youth Issues**
Mr Soour Hai Gov
Multicultural Youth Worker
Burnside Cabramatta
Ms Phanna Pao
Co-ordinator, JPET Programme
Anglicare Cabramatta
- 3.20 pm Afternoon Tea
- 3.35 pm **Workshops**
Children & Family
Power Dynamics
Education
Women
Elderly
Youth
Torture & Trauma
- 4.15 pm **Plenary and Formation of Committee**
- 4.45 pm **Vote of Thanks**

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BIO DATA

Chong-Hean Ang has a Masters in Social Administration, UWS. He is a founding member of Khmer Interagency Inc and is currently the Chairperson. Since mid-1993, he has been employed as the Centre Manager of Burnside Cabramatta Centre.

He manages a multicultural and multidisciplinary team that provides child protection, family support, youth work and adolescent legal services. He spent seven years working for the Department of Community Services from doing field work to managerial level. Recently, he completed a two-year appointment as a Community Representative for the Child Protection Council of NSW.

At present, he is a member of the management committee of STARTTS, Holroyd Parramatta Migrant Service, a Board member of the Council of South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE and is a member of the Australian Institute of Human Resource Management. He has also been appointed by the Minister for Community services as a member of the Serious Young Offender Review Panel.

Chong-Hean strongly believes in and promotes a teamwork approach and wishes to do research in the area of organisational change, management and leadership styles and development.

Jan Collie is the executive Officer of Cabramatta Community Centre and has worked for this organisation since 1985. Prior to this, she was Director of a child care centre in Green Valley. Jan has seen Cabramatta Community Centre grow from a small neighbourhood centre to a very large multi-purpose community organisation and has watched the community services industry develop and change over the past fifteen years.

Jacinta Dykes has a BA in Youth Affairs from RMIT University. She has worked for 8 and a half years in youth services with the last three and a half years working in a policy position on Indo-Chinese youth issues. She works in this position at Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre.

Mr Colin Gale from the Darug people, has a family tree dating from around 1740, before European Settlement. In 1791, Captain Watkin Tench and party met a group consisting of Goomeberee (aged about 50), his son Yarramundi (aged about

30) his sons Djimbah and Colebee (about 6 and 8). Yarramundi later had a daughter Maria, born around 1805 - Colin's great, great, great grandmother.

Colebee later was with Cox, when he surveyed the road across the Blue Mountains (1814) and later was given the first Aboriginal land in 1815 (the deed was signed on 31 August 1819).

Maria was the first child enrolled in the Parramatta Native Institution. On 28 December 1814 and after this school was moved to land opposite her brother Colebee's land. The area became known as "The Black Town" in 1824. This was 4 miles (6 x 7 kms) west of the present Blacktown City. His family have lived continuously within 2 miles of that locality since that time.

In 1988 a group was formed to collect and research the family's history, this group was called "The Darug Link", with three circles connected representing the past, the present, and the future. Colin became chairman in 1991 and has been ever since. He had the organisation incorporated in 1992 and later changed it to an Aboriginal corporation in 1996 "The Darug Tribal Aboriginal Corporation".

He has been involved in School Education in policy making and lecturing, Uni lecturing (Napean, Hawkesbury, Sydney, UTS, Macquarie and the Catholic University) and been involved in interviews and recordings on video / TV as the olympic games "Festival of Dreaming" representative.

He was a speaker at the inaugural Australia for Native Title and Reconciliation meeting at Circular Quay and Sydney Town Hall in 1996, involving numerous reconciliation groups. He was part of the committee that submitted the Blue Mountains for World Heritage Listing. He currently has one exceedingly well documented Native Title claim before the Federal Court.

Ravy Heng had commenced studies in medicine prior to 1975 but had to abandon this when the Khmer Rouge took power. She arrived in Australia in 1980, and studied first Accountancy at TAFE, then transferred to and completed the Welfare Certificate in 1985. She worked as an Ethnic Teachers' Aid to support herself while studying part-time. Upon the completion of the Welfare course, she obtained work in the Department of Health as an Ethnic Health Worker. This required her to do further study and she completed the Certificate of Counselling in 1986. She continues to work at the South Western Sydney Area Health Service located at Fairfield Community Health Service.

Velvy Holden has a background in Nursing, Welfare, Community Development and Social Administration. She is currently the Executive Officer with the Australian National Committee on Refugee Women (ANCORW Co-operative). Velvy has been working with refugee women since 1982, first as the Chairperson of the National YWCA of Thailand's Refugee Committee, then as the founder of ANCORW in 1989. She was a participant in the Consultation on Refugee Women held in Geneva in 1988. Velvy is currently completing a Master's degree in International Social Development at the University of NSW. She also has expertise in

issues of employment relating to refugee women. A paper “The Impact of Mental Health on the Employment Opportunities of Refugee Women” is in the process of being published by the UNSW.

Vannak Ing trained and practised as a mid-wife in Cambodia during the early 80's. She is currently employed by the South Western Sydney Area Health Service as an Ethnic Obstetric Liaison Officer, providing education and support to Cambodian Women.

Sochan-Kong Ly arrived in New Zealand in October 1987 as a refugee from Khao-I-Dang refugee camp. He became involved with various peace and culture organizations and the Cambodian Community at Management Level such as Secretary of Wellington Cambodian Buddhist Trust from 1989-1991, Publications Officer from 1992-1997 and then Trustee of Wellington Cambodian Buddhist Trust from 1991-1997. He was President of Cambodian Student Association at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand from 1991 to 1993.

He studied for nine years in New Zealand and completed the following degrees: Bachelor of Arts, Master of Education and Master of International Relations prior to moving to Australia in May 1997. He is now involved with the Australian Khmer Redevelopment Organization, the Khmer Youth Association and the Khmer Interagency Incorporated. He is working as a Research Assistant at Ettinger House. Currently enrolled as a research student at the University of Sydney, he is hoping to complete a Ph.D on Cambodian Higher Education.

Phanna Pao is currently working at ANGLICARE Migrant Services, as a program co-ordinator with the Job Placement, Employment and Training program (JPET). JPET is a program funded by the Department of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. The JPET programme at ANGLICARE aims to assist young people gain employment, access training or return to education using a holistic approach.

From 1994 to July 1995, she worked as a welfare worker with Burnside Khmer family program. From July 1995 to November 1997, she worked with the Khmer Community of NSW Inc. as a Grant In Aid worker.

She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts and is currently in the final semester of her Masters in Social Administration with the University of Western Sydney Macarthur. She has previously been involved with major projects including the Cambodian Women's Support Committee, Khmer Health Project, Cambodian Play Group and Khmer Child Protection Interest Group.

Nola Randall-Teung is an Outreach Co-ordinator at Granville College of TAFE and co-ordinates educational programmes in the local community and responsible for the International Students who study at Granville. She is an experienced ESOL teacher.

She completed her Bachelor of Arts in Education at Trinity College in Deerfield, Illinois, U.S.A. And then worked briefly in Bangladesh. Upon her return to Australia, she completed a Post Graduate Diploma in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages).

Through her involvement in teaching at TAFE in 1982 on vocationally oriented programmes for ethnic specific groups, she became involved in the Khmer community. Since then, she has been extensively involved with many Khmer organisations in Sydney. As a result of this involvement, particularly in relation to education, she wrote two books, "Begin to Learn Khmer" and "Begin to Speak Khmer". She is currently the secretary of the Khmer Community of NSW Inc and Assistant Secretary of Khmer Interagency Inc.

Nola first travelled to Cambodia in 1987. Subsequently, twice a year, she acted as escort for groups of Khmer returning to visit their families until 1992 when the United Nations began setting up elections in Cambodia. In 1993, Nola took leave without pay from TAFE, and moved to Phnom Penh where she spent three years teaching English at the Australian Centre for Education.

In 1996, Nola returned to work at Granville TAFE, and in 1997 undertook a further qualification. As her final project for the Master of Arts in Language and Literacy, she investigated the impact of education in Khmer on the capacity of Khmer people to participate in education in Australia. Today she is going to give a very brief outline of that study.

Hon Philip Ruddock graduated from Sydney University (BA LLB) and practised as a solicitor before entering Parliament. Currently the Minister for Immigration & Multicultural Affairs, he was first elected to the House of Representatives as Member for Parramatta at a by-election on 22 September 1973. Due to various electoral redistributions, he was subsequently elected to Dundas, and is now the Member for Berowra.

He has been involved with issues of immigration, holding the Parliamentary Party Position of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs from December 1984 to September 1985 and again from May 1989 to April 1993. He travelled to the Thai border camps in 1984 and has been to Cambodia itself three times. (1986, 1991, 1994)

LyChantha Sok has been working with the Cambodian community for more than ten years. Initially, he worked as a House-Parent (Residential Care Worker) with Cambodian unattached minors. He later worked as a welfare worker and then as a Co-ordinator of Khmer Family Welfare Service for Burnside Cabramatta Centre.

LyChantha is a trained social worker. He obtained his Associate Diploma in Community Welfare in 1991 and his Social Work Degree this year. LyChantha had presented several papers in the State conferences organised by NSW Child Protection Council and Family Support Service Association.

Lay-Choo Sor has been living independently since the beginning of the genocidal regime of Pol Pot in 1975. Lay-Choo arrived in Australia in November 1980 and began actively attending English courses. Now at 69 years of age and fluent in Khmer, Thai, Chinese Mandarin, Hokkien and English, Lay-Choo is not only actively involved in Khmer community activities, but also in the wider community. Her motivation in studying English has rewarded her with an independent life style with very minimal support from her relatives.

Rhonda Stien has been the CEO of Burnside for six years. She holds post graduate qualifications in both Social Work and Management and has twenty five years experience working in the social welfare field. The majority of that experience has been in delivering services from a non-government sector base to children and families. She has worked overseas, interstate and in different agency contexts in NSW.

In her time at Burnside she has been committed to developing a strong and positive agency culture which supports staff to work flexibly alongside clients.

Meng Eang Thai was a medical student in Cambodia before 1975. He is a refugee and a trauma survivor. Meng Eang has experience in casework, community development as a worker at the Khmer Community of NSW. In February 1992, he commenced work with STARTTS as a bicultural counsellor.

Chanboramy (Ramy) Var was trained in the refugee camp in Thailand as a primary school teacher and was later employed as an interpreter for the United Nations. She arrived in Australia in 1983 and was involved initially on a volunteer basis, with the Khmer newspaper and the Khmer Saturday school.

In 1985, she was employed as an Ethnic Teachers' Aid for Cabramatta and Ashcroft High Schools. In 1986, she became the Outreach worker, working with elderly and isolated women at the Khmer Community of NSW. She gained employment as a Health Education Officer in 1987 with the Fairfield Health Service. During this time, Ramy has developed a number of Health Education and Health Promotion Projects including the production of a Health Promotion Video called "New Country, New Way of Living". Ramy is now working for the South Western Sydney Area Health Service as the Newly Arrived Refugee Programme (NARP) Co-ordinator, based at Area Health Promotion Unit, Liverpool Hospital.

Por Heang Ya has worked for the Department of Community Services for over 14 years as a District Officer - Multicultural. Since living in Australia in the last 16 years, Por Heang has been involved with Cambodian families not only in the capacity as District Officer but also as a teachers aide, an interpreter at court, and a bilingual community consultant.

At a community level, Por Heang has been involved as a convenor for the Khmer Interagency for many years and has subsequently held the position of President of the Khmer Community of NSW Inc since 1994. Por Heang received a Diploma in

Nursing in Phnom Penh in 1968 and a Bachelor of Arts (Welfare Studies) in Australia in 1993.

Today Por Heang is going to share with you about the traditional Cambodian family values and practices and the impact that living in Australia has had on these. He will also address questions such as, what family patterns are still practised in Australia; what type of problems Cambodian families have encountered; and how to address these issues.

Tek Heang Ya was a teacher in Cambodia from 1969 until 1975 when the Khmer Rouge took over the country. She came to Australia as a refugee and worked as a teacher's aide at Chester Hill ILU upon arrival. She completed an Advanced Certificate in Real Estate at TAFE before going on to complete a Diploma in Social Science. She has a long standing interest in the Khmer Women's Network as well as being involved at a State level as a member of ANCCORW since 1991. Involved with a number of committees working with Refugees. Currently involved with the Management of the Khmer Community of NSW Inc. particularly in relation to women's issues.

In 1985, she began working for Burnside at Parramatta with the Unattached Minors Settlement Programme and is now working at the Burnside Cabramatta Centre as a welfare worker, responsible for a range of work on projects concerning support and services for Khmer refugees, families and children in South Western Sydney.

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ABSTRACTS

Chong-Hean Ang “Power Dynamics - Child Protection Work in a Multicultural Context - a Challenging Management Perspective”

This paper challenges Khmer workers to come to terms with child protection issues. The major obstacle to effective practice has been the exercise of workers’ power in their community (i.e. playing “God”) versus working in clients’ best interests.

Firstly, the paper presents several case studies where child protection and domestic problems are being discounted and as a result, women and children are being put at risk.

Secondly, the paper examines the impact of workers’ relationships with clients (professional relations / personal friendships / fellow country men, women / having been through refugee experiences together) on the effectiveness of their work within refugee and migrant communities. It reveals the complexities of being a workers of NESB; their needs to bridge two or sometimes, more cultures and their often confused roles.

The paper also looks at the effectiveness of the access and equity policy implemented by both government and non-government agencies. Does the employment of workers of NESB address these issues? The power dynamics between employers and their workers of NESB (who are seen as experts and specialists) are discussed.

Social welfare workers of NESB are often perceived as inactive and unwilling to participate in child protection work, a question needs to be asked: Are these workers provided with relevant and appropriate training by the mainstream system?

Some successful stories at Burnside Cabramatta Centre are used to illustrate these points and the paper further explores some strategies that may be implemented to achieve best outcomes.

Soour Gov “The Emerging Australians”

In “The Emerging Australians”, Soour Gov explains the dilemma faced by Cambodian young people growing up in Australia. They are trapped between two cultures with their parents locked in a “time capsule” where traditional family values

become frozen. Young people often face some segregation by their very own parents and the community. Often young people have to cope with extreme ways of disciplining by their parents, which often involves physical and emotional abuses. Parents often ask their children to choose between being an Australian or Khmer or other impossible choice such as 'your boyfriend' or 'your parents'.

The generation gap is widening more than ever before, as the young people become more Australian. This creates tension within the family when inconsistency and inflexibility parenting practices are employed by the parents. Moreover, it can be compounded to a critical phase when young people reach an adolescent stage. It often becomes a battle and usually young people end up in an unhappy family environment or have to find an alternative accommodation with the issues usually remain unresolved.

The emerging Australians need the support of their family and their community and particularly the support of the media to portray / depict their positive images. They must not be homogenised because of their looks or appearance. They must be recognised as Australians with the added values they bring from their unique culture.

Sim Heang Hay “Domestic Violence”

The concept of Domestic Violence among the Khmer Community in Australia is still a hidden crime and considered as a private matter which should be handled within the family. This paper will briefly explore some of the issues which confront the Khmer community.

Vannak Ing “Cambodian Women’s Health - Pre and Post Partum”

This paper will outline several aspects of maternal infant health and well being. The areas which will be covered will include: ante natal services, breast feeding practices, post natal health and cultural practices relating to pregnancy and childbirth. Comparisons will be made between each of these issues in Cambodia and Australia in an effort to provide an understanding of the Cambodian women and their way of learning about services, accessing services and maintaining traditional practices.

Sochan-Kong Ly “The Role of Buddhism in Education”

The majority of the Khmer population is Buddhist. The Buddhist monasteries (or wats) and the community of monks (or the Sangha) have played and continue to play a crucial part in Khmer education for many centuries even until today.

Buddhism has always contributed to the important national identity of the Khmer people.

Indeed, colonialism, civil wars, and migration have changed the role of Buddhism in Khmer education. Despite these events, there has been continuity in this religion.

The Khmer people, who have settled in Australia and elsewhere (initially, the majority as refugees and migrants), have brought the Buddhist identities and established them in their adopted countries.

This paper is mainly based on key interviews and personal observation from the four years that I lived in a temple. It attempts to discuss the role of Buddhism in Khmer education, its beliefs and maintenance of these beliefs that have taken place in Cambodia, New Zealand and in the Khmer community in New South Wales. The first part explores the origins, the main concepts and their approaches, the main branches and the Khmer adaptations of Buddhism. The second part investigates the Khmer Buddhist establishments and the role played by the community of monks in education in Cambodia and in the Khmer community in New Zealand and New South Wales. The last part examines the challenges, educational aspects, needs and expectations of Buddhism in the Khmer community in NSW, concluding with recommendations.

Phanna Pao **“Issues affecting Khmer Youth in Relationship to Employment, Education and Training”**

The aim of the paper is to describe, analyse and understand the nature of Khmer youth in the Fairfield Local Government Area. This analysis will be seen in relation to issues such as employment, education and training programmes.

This paper will start with an overview of the educational performance of Khmer youth at school. Discussion will follow the many issues affecting the young people such as the lack of information in career options, a limited employment pool which mainly concentrates on low skilled areas, poor provision of Labour Market Programmes and the impact of programmes such as Work for the Dole on young people. Recommendations will be made on strategies to assist these problem areas such as a LMP programmes that provide industry work experience with a component of training at an accredited institution such as TAFE.

Concluding comments will evaluate the current strategies and issues that have been addressed by JPET, an existing programme to address some of the aforementioned issues and make further recommendations for government and non-government agencies regarding issues faced by Khmer young people.

Nola Randall-Teung **“New Land, New Opportunity for Education”**

Is there an impact of educational and literacy levels of Khmer people, on their capacity to participate in education and training in Australia? Many factors such as age, gender and family situation impact on a refugee or migrant’s ability to pursue education upon arrival in Australia.

In this research, I set out to find if there are any trends emerging in relation to the Khmer people who pursue education. I investigated why they chose to pursue further education and if not, why not. Of particular interest were any gender

differences, differences based on social background and any particular specific outcomes which could be attributed to the Pol Pot era.

The majority of the informants arrived from 1980 to 1983 as part of the first wave of Khmer, who were then classed as refugees.

Findings indicate that among all the Khmer interviewed, irrespective of social background, it was important to pursue education, social background not withstanding. The aspirations of most Khmer families were dictated by immediate need to survive. The first generation often had to abandon immediate plans for further education in order to work so that the children could gain education. People with education were able to make plans that were realistic and achievable and which would gain them an education in Australia. Women usually had to wait for husbands and children to gain education first before they could pursue their own educational needs. Torture and trauma on the informants have had an impact to varying degrees.

Contrary to expectation, people who came with literacy skills in Khmer, their first language, did not necessarily pursue education in Australia. Young people who came with no literacy skills in Khmer, could and did successfully pursue formal education and usually gained qualifications in Australia.

Lychantha Sok “Catching Up With New Life”

Catching up with new life in a country where you have to learn to speak the language, readjust to the new culture, and cope with the unfamiliar social and political systems is not easy for many Cambodian people. Raising children, while catching up with a new life, is even harder. Some Cambodian parents learn to adjust and cope with these challenges quite well. Others find it hard to readjust to the new life and this makes the tasks of raising children become a nightmare experience. This is because the compounding problems that they have to face, the lack of resources to support them, the pressure from their community, and the different child rearing practices. The problems are often exacerbated by their traumatic experiences due to many years of war, the loss of their social support network, and the grief of losing their loved ones.

The paper I am presenting will explore the issues more in-depth and give workers an insight understanding of the difficulties facing Cambodian parents.

Meng Eang Thai “Experiences Working With Trauma Victims”

Due to the large scale social destruction which occurred in Cambodia in the 1970s, the Khmer community who have settled in Australia have experienced torture and trauma to a degree not known by other Australians. STARTTS is a service which has the task of assisting clients referred to them. This paper describes the procedures in place for such a client, outlining the initial assessment, the intensive counselling, and the other intervention options available.

Por Heang Ya “Traditional Cambodian Family Values and Change”

This paper sets out the traditional family values as they used to be in Cambodia in the area of parent-children relationships, the marriage customs and gender roles in families. It then looks at how the effect of migration is placing stress on all these relationships. It concludes with a summary of the types of problems faced by Cambodian families in Australia and some culturally appropriate suggestions to bear in mind when dealing with them.

Tek Heang Ya “The Changing Role of Khmer Women”

- The patterns of Khmer women and their families in Cambodia and in Australia which relate to economics, social and cultural factors
- Highlight the isolation in Australia of Khmer women as the key issue differentiating men and women and their ability to access services
- Identifying possible excuses of disadvantage, Khmer women with poor English skills
- Role reversal puts many families relationships under pressure
- Suggestions