

## **Bridging the pandemic gap**

*Staff and students from St Ignatius' College Riverview have walked in solidarity with Cambodians and Timorese affected by COVID-19*

It's a long walk from Sydney to Cambodia – more than 7,000 kilometres. But students at St Ignatius' College Riverview laced up their boots and set off on this epic journey – or a simulation of it, at least – to raise over \$10,000 for thousands of Cambodians living in the Battambang area whose livelihoods have been impacted by COVID-19.

"It was a great way to fundraise for the people of Cambodia who were massively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic," said Darcy Henry, one of the many Riverview students who took part in the event.

The College staff members, meanwhile, undertook their own solidarity "journey", covering the 3,840km that separates Sydney and Timor-Leste – where the pandemic is also wreaking havoc on people's lives – raising almost \$20,000 along the way. The funds will go to Jesuit Mission Australia to be disbursed respectively through their partners, the Karuna Battambang Organisation (KBO) COVID-19 Relief Fund in Cambodia and the Jesuits' lockdown relief program in Timor-Leste.

COVID-19 has decimated the economies in both countries, with job losses already measuring in the hundreds of thousands. In Cambodia, the life-giving tourism industry is in ruins, garment workers have been impacted by the cancellation of contracts by Western clothing manufacturers, and construction workers have been laid off. With no government social welfare system to depend on, those now unemployed have nowhere to turn; many have returned to their rural villages.

The KBO COVID-19 Relief Fund was set up by the Jesuits in Cambodia to support those most severely affected by the pandemic – mainly the youth and young adults. The fund will provide recipients with small business loans or employment aimed at improving irrigation systems in several villages throughout Battambang.

In Timor-Leste, the Jesuits, with the support of Jesuit Mission here in Australia, are providing emergency supplies such as rice, cooking oil, and noodles to 480 households in vulnerable communities which would otherwise face starvation. They are also hoping to supply these households with protective equipment such as soap as a way to mitigate the virus.

"I'm deeply grateful to the St Ignatius' College Riverview community for walking in solidarity with our vulnerable brothers and sisters. With such help, our partners on the ground are able to respond swiftly and effectively to the new challenges arising every day," said Helen Forde, CEO of Jesuit Mission.

The Riverview students will continue this journey until the last week in September.

**END**



Image attached

[Photo 1 – A group of Year 8 students raised \$2,200]

Bridging the Pandemic Gap  
July 2020  
by Liz Kim 02 8918 4193  
liz.kim@jesuitmission.org.au