

22 year old Namthorng Thom from Banteay Meanchey Province entered LO's GATE (Girls' Access to Education program) as poorest of the poor high school girl before entering tertiary training, again under support from LO's, STREAM (Skill -Training, Education Matching) program, and is now a highly sought after computer systems network administrator working in Phnom Penh. We met and interviewed her at the Royal University of Phnom Penh:

The sense of growth in these girls between high school where they're shy to speak in English and tertiary level where they know enough English, have the confidence and are willing to use what they have, is so encouraging. In fact their growth from uncertain and shy village girls to college girls with lots of get up and



go to the extent they are now picking between job offers, earning really good money and operating with confidence in a 21st century context, has given me the sense that it's all worth while. We never could have known how successful and on so many levels, this program, now going into it's

tenth year, would be. This is real social development, not only in the girls themselves, but the impact on their families, siblings and communities in terms of showing that girls can do whatever boys can in terms of education and well paid jobs has turned social norms on their head and erased cultural boundaries for the better.

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Namthorng tells us, "I was supported by Lotus Outreach for 2 years in the GATE program before being assisted again by LO to win a position at PNC for a two year course in IT.

"I specialised in System and Network Administration (SNA). Web Programming, WEP, is the other specialization available where I studied at Passerelles Numerique Cambodia, but I preferred SNA.

After graduating I applied for a job at Cloud Net Cambodia where I work as a Sales Executive selling website design and finding clients to buy their product. I actually applied as a network administrator to set up computer systems, which is what I am trained for, but I decided to do this work as it is giving me experience that I don't have. Many companies called me for interview so I have a lot of options and while I am now earning an OK salary of \$200 a month, I've been offered \$300 and could easily get \$500 after a short time doing this kind of work.

We asked Namthorng, Did you ever think while living in Kob this would ever happen for you? "In my dream I always hoped that I could get a high salary but could not imagine that I would ever be able to study in such a good university and get such great qualifications. English is very important for getting a good job and I could not have got that without the PNC training where we focus on English 20 hours per week.

Where would you have been had you not continued my education?

"I am the only one from my village that has succeeded in getting tertiary education and all the other girls are working as labor in Thailand or on others farms. Earlier my neighbors actually discouraged me and my family and told me not to waste money on education. Even so I continued to keep my dream and didn't listen and didn't give up. I am very proud and my family as well, that I have kept my dreams alive. My Dad always says to our neighbors, "My daughter is so wonderful! so fantastic! she studied and got a good job in Phnom Penh and sends me money all the time and whenever I need it."

"When I go home I always tell my neighbors they should convince their children and grandchildren to try hard to study and get educated and don't look down on others or listen to those giving negative opinions. To the families to find money to send them to High School and University."

"When I was studying IT at PNC I lived in a share house with 20 other girls. I was house leader and set ground rules to ensure we could live together peacefully such as, 10 pm curfew, no walking alone in the street at night, sharing housework and being honest with each other."

We could never have hoped for such tremendous outcomes ten years earlier when we began supporting girls from poor Cambodian families and advocating for education as a tool to reduce violence against women and which has brought profound and definite change in the poor village and peri-urban communities Lotus Outreach works in. The success of great young women like Namthorng, emerging as leaders and role models in their communities, definitely makes it all worthwhile!!