

Youth Stars Cambodia (YSC)

Project: "Good Citizenship in Action"

Grant Amount: \$20,000

Brief background of Organization and Key People

Youth Star Cambodia was officially established in July 2005 and is registered with the Ministry of Interior as a local Cambodian non-governmental organization (LNGO).

Youth Star's mission is to build a just and peaceful nation through citizen service, civic leadership, and social entrepreneurship. Our work is guided by the belief that building a just and peaceful nation is every citizen's right and responsibility, and that each individual can make a difference.

The purpose of Youth Star Cambodia is to develop leadership and promote good citizenship among Cambodian youth by offering university graduates between the ages of 20-30 an opportunity to provide a year of service to their country. Volunteers/young professionals are placed in underserved rural communities through a demand-driven process, for a period of nine months to one year. Potential host

partners include: commune councils, community-based associations or learning centres, traditional associations or self-help groups, indigenous organisations, schools or school departments, local agriculture or rural development offices, community health centres, among others. As catalysts for transformation, the Cambodian volunteers/young university graduates are role models demonstrating values and practices of good citizenship in the communities in which they serve. Youth Star Cambodia currently works in underserved communities in four provinces: Kratie, Kompong Cham, Prey veng, and Kompong Thom.

Youth Star Cambodia consists of 10 staff: an Executive Director (F), a Head of Program (F) 3 Program Officers (2 M & 1 F), 1 Administrative/HR Manager (M), 1 Finance Manager (M) and 1 Assistant Finance Officer (M), 1 Communications Officer (M), and 1 Administrative Intern (F). Three of the staff are former Youth Star volunteers. All staff are Cambodian. The Executive Director is a dual American/ Cambodian citizen.

Program officers are each responsible for the supervision and management of volunteers in one province. Oversight and support of the program team is the responsibility of the Head of Program who is herself a seasoned development practitioner. She was Co-founder of the Cambodian Women's Media Centre in 1991 and served as its Co-director for more than ten years. She has extensive experience of working on many gender-related issues and is well connected to the gender and development network of organisations in Cambodia.

The Executive Director and founder of Youth Star Cambodia has 29 years of development

experience in Cambodia. She has a proven track record of building strong and sustainable organisations in Cambodia including CDRI and Padek. The Executive Director has strong links with Cambodian policy makers as well as with a broad network of development practitioners in Cambodia and internationally.

Youth Star has an independent, decision making Board consisting of 9 Board Directors. The Board is responsible for policy and for general program oversight. The Board meets twice a year. In January of 2009 Youth Star received NGO Good Practice Certification for its professional practices. An independent audit of Youth Star financial records and systems is conducted annually.

Youth Star partners with over 15 NGOs .particularly for the training of our volunteers, as well as the Ministry of Rural Development Rural Health Department, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, and Commune Councils.

Project

Overall Project Objectives

The overall objectives of the Youth Star project are twofold, (1) to empower young people, through citizen service, to become the next generation of civic leaders and social entrepreneurs and, (2) to engage young people in underserved communities as active citizens contributing to their own development..

These objectives are guided by Youth Star’s institutional values and belief that active, engaged and informed citizens and innovative civic leadership are the heart of a strong, dynamic and responsive democracy. We believe in the power of young people to effect positive, lasting social change. And we believe that service is a powerful way to unite individuals and strengthen communities.

To achieve the above goals Youth Star takes a unique approach by creating service opportunities whereby Cambodian university graduates can gain hands-on experience in governance, and motivate and mobilize young people in local communities to participate in actions to improve their communities.

Project Description

The proposed project promotes youth as role models of good citizenship and civic engagement. Youth Star Cambodia will provide the nation and local communities with young leaders who demonstrate good citizenship in action. Through this project Youth Star will recruit one cohort of 20 Cambodian University graduates to serve as volunteers in under-served rural communities for periods from 9 to 12 months. Youth Star volunteers play a number of different roles in the community in addition to providing technical support. Most important of these roles is that of catalyst for transformation e.g., motivating communities to engage in civic participation, and role model e.g. setting an example of good citizenship and good governance, and promoting local volunteerism

among young people in particular and community members in general. The approach is to empower communities, especially the young people within those communities through transfer of knowledge & innovative practices, and by building collaborative relationships between communities and local governments. Volunteers are encouraged to help communities in ways that reinforce self-reliance, draw on local knowledge and resources, and foster trust between citizens. Through their example, volunteers promote good governance, accountability, and values that underpin good citizenship.

Through this project Youth Star volunteers will enable the establishment, or strengthening of youth clubs and/or youth councils in the 20 underserved communities in which they will work. Through these youth clubs and youth councils young people (between the ages of 13 and 20) will learn the basic principles of democratic governance through hands-on practice of electing and managing their clubs. Youth Council members will engage in regular meetings with the commune councils and put youth issues on the Commune agenda. Thus the councils will give young people a voice in local affairs, improve awareness of democratic values and processes, and promote accountability and transparency of commune councils. The youth clubs/ councils will engage young people from the community in discussions or campaigns on issues impacting on their lives such as HIV/Aids, safe migration, reproductive health, sexual rights and healthy relationships, prevention of gender-based violence, law prohibiting underage marriages etc among others. Each youth club or youth council will set its own agenda and work plan with guidance and input from the Youth Star volunteer. In addition each youth club or youth council will be encouraged to implement a micro income generating activity through which the members can learn basic business skills, technical skills related to the type of business venture adopted, as well as raise funds for their club or council activities. A small micro credit will be provided to each club or council through this project. Each youth club or council will learn to write proposals and prepare a proposal to access this micro fund.

In order to further ensure sustainability of the youth clubs and youth councils, the Youth Star volunteers will facilitate a one week networking camp gathering in Preah Vihear for 20 leaders of youth clubs/councils to build solidarity for mutual support, and to develop a joint agenda for change.

In addition to the above the youth clubs and youth councils will engage its members in community service/ volunteerism. The youth clubs and councils will decide their own community service activities based on the local situation and capacities. Such community service may include tutoring vulnerable students or school drop outs, community hygiene or sanitation work, environment protection or reforestation, among other possibilities.

Main Target Group and Beneficiaries

The project will be implemented in the four provinces, Prey Veng, Kg. Cham,

Kratie, and Kg. Thom where Youth Star currently works. There are two target populations in this project: first, the 20 university graduates recruited as Youth Star volunteers and, secondly over 400 (minimum 20 per youth club or youth council) young people 13 to 20 years of age, 50% of whom will be young women. Youth Star Cambodia has a strong commitment to engendering development, and thus a high priority is given to engaging girls/women in all our projects. Over the past two years women have made up over 50% of participants in most of our activities.

Secondary beneficiaries are the families and thousands of persons in the 20 communities in which the project will be implemented.

Expected Project Outcomes

In the proposed project we expect to see changes on two levels; first in the 20 Youth Star volunteers themselves and, secondly in the under-served communities in which they work. Youth Star's primary goal is to develop the next generation of civic leaders and social entrepreneurs. We therefore expect to see volunteers gain leadership skills through community service and hands on governance. Through service the volunteers will learn to be accountable to the local communities who have applied for them and who have requested their assistance for specific tasks. Accountability to stakeholders is an important element of leadership and good citizenship. They will also have gained skills in critical thinking, facilitation, problem solving, conflict management, communication, team work & motivating others, planning, report writing,, and in writing significant change stories. Furthermore, by serving one year in poor rural communities volunteers will have gained awareness and understanding of development issues and their impact on different sectors of society. The volunteers will be models of good citizenship (take their civic responsibilities seriously) and good governance. By the end of their year of service volunteers will have changed their perceptions about volunteering, e.g believe in the power of service and that each person can make a difference. They will have clear life goals and remain engaged in civic action.

The youth service program impacts communities in a number ways. In the short term we will see communities empowered to take charge of their development through more active participation in civic activities, such as local development meetings and monthly commune council meetings, community sanitation or environment campaigns, etc. As a result of volunteer and youth club activities we will see improved sanitation. Community members will be better informed about laws such as the law on domestic violence, or the marriage law which prohibits under-age marriages, for example. We will see a shift in parents' support of their children's education, especially young girls'. Thus we will see a reduction in school absences, an increase in the number of girls going to and finishing primary education, as well as a reduction in the school drop out rate, and an increase in the number of children going on to junior high and high school. All children participating in the project will be fully literate, and they will have basic life skills.

As a result of the program young people will have a voice in community affairs and development. We will see youth clubs led by young people in their communities whose members are role models of good citizenship for their peers. The youth clubs will be networking with other youth clubs in the same province and engaged in joint civic activities and exchanges. We will see many young local volunteers in the communities, tutoring younger students, conducting community sanitation and environment projects, and raising awareness about social issues such as domestic violence and safe migration. As a result volunteerism will be valued by parents and the community at large. Also we will see a reduction in gang delinquency as young people become constructively engaged in community activities and are valued by the community. We also expect to see youth councils formed that are working hand-in-hand with commune councils to engage civic participation in development. We expect to see local support for the youth councils, youth issues adopted on the commune council agenda, and the partnership recognized and respected. Communities where we work will have been strengthened by having built cooperative relationships between its members and local authorities and service providers. We will also see a network of youth club/ youth councils leaders from multiple communities working together on a joint agenda for change.

Project Sustainability

The benefits in this project accrue to the volunteers and youth club/ youth council members themselves and to the communities in which they serve. Sustainability is built into the project by empowering community participants through transfer of knowledge & innovative practices, and by building collaborative relationships between communities, local governments, and other local actors.

Volunteers are encouraged to help communities in ways that reinforce self-reliance, draw on local knowledge and resources, and foster trust between citizens. Sustainability is further built in by the requirement that communities apply for a Youth Star volunteer and appoint a local community partner. Terms of reference for the volunteer are then jointly agreed between the community and Youth Star. This fosters community ownership of the program and demands that volunteers be accountable to the communities themselves.

During their service, Youth Star volunteers work to build a local corps of young volunteers to continue their work. Thus in each community, a local core of young volunteers continues to tutor children at risk, and to engage in civic actions that benefit the community. Youth Clubs/Councils continue to function under local leadership and support. In this way, activities are designed to ensure that community impacts are sustainable and will continue beyond the life of the volunteer placement. Sustainability is also promoted by establishing realistic project goals, negotiating these with communities in advance, and requiring the active participation of community members which builds social capital.

The program will give a voice to young people in the community and enhance their participation in local decision-making and development. The volunteers and the young people in the communities participating in the program will gain hands-on-experience in self governance through the development and management of youth clubs, youth councils, small micro-enterprises, and will have gained the confidence to engage constructively with commune councilors and other local leaders.

Youth Star volunteers gain skills that enhance their employability. They have an Alumni association through which they can remain active in support of Youth Star, its mission and volunteers. The lessons learned during the project will be applied as volunteers take on leadership roles in government, the private and social sectors in Cambodia.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Volunteers will monitor the project and submit monthly progress reports. Program Officers monitor through regular field supervision visits and produce quarterly reports against objectives and indicators.

Volunteers meet every three months at Youth Star headquarters for reflection and self-evaluation facilitated by the Head of Program. Youth clubs and youth councils will self-evaluate their work against their set objectives and work plans. They will submit an evaluation report at the end of the project cycle.

Youth Star commissions an annual audit of its accounts by an independent auditor at the end of each year.

Use of USG Funds

USG funds will be used mainly towards the (1) management, training and support of one cohort of 20 Youth Star volunteers (these volunteers are not staff but key to the project) and (2) in support of the activities of the youth clubs and youth councils established under their guidance, such as a small micro fund, or for a networking/exchange between all youth club/ youth and council leaders involved in the project. (3) Ten per cent of budget is allocated to management and oversight of the project and our volunteers.

The above project fits well with US government interests as it contributes towards building strong, dynamic and responsive democracy through good citizenship and civic engagement of young people. The United States has a strong tradition of citizen service and volunteering.