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Partenaire Presse · 1 day ago · 3 min read

Cambodia & Solidarity: 'Phare Activity Camp', where children can be children again

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It all began in heavy silence, broken only by the sound of footsteps in the mud and anxious whispers. After the initial distribution of food and an urgent assessment of needs in the two largest camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs), the Phare Ponleu Selpak team in Battambang decided that more was needed than just material aid.



Yes, families needed food, water and shelter, but they also lacked something more fragile and just as vital: joy, creativity and hope. This is how the idea of opening two arts centres in the heart of the camps was born, like a bubble of colour and humanity in this environment of survival.

For the inauguration, graduates of Phare, The Cambodian Circus in Siem Reap volunteered to put on a dazzling opening show. Acrobatics, bursts of laughter and enchanting music swept away the shadows of the previous days, bringing a bright light to the eyes of the children... and their parents.



Then it was the current students' turn to take the stage. With infectious enthusiasm, they gave performances that brought smiles to the faces of hundreds of spectators. Laughter, sometimes long forgotten, returned to their faces.

One father confided, 'For an hour, I saw my children forget their fears and become themselves again.' This moment was not just entertainment: it was a breath of fresh air, a reminder that life could be beautiful, even here.



These performances were just a taste of Phare Activity Camp, a project designed to nourish the mind, body and heart. Children and their families take part in drawing, dance, theatre, circus and music workshops.

But it's not just about art: essential sessions on personal safety, hygiene, nutrition and waste management are organised for children and their carers — knowledge that can literally save lives in a camp.

Impact

In just three days, the impact has already been tangible:

368 children and families attended workshops on safety, food, nutrition and hygiene, learning simple but crucial practices for staying healthy.

Volunteers distributed milk, juice and snacks to the children, as well as toothbrushes and toothpaste for them and laundry detergent for their parents.

More than 1,200 children participated in circus, theatre, dance and music workshops.

More than 900 children immersed themselves in our makeshift library, enjoyed educational games and gave free rein to their imagination through drawing.



Whether it rains, the sun beats down on the tents or mud sticks to their feet, Phare is determined to continue its mission. They have erected secure tents on raised platforms, installed fans and provided drinking water to ensure safe learning conditions. Twenty trainers and staff members work full-time to keep these two centres running as havens of peace and creativity.





For the Phare team, every smile is a silent victory: the victory of protecting a child, of lightening a burden, of planting a seed of hope. But this work comes at a cost.

'We spend around \$2,000 a day to run the two centres — that covers equipment, shows, workshops, food and hygiene supplies, and the facilities needed in the camps. We need your support to continue this mission for as long as the families remain here.'

At the Phare Activity Camp, a drawing, a piece of acrobatics, a song or a shared game may seem small in the face of the immensity of the crisis. But in a child's heart, that little moment can become a bright memory... and perhaps the first building block of a better future.

If you are in Cambodia, you can scan the QR code on the photos to make a donation
Go to phareps.org/donate and specify Phare Camp in the comments when making your donation.