



# RCA Global Mission

## 2021 Year in Review



### Deb Wilson - Cambodia

Working with Garden of Life this past year was challenging and full of joy. This local partner group is devoted to bringing healing and recovery to Cambodians suffering from mental health issues especially resulting from trauma suffered during the genocide and horrors of the Khmer Rouge regime. This and other factors have generated high rates of depression, anxiety, suicide substance abuse, dysfunctional families, and other mental health struggles. Garden of Life is a Christian organization formed to address the lack of professional mental health care and healing services in Cambodia by offering training in professional counseling and direct services. I was privileged to work with the team as interim program manager, advisor, trainer, and chair of the interim Board of Directors.

This year we were tossed around by COVID lockdowns, prohibitions for groups to meet, quarantines, and illness, and yet we tried to focus on what we COULD do as a team and found ways to serve people amid the limitations. Our counselors met people on Zoom when they couldn't meet face to face.

Our team willingly responded to requests for help. One Christian elementary school in rural Cambodia experienced a tragic loss when one of its teachers committed suicide. The other staff and children were horrified by the event and didn't know how to deal with their reactions. The school asked our counselors to come and help and two of our counselors were able to clear their schedules and hop on a bus to this rural province. The third Garden of Life counselor stayed in the office and helped prepare materials for teaching the staff about grief, trauma, self-care, and trauma management. Our team split the group into smaller groups to debrief and give them a chance to share their experience and feelings so they could begin to understand. They offered one-on-one counseling to any who wanted more individual time. Lastly, the team held an educational session with the school staff to teach them about grief, the feelings they were experiencing, and how to manage those intense reactions.

In all, the team spent four days in the community with the school staff and then traveled eight hours back by bus again. I was so impressed by the GoL team's willingness to serve immediately and by how well they worked together and supported each other.



*Counseling by Zoom*



*Counseling team*

Several training modules had to be postponed, but we were able to implement half of the planned workshops including coaching, debriefing, and skills for counseling. This was also a good year for professional development for our three staff counselors. Online courses were still possible during the pandemic lockdowns. Also, we could have three in-house team training sessions because the group was small enough to fit within government regulations.



*Practicing coaching during training.*

In light of the numerous difficulties we faced this year, our team learned a lot about self-care to help manage stress. Taking extra time off as needed, receiving counseling ourselves, sharing meals more often, prayer and meditating/listening to God, extra sleep, enjoying the good gifts around us (like volleyball-sized mangoes in our office front yard), and increasing opportunities to laugh—these are all self-care skills we learned from each other and shared with others who were struggling with the stress and fear of the COVID pandemic.



*Harvesting mangos.*

We were saddened that many counseling clients stopped with us this year as most were uncomfortable with online counseling and they decided to wait until the COVID situation improved. Counseling is still viewed negatively by many Cambodians who tend to think that one has to be “really crazy” before they need counseling. To lose clients who had overcome that prejudice but then didn’t feel comfortable with online counseling was very disappointing and discouraging. A lot more education needs to happen to help many Cambodians see the benefits and life-enriching aspects of counseling services.

- Please pray for the team at Garden of Life for protection, strength, resilience, wisdom, and health
- Pray for Cambodians to seek relief from their mental and emotional pain and wounds and learn that counseling is one tool that can bring healing
- Pray for fundraising efforts to help the ministry continue to grow and mature to sustainable, long-term service led by Cambodian for Cambodians
- **Pray that the next generation of Christian leaders in Cambodia**, both being developed by and those currently serving at the Garden of Life, PPBS and TEEAC **would discern God’s call and be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord**, knowing that in the Lord their labors are not in vain.



*Fun stress management*

**This coming year** there is so much to look forward to. Deb will complete training, advising, and transitioning responsibilities to the new Project Director at Garden of Life and then retire by the end of 2022. She may continue as a member of the Board of Directors but will no longer be a part-time missionary facilitator. Please

pray for Deb to “end well” with Garden of Life ministry in Cambodia and with the RCA as she moves towards retirement.

Ending well includes working actively with this team this year to successfully implement its annual plan. The Garden of Life team has planned eight training modules for this year such as:

- Skills for Counseling, part 2*
- Trauma Counseling, part 1*
- Trauma Counseling, part 2*
- Understanding Suicide*
- Grief Therapy*

f. Mental Health Assessments

g. Coaching

The above training sessions will all be conducted by volunteer foreign trainers who are highly specialized in counseling and training. Our Cambodian counselors translate the sessions into Khmer and help adapt the lessons for cultural context and appropriateness.

We plan to focus on expanding networking in Cambodia with churches, organizations, and businesses to promote and educate about services and expand the number of Cambodians coming for counseling, debriefing, coaching, and self-care guidance. The goal is to have an average of 10 individual clients per week (the max that our part-time counselors can manage) and more than 100 participate in training modules.

This year we also plan for the team to complete a five-year strategic plan. Deb and Susanne (the new Program Director) will facilitate this process with the entire team participating.

We are so thankful for our partners in this ministry. You ENCOURAGE us!

*To Encourage:* to give courage; action giving someone support, confidence, or hope. I have an “encouragement” file that I look at when I feel down, discouraged, overwhelmed, alone, and ready to quit and give up. Notes from supporting churches and individuals in that file remind me that we are in this together; I am not alone. One card, like this one (on the right) I carry in my purse all the time, gives me courage every day to keep on keeping on.

Wishing you all the deepest blessings,  
Deb

