

FMPSD: Project Cambodia

"Be kind whenever possible. And it is always possible." - The Dalai Lama

When five Ecole McTavish students started Project Cambodia little did they know this classroom project would grow to become a school and eventually a school community mission that would help build a school on the other side of the world.

"The students raised a lot of awareness through local and social media and raised a lot of funds in some traditional (and innovative) ways," said teacher Derek Shackelford.

"There was the Bald Barr For Batambang fundraiser (where principal hairstyles/cuts were auctioned off), a bake sale, a pancake breakfast, donations from school fundraisers and grade 9 business projects – even money from a local dunk tank event. The students raised a grand total of \$7199.68 and it will be kept in a bank account until it's transferred to Gems International via Jan and Amgad Rushdy at the appropriate time to help in building a new school."

Jan and Amgad Rushdy, each a retired FMPSD teacher/administrator, have been working with GEM Schools International for a long time and been instrumental in raising awareness in Fort McMurray, connecting teachers and students to the Gem Schools project in Cambodia.

"Jan Rushdy has been a mentor and role model to me since I

was a teenager," says teacher Shannon Loutitt. "Her service at Gems inspired me to do the same. I've traveled to Cambodia as a tourist and had it in the back of my mind that I'd like to go back some day and teach. I would like to help build capacity in the teachers at Gems. I think it will help to remind me just how lucky I am to teach in a fully equipped classroom in a safe school, where students do not have to worry about where their next meal will come from. As well, it will help me infuse a global perspective into the curriculum. Supporting Project Cambodia would be a great way to help the school. My students were blown away when I showed them photos of the school. They couldn't believe the conditions, and the difference between Gems and Ecole Dickinsfield. As part of the Social Studies curriculum, students are creating and executing a Service Plan involving volunteering, fundraising, or random acts of kindness. Some students chose to fundraise for Project Cambodia, and I am so proud of them for that."

Jenna MacDonald is another teacher who was inspired by the Rushdy family. "During the summer 2012, I was searching to volunteer abroad. I contacted my friend Emily Rushdy who worked at GEMS school at the time the timing worked out perfectly and I was able to go for six weeks. During the first trip I was learning how the Cambodian

classroom is run and getting to know the students. This time, I hope to be of more assistance to teachers as they implement more student-centred teaching strategies and the Reading Roots literacy program. The experience has already affected my teaching practice in Canada. I try to set up as many authentic learning opportunities for students as possible so that they may interact with people outside of our school. Building a new school for the GEMS community would be the single most beneficial way to help. The school directors do not own the current facility where classes are taught, so building a new school will ensure that the very talented local Cambodian teachers can continue to provide a high degree of education for students for years to come. My students know that I've taught in Cambodia before and that I'm going again. They like to see pictures of students in Cambodia and learn about how they live and learn at school. I hope that this is helping them to be more globally aware of living conditions around the world. I've been very inspired by the selflessness and work that Janice and Amgad Rushdy have done at GEMS school. Bound by a common interest of education, a few teachers and students from Fort McMurray are making meaningful connections with Cambodians and enriching student lives, both in Cambodia and in Fort McMurray. I am very grate-



SUPPLIED PHOTO

An FMPSD teacher working with GEM Schools International and helping children in Cambodia.

ful to have been a part of this whole adventure!"

So what does the future look like for Project Cambodia? "We will be starting up at the beginning of the year again" says Derek Shackelford. "We will plan numerous fundraisers throughout the year. We would also like to get the charity registered and partner with local businesses to raise money. Project Cambodia will be the main charity focus of Ecole McTavish for the foreseeable future until the new Gems School is built - then we will look for other schools in Cambodia that need improvement with the help of the Rushdy's and go

from there! The eventual goal would be \$50,000.00 a year!"

For more information on Project Cambodia and GEM Schools International please visit the website and social media sites below.

The Fort McMurray Public School District - Doing What's Best for Kids (around the globe!)

Website: <http://ecolemctavish.wix.com/schoolsincambodia>, FB Page: *Project Cambodia*, Twitter: @cambodiaschools

YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/user/TheProjectCambodia>
<https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/project-cambodia-3>