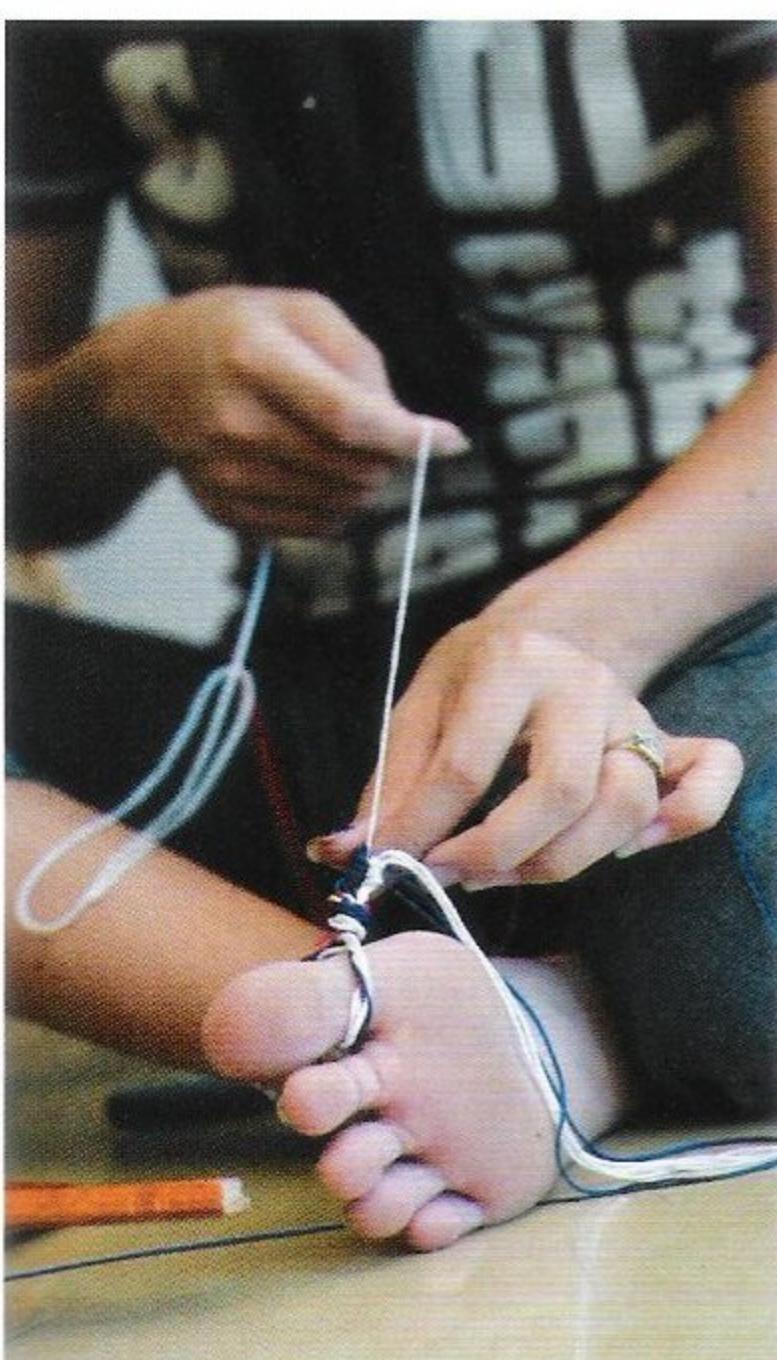
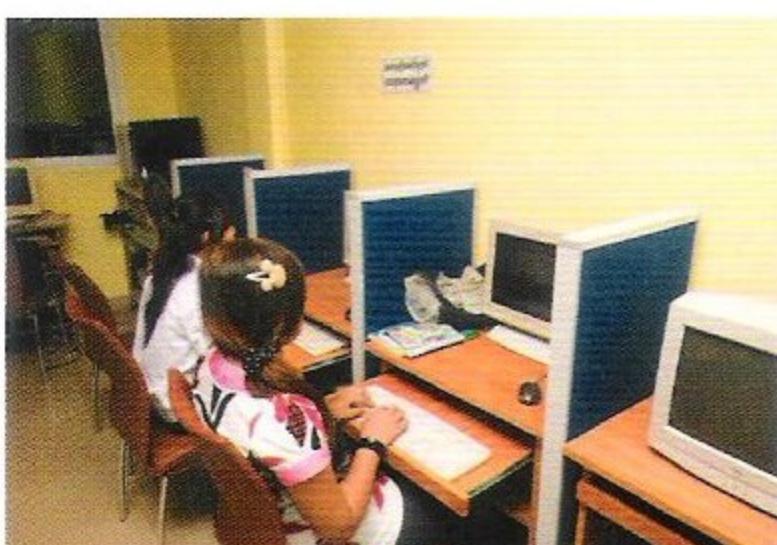


Caring for Cambodia's CHILD RAPE VICTIMS

An old saying exists in Cambodia and unfortunately remains true today: Men are like gold and women are like white cloth (the former easily cleaned, the latter once stained is ruined for life). The country's rape victims are all too often discriminated against, shunned by their communities and sold to work in the sex industry, writes **Laine McDonald**.



Those especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation in Cambodia are young girls living in poor rural families, like Seka*. Just seven years old, growing up in her small rural village, her life was changed forever on 18 October 2008. Having gone out around noon for a short walk with a few coins in her pocket to buy some sweets, Seka was enticed into her neighbour's house by his offer of sugarcane before he raped her. Later that evening, the distraught little girl told her mother what had happened. After having received a report of the crime, the local police in turn alerted SISHA.

An Australian registered international non-profit organisation, SISHA strives to ensure justice and protection of human rights for victims of human trafficking, bonded labour, physical and sexual assault and other forms of exploitation and oppression in Southeast Asia. In Seka's case, a team of SISHA investigators and aftercare staff were mobilised immediately to the victim's small village to provide support to the family and police. At Seka's mother's request, the organisation arranged for her daughter to be placed in an aftercare shelter specialising in trauma counselling. Severe poverty meant that she often had to travel to Thailand for work, and she knew Seka would be safer there rather than unsupervised at home and vulnerable to sexual predators.

SISHA also ensured that Seka received legal representation to prosecute her attacker and 20 year old Bun Chanthorn was eventually convicted of rape and sentenced to 15 years in jail – the maximum penalty for this offence. The court also ordered the offender to pay the victim's family around US\$250 in compensation. Seka's mother sincerely thanked SISHA for its help, explaining that she now feels that her daughter can once again live safely in her village without shame and fear of the offender living nearby.

*Name changed to protect victim confidentiality. Images courtesy of Transitions. For more information and to donate towards helping SISHA's work please visit www.sisha.org