



Culmination of the Wanaka Leos' Water Project at Mkak Primary School (see page 6): proud students and Humanitus representatives, Simon Cowell and Julie Cordner

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Dear friends and supporters,

It is with a sense of sadness, and completeness - albeit countered with many happy reflections - that I write this final Director's Message for the Humanitus Foundation end-of-year Newsletter. After many weeks of deliberation, I have made the difficult decision to relinquish my role as Executive Director, and to confidently hand over the stewardship of Humanitus to Sally Cordner and Simon Cowell, effective as of the end of November 2017. My decision has not been taken lightly, and if I had ever envisaged this day, I would only have made that decision with the knowledge that Humanitus had fulfilled all of its promises and commitments.

Most recently, Humanitus fulfilled its commitment to the completion of the Mkak Primary School program. The completion of this project was made all the more expeditious, and achievable, thanks to Julie Cordner's admission to the board, and her enormous personal and financial commitment to Humanitus and the completion of this project.

In acknowledging this turning-point, I do feel this to be an opportune time for me to share with all of you the story, and origins, of Humanitus. I hope that my brief farewell message will convey to all of our loyal friends and supporters what Humanitus stands for and, most importantly, will give an insight into the people who have represented, and continue to represent, a very unique non-profit organisation.

On reflection, it is hard to believe that the Humanitus many know today was conceived way back in 2001 as a bold concept with a rather apt name, culminating, after many late nights around a kitchen table in South Yarra, into a bona-fide charity on the brink of building four community radio stations (amongst other projects) in Uganda...of all places! It was a great privilege in those early days to work alongside Christopher Cölle, Angus and Celine Carnegie, and the late Trent O'Keefe (the chief proponent, and one of the most inspiring humanitarians I have met). Little did I know where that journey would take us, and the organisation we had so proudly nurtured into being - Humanitus.

With a good two years of negotiations behind us, and as guests of Vice President Gilbert Bukenya, our team embarked on their 'maiden voyage'. Uganda and its people were not unfamiliar to Trent, given his role (after Amin's overthrow and during Milton Obote's second tyrannical rule) as chief foreign correspondent for the BBC. Trent often spoke of his experience being the last Western journalist 'in residence', and ultimately being hastily removed from the country he was reporting to the world on. At the same time, he also spoke of the dire situation that still existed many years later in 'The Pearl of Africa', and his desire to return one day to try and make a meaningful difference.

Even though the situation in Uganda was somewhat removed from Trent's earlier days, it was still a country marred by decades of often tyrannical dictatorship, and one of the most corrupt nations in the world. Nevertheless, off we went on what would be one of the most inspiring and educational - albeit the most heart-wrenching - journeys of a lifetime. Upon landing at Entebbe Airport, we were greeted in a way we thought only reserved for leading diplomats and VIPs. This was to be the first of many realisations that we were in a country full of paradoxes, and one with an enormous void between the ruling elite and those in need. One quickly questioned just where all of those billions in international aid had gone over the years; unbeknown to us we would very soon have the answer to that question!

With much unrest, and civil war still raging, off we headed to visit the provinces...equipped (somewhat disconcertingly) with our own 'gifted' Glocks, and (somewhat pleasingly) a heavily armed entourage. The closer we moved towards the borders of Rwanda and the DRC, the more dire the situation became. We visited hospitals with no running water, electricity, or basic essentials [basically shelters from the rain for the diseased and dying]; clinics with shelves and cupboards containing little or no medicine; and communities that were only just surviving on their meagre crops. Nothing much changed on the return journey to Kampala, until we stopped at the Vice President's farm for a luncheon meeting and then proceeded to view the building that was to house our main radio station in the nearby township. This was the VP's town, and a virtual showcase of what 'can' be achieved with lots of aid money. A town obviously staged for many a visiting diplomat, NGO or funding body.

After a couple of days' downtime back in Kampala, our final appointment before heading back home was to have our pre-approved proposal for World Bank funding signed off by the Vice President and the Director General of Health. All went smoothly, with lots of document signing, plenty of smiles, photo opportunities and hand shaking. As our project fell under the umbrella of the Health Ministry, they were to be the ones who would include our projects in the next round of World Bank funding. However, we soon realised on our return to Australia that something was seriously amiss. Not being one to openly make accusations - especially aimed at that level! - all I will say to move towards finishing this part of the story is that, not long after our issue became common knowledge, the World Bank temporarily ceased funding to Uganda and launched a full audit into where donor nations money was being spent. It seemed we were not the only Westerners lodging complaints and questioning a broken system. As can be the norm in many countries in the so called 'developing world', those who were found to be guilty of channeling funds for their own personal use were soon back in their offices looking at European real estate and safe havens for future 'investment'. It was devastating to think that the USD 1.3 million that was allocated to our project - in what we saw to be, and were led to believe would be, a ground-breaking undertaking - ended up being consolidated into funding the purchase of a country property in Belgium for an extremely powerful and obviously sacrosanct person.

We weren't about to admit defeat...but at the same time we were well aware that it would be futile, and personally risky (having in essence become quite serious and active complainants), to try any other avenue in Uganda. So, with that chapter closed it was back to the South Yarra kitchen table with fresh visions and new ideas. We needed to focus somewhere closer to home, to work in a country where we would not have to be involved with Government, and to scale things back to a manageable and realistic grass-roots level.

Fast forward Cambodia and Sumatra! In late 2004 I embarked on a holiday to SE Asia, with one of the highlights to be a stint in Cambodia. As soon as I started exploring this extraordinary country I knew this was where we could potentially make a difference in many lives. We just had to work out how to go about this, and who would we help when almost everyone appeared to need help of some kind. It had that feel, and the desperate need of Uganda, plus it was close enough to home and well and truly 'open for business' for non-profit organisations like Humanitus...all very feasible and achievable if we maintained a grass-roots *modus operandi*.

On my return to Australia, our then board agreed this was the way to move forward and that we would focus on children, schools and health-care. Sadly though, and very unexpectedly - before any of us could make arrangements to travel to Cambodia - Trent O'Keefe passed away. Twelve hours prior to his passing he happened to make an unexpected, and at the time unnerving, appeal to me...being that if anything were to "happen" to him would I "keep Humanitus going"! Little did I know I would be honouring this request so soon after it was made.

It wasn't until midway through 2007 that I found myself in a position to put on my networking hat and finally return to Cambodia. By this time, as per his wishes, Trent's ashes had been scattered on the shores of Lake Victoria; most likely joyously infiltrating every bar in downtown Kampala! Meanwhile, I was back in Cambodia knocking on doors, networking, and gatecrashing almost every NGO haunt and embassy gathering that my passport would allow me entry to. From that journey, I was extremely privileged to make the acquaintance of Mr Denzil Sprague (founder of the Pichey Rangsey School), Mrs Moninarom Ouk (founder and Head of SFODA Orphanage), Mr Piseth Luon (founder of Mkak Primary School), and last but not least Mr Prum Thoeun (Director of the Salvation Centre Cambodia). Humanitus would go on to help each and every one of these organisations, eventually forming very special alliances with all of them.

After Trent's passing, and my return to Cambodia, the Humanitus board went through some much needed and very positive changes. Most notably, Sally Cordner and Simon Cowell - trusted and respected friends who were passionate about Humanitus - joined the board and would prove to be instrumental in helping Humanitus achieve so much in Cambodia over these past 10 years.

Suddenly, we also found ourselves to have a very international board. Christopher had moved back to Germany to pursue his career as a computer scientist, while at the same time Angus and Celine had packed their bags and retired to a remote island in Sumatra. Angus and Celine would go on to represent Humanitus in Sumatra for a number of years, busying themselves refurbishing and supplying electricity and resources to three local schools. Chris would continue looking after the Humanitus IT requirements, while myself, Sally, Simon, and - for a short (greatly appreciated) time - Philip Fox, all went on to fulfill the many commitments we were to make in Cambodia over the ensuing years.

At times it has been a difficult and even somewhat frustrating journey; however, the positives have always far outweighed any potential negatives. Humanitus has had the support of many friends, businesses and schools here in Australia and abroad and, without a doubt, through that support, has made a significant difference - and continues to do so - to the lives of many children in SE Asia. I send my sincere and heartfelt thanks to all of those supporters over the years...without which none of this would have been possible.

As well as feeling humbled, having had the opportunity to play an integral role in an amazing organisation, I also feel a great sense of privilege to have worked alongside Sally and Simon, and most recently Julie. Words probably could never express my gratitude to them for being such an integral part of the Humanitus team, and for continuing to work selflessly for the betterment of others. In every respect it has been an enormous pleasure working alongside the entire Humanitus team, and I will miss that extraordinary association with such like-minded friends.

Everyone who has been involved in some way, or at some stage, with Humanitus, has their own story to tell I am sure, and I know Humanitus means, and has meant, so much to all of us...a special journey for a special reason! Thank you sincerely to everyone who has helped shape the Humanitus of today, and I hope Trent's legacy will live on for generations to come, and continue to make a difference in the lives of many.

Lastly, I thank you all once again on behalf of Christopher, Angus and Celine, who have also elected to resign from the Humanitus board due to geographical difficulties in remaining on the board, and projects in their regions having been completed.



Jeffrey R. Richards
Co-founder and Retired Executive Director

① PICHEY RANGSEY SCHOOL

CAULFIELD GRAMMAR SCHOOL / PICHEY RANGSEY SCHOOL REPORT

At the end of Term 3 on Friday, September 8, I was a guest at Assembly at Caulfield Grammar, Malvern Campus. Here I was presented with a cheque for an amount in excess of \$7000 which the school community had raised for the Pichey Rangsey School.

The relationship between CGS and the PR school has endured over many years now, and the significant contributions from Caulfield Grammar have enhanced the students' health to a level where optimum learning is occurring. More students each year are moving on to Senior School and from there on to tertiary education.

We at Humanitus believe this is due to their improved health and focus to tasks asked of them. It is a very pleasing outcome, and the students at PR school will continue to be grateful for their CGS friends and all that they do in their efforts to raise these funds.

Our thanks, on behalf of the PR students and their families, to the Caulfield Grammar, Malvern Campus community. Miss Fiorella Soci and her Social Committees over the years deserve a special mention for their tireless efforts, as well as all the staff and students' families. We are very grateful.

Sally Corder,
School Projects Director



Above: Photos taken at Pichey Rangsey School during a visit there earlier this year.

Left: CGS students during a previous fund-raising day at the school.

② MKAK PRIMARY SCHOOL

GRIMWADE HOUSE CASUAL CLOTHES DAY

The Term 3 Casual Clothes Day event for Melbourne Grammar [Grimwade House] was held for the Humanitus Foundation. Grimwade raised over \$1000 for Humanitus, which was used to purchase the tables and chairs at the Mkak Primary School.

The Grimwade community embraced the day, and the students were encouraged to wear yellow and green casual clothes, the colours of Humanitus. What made the day a little more exciting for me was the fact that I was leaving for Cambodia shortly after the Casual Day, and I was able to report back to the students on my return exactly where their funds had gone.

The students really enjoyed seeing the pictures of the tables and chairs. They also created a video which was circulated around the school and community, making the Casual Clothes Day a huge success.

Simon Cowell,
Education & Learning Director



Left and top right:
The new desk sets
in situ at Mkak
Primary School.



**Below left and
right:** The desks
and stools in the
process of being
made - by a small
local furniture-
maker near to
Mkak Village.
We were thrilled to
be able to support
a local business
as a means to
completing this
commitment.



② Continued...

A VISIT TO MKAK PRIMARY SCHOOL & VILLAGE: September 15, 2017

It was the middle of the wet season when my partner and I arrived in Cambodia. I was excited to have returned again, but this time it was even more special as I was more of a tourist, sharing the wonders of Cambodia with my partner, a “first-timer”.

Sadly, our first pit-stop, Phnom Penh, was basically a wash-out! We had 24 hours of torrential rain, which literally turned the streets of the city into raging rivers.

We attempted to change our plans and fly to Siem Reap but couldn't find a suitable time, so we braced ourselves for the wet and hired a car and driver. To our surprise, shortly after leaving Phnom Penh we found the weather drastically improved and we were able to enjoy the scenery en route to Siem Reap.

Checking into the trusty FCC, I felt like I had returned home! Later that night, meeting up with Julie Cordner to discuss all things Humanitus was fantastic, and it is truly a credit to Julie with all the things she has been achieving while living in Cambodia. She has been a wonderful link for us back in Australia, which became evident with all that she has been able to get done at Mkak when we visited later in the week.

Our trip to Mkak Village was on a very hot day. Sadly, I was in Cambodia while the children were not in school. However, eager to please, the school opened its gates for a morning and as usual it was filled with excitement when we arrived. Water for Cambodia were also there installing water filters with funds donated by the Wanaka Leos.

I was able to see the tables and chairs Humanitus had funded, and the finished classrooms. It was a bittersweet moment, knowing our plans to complete the classrooms and furnish them was achieved. In true community development fashion we had made ourselves redundant. After a tour of the village with my partner, and then some impromptu tunnel-ball and silent ball games with the kids, we headed back to Siem Reap to debrief.

It is important for me to acknowledge the hard work our team member Julie Cordner has achieved. Getting this “done” in Cambodia is never easy and I want to publicly recognise her wonderful efforts in this newsletter.

I also want to thank you all. We couldn't have got any of this done without you, our donors. Jeff, Sally and myself feel very proud to see our vision of Mkak complete.

Simon Cowell,
Education & Learning Director



Above and left: Images showing the culmination of three projects—the completion of three classrooms at Mkak Primary School; the furnishing of those classrooms [testing the merchandise!]; and the Safe Water Project funded by Wanaka Leos [NZ].

Below: Debrief at the FCC Siem Reap. Pictured (L-R): Aja Cordner, Mark Sweeney, Julie Cordner, Sopheak Phay, Simon Cowell



③ WANAKA LEOS' WATER PROJECT

Humanitus Foundation was thrilled to be the recipient of funds raised by the Wanaka Leos group from New Zealand [the 'Leos' being the 'junior' division of the Lions, comprising young adults from the ages of 12 to 17, with the aim of "...providing the opportunity for young Wanaka kids...to help people both locally and globally, and to contribute to their community."] The funds were slated for a water-themed project, and translated into US\$1600 (US dollars being the most-used currency in Cambodia).

A lack of clean water is one of the main causes of death in Cambodia [diarrhoeal diseases]; in fact, this is a statistic put forward by Water Aid, an international non-profit organisation that was set up in 1981 as a response to the UN International Drinking Water & Sanitation decade [1981-1990]: ***"Cambodia is one of the least urbanised countries in Southeast Asia with over 70% of people living in rural areas, many in extreme poverty. Cambodia has the lowest sanitation coverage and the second lowest water supply coverage in the region. As a result, over 380 children die each year from diarrhoeal diseases..."***

"Addressing this crisis is essential to Cambodia escaping its reliance on outside aid and to develop economically. Without access to safe water and toilets close to home, Cambodian children can not grow up to [be] healthy and smart and maximise the new opportunities from increasing economic integration in the region."

Another staggering statistic is this: ***"In Cambodia...36.2% of total households have [a] source of drinking water within their premises in 2008. Especially, this proportion is 29.4% in rural areas, while 67.4% in urban areas."*** While these figures might have improved in intervening years, it is clear from Humanitus' visits to the region that access to clean, safe water is a major problem. Few families in the village of Mkak, for example (where we intended to use the Leos' funds) have an on-site latrine, and in fact it is still quite common for Cambodia's rural inhabitants to openly urinate and defecate...causing major health problems.

From water-testing done through the international NGO, Water for Cambodia, we determined that the water at Mkak School was not of good quality—and certainly not drinkable [except possibly if boiled first]. Infrastructure already in place indicated that we could simply connect the individual elements into a more efficient system. However, this required that some mechanical fixtures should be contained permanently in a secure housing, and we found that the teachers at the school did not want to change the system already in place... At this juncture, Humanitus turned again to our friends at Water for Cambodia, and requested that they supply their cement Biosand filters to the school—one for each classroom, and one for the Library.

Delivery of the filters coincided with a visit to the school by Humanitus representatives, so photos were taken of the filters in place, as well as the technician instructing three of the school's teachers on how to maintain and look after the filters. Here's some information on the filters themselves:

"Each filter is constructed of a concrete body 3' tall and a foot square filled with layers of gravel and sand. Source water is poured onto a diffuser plate at the top of the filter to prevent disturbing the top layer of sand. After passing through the sand and gravel, the now clean water travels through the copper pipe and out the spout using the force of gravity alone. There are no moving or mechanical parts to break.

The key to the effectiveness of the filter is the biological zone which naturally forms on the sand surface. This layer consumes harmful bacteria and other pathogens. As the water passes through the sand layer larger contaminants (e.g. parasites) are trapped and others (e.g. viruses, certain organic compounds) are attached to the particles of sand, a process called adsorption. In the lower layers of the filter where oxygen levels diminish organisms die a natural death...

Biosand filters in general require very little maintenance (occasional stirring up of the top few inches of sand and scooping the suspended sediment) and are still functioning effectively more than 10 years after installation. Filters are manufactured locally using local materials."

Choosing to go the 'cheaper' route by installing filters meant that we still had enough funds to add another school into the project. In the quest to find further projects for Humanitus to be involved with, we had come across 'Sopheak's Friendly School', situated about 20km out of Siem Reap in the village of Roluos Khang Keut. As with one of the sources at Mkak School, water was currently being brought up from a shallow surface-water well, so again we had to get the water tested, just to find out what we were up against. Again, results were not great. The decision to incorporate filters here proved a timely one. And, because this school is smaller than Mkak, with only three classrooms—and because there were enough funds in the kitty—we decided to add in a much-needed hand-washing station outside the two sole latrines. A local tradesman was called in to create the design, and the children were very pleased with the result...a tile-covered concrete structure with roof, lighting (for late afternoon use) and SIX taps!

Julie Corder,
Head of Projects—Cambodia



Above, left and right: The Water for Cambodia technician sets up one of the new filters at Mkak Primary School, and (next picture) instructs the teachers in its use. With regular, but not onerous, maintenance, the filters should last about 10 years.

Right: Not quite complete—but this water filter stands in the Mkak school Library. Altogether, the school received seven filters.

Left: SFS founder, Sopheap Phay, pretends to get water from one (of three) of his school's new filters [it takes several hours for the process to run through and for clean, usable water to start flowing].

Below: But, ready for use, is SFS's new hand-wash station, situated outside the school's pre-existing latrines. A supply of soap is now on the school requisites list.



④ THE PAPER AIRPLANE PROJECT

Something completely ‘out of the box’ for Humanitus Foundation in Cambodia during November 2017, was involvement in a school-based art project. Mumbai-based artist Baptist Coelho had Siem Reap on his itinerary of Southeast Asian cities to visit, and - with a connection to Humanitus Director, Jeffrey Richards - decided to enlist Humanitus’ assistance in finding venues for his artistic endeavours. Most specifically, Baptist wanted to add to his ‘Paper Airplane Project’ which he has been undertaking in schools around the world since 2008. In fact, up until November 14/15, the ‘Paper Airplane Project’ had been realised with 1,140 children from 56 schools in 19 cities in 13 countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Norway, Poland, South Africa, South Korea, Switzerland, Thailand, United Arab Emirates and United Kingdom). Since Baptist is intending to wrap up the project in 2018, after 10 years, the Siem Reap school would be one of the (if not THE) last ones in which he conducts the Project.

The school selected for the Project was the School of Joy (run by New Bridge Cambodia), situated in the Kork Chork Commune of Siem Reap. Humanitus has had connections here since earlier in 2017 when investigating possible future projects to be involved in in the Siem Reap region, meeting up with the New Bridge founder, Pich Chansophol and his wife Sar Chear. It was clear that School of Joy would fit the brief for the Project.

The Project took two days to complete, comprising two sessions of students (morning and afternoon) on both days. Overall, about 75 children were involved, and they really seemed to take the task to heart. Initially, they were supplied with a pack of 4 sheets of coloured paper and a Permission Slip. On the first day, they constructed four different paper airplanes (under Baptist’s guidance), then wrote their names on the planes, plus the phrase, “When I grow up, I would like to be...”, which was to be completed at home. From home they were to collect objects that could be included in their next day’s task—which was to create an artwork illustrating their chosen ‘dream career’, incorporating one of the paper planes and drawings and objects. Since Cambodian children don’t have lots of ‘stuff’ to give away, Humanitus provided some books for inspiration and little items that could be used in their art pieces...

The second day saw the artwork being created, then the children were allowed [finally!] to throw their planes up into the air to release their ambitions to the Cosmos. Another plane was affixed to a ‘Tower of Dreams’ (with the noses pointing upwards of course). Baptist took away with him one plane to use in a future project (plus the all-important Permission Slip signed by a parent) - but hopefully he also took away a deeper understanding of Cambodia, its culture, and most importantly its children...

Julie Cordner,
Head of Projects—Cambodia



Above: Phases of the ‘Paper Airplane Project’: from learning about it, to making the planes, to creating the artworks, then culminating in the children’s ‘Tower of Dreams’ (left).

Left (L-R): Sar Chear, Julie Cordner, Baptist Coelho



While he was going to be in Siem Reap, Baptist Coelho asked Humanitus whether we could organise for a showing of a curated video of some of his other works—and we were able to effect this at One Eleven Gallery, Siem Reap.

After the showing of 'Under My Skin—Under Your Skin', Baptist sat down to take questions from the audience, facilitated by Gallery director, Jessica Lim.

DRINKS & NIBBLES EVENING FOR BELLARINE FRIENDS

On Saturday, August 5, the newly formed Bellarine Friends of Humanitus group was invited to a Drinks & Nibbles Evening at Sally Cordner's home in Point Lonsdale. Delicious food provided by our resident caterer Christine Gilliland, and wine provided by Humanitus, ensured the evening was a great success.

There were many items donated by the local community in Point Lonsdale for silent auctions, as well as a raffle. Donations too were given on the evening, also from Friends who were unable to attend on the evening. Dialogue about Cambodia and our projects abounded and we were very grateful for the input provided by our guests.

Funds in excess of \$2500 were raised, and these funds will be used for specific projects currently being sourced by our team. Another feature of the evening was the interest in our work, and although a small group, the enthusiasm was wonderful.

A sincere thank you to all members of this group for their generosity. Another function is currently being considered at Tussock Gallery in Point Lonsdale during the first half of 2018.

Sally Cordner,
School Projects Director



Tussock 'Upstairs' Gallery, Point Lonsdale (VIC)

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