



Sotheary looks so confident while she is writing her lesson in the class. Photo by Mao Daneth/CRS

## Overcome barriers to learn better at school

### SUCCESS STORY

Sotheary is the youngest among three sisters living in rural Trapang Pring Village in Takeo Province, south of the capital Phnom Penh. She is currently studying in sixth grade at her local primary school located in the same commune. It takes about ten minutes by bike to get from her house to school every day. In the family, there are two people who have a visual impairment, her second sister and Sotheary herself.

Back in 2016 when Sotheary was in first grade, she struggled to see the lessons that her teacher wrote on the whiteboard. In addition, she could not move freely either at school or at home. She was often hesitant to go out; for example, when her mom asked her to bring food to her grandma, she worried because of her difficulty in seeing.

In 2019, Sotheary was identified as possibly having a visual impairment when she took part in a health screening activity supported by CRS Cambodia in collaboration with the provincial/district education office and the director and teachers at her school. The disabilities screening activity at Angseyamar Primary School was one of the “Healthy Kid Project” activities co-funded by the Cambodia Charitable Trust New Zealand and Catholic Relief Services to refer children with disabilities in target primary schools in Takeo and Kampot Provinces. The goal is to provide disabled students with access to proper health support and disabilities-related services. Moreover, it includes health kits distribution, dental treatment, WASH infrastructure modifications, and menstruation education.

After identifying that Sotheary had a potential visual impairment, the school and CRS staff arranged to transport her to the hospital to get her eyes checked. With financial support from the project for transportation, food, checkup fees etc., Mrs. Lim Sopheap, Sotheary’s mother, took her daughter to the hospital where medical staff discovered that Sotheary’s right eye was severely impaired. Mrs. Sopheap said, *“the doctor told me that it was almost too late and that my daughter might completely lose vision in her right eye. Fortunately, I brought her to the hospital on time, so she received treatment and her first pair of eyeglasses.”*

In addition to Sotheary, the “Healthy Kid Project” has helped many children with disabilities to get equal opportunities through health screenings as well as enabling them to study at school, similar to other students with normal health status. As a result, from 2019 to mid-2022 some 127 disabled children in Takeo and Kampot Provinces, 52 of them girls, were referred more than once each for health support and disability-related services at local hospitals thanks to the support of CRS.

Fast forward and it has now been three years since Sotheary started wearing glasses, resulting in much improved vision. Additionally, at school she receives support from her teacher who reserves a front row seat for her, enlarges the size of the letters on the whiteboard, and helps to engage her in class activities along with other classmates. With this support, little Sotheary is able to read and write. As a result, she earns better grades than before and confidently rides her bicycle to school on her own. At home she can do her own homework, recognize people better, and help her mom with some household chores. These are small accomplishments to us, but to Sotheary they can be life-changing.

**In the words of Mrs. Sopheap: “I am so grateful that my daughter’s eye condition has gotten much better which allows her to go to school as normal and get satisfactory grades. I am thankful for the support of CRS which has resulted in a better life for my child.”**



Mrs. Lim Sopheap helps Sotheary to do her homework. Photo by Mao Daneth/CRS