

Hunger for books inspires trustee

BY YVETTE BATTEN

yvette.batten@mbf.co.nz



Books For Cambodia founder and trustee Jennie Wilson is about to see the fruits of her labour.

She left New Zealand on Friday to visit the country where the trust has set up six libraries in high schools and three in primary schools.

Fundraising is done through book fairs, garage sales, music evenings, dinners and festivals all run and organised by people passionate about the cause.

"And donations," she says. "So we're looking to get some extra funding of course, because if we get more donations or funding then we can buy more books and set up more libraries."

It all started in 1997 when Mrs Wilson and her husband Roger went on a two year Volunteer Service Abroad trip to Cambodia.

She was an early childhood advisor there and he worked as a community development advisor.

When their two years were up they were appointed project co-ordinators for a UN funded refugee resettlement programme there.

"Our key tasks there, in the northern part of Cambodia, were building schools and teacher training, which was my area of work.

"My husband Roger worked in assistance in housing and food production, well drilling and producing water jars. The people had no way to store water."

After they returned to New Plymouth in 2000, the couple, with



Giving books: Jennie Wilson, of Books For Cambodia, with one of the books she's taken overseas.

the help of six others scattered around New Zealand and Australia, set up Books For Cambodia Charitable Trust.

"It [books] is extremely important," she says. "For Cambodia it's the development of reading culture from a very youngish child up to the more senior students in the high schools.

"I think there's a real hunger

for books as well. They love to read. You go into a library and their heads are down and they barely glance up as you walk in."

While in Cambodia Mrs Wilson observed that their education system had been eroded in the wars and the Khmer Rouge regime.

The aim of the charity is to develop school libraries, source

and purchase books, donate them to the libraries and provide training for librarians.

Mrs Wilson will be doing all these things on her trip, which spans most of October.

Books cost about \$4 in New Zealand dollars. Each library has between 1000 and 6000 books.

"With the support of these schools I return annually to

Cambodia for the purchase of books and to visit libraries and investigate new schools for development."

While there Mrs Wilson will also lead a VSA two week adventure tour in Cambodia with family business Pacific Discovery.

For more details and to make a donation visit booksforcambodia.org.

Midweek Oct 2010

Photo: YVETTE BATTEN