

## Contents

A Word From Our ED

Who We Are

Why We Are Here

Our Approach

Our Programs: Prevention · Capacity  
Building · Support · Advocacy & Research

Our Partners & Networks

Financial Summary

Our Supporters

Supporting Since 2010



# Introduction

## Dear supporters and friends,

I am happy to share our annual report for 2019 with you.

2019 was both a challenging and rewarding year, in which we continued to improve the programmatic, operational, and managerial aspects of our organization, while managing the departure of some valued staff members. We developed new strategies and activities to help accelerate and support our mission for boys and young men in Cambodia. We were selected as a replicable Promising Practice for the region and launched a modern website to share updates on our work.

The public launch of our research ‘Caring for Boys Affected by Sexual Violence’ resulted in new partnerships with CSOs and government.



Our team in October 2019

It also led to the development of a national advocacy strategy which addresses the most pressing issues regarding the protection and support of boys who are in need.

Throughout our programs, we intensified our prevention work by launching two new community-based prevention pilots. Our direct services increased their reach to children affected by sexual violence and their families. We saw more case referrals than before coming from various sources, not least a small but growing share of government staff. This is an important positive trend, which we expect will increase as we have started accepting relevant government staff onto our training courses on child protection and social work.

Simultaneously, we improved our courses and expanded our training course on ‘Identifying and Responding to Children Displaying Sexually Harmful Behavior’, which helps us improve the support and referrals made by professionals. For our social work teams, we provided systematic supervision and did a thorough internal assessment of their case management and social work practice, all followed by group training and individual coaching sessions.

Building on our relations with government, we were accredited the *Child Safe Organization* certificate by the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSVY) and increased our collaboration with its departments. We joined the Ministry of Women’s Affairs’ strategy to improve parenting skills and reduce domestic violence in our communities. We were able to build stronger cooperation with local authorities and increase both the number of communes we serve and number of CSO partnerships.

I want to thank our staff for their passion for social work and their dedication to helping children and families in, often very, challenging circumstances. I also want to thank our donors, partners, and community-wide supporters for helping us bring positive change to Cambodia for boys and children in need of our services.

Thank you!

Chamreun Yaim  
Executive Director



*I didn't think that boys could be sexually abused too, so I was not interested in them and I thought only gay [people] or foreigners were interested having sex with boys.*

A participant to our training



*In his last session, Raksa said:  
“Now I can protect myself from sexual violence. I also help and explain friends how they can protect themselves too.”*





# Who We Are

First Step Cambodia (FSC) is a non-governmental organization with the primary goal to ensure that all children in Cambodia are protected from sexual abuse and that all those affected by abuse are supported and enabled to reach their potential.



## OUR VISION

We envision a Cambodia where children live and grow up in a safe environment, free from sexual abuse, and are able to fulfill their potential.

## OUR MISSION

We are working to ensure that boys are free from sexual abuse, and are protected and empowered to live in safe, nurturing families.

By applying the socio-ecological model, we address the issues on all levels of society:



Therapeutic and social services to children affected by abuse and their families



Prevention and awareness raising activities in schools, NGOs, communities



Capacity building of professionals working with children



Advocacy towards policy and societal change, supported by our own research

As a child protection expert, FSC provides its services to both boys and girls affected by sexual abuse and sexually harmful behavior, while it remains the only organization based in Cambodia specialized in giving support to boys and raising awareness about the issues for boys - as societal norms in Cambodia present boys as invulnerable, resulting in disbelief of survivors' stories, a general lack of support and limited (access to) services.

## OUR VALUES

**CLIENT SAFETY:** Clients are safe, and confidentiality is respected according to our Child Protection Policy

**EQUAL RESPECT:** Everyone is valued equally, and is treated with respect and dignity regardless of ability, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity, health status or social status

**CLIENT CENTERED APPROACH:** The client is at the very center of our work, and their needs and choices are always our first consideration

**PROFESSIONALISM:** We operate to a high level of professionalism with integrity and accountability

With a team of 14 experienced social workers and trainers, FSC provides its services from its offices in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, to the cities and the surrounding provinces.





# Why we are here

No child should be exposed to violence, abuse or neglect. Yet, in Cambodia, one in two children has experienced severe beating and, although international research indicates a higher prevalence, over five percent of Cambodian children experience sexual abuse before their 18th birthday (UNICEF, 2014).

The problem of sexual violence against children in Cambodia is considerable and far more significant than the current limited research reveals. Many factors contribute to the occurrence of and risk for sexual violence against children in Cambodia. Extreme poverty, low education levels, family separation, child institutionalization, limited parenting skills, substance

abuse, domestic violence, weak protection and reporting mechanisms, and limited access to quality social services. In vulnerable communities, parents are not aware of the many risks for and consequences of sexual abuse and other forms of violence. While punitive discipline techniques associated with an authoritarian parenting style are still widely applied and accepted, these occurrences are visible and well-documented. Combined with traditional harmful societal norms and persisting taboos around sexuality, gender and sex education, we believe that the prevalence of sexual abuse and sexually harmful behavior remains significantly underreported (FSC, 2019).

## Boys Face an Uphill Struggle

Boys face an uphill struggle to receive support, yet they are in a situation where they need our support the most. Global evidence suggests that at least one in six males experiences some form of sexual abuse in their lifetime, a number confirmed by research carried out in Cambodia (UNDP, 2013). Moreover,

little or no support (FSC, 2019). In addition, research indicates that between 25% to 35% of sexually abusive acts are perpetrated by persons under 18 (Masson and Erooga, 2006). The regional 'Partners for Prevention' research (2013) concluded that amongst the sample of men who admitted sexual abuse or

In majority of cases, these sexually harmful behaviors (SHB) are displayed by boys and young men. First Step provides direct support services to both children affected by and children displaying these harmful behaviors. In the majority of cases, providing a quick response and direct support services, in collaboration

**“Most mothers think it is okay even if boys are sexually abused because they are ‘gold’ (‘invulnerable’, as is said in a Cambodian proverb says)”**

- A service provider

a meta-analysis in the region confirmed that the median prevalence rates are higher for boys than girls, while less than 6% of boys seek help after sexual abuse, compared to 40% of girls (UNICEF, 2012 and 2014). Boys who are sexually assaulted may experience lasting stigma. They are often blamed by, or even expelled from their family and community, and receive

rape, over 50% committed their first offense under the age of 18, with a significant percentage under the age of 15.

with the child's family, has resulted in a change to healthy age-appropriate behavior in most cases.

- In Cambodian culture, idealized masculine traits are *bravery, strength, power, and responsible*.
- Therefore, adults (and children) often think that boys need no protection because boys cannot be abused or harmed.
- These norms are taught by family members, relatives, friends, community members (including teachers) and social media.



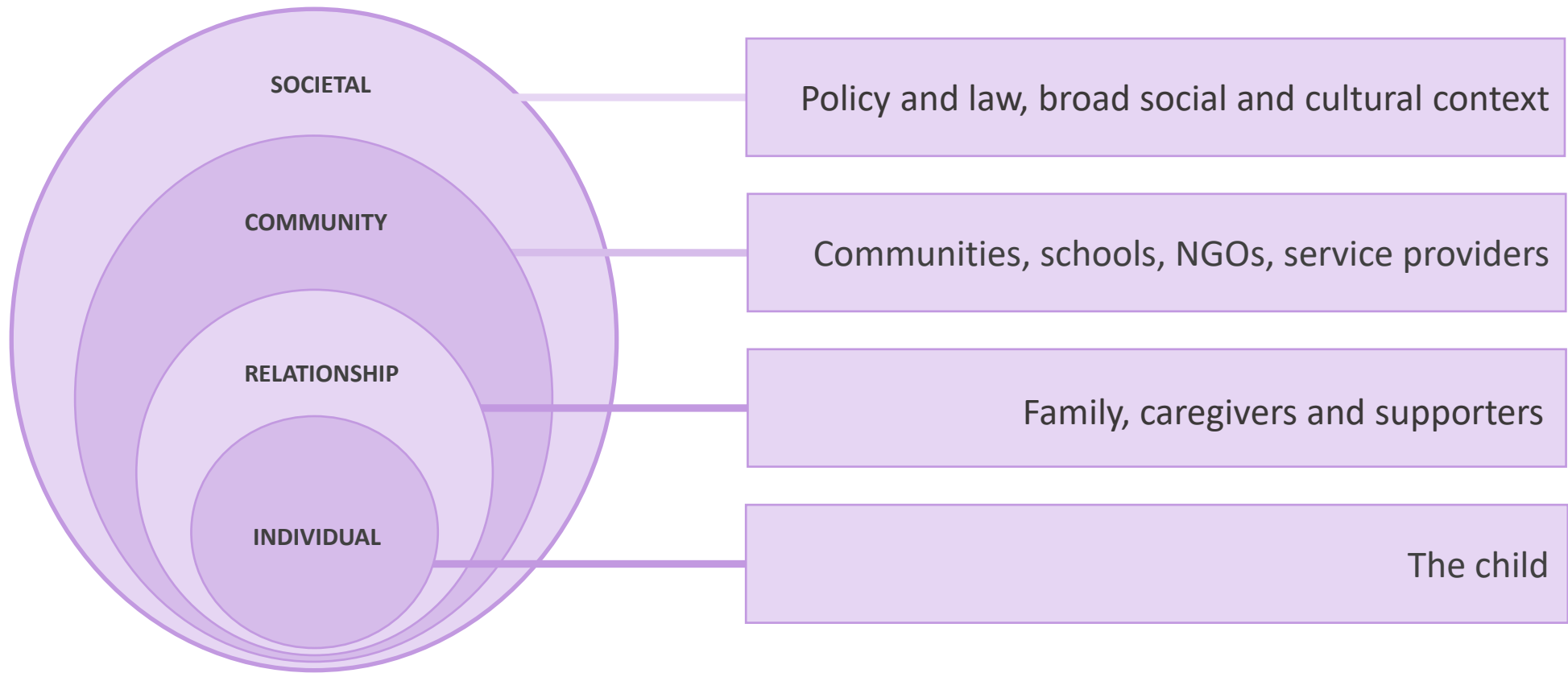
# Our Approach

## The Socio-Ecological Model

In addressing sexual abuse of children, FSC applies the Socio-Ecological Model, a model that considers the complex interplay between individual, relationship, community, and societal factors. It allows us to understand the range of factors that put children at risk of violence and protect them from experiencing or perpetrating violence. The overlapping rings in the model illustrate how factors at one level influence factors at another level.

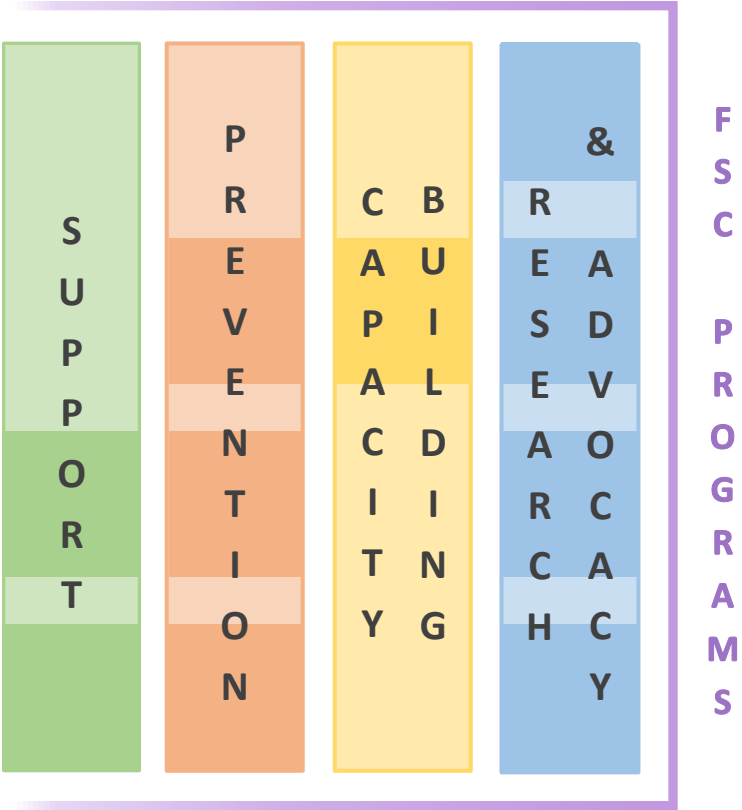
Besides helping to clarify these factors, the model also suggests that in order to prevent sexual violence, it is necessary to affect across multiple levels of the model at the same time. This approach is more likely to sustain prevention efforts over time than any single intervention.

Our programs are aligned with this approach and are designed to tackle the issues of child sexual abuse on every level simultaneously.



“ In order to prevent child sexual abuse and ensure supportive responses to child survivors, it is essential that we actively involve the family and community. We must raise awareness and improve the knowledge of children and adults, government and service providers, on all levels of society.

Sarath Yourn – FSC Program Manager ”



In 2019, FSC’s approach was selected as a Promising Practice ([learn more](#)) by the FCF | REACT network for its holistic and replicable approach.



# Our Programs



## Prevention

We increase the understanding, knowledge and awareness among different stakeholders including children, students and schoolteachers, parents, caregivers, villagers, and service providers who directly engage with children. To achieve this, we developed a range of informative and educational resources and tools, adapted to the local context. These are delivered in a range of workshops and forums to both children and adults and distributed for use in organizations and community settings.

## Direct Support

We provide therapeutic and social work services that are appropriate and sensitive to children who are affected by sexual abuse and displaying sexually harmful behavior (SHB). We build on the child's strengths, while engaging with the children's families, supporters and community, making them an integral part of the process. Based on a foundation of research, we embrace child-friendly, client centered approaches, enabling child survivors to deal with their trauma and reconnect with family and friends.



## Capacity Building

We provide specialist training, learning and consultation opportunities to improve the capacity of professionals to deliver quality services to children and families affected by sexual abuse, harmful sexual behaviors and psychosocial issues. We build the capacity of relevant government and CSO service providers working with children. Our courses vary from basic skill development to advanced courses for experienced social workers.

## Advocacy & Research

As research into sexual abuse of boys is scarce, FSC conducts evidence-based research related to the abuse of boys and sexually harmful behavior displayed by children in Cambodia and the wider region. Our research informs our advocacy strategy and program design. It enables us to identify service gaps and to advocate with our partners and networks accordingly. Through all program activities, we increase awareness of the issues for boys among families, communities and relevant professionals.





# Prevention

In 2019, we increased the knowledge of **1004** children and adults through **51** workshops, reducing the risk of abuse and improving responses to victims. We piloted two community-based workshops to test different approaches.



Our **film workshops** bring professionals together to increase their knowledge about child sexual abuse in an interactive way. We show testimonials inspired by real cases which lead to group discussions. We tackle misconceptions and share facts and knowledge, including how to protect children from sexual abuse, how to identify grooming techniques, the long-term impact of abuse on the child, and the available reporting mechanisms. Through **16** workshops, we improved the knowledge and responses of **366** professionals.



Our **poster workshops** are designed for a wide target audience and are adapted to children. Using group discussions and educational postcards that address the most common issues, we tackle misconceptions, increase the attendants' knowledge related to sexual abuse and harmful behavior, and show how to respond to and help a victim. Through **23** workshops, we improved the knowledge and awareness of **525** children and **21** adults.



Our **community-based workshops** are designed for parents, caregivers and village chiefs, and address the most common issues. As community members often act out of a lack of knowledge, this workshop has proven especially powerful – most parents had never heard of 'emotional abuse' and of boys being at risk of sexual abuse before attending our workshop. In previous years, these workshops were one-day sessions, but this year we tested expanded versions following different approaches (see next page).



Our two-day **Training of Trainers** builds the capacity of our NGO partners to conduct our poster workshops independently in their communities and help prevent child sexual abuse and increase their awareness for the issues for boys. In 2019, we trained **19** service providers. All participants agreed that they felt confident and started disseminating their new knowledge to others. We observed their first delivery of a total of **8** poster workshops, to a total of **117** children, and provided constructive feedback.



"Slowly, people are [becoming] aware that the boys can be abused and exploited so they [are] more careful [not] to let the boys be alone, like the girls." – A community-based NGO partner



After completing our ToT in 2019, our NGO partner VOICE started conducting our poster workshops to children in their target communities.

- ✓ **5668** informative and educational materials (IEC), including booklets and poster cards, were distributed to communities, parents, families and NGO professionals.
- ✓ Our prevention activities indirectly reached an additional **3284** people, including friends, family, co-workers, and community members.
- 💡 All workshops and distributed IEC materials inform target audiences that boys and girls are equally vulnerable to abuse and in need of support.



# Prevention

## Community-Based Pilots

Our social work teams launched two pilots to test new community-based prevention approaches in 2019. While the Siem Reap team tested an expansion to our family-based prevention model, our Phnom Penh team applied a community empowerment approach.



In collaboration with local authorities and CCWC, we selected respected members from two target communities in **Phnom Penh** and trained them to conduct our prevention workshops independently within their respective communities.

The pilot project focused on enabling key community members to become in-community trainers, using FSC's educational materials to conduct prevention workshops in their community on a regular basis.



With ongoing support and monitoring from our team, we accelerate our reach and impact in vulnerable communities. We reduce costs while improving the sustainability of our work.

Ten selected community members received Training of Trainer sessions, covering:

- Children's rights and Child Protection
- Child development stages and behaviors
- Gender differences and issues
- The nature of child abuse, especially sexual abuse
- The available reporting mechanisms
- How to facilitate workshops

At the end of the training, the participants practiced the delivery of the workshop together with FSC staff.

Starting the pilot in the second half of 2019, the first three workshops were delivered towards the end of the year, with a total of 38 participants. We continue the project in 2020.



"These workshops allow me to improve the protection of my community's children and stop the violence. It is important that we start listening to our children when they want to tell us something, they may try to inform us of abuse."

Mr. Leng Chhon - *community group leader*



In collaboration with our partner NGOs *Agape International Mission* and *Women Resource Centre*, we identified two communes in **Siem Reap** province to test an expansion to our community-based workshops on child protection and prevention of child abuse.



The selected communes we identified as being higher-risk for child abuse due to a high prevalence of issues such as domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and unemployment.



3 sessions and a refresher session were delivered to each commune. A total of 54 participants, majority parents, joined all sessions.



### Participants learned about...

- The different types of child abuse
- Abuse risk factors such as grooming techniques
- How to identify potential cases of abuse
- Any child, boy or girl, can be a victim
- The different stages of child development
- Appropriate behaviors according to a child's age
- Ways children *may* display sexually harmful behaviors
- How to respond to potential cases of abuse and SHB
- The available reporting mechanisms
- Everyone's duty to respond and report





# Prevention

## Case Study: Community Pilot

**From May to June 2019, FSC provided four family-based prevention workshops in a vulnerable commune in Siem Reap province. The commune was selected for its heightened risk of child abuse due to a high prevalence of issues such as domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and unemployment.**

Local communes are vulnerable to all forms of child abuse. Well-informed community members play a crucial role in preventing and adequately responding to (the risks of) child abuse. Ms. Bo Sariam lives with her three children in the selected commune. She is a village volunteer and a key member of the Commune Committee for Women and Children (CCWC), a government-supported committee that plays a vital role in the wellbeing and safety of women and children in Cambodia's communities.

As an active member of both the community and the CCWC, Ms. Bo was very interested to join FSC's sessions. It was her first time participating in a workshop focused on child protection and child sexual abuse.



Ms. Bo Sariam

For Ms. Bo, the sessions were an eye-opener. Learning about the different types of child abuse taught her that abuse is not only physical or sexual in nature, since neglect and emotional abuse can be just as problematic for a child's wellbeing. She was surprised by the long-lasting impact abuse can have on any child, boy or girl, and came to understand how deeply it can affect a child: "I didn't know about the impact of child sexual abuse and its effects on their future. I thought that, once the court proceedings were finished, the children had found justice and would recover". On the contrary, she now understands that parents have to be aware of the many challenges a child survivor has to deal with and the long-term support they need from their family, friends and community.

The family-based workshops are designed to inform local communities about the different types of child abuse, how to prevent abuse by learning about grooming techniques and other risk factors, and how to identify and respond to potential cases of child abuse.



"I didn't know about the impact of child sexual abuse and its effect on their future. I thought that, once the court proceedings were finished, the children had found justice and would recover." - Ms. Bo Sariam

Participants like Ms. Bo come to understand that any child, boy or girl, can become a victim and that the perpetrator can be anyone, including relatives and neighbors. FSC's social workers also explore the different stages in child development and appropriate behaviors according to a child's age, informing participants about the prevalence of sexually harmful behaviors that children may display. Providing an early and appropriate response to these behaviors, provides the opportunity to address and improve these behaviors, and allows for specialist organizations to address any underlying issues. Finally, participants learn about the existing reporting mechanisms and their duty to respond and report.

Understanding that boys are just as much at risk and need of support as girls, Ms. Bo says she is now committed to provide the necessary response and support to any child that informs her of sexual abuse. She is determined to take the time and carefully listen to the child, be supportive and take action by ensuring the victim is in a safe space, while coordinating with local authorities and



relevant stakeholders, ensuring that the child's wellbeing is put first.

Following the workshops, Ms. Bo shared her gained knowledge with her family and neighbors. As a focal point for CCWC, Ms. Bo also informed all members at a CCWC meeting. She wishes for FSC to continue providing these sessions to other communities. She commits to continue sharing and applying her knowledge with the community.

We thank our partners WRC and AIM for identifying the target communes. We thank our donors Heinrich Böll Stiftung and World Childhood Foundation for enabling our prevention work in Siem Reap.



# Capacity Building



In 2019, FSC built the capacity and knowledge of **199** professionals working with children through **11** specialist child protection and social work training courses.

We expanded our target audience to relevant duty-bearers, welcoming staff from relevant governmental departments and committees, such as Departments of Social Affairs (DoSVY) and Commune Committees for Women and Children (CCWC), to our training. Helping the subnational and local government levels develop skills and knowledge related to child protection and child abuse – while increasing their awareness of the specific issues affecting boys, will significantly contribute to achieving our mission and vision.

**93%** of participants feel confident to implement the knowledge they gained into their day-to-day work with vulnerable children and families.

Participants committed to raise awareness to **1505** co-workers, community members and local authorities on child sexual abuse and protection.

With the launch of our new website, partners and other professionals can now consult our training courses and training schedule.

- Overview available courses: <https://www.first-step-cambodia.org/capacity-building-program>
- Training schedule: <https://www.first-step-cambodia.org/training-schedule>

We relaunched our updated and improved key training course ‘Social Work Practice with Children Affected by Sexual Abuse’, which was the very first training course we developed and was previously known as ‘Boys First’. The course consists of 5 four-day modules and 9 recall days, spread throughout the year.



“My service plan was uncertain but after receiving training I am able to make a better and more effective service plan. I gain more confidence and want to help more clients.” – *A trained participant*

## Training Courses Delivered in 2019



### Social Work Practice with Children Affected by Sexual Abuse (29 days)

**16** participants received our in-depth training course, developing their social work skills and learning to provide professional support services to child survivors of sexual abuse. Joining our recall days, they were able to refresh their knowledge and share how they translated the course into practice.



### Identification and Response to Children Displaying SHB (3 days)

**44** CSO and government professionals learned how to correctly identify, respond to and refer cases of children displaying sexually harmful behaviors (SHB) and joined our refresher days – See next page.



### How to Support Families Affected by Psychosocial Problems (4 days)

**19** social workers learned how to work with families, conduct family assessments, engage families to support their children and how families can contribute to the recovery of child survivors of sexual abuse.



### How to Support People with Alcohol Problems (4 days)

**39** service providers gained the skills to help people with alcohol problems and became more confident in their service provision to parents and families impacted by alcohol abuse.



### Social Work Practice: advanced course (7 days)

**44** social workers learned about social work values and ethics, theory and models for sound practice, and case management. This course is delivered in collaboration with the Angkor Hospital for Children.



### Social Work Case Management Practice (3 days)

**18** participants learned how to ensure that clients with complex, multi-faceted problems receive all the services they need in a timely and appropriate fashion, using FSC’s case management system and tools.





# New and Improved Training Sessions on SHB

With the support from the European Union, USAID and Save the Children HK, through FCF|REACT, we improved and expanded our pioneer training course *‘Identification and Response to Children displaying Sexually Harmful Behaviors’*, launching new sessions for professionals across the country.

## What is Sexually Harmful Behavior?

### Sexually harmful behavior or SHB is...



- Age-inappropriate behavior enacted by children
- Anything from age-inappropriate touching to penetration
- Mostly displayed by boys, but can also be displayed by girls



### Based on our case work...

- Common factors across cases: experienced violence, parents/caregivers lacking parenting skills, lack of sex education, exposure to (consensual) parental intimacy, and access to pornography
- With a swift response, combined with specialist support services, a child can overcome the issues and future escalation of behavior can be prevented

### A nine-year-old's story...

Growing up in a residential care institution, Bun developed sexually harmful behavior from the age of 9.

In 2016, FSC was notified of Bun's problematic behavior, did a full assessment and started working with him.

To see how his story ends, click here:



Our research and pilot SHB training course (2018) documented a general lack of services in Cambodia for children displaying SHB, and that service providers:

- have a very limited awareness of this issue
- fail to identify SHB cases
- don't know how to respond and who to refer cases to



Through 8 training sessions, we will train 200 service providers and duty-bearers by 2021. Their improved skills and knowledge will indirectly benefit an estimated 7,000 children and 5,000 adults.

Expecting an increase in referral of SHB cases, an additional 28 children affected by SHB will receive our therapeutic and social work services.



We updated and improved our pilot SHB training curriculum and guidelines, expanding the course to three days. The updated Assessment & Referral tool will be integrated into OSCaR, the online case management system used by FCF|REACT partners, and will be free to use by all users from 2020 onwards.



Over the course of three days, this specialised course builds the capacity of service providers and duty-bearers to:

- ✓ identify when a child is displaying potential SHB and conduct initial assessments of the issue;
- ✓ provide appropriate and effective initial response and referrals to specialist services for full assessment, services and resources;
- ✓ follow-up referrals to ensure that services are received and that they benefit the child and their family.
- ✓ Learn using our Assessment & Referral tool and guidelines.

All trainees can join our recall days, to refresh their knowledge and share best practices and lessons learned.



**2** new sessions and **1** refresher session were conducted in 2019, with a total of 44 participants.



“I felt ashamed [...] about my harmful behavior. I didn't want it to happen and I wanted it to stop but didn't know how. Via counselling from FSC, I learned so much about the impact of my behavior and I learned ways to control myself. I now have stopped it all.” – *A boy client*



SHB training in Siem Reap in December 2019



# Capacity Building

## Training Testimonials



Read full testimonials from trained participants on our website:  
<https://www.first-step-cambodia.org/capacity-building-program>



### How to Support People with Alcohol Problems

“In previous case work, when confronted with alcoholism, I always thought it was too difficult and preferred not having to deal with it. But now I feel confident and motivated to work on those cases because I believe [they] are victims of addiction and need my full support to overcome it.”

*Mr. Meas Seyha, Social Worker at DDP*



### Social Work Case Management Practice

“I work with vulnerable people, many of whom have one or more disabilities. This training has opened my eyes, making me understand the importance of my work and how it can be done in the most ethical way.”

*Mr. Po Sakun,  
Inclusive Art Course Leader at Epic Arts*



### Identification and Response to Children Displaying SHB

“Now that I have gained more knowledge and experience related to SHB, and how to support them, I feel more confident in protecting children who are affected by sexual abuse and SHB. I am very happy to cooperate and work with FSC’s social worker to protect our children in the community.”

*Mr. Sithy, Deputy Officer DoSVY*



### Social Work Practice with Children Affected by Sexual Abuse

“This training improved my performance at work, the quality of my services to clients, even my personal life. In the past, I always focused on someone’s faults or mistakes, but now I focus on understanding the rationale behind their behavior. I feel calmer and better about myself and in tackling problems.”

*Ms. Loek Sreyleak, Social Worker at M’Lop Tapang*

We thank GHR Foundation and FELM for their support to our capacity building program, supporting our training team and enabling us to build and improve our training courses throughout the years.



# Support

We provide long-term therapeutic sessions and social work services to boys and girls affected by sexual abuse and sexually harmful behaviors. In 2019, FSC saw the number of clients increase to **140** children and **127** families and caregivers.

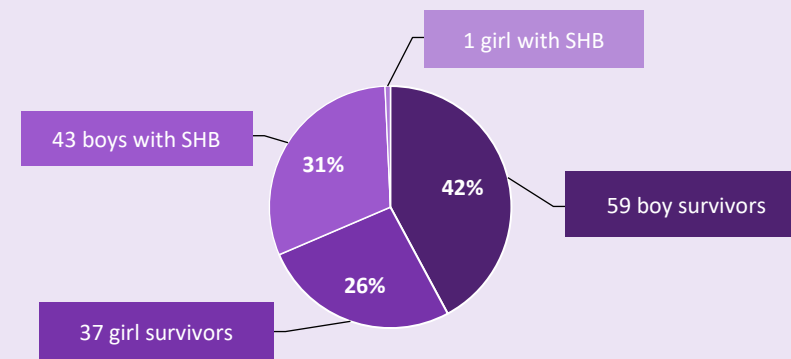
We provide therapeutic and emotional support to children and their families across a period up to 24 months and are always available to talk in times of need. Every case is unique, and our social workers support every child until they have regained their confidence, restored their self-esteem, can cope with their trauma and can live in a safe and nurturing environment.

Supporting children affected by abuse requires a long-term commitment and holistic approach. These complex and sensitive cases require the involvement and commitment of the child's family and key supporters. In most cases, we are confronted with vulnerable families and poverty-related issues.

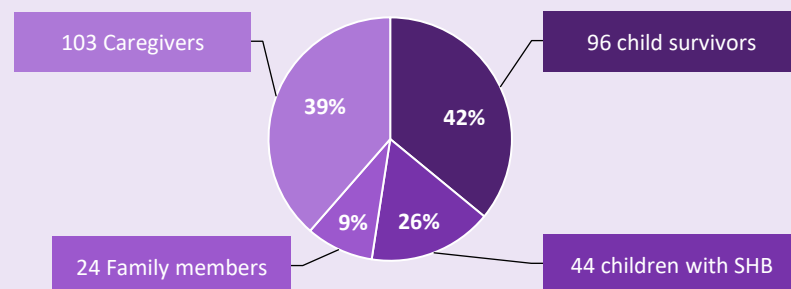


**95%** of children, and **91%** of families and caregivers, reported that the provided support responded to their needs.

## Children Supported in 2019



## Total caseload in 2019



"I always blamed my son. Receiving support from FSC's social worker, I learned so much. I stopped blaming him and started applying positive parenting techniques. Now, my son communicates in a healthy way and attends school regularly." - A mother



We aim to maximize children's chances to recover from their experiences and ensure they can live in a safe and supportive home environment. To achieve this, we work closely with the child's family and key supporters, increasing their knowledge, involvement and capacity; while providing a wide range of social work services in areas such as food security, health care and income generation.

To ensure children reconnect with their school, friends and family, and return to a normal childhood, we provide practical support that includes assistance in court, access to health care and education (such as fees, uniforms and school materials), and personal hygiene. We coordinate a cost-effective delivery of all practical support services through coordination and regular case conferences with partner organizations, government departments and local authorities.

To be successful in managing these complex and sensitive cases, our social workers are well-trained, receive regular supervision and coaching, and use a robust case management system. They are specialized in providing support that is gender-sensitive, as boys and girls experience, express and cope with their traumatic experiences in different ways.

We are one of a small number of organisations in Cambodia, if not the only, that prioritizes quality and sustained outcomes for child survivors, which can only be obtained via long-term therapeutic sessions and support. Since we are an expert service provider to boys, majority of such cases in Cambodia are referred to us.



Our social workers paid **1,803** home visits, provided support via **235** calls, and held **121** case conferences.



## Case Study: a boy survivor

**Sanya was 8 years old and living at a shelter when the sexual abuse started. Following the arrest of the perpetrator two years later, the shelter was closed by the government and Sanya was placed into foster care.**

### His tragic story

Losing both parents early on, Sanya was still a baby when he was placed at a shelter, a locally run NGO in Cambodia's bustling capital. Growing up at the shelter and never knowing any different, Sanya saw it as his home. A place where, for almost ten years, he would be every day and night, sharing meals, classes and bedroom with the other resident children. It wasn't until 2013, when he was eight years old, that the shelter's director started to approach Sanya and sexually abuse him. This abuse continued for two years, until the director's actions finally came to light.

In 2015, the shelter's director was arrested for the sexual abuse of more than ten children, all living at his shelter. During the process, Sanya and the other children had to face their abuser and testify against him in court. This led to his conviction after which the government quickly closed the shelter and placed the children in other shelters and alternative care solutions. Sanya was transferred to an emergency foster family and First Step Cambodia

was contacted to help him recover from his experiences.

"I am really surprised to see how his behaviors have changed so much. He looks cleaner than before and he has good scores at school: he is top 10 [out of 50] among his classmates."

*Sanya's foster parents*

### Assessing the situation

In the initial contacts with the foster parents, serious concerns were raised about Sanya's behavior. Sanya had difficulty engaging with other children, ate too much, did not attend school regularly and was caught playing with an animal's genitals. At home, he was rebellious, refusing to listen to his foster parents and showing aggressive behavior.



From the consequent thorough assessment, we were able to determine that some of Sanya's behaviors were a result of the sexual abuse, while others could be linked to a lack of knowledge and skills of the foster parents in supporting children affected by sexual abuse or trauma.

### Working with Sanya and foster parents

Immediately, we started therapeutic sessions with Sanya, providing him emotional support and carefully developing a relationship of trust. This allowed us to explore his experiences over time. Providing psycho-education, Sanya learned about abuse-related topics such as age-appropriate behaviors, good touch and bad touch, the impact of abuse, who is the abuser, and how to protect himself. Sanya learned different relaxation and anger management techniques.

Simultaneously, we engaged with the foster parents. Having no experience with raising a child affected by sexual abuse, we helped them understand the impact of sexual abuse on boys and how they can best support a child affected by sexual abuse. We showed them how to create a safe environment for Sanya and how they can best respond to the challenging behaviors Sanya may display.

Over the course of over two years, Sanya slowly improved his mindset, regained his self-esteem, and changed his behavior. He started attending school regularly, and regained his confidence and positive attitude towards others. In addition, Sanya stopped displaying harmful behavior to himself and others, and started respecting and interacting with others, leading us to initiate his exit plan.

"Now, I want to go to school every day and come back home on time. I don't take food or anything else from others without permission."

*Sanya (14 years old)*

### Exiting our support...

Today, Sanya is 14 years old. Having no relatives to take care of him, he is living and studying at a permanent residential care center in Phnom Penh. He has been making new friends and doing well in school, attending classes every day and achieving good results.

Our staff stays in contact to monitor his situation, and will continue to do so over the next years.

We provided these essential services to children and families in Phnom Penh and surrounding provinces with the support from GHR and FELM.



# Support

## Case Study: a girl survivor

**In 2017, a seven-year-old girl reported being sexually abused by her teenage cousin. FSC stepped in to support both children and help process their trauma.**

Nich was seven years old when the Cambodian Crisis Centre and the Child Protection Unit referred her to the hospital for emergency medical care. Medical examination and early-response social work confirmed that Nich had been sexually abused.



Living with her family in a rural village, Nich was abused twice by her cousin Rith before she found the courage to disclose what had happened to her. 14 years old at the time, Rith was arrested and found guilty in court, receiving a two years and six months sentence in prison. Rith's side of the family quickly started blaming Nich and her family for reporting to the authorities and soon all family ties were cut off. Nich's family was now facing different forms of discrimination in their community, while Nich was struggling with the mental and physical problems as a result of the abuse.

### Nich and her family's trauma

In 2018, FSC became aware of the case and was able to step in. During our first visit, several concerns were raised and issues documented. Unable to cope with the trauma, Nich was experiencing high levels of anxiety and

having regular nightmares. She was having difficulty engaging with other children, especially boys. Feeling ashamed and afraid that her story would spread in the community and school, she started to miss classes and stay at home. Feelings of shame and self-blame, but also poverty-related issues such as malnutrition, started to make her feel sick and stay in the house more and more.

Based on the initial assessment, our social worker was able to identify that some of Nich's behaviors were a result of the sexual abuse, while others could be attributed to a lack of knowledge and skills of the parents in supporting children affected by sexual abuse or trauma. The assessment also showed that Nich was exposed to emotional and physical punishments from her parents. Immediately, our social workers opened cases for, and started regular sessions with, both the child and the parents.

### Working with Nich and her parents

Providing emotional support to Nich and applying a range of therapeutic techniques, Nich slowly started to process the trauma. Learning about sexual abuse causes, risks and impacts, she improved her understanding of what had happened to her, slowly reducing the self-blaming and feelings of shame. She learned how to protect herself in the future by improving her knowledge of topics such as grooming techniques, how to identify safe places and supportive people, and how to report (suspicion of) abuse.

With Nich's parents, we focused on improving their supervision and parenting skills, especially focusing on their harmful parenting style and punishment. Increasing their knowledge of the long-lasting impact and risks of sexual abuse, Nich's parents started to understand the needs of their child to recover from her traumatic experiences. In addition, to reduce the stress levels in the family and ensure a safe environment for Nich, practical support was provided, covering the costs for school materials and contributing to the improvement of their house and toilet.



### Working with Rith in prison

Simultaneously, we engaged with Rith, who not only had received no help for his sexually harmful behavior, but also had become traumatized from the court proceedings and imprisonment. In cooperation with the Department of Social Affairs (DoSVY) and the Women and Children Consultative Committee, we started providing regular counseling in prison during one-and-a-half years, helping Rith understand the impact of his behavior and the implications of the law, and helping him change his behavior and process with his trauma.

### A happy youth and home

After 12 months of support, Nich has regained her confidence and stopped blaming herself as she has come to understand that the responsibility for the sexual abuse lies with the perpetrator. Having a

positive attitude, she is engaging in meaningful relations with other children, started attending school regularly, and achieving good grades.

Nich's mother has changed her behavior significantly, showing a positive and supportive attitude towards Nich and has improved the supervision of her children, even helping with their homework. Applying their newly-acquired positive parenting skills, Nich's parents are committed to reducing the use of physical and emotional punishment, encourage Nich in her studies and have generally become supportive to their children.

"I am very thankful for [FSC's] support. [It] lets me feel safe and [deal with] my emotional and physical [challenges]. I learned a lot about abuse and how to protect myself in the future. I [am] committed to reaching my goal to become a teacher." - Nich

### Exiting our support...

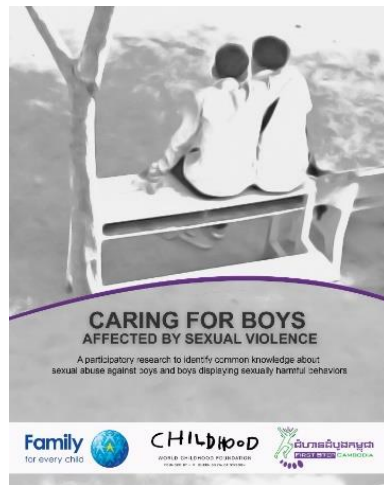
Today, Nich is living with her parents and going to school every day with a positive mindset. Her parents have lost all contact with Rith's side of the family but are no longer isolated from life in the community. After one-and-a-half years providing support, FSC has referred Rith to This Life Cambodia to join their vocational training program in the prison, preparing him for his release in 2020. He plans to leave the village and find employment in Siem Reap city.

We provided these essential services to children and families in Siem Reap and surrounding provinces with support from USAID and World Childhood Foundation.



# Advocacy & Research

In Cambodia, research into the issue of sexual abuse is scarce, especially in relation to boys. We have been contributing to closing this gap via evidence-based research. In 2019, we presented our newest research paper entitled *Caring for Boys Affected by Sexual Violence* and used its findings to inform our government and partners, create new partnerships, and address service gaps. It also resulted in a long-term national advocacy strategy.



“Most mothers think it is okay even if boys are sexually abused because they are ‘gold’ (invulnerable, as the Cambodian proverb says)”  
- A service provider

The **Caring for Boys Affected by Sexual Violence** study shows that the idea that boys can be victims of sexual violence runs contrary to the dominant notions of masculinity and sexuality in Cambodian society.

Focus groups and key informant interviews from all levels of society documented how persisting and widespread beliefs in societal norms of masculinity prevents boys from seeking, finding and accepting support and protection.

We shared our findings and recommendations via dissemination workshops attended by government and partners in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap.



## Recommendations

### Family



- Empowering boys to speak up
- Increase awareness and knowledge of parents
- Families treating boys/girls equal and fair

### Community



- Peer supporters (children helping children)
- Health & sex education at school
- Raising awareness in communities
- Strengthen child protection mechanisms
- Religious places
- Increase unbiased & fair (social) media information sharing

### Service Providers



- Safe spaces for boys
- Improved and more comprehensive referral systems
- Closer collaboration of NGOs with and direct link to state authority services
- Capacity building: train more specialists and increased higher education in social work



Our research reports and other relevant information can be consulted here: <https://www.first-step-cambodia.org/resources>

This research is part of a regional study in collaboration with likeminded NGOs in Nepal, the Philippines and India. In June 2019, we hosted a four-day workshop led by Family for Every Child to share national findings among regional partners and co-develop advocacy strategies.



Advocacy Workshops in Siem Reap with FEC partners

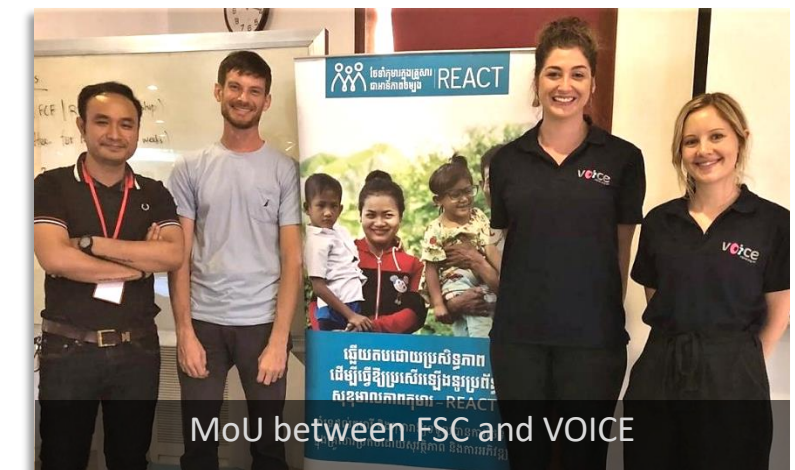
Three key issues were identified by all participating countries and were translated into shared advocacy goals:

- Absence of sex education and education on healthy (sexual) relationships and sexuality, and gender related issues
- Lack of capacity among **service providers**
- **Media** misrepresentation of the issues or lack of coverage of the issues.

In the coming years, we will focus our advocacy work on addressing and improving these issues in Cambodia.

Sharing our findings in our networks has resulted in our teams developing new partnerships and improving service delivery to boys.

Presenting our research at an FCF | REACT network event made an impression on representatives from the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSVY), resulting in joining their monthly coordination meetings. It also resulted in signing an agreement (MoU) with the NGO VOICE, creating a new temporary safe space for boy survivors at their center. Shortly after signing this MoU, our team provided training and a workshop to both VOICE's children and staff.



MoU between FSC and VOICE



# Advocacy & Research

Boys are just as vulnerable and need of support as girls, yet the responses and services for boys are still very limited in Cambodia. Our staff is always trying to improve the understanding and support for boys, advocating via all program activities, the many network and partner meetings they attend, public events, and the media.



Advocating for boys is in our DNA. Our program activities are not only designed to improve the prevention of child abuse and the support for children affected by it, they also raise awareness about the issues for boys and their need to receive protection and support. We inform children and adults, schools and communities, government and service providers, parents and other caregivers. During our prevention and training activities, we motivate participants to share what they have learned about child abuse and boys with others.



Every quarter, we join the 'Our Kids Safety' program, on 99.5FM Family Radio. Our Technical Manager discusses child sexual abuse and SHB, raises awareness for boys, and answers any questions people may have. We reach an estimated 1,500 listeners with every broadcast. You can watch an example on our YouTube channel here:

<https://youtu.be/HXm-vVCScXI>



Every year, we create and disseminate informative and educational materials (IEC), including booklets and poster cards. These materials are shared with communities, parents, families and service providers. They provide information on child abuse prevention and response, including topics such as *how to report a case*, *what is child abuse*, and *boys can be victims too*. In 2019, we distributed **5668** IEC materials to our target audiences via our networks, events and program activities.

## Main Events in 2019



International Children's Day

Our staff joined the Angkor Hospital for Children, meeting with both visiting families, and hospitalized children and their parents. Through play, we were able to share information on children rights and were able to promote our available services to more than 500 visitors.



Mental Health Day

On Mental Health Day, our team was able to inform more than 500 students on children rights and raise awareness of sexual abuse of boys.



In 2019, we reached more than **43,000** indirect beneficiaries via our programs and advocacy work.

During Cycle 4 Families, organised by FCF|REACT, our staff presented the issues of children displaying sexually harmful behaviour to 100 participants from the Royal University of Phnom Penh, the National Institute of Social Affairs, MoSVY, and NGO partners.



Cycling 4 Families



Khmer Empire Marathon

Part of a yearly tradition, our teams joined the Khmer Empire Marathon in Siem Reap. During this event, attended by thousands, we raised awareness for boys' issues and our staff enjoyed completing the wonderful 10k run through the Angkor complex.



Anti-Human Trafficking Day

We participated in the National Anti-Human Trafficking Day, with 2,500 participants, and celebrated International Women's Day, attended by 1,140 participants.



International Women's Day



# Our Partners and Networks

Our approach to partnership and networking remains the key to our effective and efficient service delivery. Coordinated responses and shared resources ensures the best outcomes for our clients and an optimal service delivery to vulnerable children and their families.



**“Before,** I used to think people lied about SHB and sexual abuse, especially some of my cases [...] I ignored them and assumed that they made it up and lied.” – *an NGO partner*

We recognize and support the key role of the government in developing and providing social services to children, families and communities. We join in monthly meetings with the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSVY) and operate in close collaboration with the government at all levels, including the Departments of Social Affairs (DoSVY) and Women Affairs (DoWA), the Commune Committees for Women and Children (CCWC), the Provincial Committee for Counter Trafficking (PCCT), the Women and Children Consultative Committee (WCCC), village chiefs and local authorities.

## Joining MoWA – positive parenting

We joined the Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MoWA) Positive Parenting strategy. MoWA provided our staff a ToT on positive parenting, enabling us to join their efforts to increase the positive parenting skills of parents countrywide. We added the new skills and knowledge to our daily work with families and communities.

## NISA Steering Committee

We accepted the invitation from the National Institute of Social Affairs (NISA) to join their national steering committee. NISA is one of few institutes that provide a Bachelor degree in Social Work in Cambodia. The institute determines the national curriculum on social work and related courses. We are represented by our Executive Director.

We are an active member of important local and international networks. Through these networks we share best practices and resources, coordinate program activities and develop joint projects. In 2019, we shared our expertise on child protection, social work and child sexual abuse, and advocated for boys, via **133** network meetings with the Social Work Network, Family Care First|REACT, Family for Every Child, the Child Protection and Disability Network, the Big Five Network, the Violence Against Children Working Group and the Disability Network.



Social Work Network – Siem Reap

## Networks



FCF|REACT - Learning Summit in November 2019



Social Work Network – Phnom Penh

## NGO

We work in partnership with over a hundred NGOs. Case conferences among partners allows us to discuss individual cases and coordinate catered support for each child. By building their staff's capacity in child abuse prevention and response, we see a steady increase in the number of referrals to our social workers.

## Government

## Child Safe Organization - MoSVY

Following a rigorous assessment, the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSVY) awarded us with the official Child Safe Organization certification. We encourage other NGOs to apply and join the government’s efforts to improve NGO work with children in Cambodia. Currently, we are only one of few NGOs that have obtained this certification.



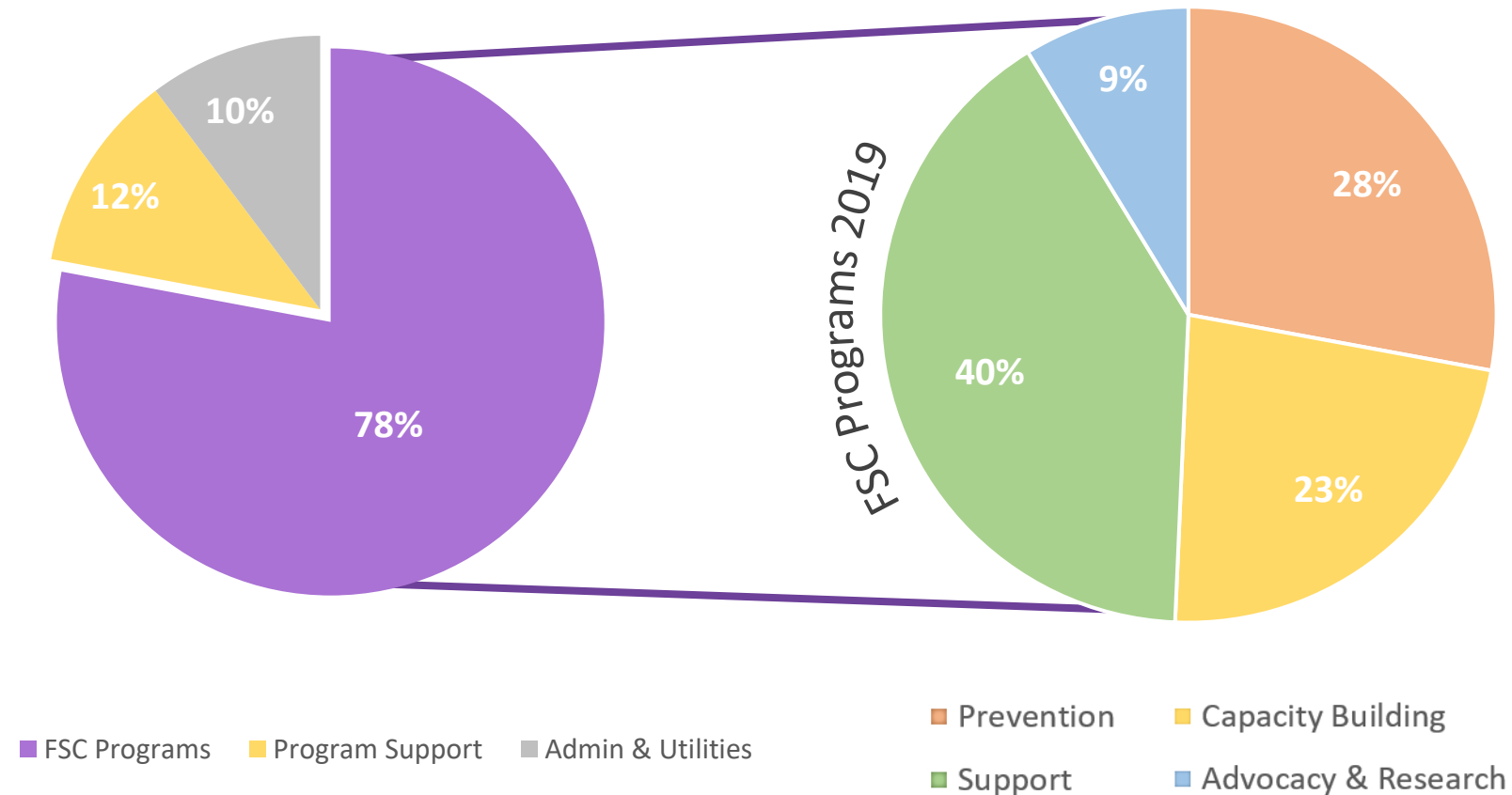
Receiving the CSO certificate from MoSVY



# Financial Summary

In 2019, First Step Cambodia was able to provide its wide range of services on a budget of a little over \$334,000 USD. First Step receives a yearly external audit, to ensure transparency and correct financial practice. In addition, we receive regular programmatic audits and visits from our funding partners.

FSC - Budget Spent 2019



In 2019, 96% of our funds came from grants provided by our multi-year partners. The remaining funds came from income generation (3.4%) and individual donations (0.6%).

# Our Supporters

We thank all our achievements in 2019 to an excellent group of donors who have been very supportive to our cause. The majority of our funding came through generous grants from these partners:



For the first time, we also welcomed individual donations, facilitated by our new partner *association basmati*, who manages Swiss donations to our organization. We are grateful to these individual donors for choosing us as the organization they wish to support.



# Supporting

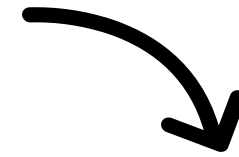
First Step Cambodia was established in 2010, after the first epoch-making historical research “I thought it could never happen to boys” that documented stories of sexual abuses against boys in Cambodia.

With the support of our donors, external board and local leadership, our organization has managed to grow in a sustainable way, building on the successes of a specialized team that is proud of the essential services it has been able to provide since its start.

We recognize there is still a lot to do in order to achieve our mission in Cambodia, but we are grateful for every little step we take to protect children from abuse and improve the responses of Cambodians at all levels of society to boys who are at risk of or survivors of sexual violence.



## Since 2010

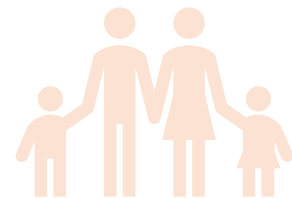


### Capacity Building

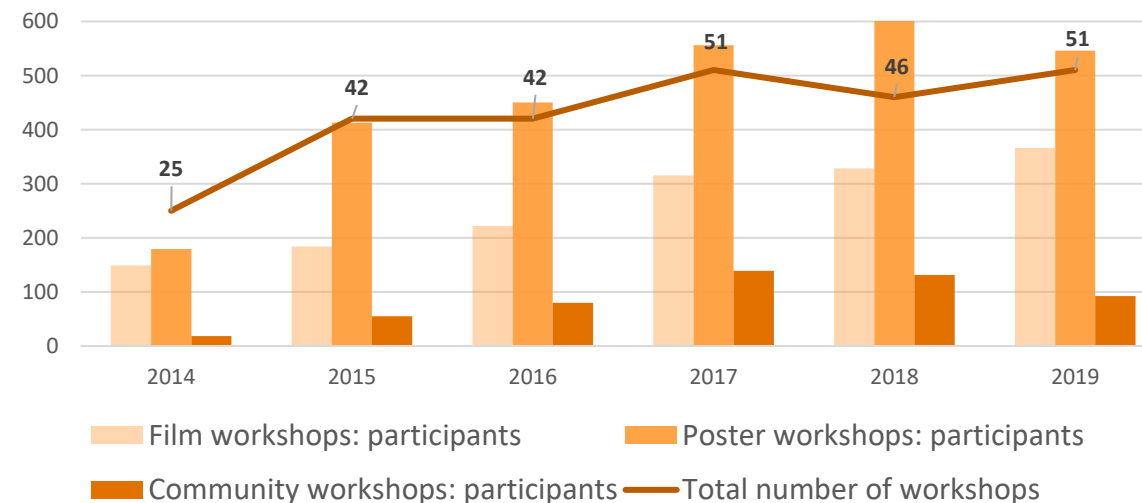


- 8 training curricula
- 31 training courses delivered
- 514 professionals trained

### Prevention



- 257 prevention workshops
- 4,900 children and adults informed



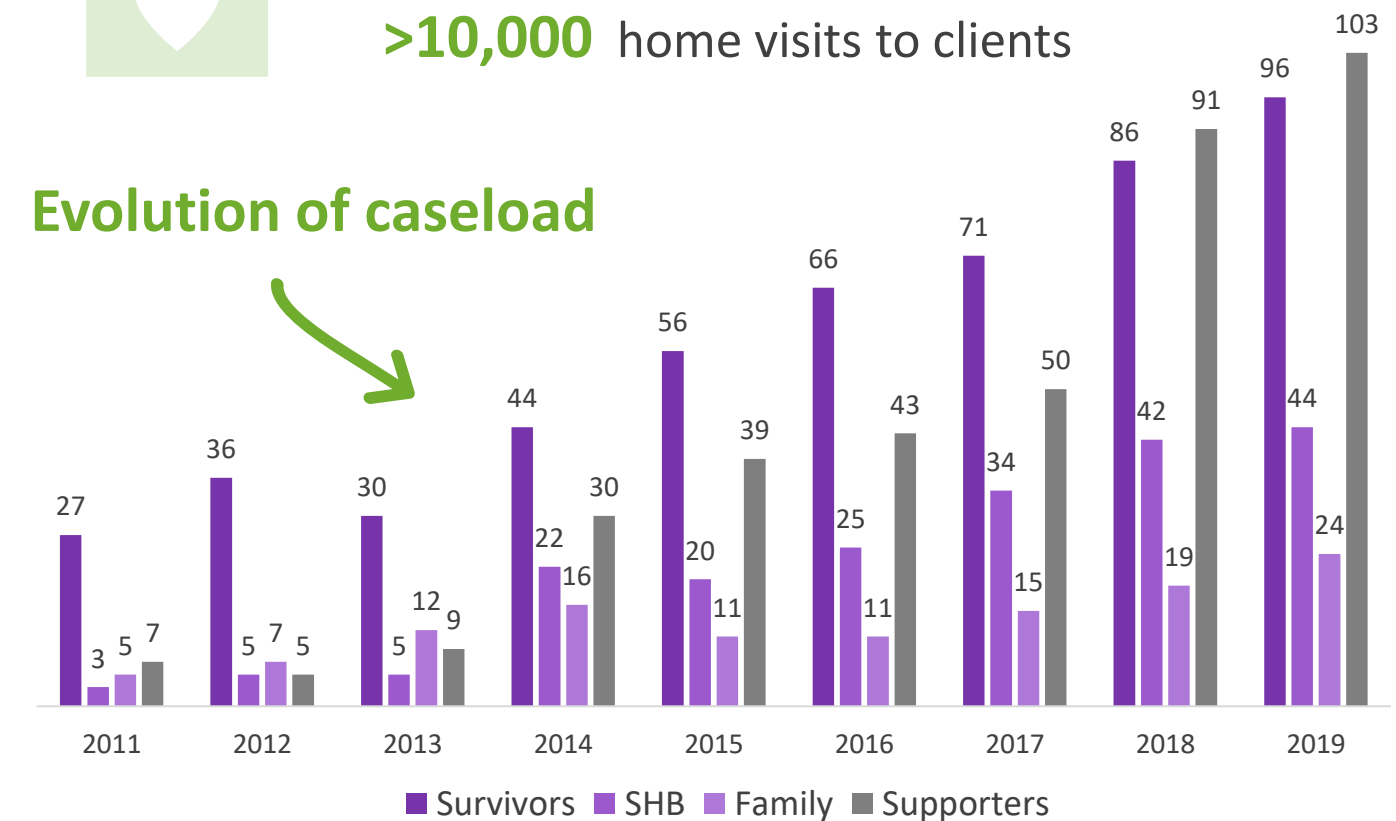
“Now, I am very happy! I feel safe at home and my parents support me. I can go to school and play with my friends.”  
- A child survivor (10 years old)

### Support



- 28,6% average annual increase in clients
- >10,000 home visits to clients

### Evolution of caseload



Read more case studies from past years on our website:  
<https://www.first-step-cambodia.org/support-program>





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