

helping

TO OVERCOME STRUGGLES

McMaster School Scholar Jennifer Creighton finds the value in helping people in crisis

by Debbie Richard '02, '04, Assistant Director of Marketing

As a 2007-08 McMaster Scholar to Cambodia, Jennifer Creighton carried out a project focused on natural forms of birth control.

A local student and a Presidential Scholarship award winner, Jennifer became interested in the McMaster program after seeing another student's presentation about garment factory workers in Cambodia. It had enough of an impact on her that she met with Dr. JoAnn Burkhardt to learn how she could get involved. As an International Studies major and Religion minor, Jennifer studied ways to help and settled on research on natural methods of birth control.

Cambodia's past unrest has made the use of and methods of obtaining medicinal forms of birth control difficult, if not impossible in some regions, and rarely affordable to the people in this poverty stricken country. During the reign of the Khmer Rouge, millions of people were killed, many of whom were the educated and doctors. Over 30 years later, the country is still trying to recuperate from the turmoil. The struggles women have in this nation are exacerbated by lack of control over their fertility.

Creighton's research took her to the Georgetown University School of Medicine, Institute of Reproductive Health website and research on one form of natural birth control – CycleBeads – that had 95% effectiveness with correct use and 88% effectiveness with typical use. The beads help women with normal ovulation cycles understand when they are more likely to become pregnant, thus allowing them to help control and plan their future. She also discovered and taught another method that could be used for women without a normal ovulation cycle, called the

Two Day Method, which mainly relies on a woman's ability to understand what her body is telling her.

"My biggest worry was not the research, but whether the women in the Cambodian Women's Crisis Center would accept me as a knowledgeable figure and the information I brought to help them," Creighton said. Working with Sophal Leng Stag of the Southeast Asia Children's Mercy Fund as her translator, the Crisis Center's staff and the professors within the McMaster program, Creighton was able to provide information that was easily and gladly accepted. The women in the Crisis Center also wanted to ask other questions and learn how to make the CycleBeads so that others could benefit from the knowledge.

Pleased that she could have such an impact on a foreign trip, Creighton is now focusing on New Orleans, another McMaster research area, and how she can help bring more awareness to the problems in Louisiana, specifically working with the Turtle Cove Environmental Research Station on the eroding of the swamp and marshlands and the eventual displacement of its people. "This project is driven by a community need, as without the coastal wetlands, the city of New Orleans would cease to exist," she says. "The wetlands are what protect the city from hurricanes, which strike the Louisiana coast more frequently than anywhere else in the United States. The community's need for a strong storm surge infrastructure, whether it be natural or man-made, is very high." ♦



Jennifer Creighton instructs Cambodian women in the use of CycleBeads.