



QUARTERLY IMPACT REPORT

1 APRIL TO 30 JUNE 2026

Supporting girls and families to break free from debt, danger, and disruption.

This quarter, Free to Shine supported girls' safety and education across three districts, eight communes, and 30 villages, working with 160 girls and families through social work and education programs. New intakes exceeded exits, reflecting both the scale of ongoing need and the continued reach of the program.

Alongside casework, Free to Shine strengthened community-based prevention through debt awareness sessions and distribution of prevention posters in homes and key community locations. The team also finalised a Community Consultation on Complaints, Feedback and Reporting, which confirmed strong trust in Free to Shine, identified barriers to speaking up, and informed the next phase of child-friendly safeguarding and reporting pathways.

Goal of the quarter

**SAFE
COMMUNITIES**



Names of all girls in this report have been changed to protect their privacy.



What is an 'exit to safety'?

An exit to safety is a planned transition out of the program when a girl and her family are no longer at risk of trafficking. The family has the knowledge, support, and stability to keep her safe independently.



251

Safety Visits



122

Social Work Interventions



22

New Girls Enrolled



10

Exits to Safety
(see note)



25

Bikes Delivered



15

Emergency Food Packages

THE NUMBERS THIS QUARTER

IMPACT THIS QUARTER

- 01 Why Debt is a Child Protection Issue
- 02 Our Response
- 03 Strengthening Community Safeguarding & Accountability
- 04 Story of Impact: Rina*



Free To Shine is a child protection organisation that prevents the sex trafficking and exploitation of school-aged girls in Cambodia. We strengthen community and family systems to prioritise children's safety and education.

01

WHY DEBT IS A CHILD PROTECTION ISSUE

In rural Cambodia, limited access to formal credit means that when a bank says no, predatory lenders say yes: fast, with no paperwork and no protection against extortionate interest rates. For families facing financial hardship, that “yes” can look like a lifeline: money for a medical emergency, food during a shortage, or support after a poor harvest.

The cost is severe. Loan repayments can quickly consume already fragile household budgets, reducing money available for food, schooling, and healthcare. In this context, entrenched gender norms often place pressure on the oldest daughter to contribute income, increasing the risk that she will leave school or be pushed into unsafe or exploitative work to help repay a debt she did not create.

As repayments grow, spending on essentials is squeezed and financial pressure narrows the choices available to families. Without timely support, girls may feel pressured to leave school, take on work, or accept unsafe opportunities

to help the household cope, limiting their future opportunities and increasing their vulnerability to exploitation.

This isn't a distant statistic for Free to Shine's team. Nearly 90% of the 160 girls and families on our program hold at least one debt or loan, and in some cases financial strain had already contributed to a girl leaving school before support began. Debt does not only deepen hardship; it can become a direct pathway into the very harms Free to Shine exists to prevent.





02

OUR RESPONSE

Free to Shine addressed predatory lending through a dual approach: targeted casework with families and broader community-level prevention. This work was delivered in partnership with 3PC, which supported the development of Khmer-language training materials for social workers and designed community awareness resources, while Free to Shine led printing and distribution across target communes.

In casework, one family at a time. Social workers facilitated structured sessions with girls and their families focused on identifying exploitative lending practices, understanding safe vs unsafe debt and strengthening household financial management. By integrating these conversations into regular visits, social workers helped families connect financial decisions with girls' safety, school attendance, and long-term wellbeing.

In the community, one household at a time. The team implemented a debt awareness campaign designed to reach households beyond the formal caseload. Prevention messages were placed in high-visibility, everyday locations to maximise reach and reinforce key information.

Location	Posters
Family homes	68
Community gathering points	41
Total	109

These materials now provide ongoing community-level prevention by increasing awareness among families who may never engage directly with a Free to Shine social worker. In this way, safeguarding messages extend beyond individual casework and into the broader community.



“

Our group discussion benefited us, because we now have new knowledge about how to protect ourselves. We do not receive such lessons and guidance at school.

– Child participant, Community Consultation Focus Group Discussion

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03

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY SAFEGUARDING & ACCOUNTABILITY

Free to Shine strengthened safeguarding and accountability by listening directly to the people most affected by harm and risk. Free To Shine hosted consultations with 90 community members, including children, caregivers and local leaders. These consultations focused on how people understand their rights, how safe they feel to raise concerns, and which reporting channels they trust most.

The findings reaffirm strong community trust in Free To Shine: 100% of local children, caregivers, and community leaders know their right to raise concerns, with high confidence in our confidentiality. Direct face-to-face conversations and phone calls emerged as the most safe, trusted, and practical reporting channels. Furthermore, female figures, including mothers, female staff, and local female leaders, were consistently identified as the primary trusted focal points for children and families, particularly regarding sensitive SEAH (Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment) concerns.

The next phase of work will build directly on what communities asked for. Free to Shine will expand child- and community-friendly information so that rights and confidentiality are easy to understand, formalise reporting pathways that centre trusted focal points, and pilot more accessible anonymous options.

Understanding who people turn to, how safe they feel to report, and which channels they prefer allows Free to Shine to design reporting pathways that are realistic, accessible, and responsive to the children and young people involved in the program. This helps ensure that children and families can safely raise concerns before harm escalates and strengthens accountability across the organisation.

Rina*, 16, has been working with our Senior Social Worker for six months, after leaving school when her family faced significant financial hardship. Her parents struggled with alcohol use, limited income, and Rina and her sister were often exposed to family violence. Rina's parents were not able to consistently support both daughters' education, so after Rina left school, she made the difficult decision to work in the city to help ensure her younger sister, who is in Grade 7, could continue studying.

When our social worker first met Rina, she understandably took time to feel comfortable engaging. Over time, through regular visits and conversations about her work and wellbeing, they built a trusting relationship. Although Rina's employer provided accommodation and meals, she often worked long hours late into the night, which affected her health and wellbeing. The team was concerned about Rina's safety both at work and in her accommodation, and about whether she knew her rights, how to keep herself safe, and what protections were available to her.

As our social worker continued working with the family, she shared information about available health services and supported Rina's parents to seek medical care when Rina's mother became ill. During this period, Free to Shine also provided

emergency food relief to help ease financial pressure. Together with the family, she facilitated discussions and learning on healthy relationships, child protection, labour rights, online safety, and the risks of predatory lending, so that everyone had more information to make decisions that protect the girls' safety and futures.

Today, Rina's mother has recovered and reduced her alcohol use, and her father has also reduced his alcohol use and is now working in construction. With support from Free to Shine, Rina's mother is now growing vegetables from seeds provided by the program and making brooms to generate income, strengthening the family's livelihood. Rina has returned to live with her family and, together with our social worker, has begun exploring safer, better-quality work opportunities available to her, including vocational training options that protect her health, safety, and future opportunities.

Most importantly, Rina has developed the confidence and skills to make decisions that are right for her safety, including choosing to leave her job, even when her employer asked her to stay. Drawing on the information and support she received, she recognised that the long working hours and work conditions were not good for her wellbeing and chose to prioritise her safety and future.

Your support enables Free to Shine to prevent exploitation before it happens by addressing the drivers of risk, like predatory debt, alongside immediate safety and education needs. Together, we can help girls and their families move from crisis and coercion to safety, choice, and long-term stability.

Through these efforts, Free To Shine reaffirms its commitment to creating a safer, more educated, and empowered community for all.

If you would like to contribute towards this work you can do so here:

www.freetoshine.org/donate

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