

# "I BELIEVE THAT WE ALL HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR SAVING OUR CHILDREN FROM VIOLENCE."

**Chea Sok Lim, Santa Ana**

Winner, 1997 California Wellness Foundation Peace Prize

The Minnie Street area of Santa Ana can be a dangerous place to live. The streets are violent. Crime and gangs threaten some children from an early age. A beacon of hope for the Cambodian children is The Cambodian Family and its Youth Coordinator, Chea Sok Lim.

Chea was born in Cambodia. He and his family escaped the killing fields, though for years he was haunted by nightmares of the horrors he had lived through. He came to this country with his parents and his eight brothers and sisters in 1981.

He immediately began working with children. He was concerned that the school dropout rate was very high. The people of his community are poor. Most are refugees, from Cambodia and from Latin America. Children who are learning English cannot communicate with their parents in this new language.

Chea organized the Cambodian Family Dancers, children who performed everything from



traditional Cambodian dances to contemporary hip-hop. They became famous throughout the region. He fostered a sense of cultural pride and self-respect in the children.

To help families communicate, Chea set up classes to teach the Khmer language to children and English to parents. To keep kids from dropping out of school, he arranged special classes in math and reading.

He is known and trusted throughout the community. Because of him, children who would have been lost to gangs, who might have died, are going to college instead. And many follow Chea's example and come back to volunteer at the center.

Minnie Street is a safer place today because of Chea. There's been a lessening of tension among ethnic minorities. Chea Sok Lim's selfless dedication to his community has brought young people optimism and dignity and the promise of a life without violence.

The California Wellness Foundation is proud to honor Chea Sok Lim with its Peace Prize, a \$25,000 grant. The Foundation is dedicated to improving the health of Californians, especially children, youth and families. And there is no greater threat to the health of California youth than violence. Chea Sok Lim, Barbara Rivas of San Diego and Police Corporal Malcolm Williams of Oakland, winners of this year's prizes, are proof that individuals can make a difference, that lives can be saved, that neighborhood by neighborhood, we can reduce the nightmare of violence so that our children can live their dreams.