



Friends of Vietnam Orphanages Inc.
Liên Hiệp Những người bạn của trẻ em mồ côi Việt Nam

REPORT TO DONORS FOR 2017 FINANCIAL YEAR

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OUR DONORS

I am grateful to our board, **Julie, Dennis, Geoff and Clive**. They have provided encouragement and support. I have regularly consulted Vietnamese-Australian friends **Loan and Tiep** as cultural interpreters. They have provided a picture of what is happening under the surface.

Thank you to our faithful weekly contributors **Clive, Vytas, Michael and Adrienne, Geoff and Rachelle**.

Thank you for generous donations from the friends of **Mrs Pho House**, the Vietnamese Restaurant at 221 Rangoon Rd Singapore. The owner, **Hoang**, organised an amazing fundraising opening night for this new restaurant. Also thank you to our Vietnamese-Australian friend **Thuy**.

The orphanage fund received large donations from our friends **Dennis and Karna**.

Thank you also to our many volunteer interpreters and “fixers” in Vietnam: **Hien, Chau, Thuy, Huyen, Hiep, Truclinh, Duong, Lam, Son**. I was not able to involve all of them during the 2016 trip. But nothing could get done without the help of our interpreters.

We relied heavily on the generosity of local people, some of whom were also volunteer interpreters, to carry out and complete projects: **Hiền** in Mekong Delta, Sister **Kim Anh** in Binh Duong, **Lâm** in Nha Trang, “**Nam1**” in Ha Tinh, **Châu** in Ha Tinh, Sister **Quế** in Buôn Mê Thuật, Sister **Nhàn** in Phong Nha, Sister **Kính** in Phát Diệm, Sister **Lành** in Xã Đòai and Sister **Nguyễn** in Quỳnh Lập. Sorry if I left out anybody.

Neighbours in our street including **Hamish** and **Ginny** helped with fundraising street parties. **Jee and Joyce** held a Sunday junk stall at the local Trash-n-Treasure market.

With this funding we were able to carry out many small, local projects at the village level. There were also three projects that were over a thousand dollars each:

- \$1,200* (20M) Flood relief for 20 households in Ede indigenous village, Central Highlands, south of Buôn Mê Thuật. Pig raising and food. Project carried out by Sister Quế.
- \$1,600* (27M) Medicine supply to 8 orphanages in Nha Trang region. Project carried out by Lâm.
- \$2,000* (34M) Geese for 34 poor households in 4 mountain villages around Phong Nha. Project carried out by Sister Nhàn.

On behalf of Friends of Vietnam Orphanages Inc, I am grateful to all, for generous donations to the fund, practical help, moral support and good counsel.



**Peter Kabaila,
Secretary**

PROJECT SUMMARY

Every dollar you donated went to direct assistance in Vietnam.

During the 2017 financial year we carried out a wide range of projects including to encourage children to attend school, provided an electric wheelchair, medicines for a group of orphanages in Nha Trang and provisions to disadvantaged families in villages and a leper colony. This financial year, donation income for was **\$15,232.40** and we spent **\$12,672** on projects summarised below. The funds were personally administered by us and our local helper network.

*(*items completed during the November 2016 Vietnam visit are asterisked)*

\$235*	(4.0M)	Food packets to hand out to 100 cancer patients, Cancer Hospital Soup Kitchen, Saigon.
\$130*	(2.25M)	Footwear for 30 children at Buu Tri Pagoda Orphanage, Can Tho
\$285*	(4.8M)	Nutrition for 60 children at Buu Tri Pagoda Orphanage, Can Tho
\$225*	(3.8M)	Nutrition for 40 children at Thien An Orphanage, Can Tho
\$247*	(4.2M)	Free range chicken raising project at Thien An Orphanage
\$175*	(3M)	One year school fee scholarship for two girls living at Shelter for Homeless Women, Suoi Tien (Dong Nai)
\$265*	(4.5M)	Back massage chairs, Shelter for Homeless Women, Suoi Tien (Dong Nai)
\$325*	(5.5M)	Course scholarships An Binh Orphanage, Saigon.
\$265*	(4.5M)	Electric vehicle for Huyền, An Binh shelter, Saigon.
\$595*	(10M)	Baby care packages. Mother's Love Home for unmarried mothers, Binh Duong.
\$60*	(1M)	Medical insurance for Hieu, Saigon.
\$1,200*	(20M)	Flood relief for 20 households in Ede indigenous village, Central Highlands, south of Buon Me Thuot
\$1,600*	(27M)	Medicine supply to 8 orphanages in Nha Trang region
\$140*	(2.4M)	20 metal wash basins for Thanh Son Pagoda
\$65*	(1.1M)	100 kg rice for children at Loc Tho Pagoda
\$130*	(2.2M)	4 Black mountain pigs for Dai An Orphanage, (Cam Lam)
\$60*	(1.0M)	Soft toy for each girl at Huong Duong orphanage (Nha Trang)
\$24*	(0.4M)	Ice-cream night, Huong Duong orphanage (Nha Trang).
\$210*	(3.6M)	Provisions for the poor in a Paco indigenous village, A Lưới

\$2,000*	(34M)	Geese for poor households to raise in 4 mountain villages around Phong Nha
\$410*	(7M)	Medicines for the poor in 4 villages around Phong Nha
\$210*	(3.5M)	Chicken and duck raising for two poor families (1M each). Food provisions for three other families (0.5M) each. Ha Tinh Dong Dai village, Ha Tinh.
\$450*	(7.6M)	Trang Nua Trang Nua Orphanage Clothes storage furniture for children. Chest of drawers @ 1.15 x 4of = 4.6M. Hanging cupboard @ 1.5 x 2of = 3M
\$350*	(6M)	10 Blankets, 20 litres cooking oil, 4 boxes milk. Mother Teresa of Calcutta Orphanage, Xa Doai.
\$700*	(12M)	Food supplies and nappies for children. 19.3 Shelter for Severely Disabled, Xa Doai.
\$205*	(3.5M)	Quynh Lap Leper Colony. Heaters for patients in the high care area (hospice). 5 @ 0.7M = 3.5M.
\$412*	(7M)	Quynh Lap Leper Colony. Free-range chicken farming to increase household income and nutrition. For 32 of the 100 households in the colony who have the capacity to raise chickens. 350 chickens @ 0.02M each = 7M.
\$250*	(4.2M)	Phát Diệm Disabled Children's Day Care Room. Padded floor finish (interlocking foam mats).
\$35*	(0.6M)	Phát Diệm. Elderly mother with mentally ill son in his 40s: Food provisions.
\$60*	(1M)	Phát Diệm. Group household of 10 homeless women, several of them blind. Food provisions.
\$120*	(2M)	Shelter for unmarried mothers in St Paul De Chartres convent, Phát Diệm. Baby care packages for two unmarried mothers.
\$484*	(8.2M)	School fee scholarships Thien Trang Vo (Yr 5, aged 11, fees 2.42M) and Linh Dan Vo (Yr 1 aged 6, fees 2.42M)), children of illiterate parents, Thach Ha village, Ha Tinh. Also Hong An Tran (Yr 7, aged 13, fees 3.36M), Thach Bang village, orphaned and being raised by grandmother. Sept 2016 to June 2017 academic year.
\$672	(4.4m+6.8M)	Course scholarships An Binh Orphanage, Saigon.
	TOTAL	\$12,672

PROJECT DETAILS

\$235* (4.0M) Food packets for cancer patients, Cancer Hospital Soup Kitchen, Saigon.



Delivery by motorbike

Saigon Cancer Hospital Soup Kitchen. Food packets to hand out to cancer patients.
1,000 packets of noodles.
96 mini cartons of milk for children.

\$130* (2.25M) Footwear for 30 children at Buu Tri Pagoda Orphanage



With the eldest orphan. Phu is 23 years old

10 pairs large sandals 0.8M
10 pairs medium sandals 0.75M
10 pairs small sandals 0.7M

\$285* (4.8M) Nutrition for 60 children at Buu Tri Pagoda Orphanage, Can Tho



Temple children with our food and shoe donation.

45kg whole chickens (meat) 1.8M
20kg pork meat 1.48M
200 chicken eggs 0.37M (plus seller donated additional 100 eggs)
Pepper 2 kg 0.44M
Garlic cloves 5kg 0.26M
Seasoning powder 12 kg 0.48M

\$225* (3.8M) Nutrition for 40 children at Thien An Orphanage, Can Tho



Friends at Thien An Orphanage

200 chicken eggs 0.37M
45kg whole chickens (meat) 1.8M
Knorr brand seasoning 10kg 0.53M
40kg gas for one month's cooking 1.1M

\$247* (4.2M) Free range chicken raising project at Thien An Orphanage



Chicken feed delivery to Thien An

25 live hens for breeding 3.7M
100kg wholegrain rice for chicken feed 0.5M



Jungle track to Thiên Ân.

\$175* (3M) One year school fee scholarship for two girls living at Shelter for Homeless Women, Suoi Tien (Dong Nai)



Loan puts her arm round camera-shy Phuong.

Ha Thi Phuong (Yr 6) 1.68M + 0,38M
Ha Thi Loan (Yr 7) 1.48M
Sept 2016 course and uniform fees for the two daughters of Lan, a single mother working at the home.

\$265* (4.5M) Back massage chairs, Shelter for Homeless Women, Suoi Tien (Dong Nai)



Two electric back massage machines @ 2.24M



Previous year's project: sun awning for the disabled women's block.

\$325* (5.5M) Course scholarships An Binh Orphanage, Saigon. Fees Aug-Oct 2016



Sponsored student Nguyen Thi Ngoc Ahn nurses Gia Bao (2 yrs) at An Binh

- ³⁵₁₇ Nguyễn Thị Kim Oanh, year 11: 1,682,000
- ³⁵₁₇ Nguyễn Thị Mai Ly, year 11: 1,682,000
- ³⁵₁₇ Nguyễn Thị Ngọc Ánh, year 9: 620,000
- ³⁵₁₇ Hoàng Thị Huyền, year 9: 620,000
- ³⁵₁₇ Hoàng Thị Kim Mỹ, year 12: 530,000
- ³⁵₁₇ Trần Thị Cẩm Nhung, year 9: 400,000 (registration and uniforms)

Scholarship total : 5,534,000 for 6 girls and women

\$265* (4.5M) Electric vehicle for Huyền, An Binh shelter, Saigon.



Huyền is paraplegic. Her 3-wheeler vehicle was donated by a Vietnamese organisation. It was supplied powered by hands (push-pull action). We funded conversion to electric power.

\$595* (10M) Baby care packages. Mother's Love Home for unmarried mothers, Binh Duong. Project carried out by Sister Kim Anh.



Delivering items from market.

\$595* (10.1M) Mother's Love Home for unmarried mothers, Binh Duong, Saigon. Baby care packages:

- 14 bottles baby oil
- 8 small towels
- 50 bottles shampoo
- 24 bottles cooking oil
- 10 large towels
- 24 cans of milk formula x 2kg each
- 2 bottles Eucalyptus oil
- 100 mini-cartons fruit yogurt
- 50 mini-cartons white yogurt
- 30 packets of tissues



This baby was offered to me by his young mother.

\$60* (1M) Medical insurance for Hieu, Saigon.



\$60* (1.0M) Nguyen Thi Hieu. Medical insurance and cash for miscellaneous expenses.

\$1,200* (20M) Flood relief for 20 households in Ede indigenous village, Central Highlands, south of Buôn Mê Thuột. Pig raising and food. Project carried out by Sister Quế.



Local family, crops destroyed by flood.



Families gather to receive black mountain pigs. The project aims to raise household income and improve nutrition.



\$1,200* (20M) Flood relief for 20 vulnerable households in Ede indigenous villages, south of Buon Me Thuot, Central Highlands.

For 10 households to supplement income through black mountain pig livestock raising: 2 piglets (lợn con) (1.0M) + 15 kg rice bag (bao gạo) (0.2M) = 1.2M/household

For 10 households who need immediate supplies: 35kg rice bags (bao gạo) (0.4M), fish sauce (nước mắm) (.03M), salt (muối)(.01M), cook oil (dầu ăn) (.08M), soap and washing powder (xà bông và bột giặt) (.08M), mosquito net (mùng mền) (0.2M) = 0.8M/household.



\$1,600* (27M) Medicine supply to 8 orphanages in Nha Trang region. Project carried out by Lâm.



Sample of meds for each orphanage

\$1,600* (27M) Medicine supply to 8 orphanages in Nha Trang region. Total was 3.365M per orphanage x 8 = 27M

La Salle Disabled workshop; Huong Duong orphanage; Dai An orphanage; Nhan Ai orphanage; Thanh Son Pagoda; Loc Tho Pagoda; An Dao Buddhist orphanage; Minh Hoa Deaf School.

Anti biotics	1, Ampicilin 500mg	2 ^h x 70.000
Anti biotics	2, Gyalexin 500mg	2 ^h x 150.000
= Imodium	3, Loperamid 2mg	5 ^h x 20.000 (25.000)
Cough syrup	4, Vitax	5 ^h x 40.000
Antiseptic cream	5, Glacort	10 ^h x 14.000
Worm tablets	6, Fugacar	20 ^h x 20.000
Vitamins	7, Biotax	20 ^{tab} x 25.000
Codaine	8, Terpin-codain	1 ^h x 60.000
Menthol	9, Dầu gió	1 ^{lôc} x 120.000
Paracetamol	10, Hapacol 500mg	3 ^h x 250.000
Anti histovine	11, Lorin	5 ^h x 90.000
		<u>3.365.000</u>

List of the medicines supplied

\$200* (3.365M) Medicine supply to La Salle Disabled workshop Project carried out by Lâm.



La Salle brother stands by the medicines.

\$200* (3.365M) Medicine supply to La Salle Disabled workshop.



Previous year's medicine donation

\$200* (3.365M) Medicine supply to Huong Duong orphanage. Project carried out by Lâm.



\$200* (3.365M) Medicine supply to Huong Duong orphanage



\$200* (3.365M) Medicine supply to Dai An orphanage. Project carried out by Lâm.



\$200* (3.365M) Medicine supply to Dai An orphanage



\$200* (3.365M) Medicine supply to Nhan Ai orphanage. Project carried out by Lâm.



\$200* (3.365M) Medicine supply to Nhan Ai orphanage.



\$200* (3.365M) Medicine supply to; Thanh Son Pagoda. Project carried out by Lâm.



\$200* (3.365M) Medicine supply to Thanh Son Pagoda.



\$200* (3.365M) Medicine supply to Loc Tho Pagoda. Project carried out by Lâm.



\$200* (3.365M) Medicine supply to Loc Tho Pagoda.



\$200* (3.365M) Medicine supply to An Dao Buddhist orphanage. Project carried out by Lâm.



\$200* (3.365M) Medicine supply to An Dao Buddhist orphanage.



\$200* (3.365M) Medicine supply to Minh Hoa Deaf School. Project carried out by Lâm.



\$200* (3.365M) Medicine supply to Minh Hoa Deaf School.



\$140* (2.4M) 20 metal wash basins for Thanh Son Pagoda. Project carried out by Lâm.



**\$140* (2.4M) 20 metal wash basins
@0.12M/basin for Thanh Son Pagoda (Cam Lam district, Nha Trang)**



\$65* (1.1M) 100 kg rice for children at Loc Tho Pagoda. Project carried out by Lâm.



\$65* (1.1M) 100 kg rice for children at Loc Tho Pagoda, Nha Trang.



\$75* (1.3M) Milk for An Dao orphanage (Cam Ranh). Project carried out by Lâm.



\$75* (1.3M) Milk mini-cartons for children at An Dao orphanage (Cam Ranh). 4 boxes of 48 cartons/box



\$130* (2.2M) 4 Black mountain pigs for Dai An Orphanage, (Cam Lam). Project carried out by Lâm.



Our previous project: a cow and calf.

\$130* (2.2M) This year's project: four black mountain pigs to raise orphanage income and provide experiences for children. Children holding piglets purchased for raising at the orphanage (photo by Lam, our interpreter).

\$60* (1.0M) Soft toy for each girl at Huong Duong orphanage (Nha Trang). Project carried out by Lâm.



\$60* (1.0M) Shopping excursion for all girls from Huong Duong orphanage (Nha Trang) for toys and one soft toy chosen by each girl.

\$24* (0.4M) Ice-cream night, Huong Duong orphanage (Nha Trang). Project carried out by Lâm.



\$24* (0.4M) Ice-cream treat for children and staff, Huong Duong orphanage (Nha Trang).

\$210* (3.6M) Provisions for the poor in a Paco indigenous village, A Lưới



Provisions to 5 poor households. To each we provided: rice 25 kg, 2 soap bars, 1 toothpaste, 3kg washing powder, 1 kg sugar, 2 litres cooking oil, 1 litre fish sauce, 1 winter blanket, 1 box of 30 packets of noodles.



**\$2,000* (34M) Geese for 34 poor households in 4 mountain villages around Phong Nha.
Project carried out by Sister Nhàn.**



\$2,000 (34M) Wild goose (“swan”) raising project for poorest households in 4 mountain villages outside Phong Nha: Hung Trạch, Liên Thủy, Sơn Trạch, Thanh Bình. Swans @ 0.05M x 20 per family = 1M per family x 34 households.

The project raises household income, improves nutrition and provides an occupation for the poorest households.



Geese delivered by supplier



Household receiving their geese.



A woman inspects her geese.



Household installs their geese into a newly constructed pen.

\$410* (7M) Medicines for the poor in 4 villages around Phong Nha. Project carried out by Sister Nhàn.



\$410* (7M) Medicines for poor people in Hung Trạch, Liên Thủy, Sơn Trạch, Thanh Bình villages outside Phong Nha. A supply of medicines (7M) was funded for the convent pharmacy to provide to locals in these villages. The plan was to avoid popular brand-name placebos and stick to the basics: Paracetamol 500mg, Codeine (Terpincodein), Worm tablets (Fucagar), Antibiotics (Ampicilin 500mg, Cyalexin 500mg), Anti-diarrhea (Loperamide 2mg), Antihistamine (Lorin), Antiseptic cream (Glocort), Iodine (Povidon).

\$210 (3.5M) Poultry raising & food provisions for 5 poor families, Dong Dai village, Ha Tinh. Project carried out by Nam1.



All photos by Nam1, volunteer: Man crippled by an accident with chickens and poultry feed.

\$210 (3.5M) Dong Dai village, Ha Tinh. Chicken and duck raising for two poor families (1M each). Food provisions for three other families (0.5M) each.

Email from Nam1, volunteer interpreter:

Chao Peter,

Yesterday I did something awesome, lolz!

Firstly, I provided to the first family 50 chickens, 2 bags of food, and vaccine. For the second family, 30 ducks, 2 bags of food and vaccine.

They were really happy for that, and promised that they will try their best to raise the animals we support. For the other 3 families, I provided rice, cooking oil, fish sauce and seasoning powder.



Retired village literacy teacher receives ducks, poultry feed, and vaccine.



Food provisions for this elderly couple



Food provisions for poor household.

Food provisions for this wheel chair bound man

\$450* (7.6M) Trang Nua Orphanage. Clothes storage for children. Project carried out by Sister Lai.



Clothes cupboards being delivered.

\$450 (7.6M) Trang Nua Orphanage Clothes storage furniture for children. Chest of drawers @ 1.15 x 4of = 4.6M. Hanging cupboard @ 1.5 x 2of = 3M.



Children and carer with their new cupboards.



Last year's project, a TV & DVD for the children.

\$350* (6M) Mother Teresa of Calcutta Orphanage, Xã Đòai. Project carried out by Sister Lành.



\$350 (6M) Mother Teresa of Calcutta Orphanage, Xa Doai:
 10 winter blankets.
 10 mozzie nets.
 Cooking oil 5 bottles @ 5 litres each.
 Large nappies 7 packets.
 Small nappies 2 packets.
 Women's sanitary pads 4 packets.
 Toilet paper 7 packets of 12 rolls each.



\$700* (12M) Shelter for Severely Disabled, Xã Đòai. Food supplies and nappies for children. Project carried out by Sister Lành.



\$700 (12M) 19.3 Shelter for Severely Disabled, Xa Doai. Food supplies and nappies:
 10 large winter blankets
 Rice 2 bags @100kg each
 Nappies 12 packets of 100
 Sugar 1 bag @ 100kg
 Sunlight dishwashing liquid 12 bottles @ 2 litres
 Vim cleaner 24 bottles
 Fabric softener 10 bottles @ 2 litres each
 Laundry powder 3 packets @ 10 kg each
 Laundry powder 3 packets @ 5 kg each
 Ariel laundry powder 2 packets @ 3kg each
 Shampoo 9 bottles
 Body lotion 9 bottles
 Cooking oil 4 bottles @ 5 litres each
 Cooking oil 12 bottles @ 1 litre each
 Milk 1 box large cartons
 Milk 1 box small cartons

Sister Lành (boss) and carer with our donation.



Staff (nuns) and carers (postulants) at evening meal.



Children inside the orphanage with carers.

\$205* (3.5M) Quỳnh Lập Leper Colony. Heaters for patients in the high care area (hospice). Project carried out by Sister Nguyễn.



\$205* (3.5M) Quynh Lap Leper Colony. Heaters for patients in the high care area (hospice). 5 @ 0.7M = 3.5M.

\$412* (7M) Quỳnh Lập Leper Colony. Free-range chicken farming for 32 households. Project carried out by Sister Nguyễn.



\$412* (7M) Quynh Lap Leper Colony. Free-range chicken farming to increase household income and nutrition. For 32 of the 100 households in the colony who have the capacity to raise chickens. 350 chickens @ 0.02M each = 7M.

Women happy with their new chickens.

\$250* (4.2M) Phát Diệm Disabled Children's Day Care Room. Padded floor. Project carried out by Sister Kính.



The same room after we provided padded flooring.

\$250* (4.2M) Phát Diệm Disabled Children's Day Care Room. Padded floor finish (interlocking foam mats).



The disabled children's room had a hard floor.

\$35* (0.6M) Phát Diệm. Food for elderly mother with mentally ill son. Project carried out by Sister Kính.



\$35* (0.6M) Phát Diệm. Food for elderly mother with mentally ill son in his 40s:
30 kg rice bag
1 box noodles (30 packets noodles)
1 large winter blanket
1 litre cooking oil
1 litre fish sauce

\$60* (1M) Phát Diệm. Group household of 10 homeless women. Food provisions. Project carried out by Sister Kính.



Sister Kính distributes the food among the women.

\$60* (1M) Phát Diệm. Group household of 10 homeless women, several of them blind. Food provisions. For each:
Cooking oil 1 litre
Fish sauce 1 litre
Rice 5 kg



\$120* (2M) Unmarried mothers' shelter, St Paul De Chartres convent, Phát Diệm. 2 baby care packages. Project carried out by Sister Kính.



Our donated baby care packages brought back from the local market.

\$120* (2M) Shelter for unmarried mothers in St Paul De Chartres convent, Phát Diệm. Baby care packages for two unmarried mothers.
Milk for babies.
Milk for mothers.
Blankets.
Tissues.
Baby clothes.
Nappies.
Big towels.
Small towels.

\$484* (8.2M) School fee scholarships in villages, Ha Tinh. Project carried out by Châu.



\$484* (8.2M) School fee scholarships in villages, Ha Tinh. Thien Trang Vo (Yr 5, aged 11, fees 2.42M) and Linh Dan Vo (Yr 1 aged 6, fees 2.42M)), children of illiterate parents, Thach Ha village, Ha Tinh. Also Hong An Tran (Yr 7, aged 13, fees 3.36M), Thach Bang village, orphaned and being raised by grandmother. Sept 2016 to June 2017 academic year.

\$672 (4.4+6.8M) Course scholarships An Binh Orphanage, Saigon. Fees 2016-2017



\$400 (rounded) (6.8M) Course scholarships An Binh Orphanage. Money transfer to Sister Nguyễn Thị Hoà, financial administrator:

Nguyễn Thị Kim Oanh: 1,300,000
Nguyễn Thị Mai Ly: 1,300,000
Nguyễn Thị Ngọc Ánh: 967,000
Hoàng Thị Huyền: 967,000
Hoàng Thị Kim Mỹ: 1,207,000
Trần Thị Cẩm Nhung: 1,067,000

Scholarship total : 6,808,000 for 6 women

MRS PHO HOUSE STORY

A couple of years ago I got a phone call from Hoang who was planning to start a Vietnamese restaurant in Singapore. **Mrs Pho at 349 Beach Rd Singapore** had a big opening night at which customers did not pay for meals but donated to the orphanage fund. <http://www.mrspho.com/>

Fast forward to a few months ago and a second Vietnamese restaurant opened, **Mrs Pho House, 221 Rangoon Rd, Singapore**. Thanks to the generosity of friends of Mrs Pho House, The opening night raised a big donation, generously topped up by the restaurant owner.

Read about this new amazing restaurant on <http://danielfooddiary.com/2017/02/22/mrsphohouse/>

A big vote of thanks to the generous friends of Mrs Pho House!



DUCKY'S VOLUNTEERING STORY



My name is Sarah but friends call me Duckie. For years I was interested in volunteering. So when I found out my family were having an overseas holiday in Vietnam, I was overjoyed at the opportunity to finally volunteer.

From the very beginning my trip to visit orphans in two orphanages in the Mekong Delta (Can Tho City) was well organised. It started with me approaching Friends of Vietnam Orphanages to discuss my interest in volunteering. Peter, who organises projects on a trip to Vietnam each year, was my first point of contact. He assisted by finding out what type of work I would be interested in and which area I would be visiting. I have a keen interest in Buddhism so I was able to choose a temple orphanage run by Buddhist nuns.

From here, Peter put me in touch via email with a local interpreter who would meet me in Can Tho and assist with visiting and translating for me. The interpreter was incredibly helpful, her English was excellent and we emailed back and forth in the months leading up to my visit. When I arrived in Vietnam we kept in contact and she assisted me in catching a local bus from HCM City (Saigon) to Can Tho to meet her.



With interpreter Hien

On arrival, Hien the interpreter (who is a volunteer) took me on her motorcycle and gave me a tour of her city and we shared a meal at a local restaurant. She mentioned to me that the children do not have many toys and said that the children liked sports and liked to play badminton. So we went to a local sports shop and I bought several badminton sets to take for them.

That afternoon, we visited the first orphanage. It was in a rural area out of town which was accessed by a small dirt road. This orphanage does not receive a lot of donations because it is isolated. The children here were not used to seeing too many foreigners and hardly had any English, although they could do basic counting. They were a little bit reluctant but greeted me with a happy 'teacher teacher'. Their faces lit up when I produced the badminton sets and we set off to play. Despite the language barrier it was beautiful see the universal language of play and the smiles light up on their faces was unforgettable. They valued their new toys very highly. There were many complicated missions to retrieve shuttlecocks from trees, roofs and in the river. When dinner was announced, the children mimed 'eating then badminton' then rushed their dinner to resume playing. I was amazed by their creativity and imagination. Most of the children wanted to join in but there wasn't enough racquets. Instead of fighting over the toys, they used their shoes to hit the spare shuttlecocks. Some children found a bamboo pole and had two children on either side holding it as a 'net'. Soon the orphanage manager announced it was time for them to study.



Using a shoe as a badminton racquet

The interpreter told me that the children had demanded I come back again the next day to play again. Despite the language barrier between us, it was incredible to experience the universal language of play.

Instead of giving the orphanage a monetary donation, I was advised to give a more practical donation in the form of food or other small goods they required. I showed the lady in charge a shopping list the interpreter had put together using pictures from supermarket catalogues. The orphanage cook then selected which food and general supplies were needed, including quantities.

While I was there I also got a tour of their facilities. I was able to see first-hand Peter's work and the positive impacts this had on their day to day living. I got to see a big chest freezer which Peter had organised for them. This enabled them to save money by buying meat in bulk and save it from spoiling, which saved them time and money. Peter had also organised for a hen house to be built with a supply of hens for a free range chicken farming project. The hens laid eggs, some of which would hatch to produce more chicks. I was very humbled to know that all funds donated to the charity are directed straight back into the communities. I was able to see firsthand examples of

how these donations were making a difference in the lives of the children and communities in which they live.

We then said our goodbyes, promising to return the following day and headed off down the dirt track back to town. The second orphanage I visited was at the Buddhist pagoda where 40 orphans live from the age of 6 months to 23 years. The nuns were very welcoming. Children were studying for an upcoming exam with a volunteer who was a student. So we didn't disturb them. Instead I had a tour of the facilities which was incredibly interesting. The pagoda is on the main street and members of the public come to pray and make their offerings. It looks exactly like a regular pagoda. If you didn't know you would have never have guessed it also housed and cared for a significant number of orphan children. It was a fascinating place. The rear of the pagoda had unexpectedly become a well-known place for the orphans to live. Unlike the purpose designed orphanage I had visited, the pagoda has to adapt the space they have. There is quite a bit of space with two medium sized areas downstairs and an area upstairs for the infants to sleep.

Unlike the other orphanage, there was no outdoor area for the children to play and no designated sleeping area (they slept on the floor head to toe on grass mats). In this organised chaos, 40 children live at the Pagoda as a big family. Then we into the back area to the kitchen and dining hall. The cook was busy preparing meals. There is a vast quantity of food prepared for one single meal. Again, I got the opportunity to view the impacts Peter had made with the orphanage fund donations. They had received a washing machine. This saved many hours of hard manual labour which now be more directed towards other more meaningful activities, along with a huge electric rice cooker to assist them in preparing a whopping 10kg of rice every day. He had also recently helped purchased all of the children a new pair of sandals to wear to school.



Again, I had a translated conversation with the cook as she browsed the shopping list and indicated what supplies they required. Before departing, I was able to interact with an older girl who had a variety of disabilities, and with small infant children. The nuns give up their lives not only to follow their religion, but also to care for these children. Having worked in childcare whilst I was studying teaching, I understand the demands of caring for small babies. After observing their interactions for a while, I could not believe the nuns had taken in and gave so much care and loving attention around the clock for these small and innocent babies, as if they were their own, asking for nothing in return. The likelihood of the older girl with severe physical and intellectual disabilities becoming a functional member of society was very low. She would remain at the

orphanage to be cared for. Being a teacher and having also having taught at a school designated for children with disabilities, I also know that they also require a very high amount of care. Many children have a lifelong dependence for basic needs and tasks. Something deep inside of me felt humbled that this girl was safe, had a loving home and through her constant smiles seemed quite happy. I bonded with her quite easily and it was sad to leave for the day.

My interpreter and I said our temporary goodbyes and put together a shopping list based on my donation budget. Both shopping lists seemed very similar. We made an estimate of costs and set out shopping. This was one of my favourite parts of my trip. In the past I have made many cash donations to various charity organisations not knowing exactly what the money would be spent on, but hoping it goes to a good cause. There was a part of me that gained a lot from physically going to the shops and purchasing exactly what they required, then directly hand delivering the goods and seeing the huge smile on their faces and shaking their hand. Knowing that my donation was of need and has made a direct difference for the children gave me great joy.

First we set off to the supermarket and loaded our trolley full of sanitary pads for the older children (with a few weird looks from the supermarket staff which I won't forget) along with several bulk bottles of shampoo. We then headed to the market and bought 4kg of garlic and 1kg of pepper along with several more badminton sets and shuttlecocks from the sports store. Then we worked out that with the rest of the money I could afford to purchase a donation of 600 eggs (which would have been funny trying to balance on the motorbike, but we decided to be safe and get them delivered). I then had the very local experience of loading and balancing all of the shopping onto the motorbike.



Ducky's donation brought back from the market

Because we were in town we set off back to the Pagoda. We delivered the donations to the back of the facility where the children were having dinner. After the children had eaten their dinner there was much excitement at my presence. I had quite a bond with a small boy with disabilities whom I had met earlier. I gave him piggy back rides and spun him around which brought joy and delight to his face. I can only imagine that this type of physical one-on-one interaction with adults would be limited. The other children crowded around, all wanting to meet me. They were very curious and all wanted to greet and play with me at once. I introduced some simple hand games to them such as paper scissors rock and thumb wars which were a HUGE hit. I also showed them on my phone some photos from back home in Australia as well as my dog (a husky) and some pictures of Australian animals. They were very fascinated by this, especially by my dog Buddy. Then I took lots of photos. The children all loved being in selfies and seeing themselves on the screen. We took some group shots as well. Unfortunately, I was unable to bring any badminton sets as there was no space to play and it was quite crowded. Upon leaving the Pagoda one of the nuns

approached me to say a personal thank you for my visit. She had been on a recent trip to Nepal and had bought all of the children a special necklace. She produced one for me and put it around my neck. One side of the pendant has a picture of a pagoda and the other has a picture of Buddha. For some reason this was a very emotional moment for me. The necklace is a treasured keepsake that I will not remove. Even now back in Australia I am able to hold it and remember that very special visit, filled with joy and laughter. Unfortunately we had to say our goodbyes. Walking away I felt a great sense of sadness and urgency to stay but placed faith in knowing that the nuns were doing an incredible job and that for now, my job was done.

Our next stop was another ride along the now wet, slippery and bumpy dirt road, whilst balancing our purchases to the more isolated orphanage as promised. I very much enjoyed the slight adrenaline rush. There were several times when I had to dismount the motorbike to allow it to go over some narrow and steep bridges safely.

Upon our arrival at the orphanage we dismounted and were greeted by an excited 'TEACHER TEACHER'. I gave out the extra badminton racquets along with some foot shuttlecocks. This was a game that is very popular in Vietnam. The shuttlecock had a feather and a small spring. It is played by passing the shuttlecock amongst each other by using your feet (or sometimes your head if you're really good). We then presented the manager with the donation items. Despite the language barrier, she was very humbled and pleased by my gesture.

We had a brief conversation where the manager told me that she was single and did not have children and considered the orphans to be her children. She lives and works at the orphanage full time, expecting nothing in return but knowing she has made a difference to 40 small lives.

The children seemed very happy that now there was enough equipment for everyone to play with. I had a short introduction to how to play with the foot shuttlecock with several of the boys. This resulted in much laughter. We had arrived quite late and it was starting to get dark. The manager said that the children needed to do some study for the upcoming exam. I also discovered while I was there that the children had a quite strict schedule so they did not get much time to play. They were expected to do chores and keep their home tidy. Study was also a very important priority for them (which I was very glad to hear.) All of the children at both schools had the opportunity to attend local schools to which they rode their bikes. I felt very happy knowing the children must have been over the moon at such a spontaneous break from routine with play with new toys.

Throughout the trip the interpreter and I shared many meals together at local roadside cafes. I felt very privileged to have this opportunity, as the locals did not speak English. She introduced me to many local dishes. She would often stop on the roadside when she saw a local roadside stall selling interesting drinks and snacks for me to try. One drink that was very memorable was sugar cane juice, juiced from fresh sugar cane. I was able to experience Vietnam culture on a very local level. We were able to talk and share stories from our homelands. No question was ever too silly and I was able to learn a wealth of information about Vietnamese food, language and culture including why many of the children end up as orphans. By experiencing and exploring local food and culture with a local person I was able to get a much more rich and authentic experience than going on an organised tour group.

I then had my last night in Can Tho and in the morning was dropped at the bus station. The interpreter and I had become quite good friends. We exchanged small gifts with each other and regrettably said our final goodbyes.

On the three hour bus journey back to HCM City I was able to reflect upon my time in Can Tho. I was and still am eternally grateful and somewhat amazed at how Hien (the interpreter) who took me in as if I was her own daughter, despite the fact that we had never met. The fact that Hien gave up two days of her own personal time to assist still baffles me to this moment, that somebody

could be so incredibly kind, asking nothing in return. It made me really want to cultivate this kind of compassion and find a way to unselfishly give back to the world in some way. In Australia I find that this value is somewhat lacking from Australian society.

Visiting the orphans also touched me in so many ways. It has provided me a sense of gratitude for what I have back home. I would not describe myself as religious person but since returning home every meal I eat I think of the children and give thanks abundance of food we have available. I am also reminded that the most important thing for a child that an adult can provide, is their time. The children did not have many toys or material objects, however this did not appear to matter. The children had their basic needs met and the nuns had devoted 100% of their time and love to nourish and raise them. In return, most seemed healthy and happy.

In summary, the visit to Can Tho was very touching. I feel like I have learnt so much about the values of kindness, compassion towards others and having gratitude for what we have. I am trying and will continue to cultivate and incorporate in my own life back home.

I visited the Can Tho orphanages for only two days. But this experience was incredibly authentic and touching. I wish I could have stayed much longer. I would recommend volunteering with Friends of Vietnam Orphanages to anybody who wishes to directly contribute to a very worthwhile cause. The fact that you can directly see the impact Peter's work is having on these communities is incredibly humbling. Having seen that every dollar donated goes directly to the children, I plan to do some fundraising of my own for Friends of Vietnam Orphanages in the near future.

