



Friends of Vietnam Orphanages Inc.

Liên Hiệp Những người bạn của trẻ em mồ côi Việt Nam

REPORT TO DONORS FOR 2023 FINANCIAL YEAR

CONTENTS

Overview

Our Donors

Project Summary

Project Details

Travel Stories (Attachment)

OVERVIEW



Red circles = project locations

Each year I take a motorbike across Vietnam, visiting orphanages, shelters and villages to make a needs assessment on the ground. The aim of this “barefoot charity” model is to reach the poorest and most unsupported communities. The guarantee to donors is that **every** donated dollar goes to direct assistance in Vietnam. Our local project partners are mostly the traditional breadwinners of Vietnam – the women. They are also uni student groups and nuns, both Christian and Buddhist. Together, we design useful projects, to get best value for money. No project is too small. Each financial year, this grass roots work is summarized in a report to donors.

OUR DONORS

Our Committee thanks people who helped us assist communities in Vietnam:

Monthly contributors

Family and friends who made monthly contributions: **Clive, Michael & Adrienne, Geoff & Rachelle, Hayden & Yên, Helen & David, Patrick H.**

Donors

Our Friends who gave donations were **Amanda, Dennis, Karna, Julie & Jan, Paul & Suzette, Aranda Men's Group, Anna & Ashley**, Vietnamese-Australians **Kim Huỳnh**, Beyond Bank (via Community Reward Scheme) and others.

Board & Advisers

Our board, **Julie, Dennis, Geoff** and **Clive**, provided encouragement and support. I also regularly consult our Australian-Vietnamese cultural advisers **Loan & Tiệp**. They are very patient in explaining Vietnamese method and custom to Westerners.

Local Interpreters

Our volunteer interpreters and "fixers" in Vietnam included **Châu, Tam, Hiệp, Xoan**. Interpreters help to negotiate each project, fix any problems and ensure completion.

Local Project Partners

We rely on local project partners. These monastic, volunteer or social groups spend their valuable time. This requires detailed local knowledge, visits and negotiations with people in their homes. We get a "multiplier effect" from time contributed by these helpers. Our project partners in Vietnam (dropping titles such as "Sister" for simplicity) were:

- Yên (in charge) and Quế (assisting), Thiên Ân orphanage, Cần Thơ.
- Bích Hường (host) and Kim Anh (in charge), Sisters of Charity (Mother Teresa of Calcutta's order), orphanage and single mothers shelter, Mai Âm Tình Mẹ, Bình Dương.
- Bắc Ái Vinh (Vinh Sisters of Charity order), serving Phong Nha villages.
- Hiệp, Huong Khe village, Ha Tinh.
- Legion of Mary (Legio Marie) women's group, Thạch Long & Thạch Sơn village, Hà Tĩnh.
- Lành (in charge), 19.5 Shelter for Severely Disabled, Vinh Sisters of Charity, Xã Đòai.
- Kính (deputy), Phát Diệm Holy Cross order, serving the poor around Phát Diệm.
- Ngọc Nu, St Paul De Chartres order, serving disabled and poor in Saigon.
- Loan, Director, SPDC convent in Buon Me Thuot, running the Vi Nhan Disabled Children's School for indigenous kids.
- Dr Trong and other medical volunteers Oanh and Cong, Gia Lai province.
- Danang Uni Christian student volunteer group for Child Centre No 5.
- Br Phat and the Franciscan Monastery, serving Leper settlements in Gia Lai province.

To summarise, the help from monthly contributors, donors, board members, advisers, local interpreters and local project partners enables us to take Australian friendship to Vietnam, to carry out both small and large local projects, at orphanages and villages.

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



Peter Kabaila, Public Officer

PROJECT SUMMARY

Every dollar you donated went to direct assistance in Vietnam.

During this financial year we carried out a wide range of projects. Projects partnered with students and other volunteer groups provided opportunities for local involvement. Our charity helped orphanages and disadvantaged families, particularly in highland tribes. 100% of every dollar donated went to direct assistance in Vietnam, because we have \$0 admin cost. This financial year, donation income was \$20,040. We spent \$20,000 AUD on 18 projects, varying in size from \$250 to \$6,550. Essential to success were our interps and project partners in Vietnam.

No.	Million VND	\$ AUD	PROJECT
1	30	1,880	SAIGON – MISSION TO DISABLED PEOPLE
2	10	625	MEKONG DELTA – CHILDREN'S SHELTER
3	10	625	BINH DUONG – SINGLE MOTHER'S SHELTER
4	15	940	BUON ME THUOT – DESKS FOR DISABLED CHILDRENS SCHOOL
5	0	0	BUON ME THUOT – INSPECT PREVIOUS PIG PROJECT
6	6	380	BUON ME THUOT – WOMAN WITH DISABLED CHILD
7	14	880	KONTUM – VINH SON 2 SHELTER
8	0	0	KONTUM – VINH SON 3 SHELTER
9	12	760	KONTUM – PIGS FOR VINH SON 4 SHELTER
10	6	380	KONTUM – VINH SON 6 SHELTER
11	6	380	DANANG – STUDENT PROJECT AT CHILD CENTRE NO 5
12	34.3	2,150	HA TINH – POTS & CHICKENS FOR CHUT PEOPLE
13	4	250	CARMELITE LOW-COST STUDENT HOUSING – CHICKENS
14	15.4	965	VINH BOAT PEOPLE – RICE & BICYCLES FOR KIDS
15	12	750	XA DOAI – DISABLED SHELTER
16	28.5	1,785	PHAT DIEM – CHICKENS FOR LOCAL VILLAGES
17	11	700	ARTHUR'S VOLUNTEER GROUP – FRIG FOR A SHELTER
18	67.9	6,550	LEPER VILLAGE RENEWAL IN GIA LAI PROVINCE
	319.4	20,000	TOTAL (exchanged 1.597M/\$100)

PROJECT DETAILS

SAIGON – MISSION TO DISABLED PEOPLE

During the Covid 19 lockdown of Saigon in 2021, we helped 70 households identified by the SPDC (Sisters of St Paul De Chartres). At that time, these people were stuck in the city with no employment and in a high risk of dying of Covid.

This time I again used the SPDC as a contact to locate 60 households of disabled people. Disabled people have to leave the disabled shelter at age 18 as they no longer qualify for government support. Sometimes they are stranded in the city with marginal income, mainly lottery ticket selling on the footpath. They live in single rental rooms in tenement houses in poorer parts of the city and use adapted tricycles or motorbikes to get around.

With the help of Sister Nu of SPDC and our volunteer Ngoc, our charity provided 60 households of disabled people in Saigon with 10kg rice, a box of 30 packet noodles, one litre each of cooking oil, fish sauce, soy sauce, condensed milk; 1 kg sugar and 1kg seasoning; packet of dessert cakes. The cost was 0.5M per family being 30M total = \$1,880.



Food parcels being sorted.



Little rental motorcycle taxi truck (xe ba ga) used to deliver our food parcels.



Disabled people leaving their tenements.



Typical tenement for factory workers, students and disabled people.



Man at his rental room.



Two lottery ticket sellers chat.



Two lottery ticket sellers chat.



Some of our clients with Sister Nu.



Receiving a food parcel at the rental room.

MEKONG DELTA – CHILDREN’S SHELTER

At Mai Am Thien An children’s shelter in the Mekong Delta capital of Can Tho houses over a hundred schoolchildren. We have been visiting this shelter for years. It is run by two lay nuns, Yen and Que, with some French Vietnamese funding. The shelter emphasis is on education and a safe social environment for the children. Que and Yen identified the shelter’s needs and we provided:

- Instant noodles – 20 boxes of 30 packets each.
- Fish sauce – 2 boxes of 12 litres each.
- Tomato sauce – 2 x 5 litre cans.
- Chilli – 2 x 5 litre cans.
- Cooking oil – 20 litres.
- Shampoo – 20 x 1 litre bottles.
- Bar soap – box of 72 soap bars.
- Meat – 20 kg.
- Chicken eggs – 200.

Cost 10M = \$625.



Children standing with our project this year.

BINH DUONG – SINGLE MOTHER’S SHELTER

For some years, we have been visiting this Sisters of Charity of Calcutta shelter for single mothers and babies., we helped the Mai Am Tinh Me single mother’s shelter, which houses around half a dozen single Mums and over a hundred kids is in the factory worker district of Binh Duong, 30 km north of Saigon. Former Hue Uni English student Ngoc was our local contact for this project.

In discussion with Ngoc, the shelter identified their need for 50 stackable children’s beds in kindergarten (60 x 120cm) and junior primary school (60 x 140cm) sizes. Cost 10M = \$625.



Four boys left by their single mothers at the orphanage.

BUON ME THUOT – DISABLED CHILDRENS SCHOOL

In Buon Me Thuot city, capital of the Central Highlands province of Dak Lak, I visited the Vi Nhan School for disabled children run by SPDC. Sister Lien, the school manager, identified a need for school desks which can be arranged into a curved layout for some of the special classrooms.

The disabled school runs on a typical business model, where donations form an important part of the operational budget but are supplemented by the monastery's businesses, such as craft sales and food production. It is not for free (there is nothing for free in developing countries). It does, however, benefit the children. These children are not permitted to attend a government school for normal children. If they did, they would be not accepted and bullied. Here they have friends, wear a uniform and are treated well.

We paid for the materials and our local project manager found a fabricator who donated the labour to make the desks. This was an economic way of obtaining such furniture, rather than buying up a load of coloured plastic furniture that would soon break. Our charity provided 50 desks. Cost 15M = \$940.



Lunchtime at the school canteen.



Prototype desk



Measurements from prototype



Start of production



Some desks assembled and lacquered

BUON ME THUOT – INSPECT PREVIOUS PIG PROJECT

Guided by Sister Huong of SPDC in Buon Me Thuot, I visited our previous mountain pig raising project in a nearby Ede ethnic minority village. The good news is that the pigs were being well housed and well looked after. They were found to be growing well (rather than ending up in the pot). The people of this village are catching up with the economic development of the Vietnamese general community. There was no new project at this village.



BUON ME THUOT – WOMAN WITH DISABLED CHILD

In a camp on other people's farmland, I visited a woman with a disabled 15 year old son and younger son with "white blood disease". This is a difficult situation because she is a fulltime carer for her son. Her husband is a labourer at a nearby coffee farm.

We provided some supplies for the disabled boy's care.

Following the visit, Sister Huong of SPDC agreed to visit the woman regularly with supplies of nappies, food and the like for the disabled boy.

Also our charity helped the woman increase her household income by raising two mountain pigs. The plan was for the husband to build the pig pen and then we would purchase 2 piglets for the woman to raise. If successful, we can continue with more piglets at a later date.

Cost was \$6M = \$380, comprising 1.5M = \$100 of nappies, medicines, food etc. Pigs = \$280.



The family camp



Mother stands over her boy placed on the family bed



Sister Huong's brings a supply of nappies and milk paid out of our project

KONTUM – VINH SON 2 SHELTER

At Kontum, I visited the chain of shelters for children run by local indigenous nuns of the Anh Phep La Order. Some children have lost a parent, but many are brought by parents or relatives who are poor, have too many children and have difficulty getting the children to school or raising them. All shelters are named after St Vincent De Paul (*Vin-cent* Vietnamese to *Vinh Son*) and are allocated a number.

The shelter's Director, Sister Nguyet, aged in her early thirties, was to be seen everywhere in the grounds and in the office, organising everyone. Nguyet made all the decisions relating to our project. I also found her in the shelter's bakery. After a day of baking, some of the girls ride out on their school bicycles to sell the brioche style bread rolls to the local shops.

Shelter no 2 is in the city of Pleiku and has the oldest facilities. I met up with medical volunteers Dr Trong and his medicine dispenser Oanh. They had travelled north from Gia Lai. The group carried out medical consults and treatments at the shelter for indigenous children.

The sister in charge, Sr Nguyet, presented children with illnesses to the doctor and explained the symptoms. She then interpreted into the Jarai language while the doctor made an assessment and prescribed the medicines required. His assistant Oanh dispensed the medicines and a young Jarai man wrote out instructions for use of the medicines.

Life threatening illnesses or surgery cases are taken to the medical centre. The kids usually tough out the minor illnesses. Girls usually help each other out by picking the lice out of each other's hair. Other conditions remain untreated. So this was a great opportunity to get a GPs advice and treatment for ear infections, fungal skin conditions and respiratory infections.

There are 173 children at this shelter. Over the course of the day, about 50 children and staff were checked and treated, including Sister Nguyet. But most checking was the ears and throats of the little ones, who seemed to be living in a constant state of reinfection. Before leaving on his motorbike for his home city of Pleiku some 50km away, the doctor gave medicines for the shelter to keep in their pharmacy cupboard, with detailed instructions on how to use them. Our charity paid for the supply of medicines. Medicines cost 8M = \$500. The following day our charity provided some useful supplies for the shelter at a cost of \$6M = \$380. Total cost 14M = \$880.



Close contact and casual hygiene of the little ones causes them to live in a constant state of reinfection.



Rapt attention from the pre-schoolers.



Sister Nguyet getting a sore jaw from having to remind every toddler, "Say "Ahhh".



A prematurely born 2-month old gets a check for her respiratory infection.



All meals are prepared by the kids. There's nobody refusing to eat their food at meals.



Medicine supply we provided to the shelter.



Our meds included beautifully coloured vitamin tablets. Most children got some as supplementary medicine. The breakfast diet of instant noodles and candy in most shelters does not provide the protein or vitamins children need at the start of the day.



Children with the supplies provided by our charity.

KONTUM – VINH SON 3 SHELTER

This shelter was about 5km out of the city. It appeared to be newly built with large facilities and the children appeared to be indigent, entertaining themselves with disco music while the nuns prayed in the chapel. There didn't seem to be any need for our charity's involvement here so I left.

KONTUM – PIGS FOR VINH SON 4 SHELTER

Shelter no 4 is 10km out of the city. The walls have been painted with murals by seminary students organised by a teacher. The large land area has a produce farm that includes chickens and pigs. The coffee farm and rubber tree plantation are harvested by relatives of the children. The children seemed well behaved, well organised and busy with cleaning work. There are 130 children and 4 nuns at the shelter.

The nuns explained that because of their remote location, they rely heavily on the farm for income. We talked about the farm and offered to buy more piglets to raise. These are a local breed of striped pigs and the nuns got a quote to buy 10 small ones, when weaned, for \$6M = \$380.

Our charity also provided some useful supplies for the shelter @ 6M = \$380:

- Kids sandals.
- Washing powder, shampoo, dish washing liquid.
- Laundry baskets.
- Colanders, kitchen knives.

Total cost 12M = \$760.



Trompe-l'oeil fence mural at the veggie farm



Picking out lice is a weekly routine



Our project



The shelter's rubber farm



Girls cleaning the laundry area



Vietnam is a land of contrasts. Here, St Martin De Porres (who is the patron saint of mixed race people and has a loyal local following) stands next to the idyllic mural scenes of this razor wire topped boundary fence.

KONTUM – VINH SON 6 SHELTER

No 6 shelter was 17km from the city. It houses 77 children and 3 nuns. The large farm includes a pigs, chickens, casava, rubber and coffee.

The farm seemed very well set up and the director was vague about what they might need. So our charity simply provided some useful supplies for the shelter:

- Instant noodles.
- Cooking oil.
- Sugar.
- Milk.

Cost was \$6M = \$380.



Children coming out to have a look at the foreign visitor



Children with our project

DANANG – STUDENT PROJECT AT CHILD CENTRE NO 5

Built by French charities, this children’s shelter is one of about 10 local shelters that have been taken over by local officials in Danang. This one is Child Protection Centre No 5. Our local project manager organised a visit by about 20 uni students from the architectural and medical universities in Danang.

The uni students made a very detailed plan to:

- Visit the shelter for a day.
- Conduct children’s educational and activities and games.
- Award prizes to groups and individual children.
- Cook a group lunch.

Our charity paid for:

- Prize for each child at the shelter.
- Materials for repairing doors and windows.
- Some cleaning, hygiene and cooking items requested by the shelter.
- Group lunch (food ingredients).

The student group then did a working bee, fixing doors and windows and cleaning the buildings. This was a great way to encourage uni student involvement and mentoring, with some practical outcomes. Cost 10M = \$625.



HA TINH – POTS & CHICKENS FOR CHUT PEOPLE, HUONG KHE

Rao Tre village in Huong Khe is a remote highland village near the Laos/Vietnam border. This is a tiny village of 46 households of the Chut people. Chut is an umbrella term for four *Vietic* language groups. That is, their languages are related to Vietnamese. Up to the 1950s, the Chut were nomadic hunter-gatherers. As nomadic, stateless people, they moved freely across the mountain range and across the Vietnam/Laos border.

The old growth rainforest was clear felled and replaced by *cay tram* plantation trees and water storage dams. The Chut have been settled into a row of government-built houses in this replanted forest, on the edge of a lake. They have learned to grow a bit of rice. 12 of the households raise chickens and one household raises a cow. The Chut community is managed by the local border army post.

Our local volunteer Hiep, who is a retailer but also a part time journalist, identified this disadvantaged community. He negotiated with local police and the border army post to carry out this project. The officer in charge at the border post organised the people, who he knows well.

Our charity provided each of the 12 Chut households who have the capacity to raise chickens with 30 chickens of a strong breed, a 25 kg bag of feed and chicken medicine to add to the water.

On the advice of the helpful border army officer, our charity provided each of the 46 Chut households with a winter blanket and a set of kitchen pots (3 pots, 1 fry pan, 1 kettle).

A bit of background might better explain the rationale of this project. Earlier in this generation, all villagers in Vietnam cooked over a small open fire of leaves and sticks collected from the jungle. The fire was usually on open ground outside the bamboo/palm hut, or on the footpath in the cities. These aluminium pots quickly accumulated a thick soot and were not cleaned.

As people built more permanent houses, they also built a small kitchen room to house the woman cooking over a small open fire, breathing in the smoke and black soot which coated everything. In these indoor kitchens, people had scrubbed the pots. This was often done on river banks, using a torn fragment of fishing net and sand from the river bank. Very quickly, these scoured light aluminium pots wore thin and became pitted with holes.

In the cities, people started to get gas cookers and electric rice cookers. They turned to the more durable stainless steel pots. But the hill tribes continued their custom of cooking with light aluminium pots over open fires. This is why our project provided each kitchen with a new set of pots.

The hill people in Vietnam have too many children and too many mouths to feed. The parents live an indigent but relaxed life. But the teenagers, the village has little to offer. So they stay and make more children, or leave to find work in factory areas such as Binh Duong near Saigon, or try to get work across the border. From there they can send a bit of money back home.

Project cost : Chickens 12.8M, cooking pots 21.5M = Total 34.3M (\$2,150)..



The Chut people have been settled in a scenic part of their traditional lands, although the jungle and river have been replaced by plantation forest and a dam.



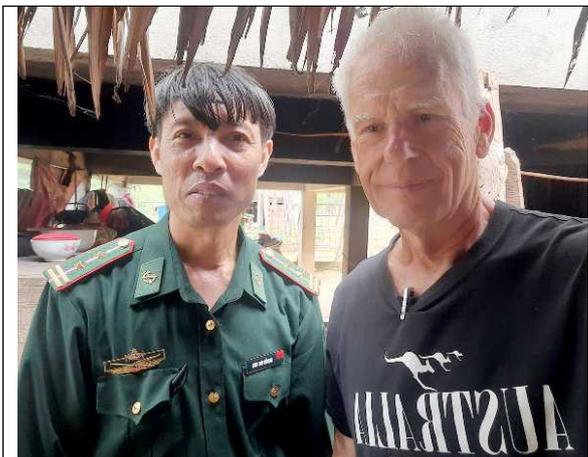
Our project was at the meeting hall, with local army and police and the usual ceremonies (getting people in lines, taking photos etc).



People lining up for photo with their blankets and bagged sets of kitchenware.



Typical chicken house design with new chicks.



The kindly army officer-in-charge of the border post helped manage this project. His family lives only a few hours drive away so he gets to visit his children regularly.



People wait patiently while the army and police do important stuff (read names off lists).



Typical rice chest in a house. This holds rice for sowing next year's crop.



Visit to typical kitchen storage area.



Inspecting the roof of the chicken house.



Owner at the open chicken hatch to give water



Bottles for water from the village spring.



Very basic farm tools: saw, pick axe, crow bar.



Man shows eggs from his chickens.



Typical dingo-like local breed.



The kitchenware set that we provided to each household in the village.



Our charity's supply of winter blankets arrive at the meeting hall.

VINH BOAT PEOPLE – RICE & BICYCLES FOR KIDS

This small village of 12 households live in boats. Some boats are in the river and some now on land. They have no clear memory of where they came from or how many generations have lived on the river. They may have been stateless migrants from Thailand who settled in Vietnam.

Vinh is the city in Nghe An Province, one of the notoriously poor farming areas on the Australian Home Affairs (i.e. Immigration) Department unofficial blacklist. If you come from Nghe An, Quang Binh, Hai Phong, Thanh Hoa or Ha Tinh, you will not get refugee status or a study permit.

One electrical meter on the river bank branches out with extension chords to each of the boats. During heavy storms, all go to shore to find shelter. While families on the river live by fishing, a few of their concrete boats have been taken to shore, where they are occupied by the elderly people.

Local officials have talked about settling these people on land. But it is unclear how this would help. Removing their connection to fishing life might impoverish them further. There are too many children and too many mouths to feed. They already seem to rely heavily on charity.

Meeting a few of these boat people indicates that their problems have cultural roots.

Our local guide Nguyet, aged 33, was very impressive in her project management abilities. She was clear about what the people need and very organised about getting help to her group. It was only when she handed the mobile phone to her teenage son to find a contact, that I realised she is also completely illiterate.

I also met Ngoc, pregnant at 16 and unable to get either government or church paperwork to recognise her common law marriage to her boyfriend. She has to wait to age 18 and the man has to wait to age 20 for their de-facto relationship to be legally recognised.

A middle-aged woman living in a shack between two boats has chronic knee pain. She was not satisfied by the “chemical western medicine” at the hospital. Instead, she was using a “natural” herbal mixture sold to her by a nun. I told her to go back to the hospital.

When I asked our guide about how long our 30kg bag of rice will last (thinking it might a few months), she said, “Seven to ten days”. Because she has seven mouths to feed. This includes five growing sons. Of course, they will eat all the rice fast.

This is a group with entrenched inter-generational poverty. These families have too many children to feed or educate properly.

Our charity provided a bicycle for each schoolchild that did not have one (3 girls and 3 boys), to encourage them to go to school. We also provided each of the 12 families with a food parcel of 30kg of rice and the usual oil, fish sauce, seasoning powder.

Project cost was 8.4M for bicycles and 7M for food parcels, totalling 15.4M=\$965.



On board a house/boat.



Heavy work of taking up a 50m long fish trap.



Some boats are on the water.



Some boats are stuck on land.



Dogs living on a raft



Man caddes a cigarette from a relative on a boat on land while the women relax and chat.



Prow of a boat. The boat hulls are reinforced concrete with air chambers.



Poor but happy. One wonders whether resettlement into huts on land will destroy this particular way of life.



Geese live on rafts.



Neighbour greeting, "Catch fish today?"



Catch of the day.



Girl paddles past us in the family fishing canoe.



Steadying my canoe for boarding.



Greeting local guide and volunteer from onboard.



Front of the house boat has father's belongings and a shrine for good luck.



Rear of the house boat has kitchen, study and sleeping areas.



Year 3 girl at her study area. Here are her school books, kindergarten graduation photo and study table.



Family kitchen behind the study area.



Ngoc lives in this hut with 7 relatives.



Ngoc with her daughter Tho



One elec supply branches out to every boat



Family fishing line with multiple hooks.



Shack built over the old river pump site.



Many children = too many mouths to feed.



Our guide Nguyet lived on the boat with parents, her 3 sisters and her 3 children.



Man smokes his *thuoc lau* water pipe: *Hut thuoc lau nang cao suc khoe* ("smoke thuoc lau for better health").



Nguyet divided up the food parcels.



Dividing and distributing the rice involved all.



Arrival of the school bikes is a big event.



Girl happy with her school bike.



Boy examines his school bike.



Girl stands proudly next to her new transport.

XA DOAI – DISABLED SHELTER

Each year I visit this shelter run by Sister Lanh of the local Holy Cross Order. It houses around 35 severely disabled young people. As before, we provided a yearly supply of nappies, food, cleaning and hygiene materials.

The cultural setting and its problems are something nobody from outside can “fix”.

This shelter is run by a Sisters of Charity group. In this poor farming province of Nghe An, the Sisters of Charity monastic order was proposed by a local priest for the purpose of sheltering women which other monasteries would not accept. This included women who had not finished school, or who had a disability or some psychological problems.

This unique local order then undertook the work that others don't want, fundraising by knocking on every door,; housing the severely disabled; working with the poorest communities.

Shelters (both Buddhist and Christian) run on a business model. So the disabled inmates are used to attract cash donations. Cash is then used to build more spacious monasteries. Meanwhile, inmates are often warehoused and provided only basic care by the nuns and local people. In some cases, the most diligent local carers may be other inmates.

I have visited this monastery every year and seen only slight improvement in the living conditions of the disabled inmates. Meantime, funds have been syphoned off to build new additions to the shelter. This is the typical situation across Vietnam, and has at least two interpretations:

1 The young disabled people are being treated little better than the chickens or pigs in their farming villages. They are fed and cleaned, but often restrained in their dormitories, with little stimulation.

2 The young disabled people are given a sell protected, safe environment, in contrast to the bullying and social exclusion that can occur in a village community. They are provided:

- Social contact with others in similar circumstances.
- Nappy changes and some other hygiene.
- Regular food and basic medical care.
- Kindness from some of their carers and nuns.

The nuns at this shelter do the work nobody wants to do: housing the severely disabled.

In recognition of their efforts, our charity provided 12M=\$750 of support with nappies, rice, milk, eggs, minced meat, noodles, cooking oil, fish sauce, laundry powder, fabric softener.

An idea that each child should have a personal toy (such as a washable soft toy) to provide them with a focus, received only lukewarm support. It was explained that there is already a storeroom in which toys are packed away. We left this idea to be followed up another time.

Cultural problems which we cannot fix include:

- Low education of carers.
- Syphoning of funds to showcase “big build” projects (naturally, everyone loved “big build” projects). They are easy to explain and easily attract corporate funding.
- Feeding of children (including sugared drinks) in the lying down position, which can cause them to choke.



Older boy feeding younger one

Downe syndrome boy feeding smaller resident



Restraint on a boy to prevent skin scratching

Older inmates care for more severely disabled



Inspection of medical cupboard.

CARMELITE LOW-COST STUDENT HOUSING - CHICKENS

The Carmelite sisters in Vinh city provide a low-cost homestay for students who come in from the surrounding farming areas to study at uni.

The 25 students pay 1.5M (\$100) per month. They get sleeping quarters and the five Carmelite sisters cook all the meals for them on weekdays. The rent includes all internet, study facilities and utilities.

The students contribute in kind by working the vegetable gardens, cleaning their quarters and cooking on Sunday. They also supplement their food supply with a free-range chicken run. This was partly destroyed in a recent storm.

Our charity assisted the student budget housing by providing 1M in materials for students to repair the chicken house and 3M for a hundred chickens. Total 4M=\$250.



Carmelite vegetable garden worked by the students .



Free range chicken run that was the focus of our project.

PHAT DIEM – CHICKENS FOR LOCAL VILLAGES

As in previous years, I visited Sister Kinh of the local Holy Cross Order to assist in her mission of visiting and supporting local poor in around 7 villages in the periphery of Ninh Binh City. This chicken raising project was for 20 selected households. The budget was 28.5M = \$1,785. Each of 20 households got 30 chickens and a bag of feed. Some money also went to households who cannot raise chickens, for other forms of help.



ARTHUR'S VOLUNTEERS – REFRIGERATOR FOR A SHELTER

We purchased a refrigerator for the kitchen to encourage and support the efforts of Arthur's volunteer group. The frig cost was 11M = \$700. When I met him at a café, Arthur was fund raising and working with a group of foreign volunteers to try to improve the Hoa Mai (Orange Blossom) shelter for 30 children in Danang. Happy days for a time.

Later, when the government salaried staff at this orphanage refused to keep a seven year old girl with cancer in hospital for treatment, the good working relationship ended between the staff and the volunteer group. The volunteer group are now looking for other worthwhile projects.



Arthur's volunteer group photo, repairing and landscaping the orphanage fence.

The Vietnamese brand "Kangaroo" refrigerator we purchased for the shelter.

LEPER VILLAGE RENEWAL IN GIA LAI PROVINCE



This financial year we carried out our largest project. This was at the small, informal, and remote leper settlement at Lang Lan 2 about 55km from Pleiku City in Gia Lai Province. The work was in three stages, done at different times.

Medicines for a few months of wound treatment for lepers, for a medical volunteer group. They regularly visit the small leper settlements on coffee plantations. Dr Trong is the organiser and hero of this local volunteer group. We paid for medicine supply 8M = \$500. Dr Trong combined our donation with support from other charities and with his group's volunteer labour.

Hut verandahs. Five structurally unsound verandahs/awnings to family huts were replaced with steel framed ones. We paid for steel materials 15M = \$940.

Hut rebuilds. Some family huts were rebuilt. Others were extended. Most huts required totally new roofs with redesigned, steeper roof pitches for storm proofing. We paid for building materials 44.9 M = \$5,110.

Brother Phat, a Franciscan monk, was the hero, builder and project manager for both the hut verandahs and the hut rebuilds. As the key person on the ground, Brother Phat combined our donation with support from other charities and with paid and volunteered labour. The project was also supported by the Franciscan monastery, by paid Vietnamese construction workers. It was also assisted by the resident families of lepers in Lang Lan 2 village.

As far as locals can recall, Lang Lan 2 village started with one leper, whose brother had started to show leprosy symptoms. They had been shunned by fearful neighbours in their home village, and no other village wanted them. So, they moved to a remote spot next to a track. It was surrounded by coffee plantation fields. These provided casual employment and isolation from the villages.

The total isolation did not last for long. Other lepers heard of the remote settlement and came. The lepers were helped by several charitable groups who built the village in phases:

- Nuns from the St Paul de Chartres convent came and helped build some huts c1980s.
- As the settlement grew, siblings, children and grandchildren moved in to help support their leper relatives. A Franciscan monk came and provided a water bore and filter, a toilet block and more huts. He died in 1992.
- Just before the C19 pandemic the Baptist Church came. They built a small corrugated iron church, a room for wound treatment and new toilet block.
- By the time of my visit in March 2023, the treatment room and church still provided good spaces and the water supply still functioned. But the hut roofs were collapsing and leaking over the bedding, clothing and rice bags piled up inside the huts.

Each of the three parts of this major project is described separately below.

MEDICINES – LANG LAN 2 LEPER VILLAGE

Lang Lan 2 village has 24 households and includes 16 lepers. It is 53km from Pleiku City in Gia Lai Province. The village was built by a Franciscan brother who raised funds, provided an underground well and built a hut for each leper. Over time, relatives and other coffee farm labourers settled. More recently, Baptist missionaries have built a small church with bibles and song books in the local Jarai native language.

There we met up with medical volunteers Dr Trong and Tin, a student volunteer. Dr Trong gave a medical consult and treated the wounds of each leper. We paid for a medicine supply of 8M = \$500.



Foot bandaged during our visit.

HUT VERANDAHS – LANG LAN 2 LEPER VILLAGE

This informal settlement has 24 households with 16 lepers. It also has dilapidated housing with roof leaks. It is 53km from Pleiku City in Gia Lai Province. At the leper village our interpreter, accompanied by a local native Jarai builder, inspected the condition of the huts. They suggested that 5 of the family huts were badly leaking and probably needed rebuilding, but their structurally unsound verandahs could first be replaced in steel. We paid 15M = \$940 for materials.



Verandahs before rebuilding. People are poor but happy. If people get extra money they are more likely to spend it on a showy motorbike than on education.



Verandahs after rebuilding

HUT REBUILDS – LANG LAN 2 LEPER VILLAGE.

This project of repairing and in some cases rebuilding and extending the family huts of one informal leper settlement was a great opportunity for our small charity to :

- Leverage the building project management skills of the Franciscan monk/builder Br Phat.
- Provide some valuable employment opportunities for local villagers, including the lepers.
- Give local resident families some pride and ownership over the project.
- Give Br Phat and the locals the credit for the project (with us as a silent funding partner).
- Improve liveability, hygiene levels and comfort in the village huts.

Some family huts were rebuilt. Others were extended. Most huts required totally new roofs with redesigned, steeper roof pitches for storm proofing. We paid for building materials 44.9 M = \$5,110.



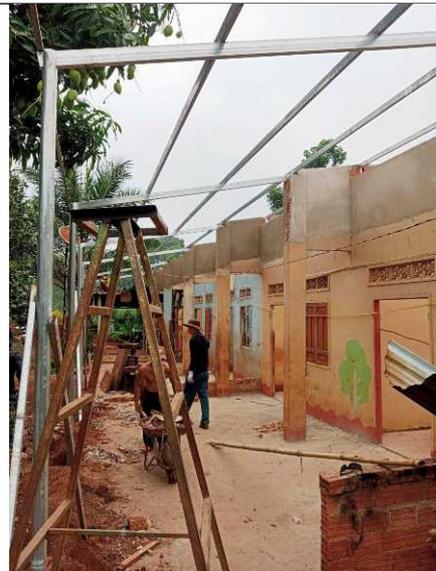
Mother stands inside her home. Stacked clothing and stockpiles of charity-donated bags of rice are particularly vulnerable to water damage from the leaking roof.



Large verandah/awnings were completed in termite proof steel framing with new roofing. Separation walls between units provide individual identity to households.



Family huts had walls raised. This allowed redesigned roofs to shed water and improve internal ventilation.



By raising the walls an additional metre the roof pitch was able to be steepened to weatherproof during heavy tropical storms.



Before rebuilding



After rebuilding



This hut extended by 4m at the rear then divided into two rooms for family and grandmother.

REPORT END