FoVO

Friends of Vietnam Orphanages Inc.

Helping disadvantaged communities in Vietnam

Report to Donors

2012 Financial Year

REGISTERED CHARITY · acnc.gov.au/charityregister



Friends of Hướng Phương Orphanage Inc.

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Introduction

The 2012 financial year was the first full financial year of Friends of Hướng Phương Orphanage Inc. The association had been incorporated in the ACT in June 2011, initially to support Hướng Phương Orphanage in Quảng Bình Province and provide tertiary education assistance for women from the associated monastic community.

The purpose broadened quickly. By September 2011 the association had adopted the object: **"Work in partnership with Hướng Phương Orphanage and village community, as well as surrounding villages, to achieve a better quality of life for all, with a focus on children with disabilities."** This broader approach was reflected in the year's projects. Assistance included tertiary scholarships and internships, an orphanage playground, educational equipment, medicines and equipment for the village medical centre, livestock raising and small practical projects for disadvantaged families.

The charity was still very small and experimental. Projects were organised through personal relationships with the sisters at Hướng Phương, Australian donors and volunteers, and Vietnamese friends and interpreters.

At the same time, a more formal approach was developing. Funding agreements, receipts and student records were increasingly requested, and projects were expected to be real, needed, specified and provide long-term benefit. Projects were followed up and, where problems arose, further funding could be withheld until they were resolved.

The association continued on the principle that every dollar donated went to assistance in Vietnam. Personal travel and administration expenses were met separately.

During the financial year, $27,300 was withdrawn from the association's account for projects in Vietnam. We thank the donors, volunteers, committee members and Vietnamese friends who supported this work.

Peter Kabaila
Secretary
Friends of Hướng Phương Orphanage Inc.

REPORT TO DONORS 2012

Project Summary

How Your $27,300 Was Spent

NO.	PROJECT	AUD	MILLION VND
1	Tertiary scholarships and internships	**$16,700**	359.6
2	Hướng Phương Orphanage — playground	**$5,800**	124.9
3	Education, library and computer equipment	**$1,575**	33.9
4	Medicines for the poor	**$1,200**	25.8
5	Village medical centre — motorbike and computer equipment	**$750**	16.2
6	Medical and practical assistance	**$170**	3.7
7	Hướng Phương Orphanage — duck raising	**$700**	15.1
8	Small orphanage, village and family projects	**$405**	8.7
	TOTAL	**$27,300**	**587.9**

VND converted at the Reserve Bank of Australia average rate for the financial year, approximately 2.15 million VND = AUD $100.

REPORT TO DONORS 2012

1. Tertiary Scholarships and Internships

Education assistance — $16,700

Description

FoVO provided scholarship and internship assistance for students associated with the Hướng Phương monastic community.

The education program supported tertiary study, particularly in areas such as medicine, teaching and disability care. Internships were also intended to encourage doctors, nurses and other health workers to work in the village medical centre.

Three separate payments were made during the financial year.

Project expenditure

- 16 scholarship payments at $250 — $4,000
- Scholarships and internships to September 2012 — $7,200
- 19 tertiary scholarships at $250 — $4,750
- 3 theology scholarships at $150 — $450
- 3 internships at $100 — $300

Total — $16,700

Observation

This was by far FoVO's largest area of expenditure during the year.

The scholarship program was becoming increasingly organised. Student profiles, receipts and information about courses were requested, together with confirmation that students had satisfactorily completed each year of study.

Funding agreements were also being introduced so that FoVO and its donors could keep track of the students being supported.

Reflection

Education had been one of FoVO's principal objectives from the beginning.

The growing number of scholarships also demonstrated the need for better records. As the program became larger, informal arrangements were no longer sufficient to show donors who was studying, what they were studying and whether the assistance was being used as intended.



Tran Thi Lai Medical nurse internship, Huong Phuong medical centre



Ngô Thị Hương Cao Đẳng GD đặc biệt Nha Trang. Disability Care certificate, Nha Trang.



Nguyễn Thị Duyên General Physician intermediate certificate, Da Nang.



Đặng Thị Ánh Tuyết Special education, Saigon.



Hoàng Văn Danh Residency Computer Course.



Nguyễn Thị Nhung Trung Cấp Y Sài Gòn. Nursing certificate level, Saigon.



Dr Phạm Thị Hải Yến Medical doctor internship, Huong Phuong medical centre



Nguyễn Thị Thường Cao Đẳng GD đặc biệt Nha Trang. Disability Care certificate, Nha Trang.



Nguyễn Thị Hương Giang Trung Cấp Y Sài Gòn. Nursing certificate with possible pharmacy graduate diploma, Saigon.



Nguyễn Thị Hiệp ĐH Anh văn Huế. Language teaching (English), Hue.



Nguyễn Thị Thủy Trung cấp xét nghiệm máu Sài Gòn. Blood test certificate with extension to degree.



Trần Thị Diệu Huyền ĐH Anh văn Huế. Language teaching (English), Hue.



Cao Thị Sánh Nurse.



Hồ Thị Ánh Đào Trung Cấp Y Da Nang.
Nursing certificate, Da Nang.



Đinh Thị Đương Trung Cấp Y Sài Gòn.
Pharmacy certificate level Saigon.



Phạm Thị Đào Trung Cấp Y Da Nang.
Medicine (General physician), Da Nang,



Nguyễn Thị Hà Trung Cấp Y Da Nang. Nursing certificate, Da Nang. 0 1688 516 598



Phạm Thị Chung Trung Cấp Y Vinh. Medical course, probably to nursing certificate level in Vinh,



Nguyễn Thị Tuyết Trung Cấp Y Sài Gòn. Medical courses, pharmacy certificate level, Saigon.



Mai Thị Luyện Trung cấp sư phạm mầm non Pre-school intermediate teaching education, Da Nang.



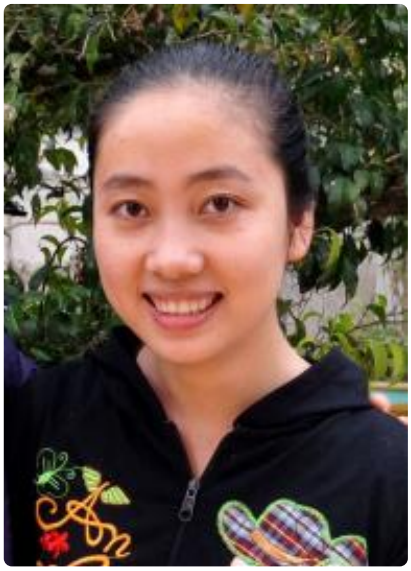
Nguyễn Thị Nga Trung Cấp Y Da Nang.
Nursing certificate, Da Nang.



Nguyễn Thị Nhung Trung cấp sư phạm mầm non Pre-school teaching intermediate education, Da Nang.



Nguyễn Thị T Hải Trung Cấp Y Sài Gòn.
Pharmacy certificate, Saigon.



Viên Thị Phương Nga Trung cấp y sı đa khoa General Physician intermediate certificate, Da Nang.

REPORT TO DONORS 2012

Personal Visits to Students During Easter 2011

Women from the Huoung Phuong monastic community currently study in student households at Hue, Dong Hoi and Saigon. Some personal impressions are recorded in my travel diary of visits to these households. This was during a holiday after Easter in 2011.

STUDENTS AT HUE UNIVERSITY

SISTERS HUYEN, HIEP & FRIENDS DINH, NAM, SISTERS CHAU, NHAN



Left to right: Hue university students Nam, Sister Nhan, Sister Huyen, Sister Hiep, Sister Chau, Dinh.



Washed student jeans on a line. This scene could be in university student housing anywhere in the world.

Sometimes there is something lost in translation. The monastic order that I travelled to visit in Vietnam translates into “Lovers of the Holy Cross”. Doesn’t translate very well, does it? This is because in modern English, the word “lover” has altered in colour over time, the most recent meaning being “sexual partner (heterosexual or homosexual), usually out of wed lock”.

At Hue City I arrived in the small hotel for French tourists next door to the student barracks. This was because the motor bike chauffer took me to the student housing, but the landlady of the student housing could not believe that I was intending to visit her humble establishment. She instead waved me to the unlikely named “Bella Garden” French/Vietnamese hotel next door. Young Sisters Huyen and Hiep then led me to visit the student house.



some laundry (no choice of course!).

University student housing next to Bella Garden Hotel. (Sister Hiep in orange). Good to see men doing I had got to know Sister Huyen’s family reasonably well over the Christmas to Tet holiday period. Her brother Thanh is a sensitive young man, haunted by the memory of his family’s near starvation at one period in 1994. He is one of three young men from the village who are studying for the priesthood in New Zealand. Young sisters Hiep and Huyen had kept in touch by email, talking of their attempts to practice English with “foreigners” (as western tourists are called in Vietnam). I was very happy to visit them. So when I arrived at Hue City and they asked, “Why are you in Hue?” the answer naturally was “To visit you, of course. Why else should I be in Hue?”



Sister Huyen’s brother Thanh on left, Tien on right, both seminarians in New Zealand. On another occasion I met a sincere and gentle young priest from Saigon who was visiting the convent. Fr

Tin asked me, "Why are you here?" Are you celibate? I replied certainly not. I love to have women around (I am sure he does as well). Later at breakfast I received more polite interrogation, “Are you Catholic?” I gave my standard response, “Yes, but not a very good one”. The confused expression on the priest indicated that this was

a cross-cultural exchange. The cheek of the response might be normal in Australia, but possibly not standard protocol in Vietnam, where appearance is very important.

Around the same time I was invited by my client Fr Vien to come back and live with the sisters “when you are 80 years old”. Presumably that is a safe age. I said that to wait 24 years to visit the sisters again might be too long and asked Mother Superior to come for a visit to UC (Australia). She seemed happy to do this. So the problem of seeing at least one of the sisters again was solved.

Back to the students. Like students almost everywhere around the world, they are stressed about study, poor in cash, rich in young company and often don’t eat enough.

Sisters Huyen and Hiep, who study English language, share a bed in a small room in the student accommodation. A photo of them in their room shows all the necessities for a student life in Vietnam: a place to sleep, a bookshelf, and a small gas cooker for meals. There are boxes with many packets of two-minute noodles, the staple food of students all around the world (just as pasta seems to be the staple of European back packers). In this case, a CD player recorder for language tapes, prayer book and crucifix complete the furniture.



Left to right, Sister Hiep and Sister Huyen. Both had emailed about having sore eyes so it was good to take them to an eye doctor for an examination.

They left with some antibiotic and other medications for eye inflammation. A visit to the Thien An monastery and some chains and crucifixes finished the healing.

Sister Yen graduates in medicine in two months. It has been a long hard road for Yen, with borrowed laptop and no internet. She was still worrying about her exams when I saw her, but I am sure she will do OK. A picture of Yen shows her in the room that has been her refuge for 6 years.



Sister Yen, who is graduating in medicine, in her student room.



Sister Yen, with the equipment and possessions of the last 6 years of study.

Their friend Sister Chau, who is preparing to enter the novitiate of another order, showed us her room. The room has some pink (girl) things such as a mirror and cheap wall paper. There is a small book shelf, Post-it stickers with English language notes, language CD player and a boiling jug (so that bottled water does not have to be purchased).



The kit of student equipment in Sister Chau's room.



notes, language conversation tape player, kettle, rice cooker, bed. Pink wall paper, shoulder bag and mirror signal that this is a girl's room.

The kit of student equipment in Sister Chau's room: Small table and chair, Textbooks, language study Their fellow students Dinh and Nam are gentle and sincere young men, both devout Christians, also at Hue University.

Their student accommodation is typical of student digs everywhere: cheap rent, a lot of company and a lot of activity. Jeans have to be washed and dried; meals have to be prepared and assignments have to be completed.



Student accommodation.

With their friend Sister Nhan, who is also preparing to enter the novitiate, we went out to dinner. It was wonderful to see these hungry young people enjoy a good meal. The 50 cent per day food allowance does not pay for much. I asked Sister Nhan, who appeared to me to be unlikely for the novitiate, how she felt about it. She said she needed to concentrate on her studies. I agreed: study is the important present task.

I travelled with the students by bicycle through the beautiful small alleys of Hue. We visited the student rooms where they lived; the monument to the national hero Trung and the Thien An monastery, from which they helped move the Mary of La Vang statue for the orphanage chapel.



Sister Chau.

The beautiful alleys of Hue City are relatively traffic free and easy to cycle. Left to right: Nam, Dinh and



Arriving by bicycle at the Thien An monastery.

A little room party was organised for my visit. The students had a great time from a few simple pleasures, such as coffee prepared by Hiep on the floor. It recalled a photo I had seen of university students from another time enjoying a party (of my father as an engineering student in war-time Europe).



Sister Hiep prepares Ka Phe Sua (Café) on the floor of her room.



Room party. University students with the simplest entertainment: snack food and each other's company.

Their food allowance equal to 50 cents per day per student barely gives them enough to eat. I bought them and their student friends a couple of "big" meals and greatly enjoyed seeing them eat everything. There were no left-overs.



Farewell party/meal. Left to right: Sister Chau, Sister Huyen, Sister Nhan, Sister Yen (playing with chopsticks), Nam, Dinh, Sister Hiep.

I left with feelings of gratitude and optimism for the generosity of the handsome and sincere young men of Vietnam and the hard-working, strong and elegant young women who study at the university alongside them.

Dong Hoi Sisters' Household

This is basically a student rental household of three young sisters from Huong Phuong. One studies pharmacy and the other two study music. I had said that I wanted some freedom from the convent routine and planned to stay at a hotel at Dong Hoi. The Sisters instead "shanghaied" me to spend a pleasant day and half at Dong Hoi, accompanied by the students and Sisters Huong, Tuyen and Hien, who all converged there for the occasion.

For my arrival, two live chickens had been bought at the market, kept trussed up in the wash up area. They were soon joined by a third live chicken. In the skilful hands of the Sisters, all the chickens were soon killed, plucked and cooked for our meals.

For that short day and half, the Sisters relaxed from the convent time schedule. The convent rules were relaxed for the post-Easter period. It all had the atmosphere of a children's sleepover (pyjama party). They gave themselves the rare treat of watching a soapie on TV. From the next room at night, I could hear the Sisters chatting in bed (not done at the mother house). The following day I gave them a small amount of money so they could have the rarer treat of doing a bit of personal shopping at the market. The best money I ever spent! The sisters did some sight-seeing, practiced music, played a game of cards and generally had a good time. Then they saw me off at the airport, where I embarrassed each with a small hug and peck on the cheek (a no-no in Vietnam).



Chickens kept fresh for a later meal.



Beautiful meal cooked by the Sisters, including the monster prawn for the guest.



Clowning around while at Dong Hoi.



Sitting down to a meal.



Glued to a Korean soapie in the evening.



Washing up.



Emerging from the household in the early morning.



Early morning.



It's not Saigon, but there are signs of necessary security at Dong Hoi.



Relaxing on holiday with a card game is definitely outside the normal convent routine.



Sisters relax in their sleeping areas in the early morning, reading music.



The kitchen also provides secure storage for motorbikes and bicycles, which have to be wheeled out before meals are prepared.



The young Sisters, both music students, in the kitchen.

Saigon City – Sisters Nhan, Dieu, Hanh, Thuy, Hoa, Tuyet, Giang, Nhung, Sanh

Student household: Nhan - theology, Dieu - theology, Hanh - theology, Thuy - pharmacy, Hoa - agriculture, Tuyet – kindergarten teaching, Giang - pharmacy, Nhung – pharmacy. This household of 9 sisters live in a cheap 2 bedroom rental terrace that is up for sale. Once sold, they will have to move out and pay higher rent of 4M VND/month. The purchase cost of about $80k to $100k is considered unrealistically high by the convent. Of course, they are comparing Saigon with village prices (an unrealistic comparison).

The current house floods regularly as it is close to the river. I previously made a lunchtime visit to the sisters and they accompanied me to the airport. There I also met Fr Luke Tan an American Vietnamese Catholic priest and convert from the Buddhist faith.

During my Christmas visit we rode bicycles through Saigon to buy food at the market, which the sisters cooked into a feast. These are smart and hard working girls, who will some day be theologians and medical doctors. These are the future leaders of their monastic community.

We rode bicycles through Saigon to buy food at the market, which the sisters cooked into a feast. These are smart and hard working girls, who will some day be theologians and medical doctors. They might be the future leaders of their monastic community.



Hospitality from the young sisters in Saigon.





Selecting produce at the local market.





Saigon. My school-French from 30 years ago got a workout.

Sang, a French-speaking monk who was my guide and interpreter when I left Ba don until I flew out of



Phuong village.

The sisters in Saigon prepare a big lunch in the kitchen of their rental house. They are all from Huong During my Easter visit, “the Saigon Sisters” and Sister Luan from the Huong Phuong orphanage intercepted me at arrival at the airport, even before my interpreter Hoan could get to me. They brought San, a French-speaking monk, as an interpreter. So my primitive school French got a workout (again!). I made contact with Fr Tin at the monastery and we all went out to a beautiful dinner cooked by the Sisters.



These girls might be uni students. But can they cook!



Celebratory dinner is not complete without C-hai (C2) green tea soft drink.



Left to right: Hoan, Fr Tin, Sister Luan.



With motorbikes cleared out of the living room, the group is set up for dinner with guests.

REPORT TO DONORS 2012

2. Playground - Hướng Phương Orphanage

Project contribution — $5,800

Matching grant (dollar-for-dollar) offered by St Aloysius College fundraising group, Sydney

Description

FoVO provided $5,800 for playground equipment at Hướng Phương Orphanage.

The playground was intended to provide the children, including children with disabilities, with an outdoor area for recreation and play.

Funds for the playground had been raised from several Australian donors and community fundraising activities.

Project expenditure

Orphanage playground grant — $5,800

Observation

The playground was one of FoVO's first substantial physical projects at Hướng Phương.

The money was taken to Vietnam by volunteer architect David Penalver. A funding agreement was provided and receipts were subsequently received from the Mother Superior.

Reflection

The playground was a very visible project for donors and provided something directly for the children living at the orphanage.

It was also an early example of FoVO trying to combine fundraising in Australia with a clearly identified and readily checked project in Vietnam.



Sisters arrive at the play equipment fabrication workshop.



Fiberglass moulded play equipment.



Moulds for play equipment in storage



Cutting steel for chair components.



Fiberglass (composite) crafting.



View of the workshop.



Sister Luan, orphanage Director, examines the fiberglass.



Director of the workshop explains the manufacturing process to the Sisters.



Fiberglass fabrication.



Fiberglass paint at the workshop.,



Hospitality at the play equipment importer's showroom.



Meeting and discussion after visits to the equipment suppliers. The sisters seem happy with their decision.

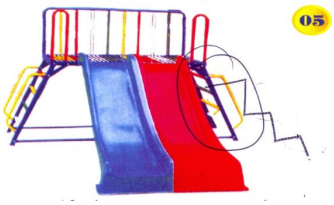
Outdoor playground $5,650A + dollar for dollar grant Centrepiece (Adventure playground) 73.2M Swing set 4.95M



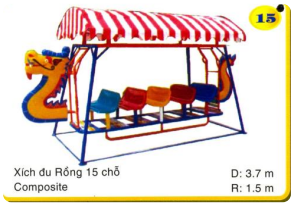
Slide 5.8M



Dragon boat ride 7.0M



Carousel 5.1M



Seahorse ride 1.8M

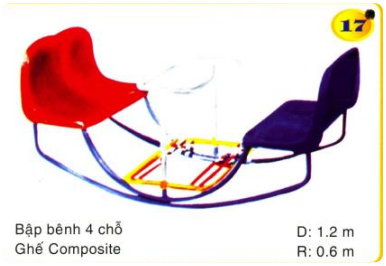


Duck ride 1.8M



Rocker 1.65M





Ball hoop 0.33M

Sand pit 14M 150mm drained wood chip base. Sand pit enclosed with stone perimeter.





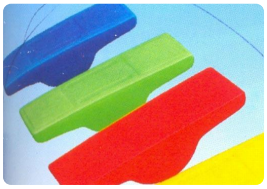
Indoor play for TV room Cost $715A Large ball x 2 0.182M Bouncers x 3 0.273M



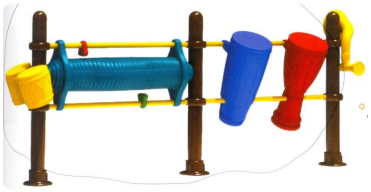
Drums x1 12.197M



Rockers x 2 0.712M



Stilts x 4 pairs 0.172M



Snowshoes x 2 pairs 0.304M



Trampoline x 1 1.118M





REPORT TO DONORS 2012

3. Education, Library and Computer Equipment

Library and educational equipment — $1,575

Description

FoVO provided $1,575 for equipment intended to establish a library and educational resource area at Hướng Phương.

Project expenditure

- Two computers
- DVD player and a collection of children's DVDs
- Two electronic pianos
- Shipping for two boxes of donated books

Total — $1,575

Observation

When the project was followed up, the equipment intended for the library had not been installed in an accessible library room. Instead, it had been locked in the convent computer room, where it was not accessible to children from the orphanage, younger sisters or students from the village.

FoVO asked the Convent Superior to explain when and where the proposed library would be established. A ground-floor room accessible to people with disabilities was suggested as the preferred location.

Further funding was to wait until the arrangements for the library had been resolved.

Reflection

This was an early lesson that buying useful equipment did not necessarily mean that it would be used in the way originally intended.

Follow-up was therefore becoming an important part of FoVO's project work. It was not enough simply to provide the money or equipment; there also needed to be some check that the intended beneficiaries could actually use it.

REPORT TO DONORS 2012

4. Hướng Phương Village Medical Centre

Medicines for people unable to afford them — $1,200

Description

FoVO established a small fund to help provide medicines through the Hướng Phương village medical centre.

The fund was intended to provide medicines free to the orphanage and at a heavily discounted price to poor people who could not afford the full cost.

Project expenditure

12 months at $100 per month — $1,200

Observation

The medicines fund was established as a 12-month trial.

The doctor who had agreed to administer the fund, Dr Haiyen, was subsequently transferred away from Hướng Phương Medical Centre.

FoVO therefore asked the Convent Superior to find another person to administer the fund and to provide a monthly account of medicines supplied through it.

Reflection

This was another early example of a project which appeared simple when the money was provided but required follow-up once circumstances changed.

The experience reinforced the need to identify who was responsible for administering a project and how expenditure would be recorded before further funding was provided.

REPORT TO DONORS 2012

5. Hướng Phương Village Medical Centre

Motorbike and computer equipment — $750

Description

FoVO provided practical equipment to assist the small medical centre serving Hướng Phương and the surrounding community.

The assistance included a motorbike for medical centre work and an upgrade of its computer facilities.

Project expenditure

- Motorcycle, including purchase, registration and fitting out — $450
- Repair of medical centre computer, internet connection and printer — $300

Total — $750

Observation

The motorbike provided transport for medical centre work in the village and surrounding area.

The computer upgrade repaired the centre's existing computer, connected it to the internet and provided a printer.

These were practical items intended to improve the day-to-day operation of the medical centre rather than establish a new service.

Reflection

Small items of equipment could make a useful difference where existing services had very limited resources.

FoVO was beginning to favour practical assistance that responded to an identified need and could be readily described and accounted for.

REPORT TO DONORS 2012

6. Medical and Practical Assistance

Clothing, baby and medical equipment — $170

Description

Several small items were purchased in response to immediate needs associated with the medical centre and orphanage.

Project expenditure

- Clothing and baby equipment for a single mother whose baby was born at the orphanage — $50
- Sleeping bag for the medical clinic — $60
- Blanket and coat for medical centre doctors — $60

Total — $170

Observation

These were small purchases rather than a single major project.

They were included in the contemporary financial record because FoVO was attempting to account for the use of donated funds even where the amount involved was small.

Reflection

Not every useful project required substantial expenditure. Small, directly identified needs could sometimes be met immediately and inexpensively.

Recording these purchases also helped establish the practice of showing donors where even relatively small amounts of money had gone.

REPORT TO DONORS 2012

7. Duck Raising - Hướng Phương Orphanage

Duck raising — $700

Description

FoVO provided $700 for the purchase of ducklings to be raised at the orphanage.

The ducklings were intended to contribute to the orphanage's small farming activities and provide a practical source of food or income.

Project expenditure

Purchase of ducklings at 70,000 VND per duckling — $700

Observation

This was a simple livestock project using an activity that could be managed locally.

Rather than providing continuing support for everyday expenses, the money purchased livestock which could be raised by the orphanage.

Reflection

The project was an early attempt to use a small amount of money for an activity that might continue to provide a benefit after the original donation had been spent.

Livestock projects of this kind were still experimental for FoVO at this stage.



The Huong Phuong Orphanage duck farm

REPORT TO DONORS 2012

8. Small Orphanage, Village and Family Projects

Practical assistance — $405

Description

FoVO used $405 for four small projects at the orphanage and within the local community.

Project expenditure

- Engineer Mr Cong — fee for advice on an orphanage cottage, paid as "lì xì" (New Year lucky money) $50
- Convent kitchen equipment and repair of a hazardous laundry floor — $85
- Village café — chairs and coffee-making equipment — $70
- Three poor mothers — seed funding to buy chickens or ducks to raise for income — $200

Total — $405

Observation

The three mothers were associated with Sisters Loi, Hoa and Yen. The assistance was intended to allow each woman to begin raising chickens or ducks as a small source of income.

The other expenditure dealt with modest practical needs: professional advice on the orphanage cottage, a dangerous laundry floor, kitchen equipment and basic equipment for a village café.

Reflection

These projects illustrate the very small scale on which FoVO was operating during its first full financial year.

The amounts were modest and the projects varied considerably, but each responded to a particular need identified locally. This small-project approach allowed FoVO to try different forms of assistance and learn from the results.

REPORT TO DONORS 2012

Stories from the Year

Starting a Small Charity

The 2012 financial year was our first full year as an incorporated association. We were still working out not only what projects to support in Vietnam, but what sort of charity we wanted to become.

At the beginning there was a lot of enthusiasm among family, friends, committee members and supporters in Canberra. Meetings were informal. The committee and donors sometimes gathered at our house in Aranda, with Vietnamese-Australian friends helping us understand how best to work in Vietnam.

We also experimented with fundraising. On 26 July 2011 I held a book launch at Smiths Alternative Bookshop in Canberra, with the proceeds from book sales going to the charity. Family and friends provided refreshments, bought books and helped with the sales.

A few days later Archbishop Mark Coleridge came to St Vincent's Catholic Church at Aranda to bless a statue of Our Lady of La Vang that I had brought back from Vietnam. The occasion became a fundraiser for the Hướng Phương Orphanage playground and tertiary scholarships.

The Canberra Vietnamese Catholic community supported the event. Their choir came with guitar and electric piano, and I also invited a Chinese opera singer who sang the Ave Maria. Donations were collected at the church door and more came afterwards. Private donors had offered to match money raised for the playground dollar for dollar.

It was successful, but complicated. Organising bishops, priests, choirs, singers, food and fundraising was a great deal of work. Two people afterwards independently suggested that I could keep doing this in other areas. I declined.

Around this time Sam offered to build a website for the new charity. During our discussions he asked an important question. Were we intending to become an organisation focused on fundraising, or one focused on helping communities in Vietnam?

The answer seemed obvious.

We did not want to become a fundraising organisation. We wanted to remain a small group of people working directly with communities in Vietnam.

That distinction helped shape what FoVO subsequently became.



Committee and donors meeting at Aranda. From left, clockwise: Tiep (holding certificate of appreciation for tertiary course sponsorship), Peter, Hung's son, Hung, David, David's partner, Hung's partner, Clive.

Book Launch and Sales to Fundraise



Long makes a sale to Vida.



Friends and family gathered to buy books and support the new charity.





Anna and Rasa served the food and drinks

Rasa and Patrick making a funny face. Fifteen later years of experience in medical care, both agreed to join the Board of the charity.

A Statue Came Home on the Plane

Raising money for the Hướng Phương Orphanage playground required a little ingenuity. One idea was to involve Canberra's Vietnamese community through a fundraising event centred on a statue of Our Lady of La Vang, who has particular significance for Vietnamese Catholics.

The statue was purchased in Saigon. Rather than being freighted separately, it travelled back to Australia with me as luggage on Vietnam Airlines.

The idea was to install it at St Vincent's Catholic Church at Aranda, show photographs of Hướng Phương Orphanage and invite donations towards the playground. Private Australian donors offered to match money raised by the Vietnamese community dollar for dollar, up to the amount needed for the playground.

It was an unusual journey for a piece of fundraising equipment: carved in Vietnam, carried to Canberra on an aircraft, and used to help raise money for playground equipment manufactured back in Vietnam.



Archbishop Coleridge blessing the Mary of La Vang statue carved in Vietnam and brought to Aranda.

The Playground — Local or Imported?

One of our first substantial projects was a playground for the children at Hướng Phương Orphanage.

There was an early choice between imported playground equipment and equipment manufactured in Vietnam. Supporting local manufacture seemed the obvious choice to us.

The sisters were less easily convinced.

They spent considerable time questioning the suppliers. Much of the discussion appeared to concern the quality of the fibreglass or plastic and, particularly, the quality of the paint.

Our view was fairly practical. Locally fabricated fibreglass could be repaired if it was damaged, and paint could always be reapplied by somebody in the village.

The main play structure was quite large, with a footprint of about 8 metres by 9.5 metres. Other pieces of equipment were optional and could be added if sufficient money was raised.

Australian therapists who worked with people with disabilities were also asked for advice. Their strongest recommendation was simple: the ground beneath the equipment needed to be soft enough to reduce injuries from falls.

The playground eventually received a FoVO grant of $5,800.

David Takes the Money to Vietnam

On 10 August 2011, FoVO withdrew $9,800 from its bank account.

Of this, $4,000 was for sixteen student scholarship payments and $5,800 was the grant for the orphanage playground.

There was no international project office or paid staff to deliver the money.

Volunteer architect David Penalver was travelling to Vietnam, so he took the project funds with him.

Funding agreements were sent with the money. Afterwards, receipts were provided by the Mother Superior and by the students who received scholarship assistance.

It was a very simple arrangement, but an important one for a new charity. Australian donations had been collected for identified purposes, carried personally to Vietnam, and followed by paperwork showing where the money had gone.

What $405 Could Do

Some of FoVO's projects during the year were very small.

A total of only $405 paid for several quite different pieces of assistance.

Three poor mothers associated with Sisters Loi, Hoa and Yen received $200 seed funding to buy chickens or ducks which they could raise for income.

Another $70 bought chairs and coffee-making equipment for a small village café.

At the convent, $60 bought kitchen equipment and $25 repaired a hazardous laundry floor.

The remaining $50 was an engineer's fee for advice on an orphanage cottage. Mr Cong was paid at Vietnamese New Year, so the fee was given as “lì xì” — New Year lucky money.

None was a large project. Together they show the very small and practical scale on which the charity was working in its first full financial year.