FoVO

Friends of Vietnam Orphanages Inc.

Helping disadvantaged communities in Vietnam

Report to Donors

2017 Financial Year

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FoVO Vietnam Field Trip Key Map Red circles indicate some project locations.

REPORT TO DONORS 2017

Introduction

During the 2017 financial year Friends of Vietnam Orphanages Inc carried out a wide range of small projects in Vietnam. Projects included school and course scholarships, food and household provisions, medicines, equipment for orphanages and shelters, assistance for people with disabilities, and livestock-raising projects for disadvantaged households. Every dollar donated went to direct assistance in Vietnam. The projects were personally administered by FoVO and its network of local helpers. During the financial year FoVO received $15,232.40 in donations and spent $12,672 on projects in Vietnam.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to our Board members Julie, Dennis, Geoff and Clive for their encouragement and support.

I regularly consulted our Vietnamese-Australian friends Loan and Tiệp as cultural interpreters. Their advice helped provide a better understanding of what was happening beneath the surface.

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

We also received generous donations from friends of Mrs Pho House, the Vietnamese restaurant at 221 Rangoon Road, Singapore. The owner, Hoang, organised a fundraising opening night for the new restaurant. Thank you also to our Vietnamese-Australian friend Thuy, and to Dennis and Karna for their generous donations.

Many people helped with fundraising in Australia, including neighbours Hamish and Ginny through street parties, and Jee and Joyce through a Sunday stall at the local Trash-n-Treasure market.

Most importantly, the projects depended on volunteer interpreters and local helpers in Vietnam. These included Hiền, Châu, Thuy, Huyền, Hiệp, Truclinh, Dương, Lâm and Sơn.

We also relied heavily on local people to organise and complete projects, including Hiền in the Mekong Delta, Sister Kim Anh in Bình Dương, Lâm in Nha Trang, Nam1 and Châu in Hà Tịnh, Sister Quế in Buôn Mê Thuột, Sister Nhàn in Phong Nha, Sister Kính in Phát Diệm, Sister Lành in Xã Đoài and Sister Nguyễn in Quỳnh Lập.

Without this local help, many of the projects could not have been carried out.

Peter Kabaila
Public Officer
Friends of Vietnam Orphanages Inc (FoVO)



AGM this year also discussed how to stabilise a 20-ton Lady Buddha statue at Penrose Monastery

REPORT TO DONORS 2017

Project Summary

How Your $12,672 Was Spent

NO.	PROJECT	AUD	MILLION VND
1	Sài Gòn Cancer Hospital — volunteer soup kitchen	**$235**	4.0
2	Bửu Trì Pagoda Orphanage, Cần Thơ — footwear and nutrition	**$415**	7.1
3	Thiên Ân Orphanage, Cần Thơ — nutrition and chicken raising	**$472**	8.0
4	Suối Tiên Shelter for Homeless Women, Đồng Nai — school fees and massage chairs	**$440**	7.5
5	An Bình Orphanage, Sài Gòn — scholarships and electric vehicle	**$1,262**	21.5
6	Mother's Love Home, Bình Dương — baby-care supplies	**$595**	10.1
7	Hiếu, Sài Gòn — medical insurance and miscellaneous expenses	**$60**	1.0
8	Ê- đê villages south of Buôn Mê Thuột — flood relief	**$1,200**	20.4
9	Nha Trang region — medicines for eight orphanages and centres	**$1,600**	27.2
10	Nha Trang region — additional orphanage assistance	**$494**	8.4
11	A Lưới Paco village — provisions for five households	**$210**	3.6
12	Phong Nha mountain villages — geese and medicines	**$2,410**	41.0
13	Đồng Đại village, Hà Tınh — poultry raising and provisions	**$210**	3.6
14	Hà Tınh — school fee scholarships	**$484**	8.2
15	Trang Nứa Orphanage, Xã Đoài — clothes-storage furniture	**$450**	7.7
16	Mother Teresa of Calcutta Orphanage, Xã Đoài — food and household supplies	**$350**	6.0
17	19.5 Shelter for Severely Disabled, Xã Đoài — food, nappies and household supplies	**$700**	11.9
18	Quỳnh Lập leprosy -affected community — heaters and chicken raising	**$617**	10.5
19	Phát Diệm — disabled children's room and household assistance	**$465**	7.9
	TOTAL PROJECT EXPENDITURE	**$12,672**	**215.6**

VND converted at the Reserve Bank of Australia average rate for the financial year, approximately 1.70 million VND = AUD $100.

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1. Sài Gòn Cancer Hospital — Volunteer Soup Kitchen 1710

Food supplies — $235 (4M VND)

Description

FoVO provided food supplies for the volunteer kitchen serving patients and families at the Sài Gòn Cancer Hospital.

Project expenditure

- 1,000 packets of noodles
- 96 small cartons of milk

Total: 4M VND ($235)

Observation

The volunteer kitchen provided simple food for people attending the hospital, including patients and family members who had travelled to Sài Gòn for treatment. FoVO purchased supplies rather than contributing cash.

Reflection

This was a simple project where a relatively small amount of money could provide practical assistance to a large number of people.



Delivery by motorbike



Volunteers are preparing meals for cancer patients.





Members of the volunteer group

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2. Bửu Trì Pagoda Orphanage, Cần Thơ

Footwear and nutrition — $415 (7.05M VND)

Description

FoVO continued its assistance to Bửu Trì Pagoda Orphanage in Cần Thơ with footwear and additional food for the children.

Project expenditure

Footwear — 2.25M VND ($130)

- 10 pairs large sandals — 0.8M VND
- 10 pairs medium sandals — 0.75M VND
- 10 pairs small sandals — 0.7M VND

Nutrition — 4.8M VND ($285)

- 45 kg chicken — 1.8M VND
- 20 kg pork — 1.48M VND
- 200 eggs — 0.37M VND, with another 100 eggs donated by the seller
- 2 kg pepper — 0.44M VND
- 5 kg garlic — 0.26M VND
- 12 kg seasoning — 0.48M VND

Total: 7.05M VND ($415)

Observation

The assistance combined an immediate practical need — footwear for the children — with better-quality food to supplement the orphanage diet. The egg seller added another 100 eggs without charge.

Reflection

Buying the goods locally allowed FoVO to see exactly what the donation provided and also produced the small bonus of additional eggs from the seller.











Tutoring class for orphans in Buu Tri temple



Local people are attending praying at the temple

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3. Thiên Ân Orphanage, Cần Thơ

Nutrition and free-range chicken raising — $472 (8M VND)

Description

FoVO provided additional nutrition for Thiên Ân Orphanage and supported a small free-range chicken-raising project.

Project expenditure

Nutrition — 3.8M VND ($225)

- 200 eggs — 0.37M VND
- 45 kg chicken — 1.8M VND
- 10 kg seasoning — 0.53M VND
- 40 kg gas — 1.1M VND

Chicken raising — 4.2M VND ($247)

- 25 hens — 3.7M VND
- 100 kg wholegrain rice for feed — 0.5M VND

Total: 8M VND ($472)

Observation

The first part of the project provided food and cooking gas for immediate use. The second provided hens and an initial supply of feed so that the orphanage could raise chickens itself.

Reflection

The two forms of assistance complemented each other: one met immediate needs while the other was intended to provide an ongoing source of food.






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4. Suối Tiên Shelter for Homeless Women, Đồng Nai

School fees and massage chairs — $440 (7.5M VND)

Description

FoVO continued assistance to the Suối Tiên shelter for homeless women and their children. Two girls, Loan and Phượng, received assistance with their school fees. FoVO also purchased two back -massage chairs for the women at the shelter.

Project expenditure

School assistance — 3M VND ($175)
School expenses were paid for Loan and Phượng for the coming school year.

Massage chairs — 4.5M VND ($265)

- 2 back -massage chairs — approximately 2.24M VND each

Total: 7.5M VND ($440)

Observation

The shelter accommodated women with very limited resources as well as their children. The school assistance enabled Loan and Phượng to continue their education, while the massage chairs were a practical comfort for the women living at the shelter.

Reflection

The project responded to two quite different needs within the same shelter: keeping two children at school and providing something useful for the women themselves.



Loan puts her arm round camera-shy Phuong.



Two electric back massage machines @ 2.24M



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





Activities in the morning and at nighttime for women in the shelter.







Fishponds a landscape setting for the nursing home.

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5. An Bình Orphanage, Sài Gòn

Course scholarships and electric vehicle — $1,262

Description

FoVO continued its support for young women associated with An Bình Orphanage by helping with vocational course costs. Assistance was provided at different times during the financial year. FoVO also helped Huyền convert her vehicle to electric power.

Project expenditure

Course scholarships — $325 (5.5M VND)
Six course scholarships were supported during August – October 2016.

Electric vehicle conversion — $265 (4.5M VND)
Assistance was provided for Huyền's electric vehicle conversion.

Further course scholarships — $672
A further scholarship payment was made later in the financial year for six women. The surviving project record gives individual payments totalling approximately 6.8M VND, while the annual summary records the combined AUD amount as $672.

Total recorded in the annual Project Summary: $1,262

Observation

The assistance was directed towards education and practical skills intended to help the young women become more independent. Huyền's vehicle assistance addressed a practical transport need.

Reflection

FoVO's support at An Bình had developed beyond supplying goods to the orphanage itself. The emphasis was increasingly on practical assistance to young women moving towards adult life and employment.



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



Huyền is trying out her electric vehicle




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BEE

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6. Mother's Love Home, Bình Dương

Baby-care supplies — $595 (10M VND)

Description

FoVO provided baby-care and household supplies to Mother's Love Home in Bình Dương, a shelter caring for unmarried mothers and their babies.

Project expenditure

- 6 large tins of baby formula — 2.4M VND
- 10 packets of baby nappies — 1.7M VND
- 10 packets of sanitary pads — 0.8M VND
- 10 large bottles of baby shampoo — 0.9M VND
- 10 large bottles of baby bath wash — 0.9M VND
- 10 large bottles of washing detergent — 1.2M VND
- 10 large bottles of fabric softener — 0.9M VND
- Household and baby -care supplies making up the balance

Total: approximately 10M VND ($595)

Observation

The home provided accommodation and support for young unmarried mothers who otherwise had few resources. The supplies were ordinary consumable items needed in caring for mothers and babies.

Reflection

Providing goods rather than cash meant that FoVO's assistance could be directed immediately to the everyday needs of the women and babies.





This baby was offered to me by his young mother



Mother with her baby



With two newborns



Checking the list and receipt



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7. Hiếu, Sài Gòn

Medical insurance and miscellaneous assistance — $60 (1M VND)

Description

FoVO continued its small-scale assistance to Hiếu, who had previously received help with training and establishing herself independently.

Project expenditure

- Medical insurance and miscellaneous assistance — 1M VND ($60)

Observation

Hiếu remained in contact with FoVO. This year's assistance was modest and mainly helped with medical insurance and immediate expenses.

Reflection

The project was a small follow-up to earlier assistance rather than a new major commitment.



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8. Ê-Đê Villages, Đắk Lắk

Flood relief for 20 households — $1,200 (20M VND)

Description

Severe flooding affected Ê-đê families in villages south of Buôn Mê Thuột. FoVO provided assistance to 20 households.

Ten households were selected for assistance to restart pig raising. Each received two piglets and rice. Another ten households whose immediate needs were greater received food and essential household supplies.

Project expenditure

10 pig-raising households — 12M VND Each household received:

- 2 piglets — 1M VND
- 15 kg rice — 0.2M VND

Total per household: 1.2M VND
10 households receiving immediate supplies — 8M VND Each household received:

- 35 kg rice — 0.4M VND
- Fish sauce — 0.03M VND
- Salt — 0.01M VND
- Cooking oil — 0.08M VND
- Soap and washing supplies — 0.08M VND
- Mosquito net — 0.2M VND

Total per household: 0.8M VND Total: 20M VND ($1,200)

Observation

The assistance was divided according to the circumstances of individual households. Families able to resume raising animals received piglets, while households with more immediate needs received food and basic supplies.

Reflection

The project showed the value of visiting households and tailoring assistance rather than providing every family with the same package.













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9. Nha Trang Region

Medicines for eight orphanages and centres — $1,600 (27M VND)

Description

FoVO purchased medical supplies for eight orphanages, schools and centres in the Nha Trang region. The medicines were distributed between:

- La Salle
- Hướng Dương
- Đại An
- Nhân Ái
- Thanh Sơn
- Lộc Thọ
- An Đạo
- Minh Hòa Deaf School

Approximately 3.365M VND of medicines was allocated to each institution.

Project expenditure

Medicines included commonly required treatments and first-aid supplies for the children and residents.

Total: 27M VND ($1,600)

Observation

Purchasing the medicines as one regional project allowed supplies to be divided among eight institutions according to their needs.

Reflection

This was one of FoVO's larger projects for the year and provided practical medical supplies across a number of small institutions rather than concentrating the assistance in one place.



Sample of meds for each orphanage

Anti biotics	1, Ampicilin 500mg	2 h x 70.000
Anti biotics	2, Cyalexin 500mg	2 h x 150.000
= Imodium	3, Loperamid 2mg	5 h x 25.000 (25.000)
Cough syrup	4, Vitatux	5 h x 40.000
Anticeptic cream	5, Glocort	10 tub x 14.000
Worm tablets	6, Fugacar	20 h x 20.000
Vitamins	7, Boralex	20 tub x 25.000
Codeine	8, Terpincodein	4 h x 60.000
Menthol	9, Dầu gió	1 lốc x 120.000
Paracetamol	10, Hapacol 500mg	3 h x 250.000
Anti histovine	11, Lorin	5 h x 90.000
		3.365.000

List of the medicines supplied

Medicine supply to La Salle Disabled workshop Project carried out by Lâm.



La Salle brother stands by the medicines



Previous year's medicine donation

Medicine supply to Huong Duong orphanage. Project carried out by Lâm





Medicine supply to Dai An orphanage. Project carried out by Lam





Medicine supply to Nhan Ai orphanage. Project carried out by Lâm.





Medicine supply to; Thanh Son Pagoda. Project carried out by Lâm.





Medicine supply to Loc Tho Pagoda. Project carried out by Lâm.





Medicine supply to An Dao Buddhist orphanage. Project carried out by Lâm.





Medicine supply to Minh Hoa Deaf School. Project carried out by Lâm.





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10. Nha Trang Region — Additional Orphanage Assistance

Food, equipment, livestock and treats — $494 (8.4M VND)

Description

In addition to the regional medicine project, FoVO provided several smaller forms of assistance to individual orphanages and centres around Nha Trang.

Project expenditure

Thanh Sơn

- 20 metal wash basins — 2.4M VND ($140)

Lộc Thọ

- 100 kg rice — 1.1M VND ($65)

An Đạo

- Milk — 1.3M VND ($75)

Đại An

- 4 black mountain pigs — 2.2M VND ($130)

Hướng Dương

- Soft toys — 1M VND ($60)
- Ice cream for the children — 0.4M VND ($24)

Total: 8.4M VND ($494)

Observation

These were small projects responding to different requests at individual institutions. They ranged from basic food and washing equipment to pigs for raising at Đại An and a modest treat for the children at Hướng Dương.

Reflection

The projects illustrate FoVO's usual small -scale approach: assistance was based on what was useful at each institution rather than providing a standard package.

20 Metal wash basins for Thanh Son Pagoda. Project carried out by Lâm.





100 kg rice for children at Loc Tho Pagoda. Project carried out by Lâm.





Milk for An Dao orphanage (Cam Ranh). Project carried out by Lâm.





Soft toy for each girl at Huong Duong orphanage (Nha Trang). Project carried out by Lâm.



Ice-cream night, Huong Duong orphanage (Nha Trang). Project carried out by Lâm.



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11. A Lưới Paco Village

Provisions for five households — $210 (3.6M VND)

Description

While travelling north along the Hồ Chí Minh Road, FoVO provided food and household provisions for five disadvantaged Paco families near A Lưới.

Project expenditure

Food and essential household provisions for five households.

Total: 3.6M VND ($210)

Observation

The families lived in a remote mountain area west of Huế. The assistance was arranged locally and directed to households identified as needing help.

Reflection

This was a small project, but direct local assistance allowed FoVO to reach families in a remote community that might otherwise receive little outside support.















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12. Phong Nha Mountain Villages

Goose raising and medicines — $2,410 (41M VND)

Description

FoVO provided livestock and medicines for disadvantaged households in four mountain villages in the Phong Nha area: Hưng Trạch, Liên Thủy, Sơn Trạch and Thanh Bình.

The main project provided geese for 34 households. Each household received 20 young geese to raise.

Project expenditure

Goose raising — 34M VND ($2,000)

- 34 households
- 20 young geese for each household
- 1M VND per household

Medicines — 7M VND ($410)
A supply of commonly needed medicines was purchased for use in the four villages.

Total: 41M VND ($2,410)

Observation

The livestock project was intended for households with the capacity to raise geese. The separate medicine purchase addressed immediate health needs in the same group of villages.

Reflection

This was the largest FoVO project of the year. Most of the expenditure went towards giving individual households livestock that they could raise themselves, supplemented by a smaller community medicine project.









A woman inspects her geese



Household installs their geese into a newly constructed pen.

REPORT TO DONORS 2017

13. Đồng Đại Village, Hà Tĩnh

Poultry raising and provisions — $210 (3.5M VND)

Description

FoVO assisted five disadvantaged families at Đồng Đại village in Hà Tĩnh. Two families received poultry to raise and three families received food provisions.

Project expenditure

One family received:

- 50 chickens
- Chicken feed
- Vaccination

A second family received:

- 30 ducks
- Duck feed
- Vaccination

Three other families received:

- Food provisions — 0.5M VND for each family

Total: 3.5M VND ($210)

Observation

The assistance varied according to each household's circumstances. Poultry was provided where a family was able to raise birds, while food was provided to families with more immediate needs.

Reflection

As with the Ê-đê flood -relief project, different forms of assistance could be provided within one village rather than assuming that every household needed the same thing.



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



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

REPORT TO DONORS 2017

14. Hà Tĩnh — School Fee Scholarships

School fees for three children — $484 (8.2M VND)

Description

FoVO provided school fee assistance for three children from disadvantaged families in Hà Tĩnh.

Project expenditure
School fees for three children.

Total: 8.2M VND ($484)

Observation

The assistance was directed to particular children whose families had difficulty meeting the costs of keeping them at school.

Reflection

School assistance was a relatively simple way of helping individual children continue their education without creating a large or complicated project.



REPORT TO DONORS 2017

15. Trang Nứa Orphanage, Xã Đoài

Clothes-storage furniture — $450 (7.6M VND)

Description

Trang Nứa cared for school -age children as well as several younger children. FoVO provided furniture so that the children could store their clothes and personal belongings.

Project expenditure

- 4 chests of drawers @ 1.15M VND — 4.6M VND
- 2 hanging cupboards @ 1.5M VND — 3M VND

Total: 7.6M VND ($450)

Observation

There were about 28 school-age children at Trang Nứa, as well as an infant and a toddler. The new cupboards and drawers provided practical storage for the children's clothing.

FoVO had provided a television and DVD player for the children in the previous year.

Reflection

This was a straightforward improvement to everyday living conditions at the orphanage. The furniture was durable and could continue to be used by successive children living there.

REPORT TO DONORS 2017

16. Mother Teresa of Calcutta Orphanage, Xã Đoài

Supplies for children — $350 (6M VND)

Description

FoVO provided supplies for the Mother Teresa of Calcutta Orphanage at Xã Đoài. The home cared for about 45 children with mild disabilities. The project was carried out through Sister Lành.

Project expenditure

- 10 winter blankets
- 10 mosquito nets
- 25 litres cooking oil
- 7 packets large nappies
- Sanitary pads
- Toilet paper

Total: 6M VND ($350)

Observation

The children had a range of disabilities but were generally mobile. The assistance consisted mainly of practical consumable items and winter bedding needed by the home.

Reflection

Working through Sister Lành allowed FoVO to provide practical assistance directly for the children.



Clothes cupboards being delivered.



Children and carer with their new cupboards



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

REPORT TO DONORS 2017

17. 19.5 Shelter for Severely Disabled, Xã Đoài

Food, nappies and household supplies — $700 (12M VND)

Description

The 19.5 Shelter at Xã Đoài cared for about 25 severely disabled children and young adults. Many were unable to walk and spent much of their time in beds.

The shelter had been established by the diocese and was run by a small group of nuns under Sister Lành.

Project expenditure

FoVO provided food, nappies and other everyday supplies required for the care of the residents.

Total: 12M VND ($700)

Observation

This was quite different from the nearby Mother Teresa Orphanage. The residents at 19.5 had severe disabilities and required a much higher level of daily care.

Reflection

The assistance concentrated on ordinary necessities that were continually needed in caring for severely disabled residents.







(boss) and carer with our donation. Sister Lành



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



Children inside the orphanage with carers.

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18. Quỳnh Lập Leprosy-affected Community

Heaters and chicken raising — $617 (10.5M VND)

Description

Quỳnh Lập was a government -run community for people affected by leprosy and their families. More than 300 people lived there in about 100 households.

FoVO provided heaters for patients in the high-care area and supported a chicken-raising project for 32 households.

Project expenditure

Heaters — 3.5M VND ($205)

- 5 heaters @ 0.7M VND — 3.5M VND

Chicken raising — 7M VND ($412)

- Assistance for 32 households to raise chickens

Total: 10.5M VND ($617)

Observation

Some residents were elderly or required continuing care, while other households were able to undertake small livestock projects. The two forms of assistance reflected these different circumstances.

Reflection

The project combined immediate assistance for residents requiring a high level of care with livestock assistance for households able to raise chickens themselves.



Heaters for patients in the hospice



Women happy with their new chickens.

REPORT TO DONORS 2017

19. Phát Diệm

Assistance for disabled children and disadvantaged households — $465 (7.8M VND)

Description

FoVO carried out several small projects around Phát Diệm.

At a day centre for ten children with disabilities, FoVO funded a padded floor to provide a safer area for the children.

FoVO also provided food for an elderly mother caring for her mentally ill adult son, food for a household of ten mostly elderly women, some of whom were blind, and baby-care supplies for a shelter for unmarried mothers.

Project expenditure

Disabled children's day centre — 4.2M VND ($250)

- Padded floor for the children's room

Elderly mother and son — 0.6M VND ($35)

- Blanket
- Rice
- Noodles
- Cooking oil
- Fish sauce

Group household — 1M VND ($60)

- Food supplies for ten mostly elderly women

Unmarried mothers shelter — 2M VND ($120)

- Baby -care supplies

Total: 7.8M VND ($465)

Observation

These were four quite different forms of assistance. Each was small and responded to a particular need identified locally, ranging from improving a room used by children with disabilities to providing basic food and baby-care supplies.

Reflection

The Phát Diệm projects show how several modest amounts could be directed to quite different needs during the same visit, rather than treating them as one standard form of assistance.



The disabled children's room had a hard floor



The same room after we provided padded flooring.



Food for elderly mother with mentally ill son.



Sister Kính distributes the food among the women.





Our donated baby care packages brought back from the local market

REPORT TO DONORS 2017

A Few Stories from the Year

Mrs Pho House Story

A couple of years ago I received a phone call from Hoang, who was planning to start a Vietnamese restaurant in Singapore.

Mrs Pho at 349 Beach Road, Singapore, had a big opening night at which customers did not pay for their meals but instead donated to the orphanage fund.

Fast forward to a few months ago and a second Vietnamese restaurant opened — Mrs Pho House at 221 Rangoon Road, Singapore.

Thanks to the generosity of the friends of Mrs Pho House, the opening night raised a large donation, generously topped up by the restaurant owner.

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 Ducky. For years I had been 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 children in two orphanages in the Mekong Delta at Cần Thơ 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 helped find 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.

Peter then put me in touch by email with Hiền, a local volunteer interpreter who would meet me in Cần Thơ and help with visiting and translating. 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 helped me catch a local bus from Sài Gòn to Cần Thơ.

On arrival, Hiền took me on her motorcycle, gave me a tour of her city and we shared a meal at a local restaurant.

She told me that the children did not have many toys and that they liked sports and badminton. We went shopping locally for things that would be useful for the children.

With the money I had available we bought several badminton sets and shuttlecocks. We then worked out that with the rest of the money I could afford to purchase 600 eggs. It would have been funny trying to balance 600 eggs on the motorbike, but we decided to be safe and have them delivered.

I still had the very local experience of loading and balancing the rest of the shopping on the motorbike.

We returned to the pagoda and delivered the donations while the children were having dinner. Afterwards there was much excitement at my presence.

I formed quite a bond with a small boy with disabilities whom I had met earlier. I gave him piggyback rides and spun him around, which brought joy and delight to his face. The other children crowded around, all wanting to meet me and play.

I introduced simple hand games such as paper, scissors, rock and thumb wars, which were a huge hit. I also showed them photographs on my phone from home in Australia, including my dog Buddy, a husky, and pictures of Australian animals. They were fascinated, especially by Buddy.

The children loved being in selfies and seeing themselves on the screen.

Unfortunately, there was not enough space to use the badminton sets because the pagoda was quite crowded.

As I was leaving, one of the nuns came over to thank me personally for my visit. She had recently been to Nepal and had bought all the children a special necklace. She produced one for me and put it around my neck.

One side of the pendant had a picture of a pagoda and the other a picture of Buddha.

For some reason this was a very emotional moment for me. The necklace became a treasured keepsake and, back in Australia, I could hold it and remember that day.