FoVO

Friends of Vietnam Orphanages Inc.

Helping disadvantaged communities in Vietnam

Report to Donors

2022 Financial Year

REGISTERED CHARITY · acnc.gov.au/charityregister



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

REPORT TO DONORS 2022

Overview

Since 2011 I have taken annual leave from work to travel across Vietnam and assist disadvantaged communities through our small registered charity, Friends of Vietnam Orphanages Inc (FoVO). I pay my own travel costs, so every dollar donated to FoVO goes to direct assistance in Vietnam.

I have described this as a "barefoot charity model" — one ride, one man, one motorbike. But our local project partners are the key to making it work. They help identify people and communities needing assistance, organise projects and follow up after I have moved on. Many are women, together with university student groups and Christian and Buddhist nuns. Our Committee thanks everyone who helped us assist communities in Vietnam during the 2022 financial year.

Monthly Contributors

We particularly thank the family and friends who made regular monthly contributions:
Clive, Vytas, Michael & Adrienne, Geoff & Rachelle, Hayden & Yến, Helen & David, and Patrick H.

Other Donors

We also thank Amanda, Dennis, Karna, Julie & Jan, Paul & Suzette, the Aranda Men's Group, Richard, Graham, Antony, Kim and others who contributed during the year.

Board and Advisers

Our Board members Julie, Dennis, Geoff and Clive provided encouragement and support throughout the year. I also regularly consulted our Australian-Vietnamese cultural advisers Loan and Tiệp, who helped explain Vietnamese customs and ways of doing things that were not always obvious to a Westerner.

Local Interpreters and Project Partners

Our volunteer interpreters and "fixers" in Vietnam included Thi, Tam, Hiệp and Xoan. Their role went well beyond translation. They helped negotiate projects, solve practical problems and check that projects were completed.

FoVO also relied on a network of local project partners. These people and groups contributed their time, local knowledge and practical help:

- Yến and Quế — Thiên Ân Children's Shelter, Cần Thơ.
- Bích Hường and Kim Anh — Sisters of Charity of Calcutta, Mai Ấm Tình Mẹ single mothers' and children's shelter, Bình Dương.
- Mùi — Linh An shelter for children and single mothers, Lâm Hà, Lâm Đồng Province.
- Lâm and helpers — Nha Trang medical supplies projects.
- Huế La Salle university social club — projects with Vân Kiều communities at Bản Khe Ngài, Đăkrông, Quảng Trị.
- Bắc Ái Vinh (Vinh Sisters of Charity) — projects assisting villages around Phong Nha.

- Hiệp and the Hope Connection volunteer group — Kỳ Sơn, Nghệ An.
- Legion of Mary women's group — Thạch Long and Thạch Sơn villages, Hà Tınh.
- Xoan — teacher and local project organiser, Hà Tınh.
- Lành — 19.5 Shelter, Xã Đoài.
- Sister Kính — Holy Cross convent and village projects, Phát Diệm.
- Sister Phương Liên — St Paul de Chartres, Sài Gòn.
- Sister Loan — St Paul de Chartres and Vi Nhân Disabled Children's School, Buôn Ma Thuột.
- Street Singers, Đồng Nai, and An Vũ — volunteer assistance.
- Dr Trong, Oanh and Công — volunteer medical projects, Gia Lai.
- Đà Nẵng university Christian student group — Protection Centre No. 5.

These local partners were an important part of FoVO's work. They identified needs, visited families, organised purchases and transport, and helped carry projects through after my field visit.

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

REPORT TO DONORS 2022

Project Summary

How Your $30,000 Was Spent

NO.	PROJECT	AUD	MILLION VND
1	Đại Lộc, Quảng Nam — chicken raising and food assistance	$1,500	25
2	Đà Nẵng — SPDC Disabled Children's School, educational aids	$545	9
3	Đà Nẵng — SPDC Elderly Women's Shelter, equipment	$600	10
4	Xã Đoài — food and hygiene supplies for three disability shelters	$1,500	25
5	Hà Tĩnh — clean drinking water, Thạch Sơn Kindergarten	$600	10
6	Hà Tĩnh — education support for disadvantaged students	$720	12
7	Hà Tĩnh — household assistance for an elderly couple	$600	10
8	Hà Tĩnh villages — bicycles for school students	$1,200	20
9	Hà Tĩnh — chicken raising for 20 families	$1,500	25
10	Hà Tĩnh — support for single mothers	$300	5
11	Phát Diệm — chicken raising and food assistance	$1,930	32
12	Nha Trang — education and practical support	$900	15
13	Kontum — Vinh Son 2 Children's Shelter	$1,980	33
14	Ngọc Réo Children's Homestay, Xơ Đăng people	$2,410	40
15	Pleiku — books and library support, La Salle Indigenous School	$720	12
16	Gia Lai — Dr Trong's medical and leprosy outreach	$3,610	60
17	Gia Lai — medical treatment for Đào	$1,020	17
18	Đắk Đoa, Gia Lai — school supplies for 200 children	$1,510	25
19	Đắk Đoa, Gia Lai — health checks and medicines	$600	10
20	Buôn Ma Thuột — pig raising for 11 H'Rat village households	$1,500	25
21	Buôn Ma Thuột — classroom support, Vi Nhân Disabled Children's School	$600	10
22	Quảng Trị — food and household supplies for 50 Vân Kiều families	$1,510	25
23	Quảng Trị — water supply well for Vân Kiều village	$1,080	18
24	Bình Dương — support for Mai Am Tinh Me Single Mothers' Shelter	$900	15
25	Cần Thơ — support for Thiên Ân Children's Shelter	$600	10
	TOTAL	$30,000	498

Totals are rounded. Exchange rate used: approximately 1.66 million VND = AUD $100.

REPORT TO DONORS 2022

1. Chicken Raising and Food Assistance — Đại Lộc, Quảng Nam

$1,500 (25M VND)

Description

Local volunteers in Đại Lộc identified 20 disadvantaged households for a small chicken -raising project. Each household received 30 chickens and a 25 kg bag of feed.

The volunteers also organised food parcels for elderly and disabled people, containing rice, cooking oil, fish sauce, seasoning and milk.

Observation

Chicken raising was already familiar to the households and required recipients to contribute their own time and work. The chickens could provide both food and a possible source of household income. The photographs also show something of the practical scale of the project: crates of chickens arriving by motorbike and being distributed locally rather than through any elaborate FoVO delivery system.

Reflection

This was the kind of small project FoVO increasingly preferred. It started with something people already knew how to do rather than introducing a new activity requiring outside training or supervision. The money provided the initial chickens and feed. The households supplied the labour and existing knowledge.



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REPORT TO DONORS 2022

2. Support for SPDC Disabled Children's School — Đà Nẵng

$545 (9M VND)

Description

The Sisters of St Paul de Chartres (SPDC) operated a school in Đà Nẵng for children with disabilities, including autistic and deaf children.

The teaching staff identified a need for additional educational aids. A staff member accompanied us to an educational supply shop and selected teaching and play materials suitable for the classrooms.

Three English-speaking seminary students, who were preparing for later parish work in New Zealand, also assisted with the project. FoVO provided 9 million VND, approximately $545, for the educational materials.

Observation

The school was not simply a shelter for children with disabilities. It had structured classrooms, trained teaching nuns and specialised learning activities.

The photographs record some of this work: classroom displays for deaf children, teaching aids, mobility therapy equipment, prosthetic limbs used for walking practice, wheelchairs and fine-motor activities. One school display recorded substantial numbers of children with intellectual, physical and other disabilities across kindergarten, primary school and vocational training. The educational materials were chosen by people actually teaching the children rather than selected by FoVO.

Reflection

This was a straightforward project, but it reinforced an approach that became increasingly important for FoVO: the people providing the service usually know what equipment they need better than the donor does.

Our role was therefore mainly to provide the funds and let the teaching staff choose suitable materials locally.



Teacher demonstrates teaching aids.

REPORT TO DONORS 2022

3. Equipment for SPDC Elderly Women's Shelter — Đà Nẵng

$600 (10M VND)

Description

The St Paul de Chartres (SPDC) elderly women's shelter in Đà Nẵng accommodated about 30 women in dormitories around a central courtyard garden. The nuns identified a need for five commodes and supplies of colostomy bags. FoVO provided 10 million VND (about $600) for the equipment and supplies.

Observation

Selecting suitable commodes proved less straightforward than expected. Two models were initially delivered, but the carers found neither suitable: one had a chromed-steel frame considered prone to rust, while the aluminium model was not height-adjustable.

Rather than accept unsuitable equipment, the items were returned and a nun who worked directly with the carers went to the supplier to select an appropriate model. She also identified the need for colostomy bags. The required items were delivered the following day.

Reflection

This small mistake produced a useful lesson: the person purchasing an item is not necessarily the person who best understands what is needed.

Where specialised equipment is involved, FoVO should wherever possible let the people who use it — or those directly caring for the users — choose the equipment themselves.



With students and some residents.

REPORT TO DONORS 2022

4. Food and Hygiene Supplies for Three Disability Shelters — Xã Đoài

$1,500 (25M VND)

Description

FoVO worked with the Vinh Sisters of Charity at Xã Đoài to provide basic supplies for three shelters caring for children and adults with severe disabilities.

A group of six local volunteers helped purchase and distribute the supplies. These included about one tonne of rice, together with fish sauce, milk, nappies, cooking oil, laundry liquid, shampoo, body wash, mops and other everyday necessities.

The total project cost was 25 million VND (about $1,500).

Observation

The project provided ordinary consumable items rather than new facilities or equipment. For residential shelters caring for people with severe disabilities, however, food, hygiene products, nappies and cleaning materials represented substantial continuing costs.

Working through the Sisters and local volunteers also meant that the supplies could be selected according to the shelters' immediate needs and purchased locally.

Reflection

Not every useful project needs to create something permanent. For residential services with continuing operating costs, a relatively small contribution towards everyday necessities can free their limited funds for other needs.

At the same time, this kind of assistance has little lasting effect by itself. It therefore works best where FoVO knows and trusts the local organisation and is responding to a clearly identified need.



Thuy's volunteers visit the disabled shelter.

REPORT TO DONORS 2022

5. Clean Drinking Water — Thạch Sơn Kindergarten, Hà Tĩnh

$600 (10M VND)

Description

FoVO provided two water-filter machines for Thạch Sơn Kindergarten, a small village school in a fishing area of Hà Tĩnh Province. The machines supplied both hot and cold filtered drinking water for about 100 children.

The project was organised locally by Dung, a teacher at the kindergarten. FoVO had previously worked with her on a project providing bicycles for seven disadvantaged children.

Observation

The school identified clean drinking water as a practical need for its children. Rather than providing bottled water as a continuing consumable expense, the project installed equipment that could remain in everyday use at the kindergarten. A photograph in the original report shows children drinking directly from one of the installed machines.

Reflection

This was a small infrastructure project with the potential for continuing benefit. It also illustrates the value of returning to local partners FoVO already knew: Dung understood the school and could identify a relatively modest item that would be useful to many children.



Children drinking from the filter machine.

REPORT TO DONORS 2022

6. Education Support for Disadvantaged Students — Hà Tĩnh

$720 (12M VND)

Description

Xoan, a local school teacher, identified nine students from disadvantaged family circumstances who were doing well at school. FoVO provided half a year's school fees for the nine students as practical assistance and encouragement to continue their education.

Observation

During the visit we met two of the nine students, two young women known to Thi who had left their village families to continue their studies. They were combining study with work in a phở restaurant business, where the arrangement provided employment, board and lodging and some help with their studies.

They were finding life away from their families challenging and somewhat isolating. The visit was therefore partly about personal encouragement: having a fruit smoothie together, asking how they were managing and buying some study materials at the local market. Thi's continuing contact also meant they had someone familiar they could turn to.

Reflection

The encounter was a reminder that educational assistance is not only about paying fees. For young people from disadvantaged village families, leaving home to study can bring social and practical difficulties as well as financial ones.

A small charity may sometimes contribute simply by maintaining a personal connection and encouraging a student to stay the course.



Student Hung with certificates of merit at school.

REPORT TO DONORS 2022

7. Household Assistance for An Elderly Couple — Hà Tĩnh

$600 (10M VND)

Description

FoVO assisted Kính and his wife, an elderly couple living with significant disabilities. Kính was blind following a stroke and his wife was his principal carer while also living with a disability. The project initially considered providing some second-hand household furniture, but after visiting the couple and discussing their needs, assistance was directed instead towards more immediately useful items.

The project was organised by Chi Hue through a local women's charitable group, the Legion of Mary. FoVO provided 40 two-month-old chickens and chicken feed, together with a commode wheelchair, massage mattress, food and medicines.

Observation

The assistance combined two different purposes. The wheelchair, mattress, food and medicines responded to immediate everyday needs, while the chickens provided the household with a small productive activity that could continue after the visit.

The project was again organised through a local person who knew the household and its circumstances.

Reflection

For a household facing several difficulties at once, there may be no single intervention that solves the problem. A small charity can nevertheless respond practically by combining immediate assistance with something that may provide an ongoing benefit.

The chicken-raising component also followed a principle increasingly used by FoVO: where possible, support an activity already familiar to the household rather than introduce something requiring new skills or continuing outside management.









REPORT TO DONORS 2022

8. Bicycles for School Students — Hà Tĩnh Villages

$1,200 (20M VND)

Description

FoVO provided bicycles to 12 school students from disadvantaged families in villages in Thạch Hà District, Hà Tĩnh Province.

The project was organised by Nam, Hiep and Dong, three former schoolmates who had become regular local FoVO project partners. They identified families in their home province, visited them and selected students for whom a bicycle would assist with getting to school. Nam then organised delivery of the bicycles. The original report described them as “encouragement awards” for the students.

Observation

The bicycles were a relatively simple form of educational assistance. Rather than paying an ongoing expense, the project provided something the students could use every day to travel between home and school.

The selection process was also important. The recipients were not chosen remotely by FoVO. Local people who knew the district located and visited the families before the bicycles were provided.

Reflection

Bicycles became one of FoVO's recurring small projects because they addressed a practical barrier to education without requiring an ongoing program. A modest one-off purchase could make it easier for a student to continue attending school for several years.

The project also illustrates the value of maintaining trusted local relationships. Nam, Hiep and Dong could identify students and families in their own communities, while FoVO's role remained relatively simple: provide the funds and allow the local partners to organise the project.



Nam (wearing glasses) delivered bicycles for the children.

REPORT TO DONORS 2022

9. Chicken Raising for 20 Families — Hà Tĩnh

$1,500 (25M VND)

Description

FoVO worked with Kien and Ha from a Hà Tĩnh volunteer group that normally operated a soup kitchen for hospital patients.

The volunteers identified 20 disadvantaged households across three mountain villages about 50 km from Hà Tĩnh city. They visited the households, checked that they had suitable places to keep chickens, prepared a recipient list and organised chickens for the families to raise.

Observation

The households had a wide range of circumstances. They included a woman caring for a husband with a disability and two children, a parent with mental illness raising three children, a single woman with serious illness, a grandmother raising six grandchildren after the death of her son, and a blind single mother.

The local volunteers did more than distribute chickens. They visited the families beforehand and checked whether chicken raising was practical for each household.

Reflection

This project reinforced two useful principles for small livelihood projects. The activity should be familiar to the recipients, and someone locally should check that the household is actually able to undertake it before money is spent.

The project also showed the value of working with an existing volunteer network. Kien and Ha's normal activity was providing meals for hospital patients, but their local knowledge allowed them to identify and assist disadvantaged households beyond the hospital itself.



Our project partners are contributing chicken for families at Hương Đô village.



Nương with her chicken project

REPORT TO DONORS 2022

10. Support for Single Mothers — Hà Tĩnh

$300 (5M VND)

Description

FoVO provided practical assistance to Mai Am Thiên Ân, a small shelter in Hà Tĩnh providing accommodation and care for unmarried pregnant women and new mothers.

At the time of the project, four mothers and their babies were staying at the shelter. FoVO funded items identified as needed by the shelter. The project was organised locally by Hien.

Observation

The shelter provided somewhere for women to stay during pregnancy and after giving birth when they could not readily remain with their families.

The original 2022 report recorded that unmarried pregnancy could result in rejection by family and community, and that babies might subsequently be placed with other families through the shelter.

Reflection

This was a very small project, but it supported an existing local service dealing with an immediate need. FoVO did not attempt to establish or manage a program of its own. The shelter identified what its residents needed, and FoVO helped pay for it.

The project also demonstrates why local partners were important to FoVO: sensitive circumstances could be addressed through people already working with the women rather than through direct intervention by an overseas charity.



Handover/evidence photograph

REPORT TO DONORS 2022

11. Chicken Raising and Food Assistance — Phát Diệm

$1,930 (32M VND)

Description

FoVO worked with Sister Kính of the local Holy Cross convent to assist disadvantaged people in Phát Diệm and surrounding villages. Sister Kính knew the area well, including her own home village. Twenty disadvantaged households were each provided with 30 chickens and a 25 kg bag of feed. Many recipients were elderly people living alone or people with disabilities.

The project also provided food for a group household of 10 elderly or disabled women without family support. They lived together in an old house and largely depended on local goodwill. Sister Kính visited them regularly and brought food when she could. During this visit FoVO funded rice and other basic food provisions.

Observation

The project combined two forms of assistance according to people's circumstances. Households capable of raising chickens received chickens and feed, while the group of older women received basic food supplies.

This was possible because Sister Kính already knew the people she was assisting. FoVO did not need to impose the same solution on every household.

Reflection

The project again demonstrated the advantage of working through a trusted local person who knows individual households. This was straightforward short-term assistance. We did not assess its longer-term effect.



Two single women stand at the 1970 date stamped water tank of their V-A-C family farm



Household of 10 elderly/disabled women with food parcels delivered by Sr Kinh





Villagers arrive to collect their chickens to raise.





Group with Sr Kinh and feed bags.





People leave with chickens

REPORT TO DONORS 2022

12. Education and Practical Support — Nha Trang

$900 (15M VND)

12.1 Assistance for Three Students

$300 (5M VND)

Description

Thi organised assistance for three young people in difficult circumstances in Nha Trang:

- Linh, studying occupational therapy and one of seven siblings;
- Luyen, studying communications. Her father had died from cancer and the cost of his treatment had left the family in serious financial difficulty; her mother worked as a fisher;
- Trang, who was in Year 10.

They were receiving training and support while working at a restaurant. FoVO provided money towards study materials and medical expenses.

Observation

This was modest individual assistance rather than a formal scholarship program. The three were already studying or attending school and combining education with other practical support.



Trang, Linh, Luyến from the left.

12.2 Thiện Tâm Orphanage

$600 (10M VND)

Description

Thi also organised assistance for Thiện Tâm Orphanage in Nha Trang, described in the 2022 report as being run by an elderly couple.

Rather than providing a single item, FoVO funded a mixture of practical needs:
Bicycle repairs: parts to repair 15 old bicycles, including tyres, tubes, chains, brake cables, spokes and other components — about 2.8M VND. Education: school books for five children — about 1.5M VND. Health supplies: basic medicines and first-aid items, including deworming medicine, bandages, vitamins, a thermometer and povidone — about 0.8M VND. Food and household supplies: including 100 kg of rice, eggs, cooking oil, condensed milk, sugar, seasonings and cleaning supplies — about 4.9M VND.

Observation

The detailed shopping list is worth retaining, perhaps in shortened form, because it shows what 10 million VND of assistance actually meant on the ground in 2022. It was not simply a generic donation to an orphanage: much of it went into maintaining existing bicycles and purchasing ordinary food, school and health supplies.







REPORT TO DONORS 2022

13. Vinh Son 2 Children's Shelter — Kontum

$1,980 (33M VND)

Description

Vinh Son 2 was one of six children's shelters in Kontum operated by an order of Indigenous nuns working with Indigenous communities. At the time of our visit, the shelter had 165 children, five nuns and 14 staff. FoVO provided:

- 250 kg rice — 3M.
- school materials including pens, pencils, chalk, exercise and colouring books and small chalkboards — 8M.
- hygiene and household supplies including soap, laundry powder, floor cleaner, toothpaste and toothbrushes, cleaning products and nappies, together with cooking oil and seasoning — 9M.
- a 250-litre solar hot-water system for the children's showers — 13M.

Observation

The shelter was busy and highly organised. Children participated in everyday work including cooking, sweeping, looking after younger children and doing laundry. The buildings themselves were somewhat run-down, despite the large number of children being cared for.

The solar hot-water system was a more permanent improvement than the other assistance and was installed for the children's shower facilities.

Reflection

The project combined consumable supplies with a small infrastructure improvement. The supplies met immediate needs, while the solar hot-water system was intended to remain in use beyond the year of the project. We did not subsequently record how long the system remained operational.





The children helping with our project.

REPORT TO DONORS 2022

14. Ngọc Réo Children's Homestay — Xơ Đăng People, Đắk Hà, Kontum

$2,410 (40M VND)

Description

Ngọc Réo was one of the Vinh Son network of shelters in Kontum, but was distinctive because it was smaller and more remote. Three Xơ Đăng Indigenous nuns provided board for about 40 school students from surrounding farms, enabling them to live closer to school during their studies. The Ngọc Réo homestay was run by three Indigenous nuns and provided board for about 40 school students from surrounding farms, enabling them to live closer to school during their studies.

FoVO funded three related activities:
Homestay improvements — 23M. A welder and assistant worked for about ten days, weatherproofing outdoor storage areas with polycarbonate glazing. They made 20 wardrobes and shoe racks for the girls, and hanging rails and shoe racks for 20 boys.

School materials — 7M. School supplies were provided for the 40 children at the homestay.

Food assistance — 10M. With Sister Vút, food parcels were distributed to 30 disadvantaged families in Ngọc Réo village.

Observation

The project extended beyond the children themselves. Some assistance improved their living and study arrangements at the homestay, while the food parcels went to families in the surrounding village.

The wardrobes, hanging rails and weatherproof storage are worth describing because they show the fairly ordinary practical problem being addressed: 40 boarding students needed somewhere dry and organised to keep their clothes, shoes and belongings.



Woman with babies gathering to get our contribution.



Wardrobes



Kids holding their school materials

REPORT TO DONORS 2022

15. Books and Library Support — La Salle Indigenous School, Pleiku

$720 (12M VND)

Description

The La Salle monastery in Pleiku operated a free primary school for Indigenous children. About 40 students from remote farms boarded at the school during the week and returned home on weekends.

Brother Thưởng showed us the school's small library, which was being renovated. FoVO funded:

- 100 second-hand books — 2M VND; and
- 500 educational books and booklets, selected by Brother Thưởng from a large educational bookshop — 10M VND.

Total expenditure was 12M VND.

Observation

The books were selected for an existing school and library rather than establishing a new facility. The combination of second-hand books and newly purchased educational material considerably increased the amount of material available within the 12M budget.



Thưởng.



Primary library under renovation, and holding our purchased English language book with Brother .



We funded 100 second-hand books, which were half of the RRP (2M). Thuong then selected 500 educational booklets and books from a large educational bookshop (10M). Our library book project totalled $720.

REPORT TO DONORS 2022

16. Dr Trong's Medical and Leprosy Outreach — Gia Lai

$3,610 (60M VND)

Description

Dr Trong worked in the emergency department at Gia Lai General Hospital and, on his days off, travelled with a small volunteer team to remote villages around Pleiku. The regular team included Dr Linh, Oanh, Brother Nam and Công, who assisted with interpreting and nursing. The team carried out consultations, blood-pressure checks, dispensed medicines and cleaned and dressed wounds.

For the regular circuit of seven small villages, FoVO provided 30 million VND for food parcels for about 100 people affected by leprosy. Each parcel contained rice, cooking oil, fish sauce, seasoning and noodles. Dr Trong's wife purchased the food and prepared the parcels.

FoVO also provided 12 million VND for approximately three months of commonly used medicines, purchased locally by Oanh.

A further 18 million VND supported medical treatment and medicines in three Gia Lai villages — Kon Tuk, G'r Oi and Doong Ro — where about 80 people affected by leprosy were assisted. Of this, 15 million VND was recorded for medicines and 3 million VND for transport. This activity also involved additional food assistance funded separately by our friend Thuy's group.

Observation

This was an existing volunteer medical service rather than one established by FoVO. During the village visits, team members had established roles: Dr Trong conducted consultations, Oanh organised medicines and blood-pressure checks, Brother Nam dressed wounds, and Công assisted with nursing and interpretation. Local people were already waiting for the team's regular visits.





Our food project being stacked at a village and people with leprosy collecting food parcels.





Inspection for wounds, cleaning them and applying dressings is some of the most regular work.







Scene in the small treatment room: Dr Trong attends to one client while another client waits at the door. Oanh dispenses medicines while the medical volunteer dresses a foot wound (photographed above).

REPORT TO DONORS 2022

17. Medical Treatment for Đào — Gia Lai

$1,020 (17M VND)

Description

Đào was a six -year-old Ba Na girl whose leg had become seriously infected the previous year. She underwent surgery at Gia Lai Hospital, but the infection became more serious and she was sent to a hospital in Sài Gòn before returning home.

The infection subsequently spread deeper into the bone and there was concern that her leg might have to be amputated. Dr Trong helped arrange for her admission to a major hospital in Sài Gòn for further treatment. FoVO paid the airfares for Đào and her father to travel to Sài Gòn, as well as her hospital fees.

Observation

This was not a one-off medical visit. Đào required prolonged hospital treatment for a serious infection, and at the time of this project the eventual outcome was uncertain.



Dr. Linh checking Đào's infection.



Đào's infection on her leg.

REPORT TO DONORS 2022

18. School Supplies for 200 Children — Đắk Đoa, Gia Lai

$1,510 (25M VND)

Description

FoVO worked with Oanh to provide school supplies for 200 Indigenous children from four disadvantaged villages in Đắk Đoa, Gia Lai. Oanh had assisted Dr Trong with health checks and wound treatment for people affected by leprosy for about six years and was undertaking pharmacy training.

Oanh selected the villages and organised the children and families to gather at a communal house. FoVO provided 200 school bags, 200 pairs of plastic sandals and 2,000 notebooks for the 200 children.

Observation

The supplies were simple items intended for everyday school use. The children came together from the four villages for their distribution.







Children gather from four villages.

REPORT TO DONORS 2022

19. Health Checks and Medicines — Đắk Đoa, Gia Lai

$600 (10M VND)

Description

Dr Trong organised his volunteer medical team to provide health checks and medicines for about 200 children and elderly people from four villages in Đắk Đoa, Gia Lai — Angleh, Đak Ioh, Đê Klanh and Đê Thung.

The team included Dr Linh, Oanh, who assisted with medicines, and Công, an Indigenous nurse who also assisted with interpreting. FoVO provided 10 million VND towards the health checks and medicines.

Observation

The project extended the work of Dr Trong's volunteer medical team beyond its regular visits to people affected by leprosy. The photographs record the doctors carrying out health checks and Oanh dispensing medicines during the visit.



Dr. Trong and Dr. Linh doing health checks. Oanh dispensing medicine.



Dr. Linh'sconsult with a mother and her daughter.

REPORT TO DONORS 2022

20. Pig Raising for 11 Households — H'rat Village, Buôn Ma Thuột - Ê Đê

$1,500 (25M VND)

Description

FoVO provided pairs of piglets to 11 disadvantaged Ê Đê Indigenous households associated with H'Rat village near Buôn Ma Thuột. Ten of the families lived in the village and one lived on a nearby coffee farm.

The piglets were purchased from the SPDC School for Disabled Children and the neighbouring La Salle Monastery school, both of which raised pigs as part of their activities. Sister Hương, who regularly visited H'Rat village, helped organise the project. The local village leader prepared the recipient list and the pigs were transported by truck to the village for distribution.

Observation

Each household received two piglets to raise. The project therefore involved both the religious institutions that raised and supplied the pigs and the Indigenous households that received them.





This nun hand raises the pigs and is attached to them; and the pigs being unloaded from a truck.





A pig house inspection and a family leaving the distribution on motorbike.

REPORT TO DONORS 2022

21. Classroom Support — Vi Nhân Disabled Children's School, Buôn Ma Thuột

$600 (10M VND)

Description

Vi Nhân Disabled Children's School in Buôn Ma Thuột was operated by the Sisters of St Paul de Chartres (SPDC) and provided free education and accommodation for Indigenous children with disabilities.

FoVO provided 10 million VND for educational aids for children with autism. The Project Summary also records the purchase of a printer as part of the classroom assistance.

Observation

The assistance was directed to an existing specialist classroom. The educational aids were intended for everyday teaching rather than as a separate FoVO program.



Boy with arithmetic learning game

REPORT TO DONORS 2022

22. Food and Household Supplies — Vân Kiều Village, Quảng Trị

$1,510 (25M VND)

Description

FoVO worked with a group of university students from Huế to assist 50 Vân Kiều (Bru) Indigenous households in a remote mountain village in Quảng Trị Province.

The students raised funds and visited the households. Each family received 20 kg of sticky rice, 30 packets of noodles, one litre of fish sauce, one kilogram of sugar, a winter blanket and a mosquito net. The students also organised games and activities for the children.

Observation

The student group was involved in more than distributing supplies. They visited individual households and organised activities with the children, providing FoVO with photographs and a record of the visit.





Student group carry supplies to the village and then home visits.



Children gather for games and activities.

REPORT TO DONORS 2022

23. Water Supply Well — Vân Kiều Village, Quảng Trị

$1,080 (18M VND)

Description

Working with the same Huế university student group, FoVO funded a water supply for the Vân Kiều village.

The project involved an underground bore and pump bringing water to the surface, with an above-ground stainless-steel tank where villagers could fill containers to carry water back to their homes.

The bore contractor undertook to drill sufficiently deep to obtain what was described locally as “sweet” water. One of the students returned to the village to photographically record completion.

Observation

Unlike the household supplies, the well was intended as shared village infrastructure. Water would be collected from the central tank rather than piped to individual houses.



Old meets new: indigenous house next to a road construction bulldozer and elec windmill.



People in the village getting water from the well.

REPORT TO DONORS 2022

24. Support for Single Mothers' Shelter — Bình Dương

$900 (15M VND)

Description

FoVO provided practical household supplies to Mai Am Tinh Me, a shelter for single mothers and babies in Bình Dương operated by the Sisters of Charity of Calcutta. FoVO had visited the shelter over several years, with former Huế University English student Ngọc acting as the local contact.

A FoVO volunteer accompanied the nuns to the local market, where the nuns selected items needed by the shelter. These included cooking pots and utensils, blenders, brooms, mops and other cleaning equipment, watering cans, vacuum flasks, mosquito rackets, clothing and underwear, sanitary products and basic children's medicines.

Observation

The unusually detailed shopping list records the ordinary running needs of a residential shelter. The purchases were selected by the nuns responsible for its day-to-day operation rather than from a predetermined FoVO list.



Four boys left by their single mothers at the orphanage.



REPORT TO DONORS 2022

25. Support for Thiên Ân Children's Shelter — Cần Thơ

$600 (10M VND)

Description

FoVO provided food and household supplies to Thiên Ân Children's Shelter in Cần Thơ, which FoVO had been visiting for several years. The shelter was run by two lay nuns, Yến and Quế, with some support from French-Vietnamese donors. The 2022 report described its emphasis as providing education and a safe social environment for the children.

The FoVO volunteer group was led by Anh Thu, a third-year student at Cần Thơ University. The supplies included soy sauce, instant noodles, sugar, milk, pasta, green beans, pepper, seasoning, cooking oil and fish sauce, together with floor cleaner, laundry powder, toothpaste and toothbrushes.

Observation

This was routine support for an established shelter rather than a new activity or capital project. The assistance consisted mainly of everyday food, cleaning and hygiene supplies.



Handover/evidence photograph

REPORT TO DONORS 2022

Stories from the Year

Quảng Nam – Đại Lộc Village, Chickens + Food by Local Volunteers

Our first project in Central Vietnam was a simple chicken-raising project for disadvantaged households in a village.

I love chicken raising as an activity to help people:

- Vietnamese traditional customs include chicken raising. They know how to raise chickens.
- The project requires people to become involved and contribute work.
- Chicken raising gives people an occupation.
- It also improves household income and nutrition.

After arriving in Đà Nẵng, I met the local volunteers from Đại Lộc who organised the project. The photographs show the chickens arriving by motorbike, their distribution to families, and elderly and sick people collecting food provisions.



Chickens delivered by motorbike





Chickens being distributed to disadvantaged families. Sick and elderly arrive to collect food provisions.

DANANG – SPDC DISABLED CHILDREN'S SCHOOL & NURSING HOME

Danang is mainly Buddhist. But during the French occupation the Sisters of St Paul De Chartres (SPDC) were established in the rural outskirts. As the city grew and land became very valuable, local government tried to take the land. But the SPDC, being well-connected and muscular Christians, opposed it. Finally, the city planners agreed to use some of the resumed land for a public park, reserving one corner for a Mary shrine. This has become a sacred site, believed for many miracles. It is popular with the Christian minority in Danang as a place of prayer.



Like the Buddhist temples and other Christian monasteries, the SPDC use their income sources to cross-fund their charities, managing finances in the typically opaque Vietnamese way. They run a Montessori kindergarten on a business model. This cross-funds their Disabled Children's School and nursing home.

Through these impressive women, some of whom speak both French and English, I met several seminary students. They were preparing for a mission to serve as parish priests in New Zealand. They helped to carry out this project.

Disabled Children's School

This needed educational aids for autistic and deaf children. The school is staffed by nuns trained in teaching children with disabilities. Sometimes an overseas-trained teacher volunteers. A staff member went with us to an educational supply shop to select educational play items for the classrooms. We provided 9M = $545 funding for these items.



The well-appointed SPDC main campus has been built in the French style.



Classroom in the Disabled Children's School.



Children's birthday display board in the deaf children's classroom. There are 16 deaf children.



Time and countries of the world display in the deaf children's classroom.



Teacher demonstrates teaching aids



Display board with student numbers in the SPDC schools:
Kindergarten: 61 intellectually disabled, 20 movement disabled, 29 other disabilities. Primary school: 75 intellectually disabled, 26 physically disabled, 52 other disabilities. Job training (16 yrs +): 30.



Partially sighted, deaf girl concentrating on her colouring in.



Classroom student photo board with "Today, how do I feel?" sign.



Mobility therapy area.



In class with teacher.



Boy pinning coloured beads.



Intellectually disabled children with carers.



Prosthetic limbs for physically disabled children to practice walking.



Wheelchairs lining walls of a passage.



Necklace threading toy.

Elderly Women's Shelter

This is another of activity run by the SPDC. It is on an older and less renovated campus. The shelter houses 30 women in dormitories around a beautiful courtyard garden. The nuns identified a need for commodes (we provided 5).

The Commode Conference

It wasn't simple. First, I was sent with a photo of a commode to a supply shop. They could not match the product in the photo. So, I purchased 2 designs and had them delivered by the supplier to the nursing home.

On arrival, I found a group of nuns gathered in conference around a commode. It was being assembled by the supplier. The nuns were discussing the design attributes of the commode. One model was prone to rust (chromed steel frame). The other model was rust free (aluminium frame) but it was not height adjustable. Upholstery was also discussed. The nuns rejected both designs.

After much deliberation, I suggested the commodes be returned to the supplier. Also, that one nun (the one who works directly with the carers) go to the shop and choose a commode. This nun also asked for colostomy bags. So, the problem was solved. The manager (who did not need to know details about commodes and colostomy bags) was satisfied. The next day the items were delivered to the nursing home.



Conference over design attributes of a commode.



Sister-in-charge shows a typical dormitory.



With residents and students on the courtyard verandah.



Resident catching up by video call in the courtyard.

Profile of Sister Kính



Sister Kính is one of the original nuns at the Holy Cross convent in Phát Diệm and second -in-charge of 400 sisters. She has a good heart and visits disadvantaged people in the surrounding area. Most are Buddhists.

She agreed to carry out a food relief and chicken raising project in the Phát Diệm area.

Sister Kính is always smiling. But when she happily raced off on her motorbike to lead me to her village, I lost her in about 5 minutes. Only a phone call brought her back. She was so distracted, I wondered whether she was trying to get through her daily rosary chant while riding. My suspicion was confirmed when she took off again and crashed into a motorbike on a corner. Shaken and disappointed with the damage on her new shoes, she jumped back on and continued the journey. When she returned to the convent, she got no sympathy. The sisters say Sister Kính rides too fast and needs to slow down.

Phát Diệm is a small town, famous for the stone Cathedral that is the core of a Christian temple complex. To the north is the bishop's house with a large plaza. To the south is the historic La Salle French monastery. West is the seminary. Further south is the Holy Cross Convent with 400 sisters. The only clash is a tall tower with speakers for Communist Party propaganda. This competes with the church gong.

So Phát Diệm has all the infrastructure of a large Christian centre. But most of the Christians have left as refugees for the south, escaping persecution. The remnant Christian population is about a thousand, a quarter of the population in Christian villages further south. Most of the population are Buddhist settlers from other areas.

Sister Kính was born in 1968 at the start of the war. She had a tough childhood on the edge of starvation in a nearby village. She was born into a big family with 7 brothers and sisters. As children they had no rice. When mother gave birth to Kính's little sister, mother became seriously ill and the children became the carers. Then the father died.

By 1974, farms were confiscated and collectivised by the Communists. The result was starvation. After cutting rice, people hid some rice in the fields and returned at night to steal it for their families.

One of Sister Kính's earliest memories was from this time when at the age of 6 she played the role of Mary in the May Day ceremony during the rice harvest. This was a performance in which flowers were brought to Mother

Mary. After this, she succeeded in getting some rice by begging. She would sing the Mary song for people and they would give her some rice.

Sister Kính's mother walked with her when she was 12 years old to a village 5km away, to show her the road and how to buy harvested rice to take home for threshing. After that, she would go by herself to the village, buy the rice and cart 15 or 20kg on her head back home. She would then thresh all the rice by grinding it in a large stone pestle to sell on the street. The leftover rice powder was then boiled up into a soup for the family.

Mostly, the family ate rice mixed with cassava or sweet potato. If a fistful of fish was caught in the hand net, this was mixed with a lot of salt to flavour the rice. One egg with a lot of salt would flavour the rice for all the family to eat. The family did not eat meat at this time.

After the war around the 1980s the food and clothing fabric coupon system was operating and Chinese rice was given to the ordinary people. The rice was often not fresh and had insects in it. In the convent only the old women were given this rice allowance by government officials.

Sister Kính's older brothers and sisters all stopped school to take turns to look after their mother and youngest sister.

Sister Kính stopped school at the age of 13 in middle school and followed the exodus of people leaving her home village to work in the Nari Thái Nguyên gold mines, 60 km from Hà Nội. She worked in the mines for three years and sent money back to support her mother. At the age of 16 she returned home.

Every time a new mine starts up, whole villages empty out as people join the rush to make their fortune. The sex industry follows the short mining booms and some of the men return to their villages infected with HIV. This has happened in Sister Kính's home village as well.

Sister Kính then joined 18 local girls who tried to move into the convent with the 30 elderly sisters in the convent at Phát Diệm. But the Communists were closing the convents. This period was chạy giặc, of people escaping the Communists to move south. Old women were allowed to stay but young entrants were not permitted by the Communists. The theory was that after the old women died the convents would all close. At night the officials raided the convent to expel any young women. All the girls escaped out into the fields or hid in a dugout under the convent floor.

Every girl was given a new name by the nuns. When the Communist officials questioned people in the village about any of the nuns, the villagers would not recognise the name. That was how Lan lost her name and became known as Kính in the convent.

But Communist persecution of Christian communities had been even more severe in the 1945 to 1954 period. Communists came to kill the men and then raped all the women. There are many ghosts at the convent from that terrible period.

At Phát Diệm the La Salle monks were expelled to the south and their school was confiscated to be turned into a government school. Seminaries were disbanded. This story was repeated all over Vietnam. Some convents and seminaries moved south.

When Sister Kính came to the convent there was not enough food to eat. So, the young girls wove sleeping mats to sell on the street. Other sisters went out to work in the fields to get some food.

Even though Communist persecution continued to around the year 2000, Sister Kính joined the convent at the age of 18 and was part of the first class of young women to be accepted there. They were all from farming families and did not go to school.

After the war there was not enough clothing. You could see a lot of patches on people's clothing. Some nuns had only one sandal. So, they used to walk to the church with the sandal tucked under an arm. Then they wore the sandal in church and returned to the convent barefoot.

In 1993 at the age of 25, Sister Kính and all the other women that were in the same class at the convent went back to finish high school.

Later Sister Kính was sent to train as a kindergarten teacher. The Holy Cross sisters are in every diocese in Vietnam. Their main work is to help in the parishes with housekeeping for the priests, religion teaching and choir training. Kindergartens are the main businesses of the nuns across Vietnam. But they also run farms, convent pharmacies, medical centres, craft industries, souvenir shops, orphanages and shelters. In fact, anything that helps sustain them.

In 2013 Sister Kính was sent to mission at Hòa Bình (near Hà Nội). Most of the community were Vietnamese but there were also indigenous Mường people.



The Phát Diệm Christian temple complex at twilight.

Central Highlands

The Ride to Kontum

The Central Highlands is the mountain region between Saigon and Danang. It has five provinces (Kon Tum, Gia Lai, Dak Lak, Dak Nong and Lam Dong). This trip I visited villages in three of these provinces in a 1,500km ride. After a fall/surgery in Belconnen, I tried to preserve the knees and back by leaving the very hardy, but aging, Yamaha Taurus scooter which has done over 50,000km. Instead, I took the Suzuki GZ 150 mini-cruiser (soft riding on roads; but not made for dirt tracks).

The Danang to Kontum ride is across two mountain passes. Someone in the road construction team left out the concrete reinforcing. So, there are deep cracks. Slabs of concrete occasionally bounce under the wheels of passing trucks.

Kontum is unique in using the local Ba Na language as a common language for its 29 highland tribes.

Kontum Children's Shelter No 2 (ba Na People)

Kontum is unusual in Vietnam because it has a monastic order of Indigenous nuns who work in Indigenous communities. Some of the approximately 200 nuns in the province run six live-in children's shelters. Others live in small households in highland villages, where they house and teach children and provide medical help. The order also provides opportunities for Indigenous women to gain education and security through religious life.

Children in the city shelters come from different family circumstances. A parent may have died or left, or a large family may send a child to live with the nuns to reduce pressure on the household.

At Kontum Children's Shelter No. 2, Vinh Sơn 2, the buildings were a little run down, but the five nuns and 14 staff looking after 165 children appeared relaxed and highly organised. The children were alert, enthusiastic and busy with everyday chores — cooking, sweeping the yards, feeding younger children and doing their laundry.

Teaching and organising so many children is a high-energy occupation. Sister Nguyệt, second -in-charge and only 33 years old, took me through a detailed inspection. Her boss, aged 50, was away at management meetings.

Our project provided school materials, hygiene supplies, food and a Vietnamese-made solar hot-water system for the children's shower room. The photographs show much more of the everyday life of the shelter.



Teenagers at the shelter on kitchen roster



Cooking lunch



Large free range chicken pen



Some of our clients



The little kids having a mid-morning snack.



Young teenagers doing their laundry.



The children helping with our project



The children helping with our project.





Masked up for kindergarten

Breakfast before school (with enthusiasm)



Supervised meal for the little ones



Sunday volleyball organised by a teacher



Little boys table at breakfast



Sister Nguyet, a local Ba Na



After school tutoring room



Entry sign

Ngoc Reo Village Student Homestay (xơ Đăng People)

The sisters then directed me to Ngoc Reo village, Dak Ha. The village is only 15km from Kontum city. But to reach the village, a mountain pass has to be crossed and this makes the village quite remote. There, three nuns run a homestay for 40 indigenous students whose families work in coffee farms. These farms are too far from schools. So, the children live in a group under the care of the nuns. I inspected the place and looked at a project for next year, to give each child an individual storage unit for their personal belongings.

We also funded food parcels for 30 disadvantaged households, mainly single women who took their babies and children to work with them on the coffee farms.



Half of the kids at the home. The other half were at school as education is run in two daily shifts





Women arrive to collect our project





Pleiku History

Going south, the main road is a smooth ride into Pleiku, the capital of Gia Lai Province. The province is named after its largest highland tribe, the J'rai. Like the other Central Highland provinces, the capital city is full of

ethnic Vietnamese, running businesses and government. The local indigenous people labour on farms, sometimes living in shacks on these farms. They are rarely seen in town.

As an aside, Pleiku was significant in Vietnam War history. The 1965 VC attack on Pleiku airbase killed some US servicemen. The USA retaliated by escalating the conflict and bombing the DMZ (border area). The historical lesson should have been clear: Don't f**k with the US, or you'll get smacked. In a local catastrophe ten years later, the VC attacked again. People tried to escape the conflict, but up to 100,000 were stranded or killed as they tried to escape.

This trip was in April. So, every main village street had government sponsored flags and banners to mark "Victory Day" public holiday. This celebrates the capture of Saigon and shameful treatment of its people. Businesses and properties were grabbed by VC officers. Local men were executed or sent to "re-education" camps. "National Victory Day" is known by overseas Vietnamese as "National Day of Hate". Even in 2022, just mentioning the ruling party in a conversation in a negative way can land a person in gaol for three or four years.

In two of the provinces I visited, Kontum (Ba Na people) and Dak Lak (Ê Đê people), the dominant indigenous group is acculturated, learning to grow rice and speak Vietnamese. This is normal village life. But around Pleiku I visited lepers living on large coffee farms in dire poverty.



Pleiku city at sunset



Leper farm labourers meet us at a village

La Salle Indigenous School

The La Salle monastery runs a free primary school, solely for indigenous children. Following the Vietnam War, La Salle monastery schools and properties were confiscated by the State. Now, the old generation of French trained monks are gone. Young Vietnamese men join the monastery and find patrons to lease land to the school. This way, the monks obtain government registration for their school. It is maintained entirely from donations.

One residential block houses around 40 students from remote farms. They board during the week and return home on weekends.

Brother Thuong speaks good internet-taught English. He showed me the small library which was undergoing renovations. We funded 100 second-hand books, which were half of the RRP (2M). Thuong then selected 500 educational booklets and books from a large educational bookshop (10M). Our library book project totalled $720.





Entrance murals depicting J'rai customs





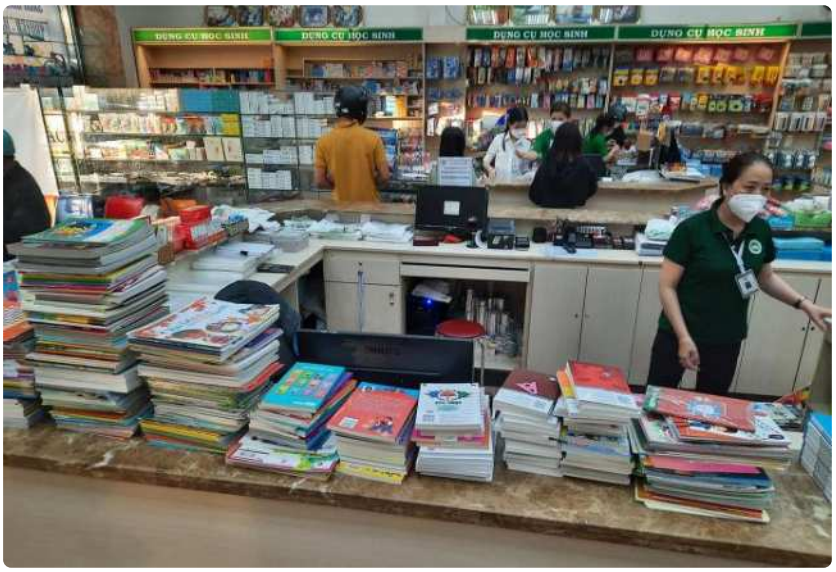
Monument to the famous Vietnamese writer and educator, Truong Vinh Ky



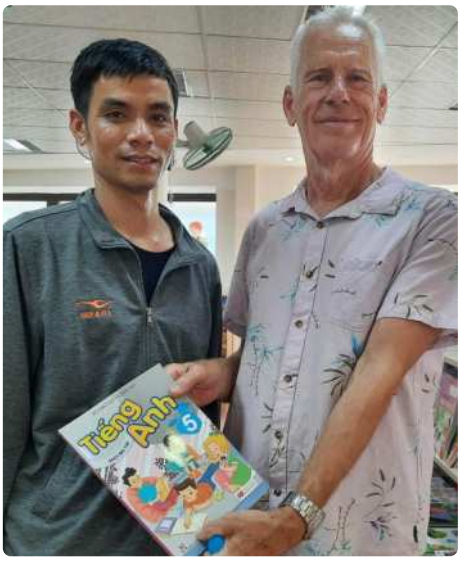
School grounds



Primary library undergoing renovation



Our library book purchase



With Brother Thuong at the bookstore

Dr Trong's Leprosy Outreach

At Pleiku I met Dr Trong and his volunteer team. Dr Trong works at Gia Lai General Hospital emergency department. But on his days off, he and his volunteers run an outreach. They travel to 7 small remote villages, treating lepers and carrying out medical checks for villagers. In total the group regularly treats 100 lepers. Officially, Vietnam is free of leprosy. The WHO gives free leprosy meds, but governments don't distribute them in remote areas.

The team members are:

- Dr Trong, born into a big family of 12 siblings. First career was a musician. He still has some of the muso character, appearing laid back when he chats with people. He has done this volunteering for 30 years. He does the patient consults.
- Dr Linh, a young hospital doctor whose day job is in gastroscopy.
- Oanh, whose day job is book keeping for a building company. For 6 years she has assisted Dr Trong, dispensing medicines and carrying out blood pressure checks.
- Nam, a monk who cleans and dresses people's wounds. He has been doing this for a year.
- Công, J'rai interpreter and male nurse.

Travelling in a van on weekends, the team chat, joke, doze off and stop at the roadside for a quick meal and coffee. But the minute they arrive at a village, they all know their jobs. Local people are waiting for the monthly visit. Each person in the team quietly swings into action. Oanh begins unpacking the meds. Dr Trong starts his consults. Nam sets up a bench for wound dressing. The infected and dead skin on lepers' feet needs to be removed, revealing raw flesh underneath. This is then cleaned and dressed. It's all done without any bureaucracy or fuss, and puts the villagers at ease. Then the team quickly pack up and go to the next village on their regular circuit.





Local children come out to see the arrival of Dr Trong's van at the village

L to R: Brother Nam (wound dressings); Công (nurse and J'rai interp); Dr Linh; Dr Trong; Oanh (medicine dispensing and blood pressure checks.





The team at work

OUR PROJECT: FOOD & MEDICINES

Each of the 7 villages in this project is very small. Each village has around 10 to 20 related households. In total there are around 100 lepers across these villages. We funded food parcels for 100 lepers for 30M ($1,800). Each parcel had the usual rice bag, oil, fish sauce, seasoning powder and noodle packets. The food was purchased by Dr Trong's wife who also sorted it into bags.

We also funded about 3 months' supply of medicines. These were the usual suite of paracetamol, multivitamins, antibiotic (Cephalexin), antihistamine, indigestion tablets and the like. No designer drugs here. All these medicines are available locally for a low cost, so Oanh was able to buy a good supply with our budget of 12M ($720). Medicines were being dispensed with care and it appeared to us that there should be enough for about 3 months. Thank you Rasa for your contribution to this.



Our food project being stacked at a village



Some of the medicines we funded





Lepers collection food parcels.

A relative pushes a leper's wheelchair. Our food project is in her traditional Central Highlands woven grass back pack.

Lan 2 Village

The village is inhabited by K'rai people and has 16 households with lepers. There is no visible government support. Franciscan monks built the houses, probably 15 years ago. Houses are basic but usable huts. The Baptists arrived in the last year or so and built a little tin church/meeting house. The Franciscans also built the 4m x 4m treatment room in which Dr Trong's team sets up.



Woman with no fingers takes our rice and food bag back home along the village main street



Typical house exterior



Feet wounds being treated



Leper house interior: prosthetic legs on bed; Uncle Ho next to the Virgin Mary and Christ.





Lang Tang Village

The village has 20 lepers. There were no medical consults, but we met the villagers and dropped off the food parcels.









Jri Village

The village has Ba Na and J'rai people. It has 22 lepers and all of them are attached to, and live on a coffee farm where they work as labourers. The village "leader" (nominated by local government) is B'Lak (pronounced "black").









Typical house, jack fruit and banana tree plantings. Farm labourer's motorbike, hoe and woven grass back pack

Pa Boong Village

The village has 14 lepers, and again, we just greeted people briefly and dropped off food parcels. This included food parcels for transfer to Vong Chep village. This has 30 lepers and is even more remote.







Villagers stand with Dr Trong's volunteers for a photo

Buon Me Thuot, Dak Lak Province

I left the Ba Na-speaking area of Kontum and the J'rai-speaking area of Pleiku to ride south into the Ê Đê language area of Đắk Lắk.



Supporting Education by Buying Piglets

There, the St Paul De Chartres (SPDC) convent had raised 7 piglets. This was for our project to provide disadvantaged families in one local Ê Đê indigenous village. The aims were to give people an occupation of raising the local variety of mountain pig, with an opportunity to improve nutrition and improve household income.

The SPDC Vi Nhan Disabled Children's School charges some fees to cover costs. But it provides free care and education for children at risk and to indigenous disabled children. There are 12 nuns and a large team of employed teachers. There are 40 disabled children who board and another 200 disabled children who attend the day school.

The convent neighbour is the La Salle monastery who run a school for 185 boys. The monastery had raised 15 piglets for our project. The monastery has 5 monks and over 10 staff to teach the boys. Like its neighbour, the La Salle boys school uses fees from the wealthier families to provide free education to boys from poor families.

We provided a little bit of support to both schools by buying their pigs. The dark-coloured mountain pigs were considered hardier, more disease-resistant and easier to raise than the factory-farmed white pig.



This nun hand raises the pigs like her babies. They are very tame.



Children at the SPDC Vi Nhan Disabled Children's School have a beautiful garden setting.

H'rat Village, Bmt - Ê Đê People

Sister Loan, manager of the SPDC convent. is in charge of everything there. She has shown quite a bit of flexibility in providing her senior sisters with some lifestyle choice. Loan permits Sister Hương to live at her parents' home to care for her aging parents. Loan also has given Sister Hương the mission to carry out a monthly pastoral visit to a local indigenous village. This is because Sister Hương lived in Kontum and became familiar with the life and customs of indigenous villages.

Our project, to provide 11 disadvantaged households with a pair of piglets each, is a good reinforcement of Sister Hương's mission to improve the life of the people of H'Rat village. Actually, 10 families live in the village and the 11 thfamily lives on a coffee farm.

The local village leader (nominated by local government) was contacted to prepare a household list and get the people ready. Our convoy of 2 motorcycles was followed by a truck carrying pigs and an 800cc Suzuki van crammed with half a dozen nuns. Evidently the nuns wanted an outing to experience the mission.

Arriving, we briefly met the village leader who had the list and his wife, who manned the pig distribution at the truck. Sister Loan lined the recipients up and like principal at speech night, gave the locals a pep talk. This was about how the piglets were being funded. But if the piglets died (got sick or went into the cooking pot), then there would be more more pigs next year. But if the pigs were big and healthy, then Peter would come back from Uc (Australia) with more pigs for the people.

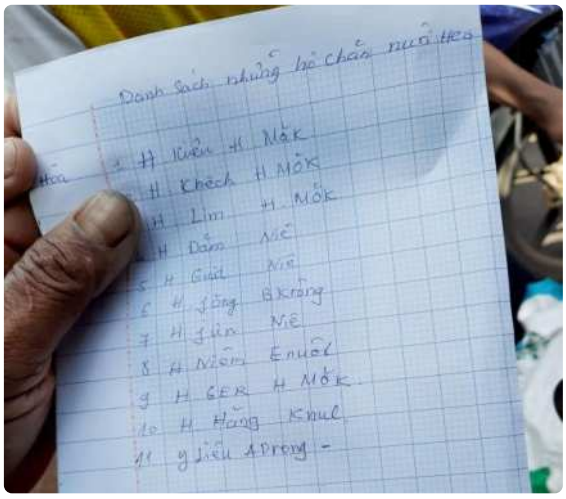
I am sure the locals did not much care whether Peter came from Uc (Australia), the Soviet Union or the moon. But they listened politely.

That was the last of the organised atmosphere. Because when the pigs began to be grabbed by the men for transfer into bags brought by the people, all hell broke loose. Piglets ran around in the truck, squealing loudly and trying to jump out or evade capture. People crowded round the truck so they would not miss out. Eventually, however, all the piglets were caught and despite trying to bite their handlers and everyone else, got transferred into bags and loaded onto motorcycles. One bag had a hole cut for the pig's snout to stick out to help it breathe. Another man decided to start burning ventilation holes into his bag with his cigarette after putting 2 piglets into it. Then they all took off on old motorcycles, rattling over the dirt roads, holding bags containing pairs of piglets.

Once the confusion settled, our group were invited to visit the piglets in their new homes. I asked to see two houses. The first house had a 20-year-old woman, married last year with one child. Her glamorous wedding photo posters on the wall provided a stark contrast to the village setting. This was a basic village home and I took photos of the interior, exterior, yard and piglet pen.

The second home was that of a young farm labourer with his wife and 4 children. They all work on a pepper farm during the day and shell cashew nuts at night for some extra income. This project seemed a success. With the nuns piling back into their van, I left to meet them at the convent.















Cigarette burn vent holes in piglet bag



Sisters piling into their incredibly useful van



Rice harvest drying out on concreted yard



Kitchen pots at side of the house



Glamorous wedding photos



House interior



Piglets getting used to their new home



Animal pen in a typical village house yard





Piglets are kept in the "tiger cage" in the yard

Farm labourer's home with welcome mat and green tea offered for the guests. Cashew nuts for shelling in the evening are on the floor.

Buon Me Thuot Spdc Disabled Childrens School – Autistic Learning

Sister Lien, who supervises the class of autistic children, asked for a black and white laser printer so she could print out assignment sheets in the classroom (4).

There is a problem in Vietnam with people wanting the latest complex technology, and then abusing the equipment until it needs to be thrown out into the street. They then ask for a replacement.

So, this time it was suggested to the good sister that when (not "if") the machine breaks down, it should be sent out to be repaired, rather than ask for another one.

I also agreed to fund 6M to pay for some learning materials for the autistic children. So, this project total was 10M or $600.

Below are examples of learning materials I saw at the SPDC sister school for disabled children in Danang.



Teacher helping a boy to sort images of garbage into recycling, landfill and green waste bins.



Activities in classroom.



Autistic girl practicing colour sorting.



Autistic boy matching beads with numbers. Boy pinning coloured beads.

Quang Tri – Bru-vân Kiều Indigenous Village by Hue Uni Student Group.

In the past I did a yearly visit to this remote village of Bru-Vân Kiều people indigenous people. Their livelihood is slash and burn agriculture and reforestation. I plan to return during a better growing season with a thousand nitrogen-fixing cay tram tree seedlings (Queensland wattle).

Food + Blankets + Mosquito Nets for 50 Families

We had a large university student group who fundraised for this project and visited 50 households in a mountain village, delivering food, winter blankets and mosquito nets.

As part of this student engagement, the students visited each household, organised children's games and activities, sent photos and had a great time escaping from their studies for a day trip.

Water Supply Well

With our uni student volunteers we scoped a simple water supply project for the village.

Construction will be an underground bore and pump to bring water to the surface. An above-ground stainless steel tank will hold the water. People from the village come to fill up containers to bring water back home.

The water bore contractor provided a guarantee that the bore would be deep enough for the water to be "sweet".

The students undertook to send one of their group to return to the village to monitor and record the work.



Home visit



Student group carry supplies to the village.



Children gather for games and activities.