FoVO

Friends of Vietnam Orphanages Inc.

Helping disadvantaged communities in Vietnam

Report to Donors

2024 Financial Year

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

REPORT TO DONORS 2024

Our Donors

On behalf of the Friends of Vietnam Orphanages Inc (FoVO) Board, thank you to everyone whose donations helped us support disadvantaged people and communities in Vietnam during the year.

Monthly Donors

We are particularly grateful to the family and friends who made monthly contributions:
Clive, Michael & Adrienne, Geoff & Rachelle, Franziska, Hayden & Yến, Helen & David, Leo, Patrick H., and Peter & Margaret.

Other Donors

We also greatly appreciate the friends, groups and organisations who made donations during the year: Amanda, Dennis, Karna, Julie & Jan, Paul & Suzette, the Aranda Men's Group, Anna & Ashley, Kim Huỳnh, Beyond Bank through its Community Reward Scheme, and others. Every contribution, large or small, helped make these projects possible.

Board, Volunteers and Project Partners

Our Board members — Julie, Dennis, Geoff and Clive — provided practical help, advice and encouragement throughout the year.

In Australia, Loan and Tiệp continued to provide advice on Vietnamese culture and language.

In Vietnam, volunteer interpreters and local contacts, including Thi, Tam, Hiệp and Xoan, helped us visit communities, understand local circumstances and organise projects.

We also relied on a much wider network of local partners: village leaders, nuns, university students, volunteer groups, medical workers and others who knew the communities in which we were working. Their local knowledge and voluntary time allowed relatively small FoVO grants to achieve considerably more than the money alone could provide.

Rather than list everyone here, the people involved are introduced with the projects they helped carry out.

Our Approach

FoVO is a small charity with no paid staff. We try to keep our projects simple, direct and adapted to local circumstances.

Where possible, we visit communities ourselves and work through people who know them. We ask what is needed, look at what is already available locally and use local materials, labour and skills wherever practical. This can result in very small projects.

During 2024 we paid a village carpenter to repair and make furniture rather than replace it with plastic furniture. We supported university students who volunteered their summer holidays to tutor children living in a shelter. Before providing ducks to disadvantaged village households, the local community leader visited each

family to make sure they had suitable facilities and understood what would be required to raise them successfully.

Sometimes it also means changing our minds. During the year we withdrew from a proposed Mid-Autumn Festival project when it expanded into a much larger gift-giving exercise than originally discussed. We instead used the funds to provide food parcels for 110 disadvantaged households identified by local partners in Angleh Village.

We sometimes describe this as our “barefoot” approach to charity: small, direct and responsive to what we find on the ground. The projects in this report show how that approach worked in practice during the year.

During the 2024 financial year, FoVO received $18,945.84 in donations and spent $19,500 on projects in Vietnam. Most of the year's work was in the Central Highlands provinces of Kontum and Gia Lai, with other projects elsewhere in Vietnam.

“Every dollar donated directly to FoVO was used for assistance in Vietnam. No administration costs were deducted from donations.”

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

REPORT TO DONORS 2024

Project Summary

How Your $19,500 Was Spent

NO.	PROJECT	AUD	MILLION VND
1	Vinh Son 2 Summer Holiday Program — Kontum	**$1,720**	27.5
2	Medical Support for Shelters and Villages — Kontum and Gia Lai	**$1,910**	31
3	Single Mothers' Shelter — Binh Duong	**$625**	10
4	School Supplies for Mông Children — Nghe An Province	**$1,035**	16.5
5	Pleiku Indigenous Boarding School — Bags, Desks and Chairs	**$1,035**	16.5
6	Furniture and Reading Rooms for Shelters and Village Schools — Kontum and Gia Lai	**$5,190**	81.5
7	Children's Bicycle Enclosure — Vinh Son 1 Shelter, Kontum	**$650**	12
8	Tutoring Support for Vinh Son Shelters — Kontum	**$1,250**	20
9	Duck Raising — Kon Jo'Dreh Village, Kontum	**$625**	10
10	Bicycles for High School Students — Vong Chep, Gia Lai	**$2,130**	34
11	Assistance to Thien An Shelter — Can Tho	**$1,250**	20
12	Food Parcels — Angleh Village, Gia Lai	**$2,065**	33
	TOTAL	**$19,500**	**312**

Amounts are rounded. Exchange rates varied, generally around 1.597 million VND = AUD $100.

Project 6 expenditure

The four furniture projects making up Project 6 were:

- 6.1 Ngoc Reo Shelter, Kontum — 21 million VND / $1,405
- 6.2 Vinh Son 1 Shelter, Kontum — 20.5 million VND / $1,285
- 6.3 Ngọc Leang Village School, Kontum — 20 million VND / $1,250
- 6.4 Kon Sơ Lăng Village Shelter, Gia Lai — 20 million VND / $1,250.

REPORT TO DONORS 2024

1. Vinh Son 2 Summer Holiday Program — Kontum

$1,720 (27.5M VND)

Description

Vinh Son 2 is a shelter for around 250 Indigenous children in Kontum Province. During the 2023 summer school holidays, FoVO supported a two-month volunteer program organised by students and staff from Hue University. Five university students and two staff members participated in two shifts, staying at the shelter and working with the children each day.

The volunteers provided tutoring in the mornings, afternoons and evenings. At the end of the program they organised a camp with discussions about social media, quizzes, drawing and cooking competitions, games, a communal lunch, and an evening campfire with music and dancing.

FoVO provided:

- 6 million VND for volunteer transport and school materials;
- 4.5 million VND for awards and prizes;
- 5 million VND for food used in the cooking activities; and
- 12 million VND for food delivered to nearby Vinh Son 4 shelter.

Total: 27.5 million VND (about $1,720).

Observation

The project provided more than school tutoring. The photographs show children cooking together, judging the results, participating in group activities and gathering around the campfire for music and traditional dancing.

The university students brought their own time and skills to the project. FoVO's relatively small contribution therefore supported two months of activities that would have cost considerably more if the work had been provided by paid staff.

The project also benefited nearby Vinh Son 4. Food purchased through the program was transported there by motorbike and small truck, extending the assistance beyond the children participating directly in the summer program.

Reflection

Small grants can achieve considerably more when they support people who are already willing to contribute their own time and skills.



Cooking competition



Winning entries in the cooking competition.



Cooking competition display and prize judging.



Our food supply purchase for nearby Vin Son 4 orphanage is delivered on a motorbike truck.



Fire dance marks the end of the summer holidays

REPORT TO DONORS 2024

2. Medical Support for Shelters and Villages — Kontum and Gia Lai

$1,910 (31M VND)

Description

FoVO continued to support the volunteer medical work of Dr Trong, a doctor from Pleiku, and Oanh, a pharmacist who assisted him.

At Vinh Son 4 shelter, about 10 kilometres outside Kontum, four nuns cared for around 130 Indigenous children. The shelter supplemented its income by raising chickens and pigs, while the children's families helped through work harvesting coffee and rubber. FoVO provided 10 million VND (about $625), estimated to cover about five months of medicines used during Dr Trong's regular medical visits.

Later in the year, FoVO provided a further 21 million VND (about $1,285) for medicines, fuel and meals for medical visits to Vinh Son 3 and Vinh Son 5 shelters, and to the remote communities of Vong Chep and Angleh in Gia Lai Province.

At the shelters, the medical team checked children for illnesses and injuries and dispensed medicines where required. At Vong Chep and Angleh, consultations were also provided for adults and elderly villagers.

Dr Trong's group separately visited remote communities affected by leprosy in Gia Lai Province. The 2024 photographs record people with missing fingers and prosthetic legs being examined and assisted, although this wider work was not funded solely by FoVO.

Dr Trong and Oanh, a pharmacist, travelled from Pleiku City to carry out medical checks at Vinh Son 3, which housed 75 children from toddlers to university-age students, and the newer Vinh Son 5, with 85 children. They made the two-hour journey on a public holiday. FoVO reimbursed the volunteers for medicines, fuel and meal costs.

The medical team also joined our visits to Vong Chep and Angleh villages, each about an hour from Pleiku City, allowing medical checks to be carried out alongside our other projects.

Observation

Sitting in on the medical checks at Vinh Son 5 gave us a good picture of how the small team worked.

One consultation went something like this:
“Is this boy Ba Na or J’rai?” Dr Trong asked. “J’rai,” said the nun, who was also interpreting.

Dr Trong then spoke to the boy in J’rai and asked where it hurt. The boy explained that he had fallen and knocked some of his front teeth. “Are they very loose? See if you can wiggle them with your fingers.”

The boy tried. They were not too loose.

Dr Trong asked Oanh to give him some pain relief and explain in J’rai how to take it.

The consultations proceeded quickly, with kindness and good humour. Children came with the ordinary range of complaints we encountered in the shelters — skin injuries, sprains, chest infections, headaches and other minor illnesses.

At Angleh, elderly villagers also lined up for medical checks. A J'rai speaker interpreted, a volunteer recorded patients and medicines, Dr Trong carried out the assessments and Oanh dispensed the medicines.

Reflection

This was a modest project built around people who were already volunteering their skills.

FoVO did not establish or operate a medical service. We paid for medicines and the relatively small travel costs that enabled Dr Trong, Oanh and the other volunteers to take their existing skills to shelters and villages some distance from Pleiku.

Language was an important part of the service. The consultations depended not only on medical knowledge but also on people who could communicate with patients in J'rai and other local languages.

Cost of medical checks: 21 million VND (about $1,285).



Setting up the clinic: Oanh and Thi unpack the medicines while one of the children brings green tea and fruit for the visitors. Hospitality as well as medical work.



Children waiting: Children with health complaints wait for their turn while the medical table is set up. One of the older girls helps keep the younger children in order. The stick is a mark of her authority.



The medical team at work: Dr Trong carries out assessments while a J'rai woman interprets, a volunteer records patients and medicines, and Oanh dispenses the medicines.



A child impressed with the special attention.



Angleh: Elderly villagers at Angleh wait for medical checks.



“Say aaah!” says Nguyet, an indigenous nun aged 35, who runs Vinh Son 2 orphanage



Oanh dispensing medicines while a student writes and interprets the doctor’s instructions on paper



Thi checking blood pressure. J’rai people labouring in coffee plantations are Dr Trong’s regular clients.



Dr Trong's volunteer group also provided medical assistance in remote communities affected by leprosy in Gia Lai Province. This work extended beyond the projects funded by FoVO.



Haircuts from our university student volunteers help the kids reduce lice and boost their self-esteem.

REPORT TO DONORS 2024

3. Single Mothers' Shelter — Binh Duong

$625 (10M VND)

Description

FoVO provided 10 million VND (about $625) to assist a shelter for single mothers and children in Binh Duong Province, about 30 kilometres north of Ho Chi Minh City.

The shelter was operated by the Sisters of Charity of Calcutta in an industrial area with a large population of factory workers. At the time of the project, about half a dozen single mothers and more than 100 children were living there.

FoVO worked through Ngoc, our local contact. The shelter identified what was needed and Ngoc purchased the supplies and delivered them directly.

Observation
This was a project that did not require FoVO to travel to the shelter or devise a solution ourselves.

The nuns knew the immediate needs of the women and children. Ngoc was close enough to discuss those needs, buy the required supplies locally and make sure they reached the shelter.

For a small organisation working across a large country, trusted local contacts allowed us to undertake useful projects in places we could not visit ourselves.

Reflection
Not every small project needs a field inspection.

Where FoVO had a reliable local partner who knew both the institution and the circumstances, our role could simply be to provide the funds and allow the people closest to the need to decide how best to use them.

This also kept the project simple: the shelter identified the need, Ngoc purchased the goods, and FoVO paid for them.

REPORT TO DONORS 2024

4. School Supplies for Mông Children — Nghe An Province

$1,035 (16.5M VND)

Description

FoVO contributed to a Vietnamese volunteer group's annual Tết project assisting Mông children in a remote highland community in Nghe An Province.

Our local contact was Hiệp, a businessman from Ha Tinh who participated with friends in a small informal charity group. Each year the group collected contributions and selected a disadvantaged community to visit around Tết.

For this project they chose a Mông village in the mountainous west of Nghe An, near the Laos border. The group's total project budget was about 60 million VND. FoVO contributed 16.5 million VND (about $1,035) towards sandals, warm jackets, school uniforms and books for 65 kindergarten and primary-school children.

Observation

FoVO provided only part of the money. The project depended on an existing group of Vietnamese friends who raised the balance, organised the purchases and made the journey to the village.

We encountered this kind of informal charity repeatedly in Vietnam. Friends, businesspeople or work colleagues would form a group, raise money through their own networks and social media, and make an annual visit to a disadvantaged community. The activity might culminate in a group photograph with the recipients and a banner recording the donors and occasion.

From FoVO's point of view, the important thing was that the network already existed. We did not need to establish another organisation or arrange the distribution ourselves. Our contribution increased what Hiệp's group was able to provide.

Reflection

Working alongside an existing Vietnamese volunteer group allowed a relatively small FoVO grant to reach a remote community that we would have found difficult to assist independently.

It was another form of partnership: rather than FoVO running the project, we contributed to a locally organised project whose participants supplied the contacts, organisation, transport and much of the funding themselves.

REPORT TO DONORS 2024

5. Pleiku Indigenous Boarding School — Bags, Desks and Chairs

$1,035 (16.5M VND)

Description

FoVO provided school bags, bedding, desks and chairs for 50 Indigenous children attending a boarding school in Pleiku operated by the La Salle Brothers. The children came mainly from J'rai, Sê Đăng and Ba Na communities, including families working on coffee plantations in the surrounding region.

FoVO contributed 16.5 million VND (about $1,035) towards the supplies and furniture.

Observation

For children coming from outlying villages and plantation communities, attending school in Pleiku also meant needing the ordinary practical things required for boarding away from home.

The project therefore combined educational materials with basic boarding needs: school bags and desks for study, together with bedding and chairs.

Reflection

This was a simple project responding to needs identified by an existing school.

FoVO did not establish or operate the boarding program. Our contribution helped the La Salle Brothers provide some of the practical equipment needed for 50 children already in their care.





Children with the supplies

REPORT TO DONORS 2024

6. Furniture and Reading Rooms for Shelters and Village Schools

$5,190 (81.5M VND)

During the year FoVO funded four related projects providing or repairing furniture for children's shelters and village schools in Kontum and Gia Lai.

Rather than purchasing mass-produced furniture, the projects generally used local tradesmen, locally available materials and simple designs suited to each place. The four projects are described separately below.

REPORT TO DONORS 2024

6.1 Ngoc Reo Shelter — Kontum

$1,405 (21M VND)

Description

Ngoc Reo is a children's shelter in a village outside Kontum. Much of its existing furniture was old and worn, while additional shelving was needed for children's books.

A volunteer from Hue University first inspected the shelter and helped assess what could be repaired and what needed to be made.

Rather than replace the old furniture, materials were purchased and two local village tradesmen — a welder and a carpenter — were employed to repair and make furniture at the shelter.

They stayed at the nearby monastery while carrying out the work, with the nuns providing their meals.

Over about 16 days the work produced:

- 12 tables
- 5 bookshelves
- repairs to existing furniture.

The materials cost about $830, with the remainder of FoVO's 21 million VND (about $1,405) contribution paying for labour and associated costs.

Observation

The project changed considerably once the existing furniture was examined.

Some furniture that might otherwise have been discarded could be repaired. New furniture could also be made locally rather than transported from elsewhere.

The new tables were designed with steel frames and timber tops. Raising the timber above floor level was particularly useful because the shelter was subject to flooding. The bookshelves provided a more permanent place for the children's growing collection of books.

The project also put part of FoVO's money directly into the village economy by employing a local welder and carpenter.

Reflection

This small project demonstrated several advantages of making and repairing things locally.

Existing furniture was reused where practical. New furniture could be adapted to the conditions at the shelter. Transport was reduced, and local tradesmen were paid for their work.

The result was not simply furniture donated to a shelter, but useful furniture made and repaired with local labour.












Our welder Sy, making up a very solid frame for a bookshelf.



Children at Ngoc Reo using our completed steel framed desks. Before, during and after: existing furniture was repaired and new tables and bookshelves were made at the shelter by a village welder and a carpenter.

REPORT TO DONORS 2024

6.2 Vinh Son 1 Shelter — Kontum

$1,285 (20.5M VND)

Description

Vinh Son 1 is a long-established shelter in Kontum caring for about 170 Indigenous children, ranging from babies to young people completing their schooling.

The shelter was largely self-supporting in its daily operation. The children helped with cooking and cleaning, while the nuns operated a bakery, water-filtration system and farmland producing vegetables, livestock, rubber and coffee. Older children also helped sell bread produced by the bakery.

The nuns identified several practical furniture needs. FoVO funded local manufacture of:

- 3 mobile clothes-drying racks
- 6 cupboards
- 1 rack for school bags
- 15 school desks
- 1 large table for kneading bread dough

The furniture was made locally using steel and timber. Total cost was 20.5 million VND (about $1,285).

Observation

The items were ordinary rather than specialised, but each responded to the way the shelter actually operated.

The mobile drying racks provided more flexible space for the large amount of washing generated by 170 children. The bag rack and desks helped organise school life, while the large work table was made for the shelter's bakery rather than for a classroom.

As at Ngoc Reo, steel frames and timber surfaces produced strong furniture that could be repaired if necessary. Local manufacture also meant that dimensions and designs could be adapted to the available spaces rather than choosing from standard commercial furniture.

Reflection

The project reinforced what we had found at Ngoc Reo: simple furniture made locally could be more useful than donated or mass-produced furniture.

The important starting point was not deciding what FoVO wanted to give, but asking the people running the shelter what they actually needed. In this case the answer ranged from school desks to a bread-making table.

Photographs show:

- existing conditions or materials before fabrication;
- the local welder at work;
- completed desks/cupboards;

• the bakery table or drying racks in their intended setting.



Old plastic furniture in the primary kids' study room



Steel and timber arrive.



"Our man" welds the framing



Making a school desk.



These new cupboards are solid!



Trying out the cupboards.



Stacking the new bag rack.



Mobile clothes hang/dry rack



Completed cupboards.





Completed study room fitout for the primary school kids at Vin Son 1

REPORT TO DONORS 2024

6.3 Ngọc Leang Village School — Kontum

$1,250 (20M VND)

Description

Ngọc Leang is a remote village in Tu Mơ Rông District, about 50 kilometres from Kontum City. The village had a population of about 1,000 Sê Đăng people, whose livelihoods included farming, cattle raising and labouring on coffee plantations.

The village school was relatively new but had very little furniture. Three classrooms needed desks and storage for books and school materials.

FoVO funded the local manufacture of:

- 20 school desks
- 6 cabinets
- 2 bookshelves

Total cost was 20 million VND (about $1,250).

Observation

The school building itself was already there. The immediate problem was much simpler: the classrooms had insufficient furniture to make proper use of it.

As with the previous furniture projects, the desks, cabinets and bookshelves could be made locally to straightforward designs rather than purchased and transported from a distant supplier.

The photographs provide particularly clear evidence of the change, showing the sparsely furnished classrooms before the project and the completed furniture afterwards.

Reflection

A school building is of limited use if children do not have desks at which to work or somewhere to keep books and materials.

This was a modest project, but it filled a clearly identified gap in infrastructure that had already been provided.



Before: the new village school had very little classroom furniture.



After: locally made desks, cabinets and bookshelves supplied through the FoVO project

REPORT TO DONORS 2024

6.4 Kon Sơ Lăng Village Shelter — Gia Lai

$1,250 (20M VND)

Description

Kon Sơ Lăng was a small shelter in Chư Păh District, Gia Lai Province, about 55 kilometres from the city.

At the time of the project, the shelter accommodated about 20 Indigenous students aged from 9 to 17, including children from Sê Đăng, Ba Na and J'rai communities.

The shelter needed basic furniture for the children to study and store their belongings and school materials. FoVO funded:

- 20 desks
- 6 cabinets
- 2 bookshelves

The furniture was made locally and delivered to the shelter.

Total cost: 20 million VND (about $1,250).

Observation

This was a very small shelter compared with the large Vinh Son institutions. With only about 20 students, the project could provide a desk for every child as well as basic storage and bookshelves.

As with the other furniture projects, the need was straightforward and visible. The shelter existed and the children were already living and studying there; what was missing was some of the basic equipment needed to make the place work.

Reflection

Kon Sơ Lăng illustrates the value of returning to communities rather than treating each grant as an isolated project.

In 2024 our involvement was simply to provide furniture. Later visits would reveal other needs at the shelter and lead to further FoVO assistance.

A small first project can therefore also begin a relationship through which needs become better understood over time.



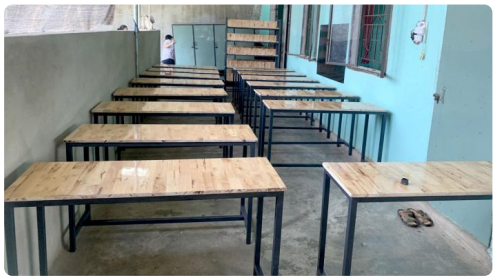


Delivery: remoteness of the shelter makes transport part of the project.









The furniture in its setting and children using it.

REPORT TO DONORS 2024

7. Children's Bicycle Enclosure — Vinh Son 1 Shelter, Kontum

$650 (12M VND)

Description

Vinh Son 1 had a covered area where the children's bicycles were stored. The Sister in charge asked FoVO to provide security fencing along the sides of the enclosure.

We initially budgeted about $1,000, but by employing a local village welder the work was completed for 12 million VND (about $650).

Observation

The obvious purpose of the fencing was to discourage bicycle theft. The Sister explained, however, that there was another practical reason: it would also discourage children from taking bicycles out without permission at night or congregating in the bicycle enclosure after hours.

Reflection

This was a very small project responding to a request from the people actually running the shelter. What appeared to us simply to be a bicycle-security problem also involved the everyday management of 170 children living together.

Using a local welder kept the project simple and brought the final cost well below our original allowance.



REPORT TO DONORS 2024

8. Tutoring Support for Vinh Son Shelters — Kontum

$1,250 (20M VND)

Description

Lan Anh, a Huế University graduate, had begun voluntarily tutoring Ba Na and J'rai children living in the Vinh Son shelters in Kontum. Her tutoring included numeracy and other school subjects.

When I met Lan Anh, I was impressed by her determination to continue the work despite having no regular income.

FoVO therefore offered her a living allowance of $200 per month, until she obtained other work, for a maximum of six months. The total project allocation was 20 million VND (about $1,250).

Observation

The project did not establish a new tutoring service or employ a teacher to deliver a program designed by FoVO. Lan Anh was already doing the work voluntarily.

Our contribution simply made it easier for her to continue for a period without an income.

Reflection

This was another example of FoVO supporting something useful that local people had already begun.

A relatively small living allowance could sustain considerably more work than FoVO could have purchased by trying to establish and administer its own tutoring program.

It also complemented the practical assistance we were providing to the shelters — desks, furniture and other facilities. Providing somewhere to study is useful; sometimes children also need someone with the time and ability to help them study.



REPORT TO DONORS 2024

9. Duck Raising — Kon Jo'Dreh Village, Kontum

$625 (10M VND)

Description

Kon Jo'Dreh is a Ba Na village near the Vinh Son 3 shelter in Kontum. When we discussed a possible poultry project, the village leader advised that local households had more experience raising ducks than chickens. The project was therefore designed around what villagers already knew how to raise.

Ten households were selected from about 140 households in the village. Selection was based on their likelihood of successfully raising the ducks and whether they had a garden and suitable housing for them. Each participating household received about 30 ducklings and a large bag of poultry feed. Including transport, the project cost 10 million VND (about $625).

Observation

Before the ducklings were distributed, we accompanied village leader Lok Lok around the participating households.

At each house he discussed where the ducklings would be kept and sought an undertaking that the family would properly house and look after them. The intention was not simply to distribute livestock, but to give the project a reasonable chance of succeeding.

Lok Lok also explained that if households successfully raised the ducks, FoVO might consider providing further assistance in the following year.

Reflection

This small project reinforced a lesson that became important in later FoVO livestock projects: start with what people already know how to do.

We did not decide in advance that disadvantaged families needed chickens and then find recipients. Local advice changed the project to ducks because villagers had greater experience raising them.

The household visits added another safeguard. Families were selected not simply because they were poor, but because they had the space, facilities and experience to give the ducklings a reasonable prospect of surviving and multiplying.

A small livelihood project works better when it builds on existing knowledge rather than trying to introduce a new one.



Lok Lok provided local mediation by explaining the project to each participating household



A household discussing how the ducklings would be housed





Existing duck housing suitability was checked

REPORT TO DONORS 2024

10. Bicycles for High School Students — Vong Chep, Gia Lai

$2,130 (34M VND)

Description

Vong Chep is a remote valley community in Gia Lai Province, more than an hour's drive from the city.

FoVO provided bicycles to all 20 students from the two connected villages in the valley who were attending secondary school. The bicycles were intended to make travelling to school easier and to encourage the children to continue their education.

The bicycles were transported to Vong Chep by truck.

Our friend Thuy, who ran her own small charity independently of FoVO, used the same transport opportunity to bring food parcels for 150 village households. Each parcel contained rice, cooking oil, fish sauce, sugar, salt, dried fish and dried shrimp.

FoVO's bicycle project cost 34 million VND (about $2,130).

Observation

Rather than selecting a few students from among those attending secondary school, the project provided a bicycle to every secondary-school student in the two villages.

This produced one small but revealing incident.

A younger girl began crying because she had not received a bicycle. She was only in Year 4. She was told that she might receive one in the future if she continued her schooling through to secondary school.

The bicycle therefore represented more than transport. To the children, it was also something associated with reaching secondary school.

Reflection

In a remote village, a bicycle can remove some of the practical difficulty of getting to school. In this project it also became a modest recognition of continuing education.

The crying Year 4 girl gave us an unexpected indication of how much the bicycles were valued.

The project was also another example of cooperation between very small charities and local networks. FoVO provided bicycles while Thuy independently provided food assistance, with both projects sharing the same truck journey to a remote community.



The bicycles and secondary-school students together. Our bicycle project delivered to every high school student in the village.



Transport arrival in Vong Chep



Village people gathering for the project.



A girl cries because she did not receive a bicycle. She is only in Year 4 and was told that she might receive one in future if she continues through to secondary school.

REPORT TO DONORS 2024

11. Assistance to Thien An Shelter — Can Tho

$1,250 (20M VND)

Description

Thien An Shelter in Can Tho cared for 55 school-age children.

FoVO volunteer Thuong discussed the shelter's needs with Chi Que, who assisted in running the shelter, and then organised the purchase and delivery of practical supplies.

The assistance included food and cooking supplies, toothpaste, shampoo, toilet paper and noodles; 10 school tables and 20 chairs; two stainless-steel cooking pots and three kitchen knives; and a range of school shoes, sports shoes and sandals for the children.

The project cost 20 million VND (about $1,250).

Observation

The project combined immediate needs with practical improvements to everyday life at the shelter.

Food remained the first priority, but the tables and chairs provided useful school furniture, while the shoes and sandals were particularly timely for children returning to school.

The project was organised locally. Rather than FoVO deciding in Australia what the shelter needed, Thuong discussed requirements directly with Chi Que and purchased accordingly.

Reflection

This was a simple project with no need to make it more complicated.

A relatively small grant could meet several ordinary but important needs at once because the people working with the shelter knew what was required. The project again demonstrated the value of asking first and purchasing locally, rather than sending donated goods from Australia.





Nutrition still the first priority.



Some of the teenagers with their new school shoes and sandals

REPORT TO DONORS 2024

12. Food Parcels — Angleh Village, Gia Lai

$2,065 (33M VND)

Description

FoVO had originally planned to support a group of university student volunteers in Huế who were organising Mid-Autumn Festival activities for children at a school for children with disabilities.

The proposed activity initially involved a day of dancing, singing and other festival activities. Shortly before the event, however, the student group expanded the proposal into a much wider distribution of moon-cake gifts. FoVO decided not to participate in the expanded project.

Instead, the funds were redirected to Angleh, a community comprising three connected villages of J'rai, Sê Đăng and Ba Na people in Gia Lai Province.

Local nuns identified 110 of the poorest households. Food parcels were purchased in Pleiku and transported by truck about 40 kilometres to the villages. Each household received 10 kg of rice, cooking oil, fish sauce, sugar, salt, dried fish and dried shrimp.

The project cost 33 million VND (about $2,065).

Observation

The food distribution was coordinated with a visit by FoVO's volunteer medical team.

The medical checks deliberately began before the food distribution. From previous experience, we knew that once food parcels appeared, people's attention would understandably turn to joining the queue.

The project also illustrated the importance of local knowledge. FoVO did not attempt to identify the poorest 110 households from outside the community. The local nuns, who knew the families, made that assessment.

Reflection

FoVO withdrew from the proposed Mid-Autumn Festival project because, as the proposal expanded, it appeared increasingly like we would be helping to fund a large parish celebration, rather than a small project directed towards a particular need.

Moon cakes have an important cultural place in the Mid-Autumn Festival, but they are relatively expensive luxury foods with little nutritional value. Funding their distribution to a large number of people would have provided perhaps half an hour of enjoyment, but little lasting benefit. We therefore decided that FoVO's limited funds could be better used elsewhere.

This did not mean that FoVO was opposed to supporting Mid-Autumn Festival activities. The following year we attended a festival at Nam Chieu Son Community in Huế City and contributed five bicycles for students. The distinction was between participating in an important community celebration and using substantial charitable funds for short-lived consumption when there were more pressing needs.

In 2024 we redirected the money to Angleh, where 110 of the poorest households received food parcels containing rice and other basic foods.

The experience helped clarify an important principle in FoVO's approach: a worthwhile community activity is not necessarily something that FoVO needs to fund. With limited resources, we generally look for assistance that meets a practical need or leaves some continuing benefit.

Later connection: FoVO subsequently attended a Mid-Autumn Festival at Nam Chieu Son Community, Huế City, in 2025, where we contributed five bicycles for students. See FoVO Report to Donors — 2025 Financial Year.







A loaves & fishes project (literally)

REPORT TO DONORS 2024

Follow-up — Dao, Gia Lai

Description

Two years earlier, when she was seven, Dao, a J'rai girl in Gia Lai, developed a serious infection in her leg. Antibiotic treatment at a local clinic had failed, and FoVO assisted her father to take her to a major hospital in Saigon, where infected tissue was surgically removed.

Her recovery took about 12 months.

When we met Dao again in 2024, she was nine years old and active.

This time our concern was her education rather than her health.

Observation

Dao was in Year 4 at her village school but, according to the information recorded at the time, had not yet learned to read or write.

I took Dao and her mother, B'ren, to an interview at a non-government boarding school for J'rai children closer to the city, hoping that it might provide her with better educational opportunities.

The school did not accept her. The principal instead suggested that Dao could spend a year boarding at a local convent, where a nun could tutor her in a small class.

That presented another problem. Removing a nine-year-old girl from her family and placing her under fairly strict supervision for a year seemed a considerable price to pay for access to better schooling. We did not pursue that option.

Dao therefore remained with her family and continued at her village school.

Reflection

Dao's story illustrates both the value and the limits of a small intervention.

The earlier medical assistance had addressed an immediate and serious problem. Two years later, we could see a healthy and active nine-year-old girl. That was a very good outcome.

Education was much more difficult.

Buying treatment or paying travel costs could overcome a particular financial obstacle. We could not as easily overcome the educational disadvantages that had allowed a child to reach Year 4 without learning to read or write.

Nor was the apparently obvious solution necessarily the right one. Better schooling might have required separating Dao from her family and village for an extended period. From outside the community, it was easy to say that education should take priority. For the child and her family, the choice was considerably more complicated.

The visit was a useful reminder that not every problem encountered during a project can — or should — be turned into another FoVO project.



With Dao and her mother B'ren, visiting non -government boarding school for J'rai children, close to the city in Gia Lai.



Dao during our meeting.





Dao shows the place where infected tissue was gouged out at hospital to save her leg.