

The logo for VSO (Friends of Vinh Son Montagnard Orphanage) features the letters 'VSO' in a white, serif font, underlined with two horizontal lines, set against a red background.

Friends of
VinhSon Montagnard
Orphanage

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Doctor Finds Anemia, Parasitic Infections, and Dental Problems Afflicting Orphans in Vietnam

Auburn, CA – September 17, 2007. Concluding his humanitarian medical mission to four orphanages in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, **Dr. David Berdy** reported that anemia, dental carries (cavities), and parasitic infections are major threats to the health of the children in the orphanages in Vietnam. Dr. Berdy made his report to the Board of Directors of the Friends of Vinh Son Montagnard Orphanage (VSO), the organization that had co-sponsored his trip to the orphanages.

Dr. Berdy found anemia in significant numbers of children in each of the four orphanages. In the orphanage where anemia was most prevalent, 57% of the children were anemic. Even in the orphanage where anemia was least prevalent, Dr. Berdy found that 20% of the children were anemic. Dr. Berdy found the prevalence of tooth decay ranged from a low of 9% in one orphanage to a high of 38%.

“If a child is chronically anemic, they will develop more slowly, have reduced physical strength and mental capacity, be more susceptible to infections and have less immune system ability to ward off such infections,” said Dr. Berdy.



Dr. Berdy at Vinh Son

“Kids with strong healthy teeth and clean oral health eat better and have fewer challenges to their immune system because fewer bacteria live in their mouths. A healthier appetite if supplemented with the proper balance of nutrition will produce a child who develops physically stronger and mentally sharper,” Dr. Berdy added.

To combat anemia, Dr. Berdy recommended an improved diet at the orphanages with addition of iron sources such as red meat, seafood, poultry, whole grains, green leafy vegetables, beans, eggs, and nuts. Dr. Berdy recommended iron-fortified formula be given to infants and all children drink milk with their meals. To improve dental health, Dr. Berdy recommended fluoride treatment, twice-yearly teeth cleanings, and educating the children on proper brushing and flossing practices. He also recommended a medication protocol to keep the children free of parasitic infections.

“We are deeply grateful for Dr. Berdy’s hard work and sacrifice in traveling to Vietnam to assess and treat the orphans. As we kick off our autumn fundraising campaign, we will be asking our donors for help in providing resources to implement Dr. Berdy’s recommendations,” said Dennis Coyne, Secretary for VSO, from his home in Erlanger, Kentucky.

Dr. Berdy’s association with VSO began in April 2007, when he contacted Mr. Coyne through the VSO website.

“David sent an email through the website. I got it because I’m also the webmaster,” explained Mr. Coyne. “David wrote that he had been working with the poor in Chittagong, Bangladesh for the past seven years and was interested in expanding his ministry to Vietnam. David had ‘Googled’ for orphanages in Vietnam and VSO was one of his hits. I told David that we were absolutely interested in partnering with a physician to improve the health of the orphans.”

VSO, which is short for “Friends of Vinh Son Montagnard Orphanage,” is a non-profit organization whose mission is to raise resources (cash and in-kind gifts) to directly benefit Montagnard orphans in the Kontum region of the Vietnamese Central Highlands. The organization supports approximately 450 orphaned Montagnard children living in four orphanages run by an order of Catholic nuns. The Montagnards (the word is from the French for “mountaineer”) are an ethnic minority in Vietnam and are generally poor even by Vietnamese standards.

Dr. David Berdy is the Executive Director of another non-profit – the **Bridge of Grace (BOG)**, a Christian ministry to the developing world. “The aim of Bridge of Grace is to endow the lives of those in greatest need with the love of Jesus Christ through medical, social, educational, and financial outreach to the extent that one day they can in turn do likewise,” said Dr. Berdy. David is also the President of Sylvan Lakes Family Physicians, Sylvania, OH (near Toledo)

For the last seven years, Dr. Berdy has traveled to Bangladesh annually to administer care to the rural poor in that country, a sub-continental nation the size of Wisconsin with a population approaching 150 million and the unenviable position as the third-poorest country in the world.

Mr. Coyne developed his connection with the Montagnards when he was with the 4th Infantry Division of the U.S. Army deployed in the Central Highlands of Vietnam in 1968-1969. In 2005, Mr. Coyne and friends from Auburn, CA formed the Friends of VSO to provide donors with the benefits of contributing to a tax-deductible charity and the ability to channel their donations into specific projects.

Since 2005, Friends of VSO has sponsored or co-sponsored several projects to benefit the orphanages, the most recent of which was Dr. Berdy's medical assessment and treatment of the orphanages. Earlier projects included a sewing machine project to provide clothes and life skills training; a bakery project to rebuild one bakery destroyed by fire and restore another that badly needed repairs; and a computer project to provide equipment and skills for use in the job market or higher education. In addition to projects, the group also provides donations for pressing needs like food, clothing and medical care. Group members also bring suitcases full of donated items with them on trips to Vietnam. These in-kind donations have included medical supplies, prescription glasses, toothbrushes and toothpaste, sewing thread, balloons, candy, toys, and sporting equipment. This past February, the travelers left money for a water well that was critically need at one of the orphanages.

Whenever the group travels to Vietnam, they pay all their own expenses so that all donated funds are used only to directly help the orphans.

About Friends of Vinh Son Montagnard Orphanage: The *Friends of VSO* is a non-profit organization whose mission is to raise resources (cash and in-kind gifts) to directly benefit the Montagnard orphans in the Kontum region of the Vietnamese Central Highlands. It costs about \$12 to feed, educate and shelter one orphan for one month in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Tax-deductible donations can be sent to Vinh Son Orphanage (VSO), P.O. Box 9322, Auburn, CA 95604-9322. Donations can also be made online at <http://www.friendsofvso.org/sitepages/donate.html>

About Bridge of Grace: Bridge of Grace is a non-profit foundation whose mission is to endow the lives of those in greatest need with the love of Jesus Christ through medical, social, educational, and financial outreach to the extent that one day they can in turn do likewise. Bridge of Grace has established rural Bangladesh as its initial area of concentration and creation of a permanent medical clinic in the remote northeast region of the country as its initial project focus. Future goals include construction of an orphanage and boarding school. Tax-deductible donations can be sent to Bridge of Grace, 7640 W. Sylvania Avenue Suite K, Sylvania, Ohio 43560. Donations can also be made online at http://www.bridgeofgrace.org/how_to_give.htm.

For additional information, see <http://www.friendsofvso.org> or send email to: info@FriendsofVSO.org. (JPEGs of individual images available upon request)