

Vietnam 2007 VSO Trip Report

SUMMARY

After our trip last year, we provided a report of accomplishments to let you, the donors, know how effective your gifts are at the Vinh Son Orphanages. A copy of that is still posted on our internet site - [click here](#) if you would like to review it and compare with this year's report.

Twelve VSO supporters left San Francisco February 12 and arrived in Hanoi February 13 to begin a 14 day journey with 4 days and 3 nights at **Vinh Son 1 (VS 1) and Vinh Son 2 (VS 2)** in Kontum. For some, this was a first time trip to Vietnam. (Note: Each traveler paid their own expenses for the trip - all donated funds go to the Orphanages.) Pat Keegan, our Treasurer, was traveling on business in Vietnam and joined us at the orphanages in Kontum. We provided funds for various projects (see below), more than **350** pairs of **glasses** from the **Auburn Host Lions Club, Auburn, CA**, the remainder of the sewing thread donated last year from Janice and Alan Stephens (Erlanger, KY), dental supplies, over-the-counter medications, and some toys/sports equipment for the children donated by Wal-Mart & Meijer stores from the Cincinnati metro area & Aero-Motion Inc. Arroyo Grande, CA.



1. Pat Keegan & Pat McKee

The 12 Travelers

Mary Waterfield

Clyde Lewandowski

On this trip to the orphanages we discovered that the sisters expanded their services to children in the remote areas around Kontum - Vinh Son 3 and 4. Both are very basic and have many needs, especially Vinh Son 4 - more on this below. The Sisters are concerned about the overall health of the children - we will work with them on this issue during the year to determine what the needs are and how we can help them meet this goal.

Since we had so many first time travelers and for others it was a return from their experiences during the war, we spent some time visiting historic and scenic locations of Vietnam during their annual celebration of TET.



2. Basic Supplies purchased with funds - Rice, Bedding, Kitchen, Mosquito Netting, etc

One of the high points was meeting the people from **Colour-4-Kids** who were at the orphanage and Kontum before us. We joined efforts with them to assist Vinh Son 4 (story below). (**Colour4Kids** is a Non Profit based in Amsterdam, the Netherlands - a group of free lance decorative painters by profession moved by the need of the Vinh Son children who set a goal for themselves to improve the lives of underprivileged children worldwide.) They and other volunteer organizations such as **Lodovico Reguitti from Italy, Jean-Pierre De Rouck from Belgium, the Friends of the Highlands, and Chapter 535 Nevada County CA Vietnam Veterans of America** are united with us in helping improve the welfare of the children.

VINH SON 1

We arrived at Vinh Son 1 the evening of February 18th (the 2nd day of TET) and were greeted by Sister Angela (head of VS 1), Sister Juliana (Assistant to the Mother Superior for both orphanages), and by the enthusiastic & excited children.

We received the traditional warm welcome and entertainment of song and dance by the children. Dinner with the children and caregivers topped off the conclusion to the evening. The next morning, we met with the VS 1 staff to **distribute the funds** we brought for: **basic needs, the sewing class, computer class, field expenses, and tractor repair.**

Pat McKee, Senior VP provided the **restored glasses** by the **Lions Club** - a primary mission of this world renowned non-profit organization. The Lions partnered with inmates from Folsom Prison in CA to repair and properly classify the glasses by prescription strength so that they can be used by anyone with a visual impairment. The glasses were provided to the caregivers at both orphanages.



3. Lions Glasses & Pat McKee

Richard Squier

Children Dancing

Mr. Nanh, Sr Angela, Hank Gonzales

After completion of these events, we toured the facilities at VS 1. This is always a treat with the highlight being interacting with the children. They try to climb your legs to be held and play with you. At times it was pretty overwhelming with us on the ground being enveloped by loving children. The soccer balls, yo-yo's, propeller toys, jump ropes, and footballs were all a hit with the children. We were amazed how quickly they learned to catch and throw the footballs, girls included. The caregivers do a great job making sure the children are well cared for.

Next stops were the computer room, bakery & kitchen, classrooms, sewing class, cow sheds, gardens and dormitories. All were well kept, but as we observed much could be done to improve the conditions overall. **We saw first hand the result of your donations last year in the restored bakery and the new computer room.** You should be very pleased with the results of your donations to improve the quality of life at VS 1.

In the afternoon, our group toured the remote fields where crops grow to provide food for the orphanage. In addition, we met with the sisters and novices at the convent to get an update on how their operations are supporting all the orphanages.

While this was occurring, Dennis Coyne taught Mr. Nanh, VS 1 Secretary, how to use a new **digital camera** we provided to document the updates that we will use in the future from Kontum. Dennis also worked with the caregivers on **Dental Hygiene education** that was recommended by Dr. Lan Jones of [DDS-4-Kids](#) from Knoxville, TN who had worked at VS 1 last year. This effort will be followed by **Ann Knight** from Great Britain who is at VS 1 now for the next month volunteering her services in a variety of areas. Ann found us through our web site and is now making great contributions in Kontum.

VINH SON 2

Our visit to VS 2 was similar to VS 1; we arrived in the evening right before supper. They entertained us just like VS 1 with song and dance. VS 2 is off the main road and receives fewer visitors than VS 1. Thus they do not receive the same amount of donations, and it shows. They do a great job with what they have, but as always, it isn't much. Most support for both orphanages comes from donations given by individuals and organizations such as ours.

The largest portion of our contributions goes for the **basic needs of the children**. The money envelopes were distributed throughout our visit - also the donated thread, toothbrushes and toothpaste, balloons, candy and toys. The next morning, we met with the VS 2 staff to **distribute the funds** we brought for: **basic needs, the sewing class, computer class, field expenses and clothing**.

As you may recall from last year, it was at VS 2 last year that we discovered the **bakery had been destroyed** by fire. **We saw firsthand the results of your donations that restored the bakery to full operating condition.**



4. Chris & Al Brooks w/ Sr. Jane Mary Waterfield & Children Dennis Coyne, Children, & Sr. Jane Richard Squier & Children

Once again, the toys were a great hit. Pat McKee received donated propeller toys (**Aero-Motion Inc.**) for all the children. Really a family feeling. What a great job by these Sisters!!!

VINH SON 3 & 4 (Dave Chaix)

As stated in the summary, new needs were brought to our attention about VS 3 and VS 4. Even before arriving at Kontum, we began to hear about Vinh Son 3 and 4. While checking into our hotel at Hoi An, I received a call from our friend Marcel Verhaag. Marcel is the leader of Colour4Kids (www.color4kids.nl) which is located in Amsterdam.

He and 2 of his associates, Jet and Barbara, had been in Kontum for 3 weeks. They accomplished great work at VS 1 and VS 2, but just found out there was a VS 3 and VS 4. These are small orphanages located about 6 kilometers north of Kontum on Highway 24, with about 30 children at VS 3 and another 43 at VS 4. Although both needed help, Marcel was most concerned about VS 4 and wanted to schedule a trip there when we arrived in 2 days.



5. Bart Ruud & teen from VS 2

Marcel Verhaag & VS 4 Well site

Dave Chaix & Marcel Frs. Ronan Brennan & Tom Relihan

On February 19th, Marcel, Jet, Barbara, the Mother Superior, Mr. Ho (our interrupter), a driver and I all climbed in a small van about the size of a roller skate. Marcel and his group had also made many purchases for the orphanages, so we loaded up everything and headed out

Due to lack of time we decided to forego a visit to VS 3, as the Amsterdam group had already provided some help and the greatest need was at VS 4. Upon arrival at VS 4 and speaking to Sister Monica, one of the 2 Sisters in charge, it became apparent that they needed immediate assistance. **Their 2 largest problems were no fresh water and no food. Pretty basic.** Part of the orphanage is new buildings, but other structures are very run down and in need of repair. The new buildings had toilets, showers, wash and kitchen facilities. Just needed water to make things work. They were dipping water out of a very polluted stream behind the orphanage for drinking and cooking. Usable toilet facilities were non-existent. Terrible conditions.

In talking with Sister Monica and the Mother Superior it was determined that it would take:

- \$450 Well
- \$125 Tank
- \$100 Frame
- \$75 Pump
- \$250 Pipe and Labor
- \$1,000 Total USD

The second greatest need was food. The Sisters were begging in the market daily for food. We determined that the orphanage needed \$1,250 USD to buy a 1-year supply of rice, above and beyond what was raised by the Sisters and orphans.

Upon returning to Kontum, a meeting was held with the board members traveling with us, and funding was provided for the well immediately. We also partnered with C4K's to provide the funding for a 1-year supply of rice.

We just received word that the **well has been completed** and fresh water is at the orphanage!!! Still to come are the tank, frame, pump and piping. We expect pictures from Mr. Nanh and the new camera very soon. Rice is being purchased for the next year.

What a great find. The water not only provided basic life needs for the children, but also helped to solve many hygiene issues.

Thanks to all for your continued support that make these miracles happen!!!

CONCLUSION

The pictures tell the story - your generosity is making a daily difference in the lives of Montagnard children and their caregivers half around the world. Our thanks to all of you, the donors of VSO

A Few Pictures from the 2007 Trip



6. Kontum Wooden Church

Delta Stream

Traditional Montagnard Jar Sipping

Buddhist Monks - Dalat