



Greetings to all our FVSO Supporters

Pat Keegan and I recently returned from a visit to Vietnam and the orphanages. We flew in to Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) and spent a couple days in meetings before heading to Pleiku in the Central Highlands. We were met in Pleiku by Sister Juliana from the Convent, Mr. Nanh and Frank Fee (from Great Britain and a frequent volunteer at the orphanages) and driven to Kontum. We spent several days at VSO and visited all four orphanages, as described in detail below.

To summarize, all the orphanages need our continued support, though some needs are more urgent than others. VS 4, in particular, needs the most help with basic necessities like food and clothing. All the orphanages need more help with clean water and basic medical and dental care. These needs may be more apparent to visitors such as ourselves, than they are to the Sisters, who labor tirelessly immersed in the poverty that we want to help eliminate. The message we left with all 4 orphanages was: **“No more hungry or cold children”**, a quote from Pat Keegan.

During our closing meeting with the Sisters and the Sister Superior, I asked what more we could do to support them. After a moment of discussion, Sister Superior stated that they would appreciate input from us on how things could be improved. That was an “ah-ha” moment for Pat and me. We realized that the Sisters, while close to miracle-workers in providing loving care with next-to-no resources, were not experts in forecasting needs, managing projects or in the organizational complexities of coordinating and sharing resources across the different orphanages. If we can step up to the challenge of helping the Sisters with these issues, we will make faster strides toward developing comprehensive, sustainable programs for the orphans.

My detailed report follows.

Vinh Son 1 (VS 1)



Figure 1 VS 1 Nap Time, Dave & Y Guan, & Ingrid Sijben and VS 1 Children

Our first visit was to VS 1 where we were met by **Sister Imelda** and the other caregivers. We also met Graham and Ingrid Sijben (he from New Zealand – she from the Netherlands - volunteers at VSO from time to time) and Gene Flynn from FOCH (Friends of the Central Highlands). My opinion at VS 1 is that they are holding their own with help from FOCH, Jean-Pierre from Belgium, Lodovico Reguitti from Italy, among others and daily visitors. In holding their own, I do not mean things are great or really even close to good. Much still needs to be done. Gene, Pat and I looked over their water supply and decided to see what it would take to build a structure to keep the area clean and covered. We would also like to find a way to purify the water there at the source, since VS 1 has only 1 well. Some minimal purification occurs within VS 1, VS 2 and VS 3, but it would be a great improvement to find ways to purify at the source for the whole facility. VS 4 does not have any purification, as we just put the well in last year. Gene and FOCH will take the lead on this and if feasible FVSO, will try and help. It would be ideal to model something at VS 1 that could be spread to the other orphanages.

Pat and I distributed the funds for the various projects as planned. We also provided funds for the Large Sewing Class. This is really a great project that helps many girls from the orphanage. As always, it was good to see and visit with Sister Pauline who is in charge.

We worked with VS 1 to release the funds held at the Convent for the teachers working at the orphanage this year. Pat has some ideas on putting together a program with more accountability for education and will be working on that with the Sisters at VS 1.

We took many pictures at VS 1 and of course one of the highlights was the visit upstairs to the nursery. There is a little girl there that I met 2 years ago who touched me in one of those special ways. Yes, there she was waiting for me. At that age I don't know how they remember, but on the wall are many pictures of visitors and there were Pat and I and the little girl and a friend. Very touching visit again!

I need to mention here that Sister Angela remains very ill and is still in HCMC being treated for a liver disorder caused by hepatitis. Please keep her in you thoughts and prayers.

184 children at VS 1 - about a 2 to1 girls/boy ratio.

Vinh Son 2 (VS 2)



Figure 2 Pat & VS 2 Kids, Older caring for younger, and Girlfriends

Again there is the status quo – no real improvement, but at least no deterioration, although this is a poorer orphanage. Funds were distributed as approved by the board, and we had a nice visit with the children. Pat had purchased some balls at the Pleiku Market and I had brought along the traditional candies (dum-dums). These were distributed at all the orphanages.

The facilities at VS 2 are in need of repair, such as bathrooms with broken fixtures and roofs that need mending (to name a few). VS 2 does not have the foot traffic or the support of other organizations as VS 1. I'm not saying that VS 1 doesn't need more help, but it is evident that the needs at VS 2 are more urgent, particularly for facilities and more caregivers per child. VS 2 is well organized and is doing very well for what they have, which needs to be more. Sister Jane does a great job. We have 4 new projects requested by VS 2 that Board will take up in our budget meeting at the end of the month. The largest 2 are for flour and powdered milk.

Also, VS 2 has 3 wells throughout the facilities, they do not produce consistently. They often take their laundry to the river (much like it used to be in the 1960's and before).

200 children at VS 2 - about 2 to 1 girl/boy ratio.

Vinh Son 3 (VS 3)



Figure 3 VS 3 New Kitchen, Pat & Sr. Gabriel, and children

We made considerable progress at VS 3 last year - many projects with the largest being the new kitchen and bathrooms. We witnessed the differences they have made. There was rice on hand and the children looked well cared for. They are mostly older children and are able to help in their own care and the care of the younger children. There are requests for projects this year and much is left to be done. We left the appropriate funds with Sister Gabriel.

Sister Gabriel does a wonderful job and is helped by at least 2 caregivers. She worked with Dr. Pat Smith in the Montagnard Hospital at Kontum in the 1960's. Pat spent many years serving the Montagnards in the Kontum area. During the TET offensive of 1968, she was hidden by the Montagnards to ensure her safety when Kontum was in the midst of battle. She returned to the US near the end of the war and resumed her medical practice in Seattle, WA.

28 children - I think mostly girls

Vinh Son 4 (VS 4)



Figure 4 Site for VS 4 Kitchen re-construction, existing kitchen, and Vinh Son Children

This children at VS 4 have urgent, immediate needs. Sister Lieng works there with 1 older Sister and possibly 1 care giver. The children, while not babies, are younger than we saw at VS 3 and certainly would need more care. They do not have a kitchen or boy's dormitory. They need a shed to store their tractor, tools and supplies. Colour4Kids, from the Netherlands, has been partnering with us at this orphanage and other projects and are great supporters of the children.

We gave funding for food; Pat and I made a return trip to provide some more funds for the various needs. This should last them for a few months, but we need to stay on top of help for VS 4.

We had been waiting for the estimates for the structures needed before the rainy season. The Sisters could not get an estimate because they had no money for the permits. Really a Catch 22 situation. Besides providing for food we left enough funding to get the permits started (we think).

50 children – not sure of the mix.

Financial Status of the Trip:

- Funds – Delivered as approved
- VS 1 – Funding previously provided for kindergarten school fees – receipts received and project closed
- VS 1 – Funding being held at the convent for teacher's pay – Pat Keegan will work with the Sisters to release funds and establish a program that will include hour's accountability among other measurements
- Large Sewing Class – Additional funds held at the Convent distributed to help fund this project.
- VS 1 – Sister Imelda requested for toothpaste – provided out of discretionary funds.
- VS 3 – Priority Request #1 – School Fees and Uniforms – provided out of discretionary funds
- VS 3 – Priority Request #2 – Computers (2), Printer (1), Sewing Machines (2) and an Electric Organ (1) - provided out of discretionary funds.
- VS 4 – Priority Request #1 – School Fees and Uniforms – provided out of discretionary funds.
- VS 4 – Request for funding to acquire permits for buildings – provided out of discretionary funds.
- VS 4 – Extra funding for food – provided out of discretionary funds.

Part of our decision to fund school fees at VS 3 and VS 4 was because of the clothing that was embedded in the projects. They need school, but really needed clothes. Upcoming Requests:

- VS 1 – Work with FOCH to establish clean and protected water source
- VS 1 – Flour
- VS 1 – Powdered Milk
- VS 1 – Building Repairs
- VS 1 – Additional Teacher's Pay
- VS 2 – Flour
- VS 2 – Powdered Milk
- VS 2 – School Fees and Books
- VS 2 – Additional Teacher's Pay
- VS 3 – Additional Teacher's Pay
- VS 3 – Tractor and Ploughshare
- VS 4 – Kitchen
- VS 4 – Boy's Dormitory
- VS 4 – Storage Shed
- VS 4 – Computers (2), Printer (1), Sewing Machines (2) and Electric Organ (1).
- VS 4 – Extra Teacher's Pay
- All – FOOD, FOOD, FOOD...



Figure 5 Gene Flynn (FOCH), Pat, Sr. Juliana, & Mr. Nanh with tractor purchased jointly by Colour4Kids & FVSO, and Vinh Son Children

Of note was the children's clothing and the mild climate. When asked, we were told it cost just a few dollars to provide a child with a coat. We saw no coats at VS 3 and VS 4 and very few warm clothes anywhere. Pat Keegan reached into his pocket and left \$100 for coats for the children at VS 3 and VS 4. I also have pictures of the boys we sent to HCMC for eye surgery (they are doing fine, but may need glasses), of the boy with the stomach problem (also doing fine) and the girl with TB (also doing fine so it seems).

All the orphanages appreciated very much the work of Dr. Berdy and hoped we could fund the de-worming again. They said that it was a "really good thing".

We have accomplished a great deal, but there is still much to do to in improving the daily lives of these wonderful children.

Respectfully,

Dave Chaix