

Summary of Vinh Son Orphanage visit February 7 - February 12, 2010

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On Sunday February 7th we arrived in Kontum. Our Vietnam Airline flight had taken us from Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) to Pleiku in the Central Highlands. Then it was a one hour taxi ride along highway 14 to the Thinh Vuong Hotel in Kontum. All travel expenses (airfare, hotels, food, transportation, etc.) were the personal responsibility of both Dave and myself.

Note: The exchange rate varies by the day but with exchange of large bills, we got 19,200 VND per US dollar at the Spring Hotel in HCMC.

Once settled into the hotel, we walked the few blocks to VS-1 and met briefly with Sister Imelda before heading to a local restaurant for dinner.

Vinh Son 1 - Summary

Monday morning we met Mr. Nanh and Mr. Ho at VS-1 and toured the grounds with these liaisons and with Sister Imelda. We got a good look at the security wall that has been replaced since the flood associated with Typhoon Ketsana on the 29th and 30th of September 2009. We also saw healthy looking pigs in the VS-1 piggery and many free-ranging chickens that have a lockable and secure henhouse with nearby quarters where an older boy sleeps and more or less guards the pigs and chickens from theft. The security fence is about eight feet high and armed at the top with jagged barbed wire to help diminish threats of anyone coming over the wall.

While on our walk-about of the VS-1 compound, we noticed older boys and girls splitting and hauling firewood that would be used for cooking fires both to prepare pig food in the barn and food for the children in the kitchen. At the wood-splitting activity we saw no chain saw and upon inquiry learned the saw purchased several years ago is no longer around. No one quite knew whatever happened to it, but in the meantime, someone on the outside was being paid to cut firewood. Once we learned of this situation, it became clear that funds for a chainsaw might be a good use of some discretionary money. Ultimately, a good saw was ordered from Pleiku/Saigon for the sum of \$250. The saw is manufactured in Taiwan and said to be a good one.

As we made our way around the compound, we looked at the relatively new water purification system that was installed about six months ago by a local gentleman, Mr. Mong, who got the system in HCMC. The cost was 12,000,000 VND, about \$650 at the current exchange rate. The system has three small filters that must be changed every six months at a cost of 200,000 VND each. In addition, it has two large canister filters that must be changed every two years, cost unknown. The gentleman who installed the system can do the required maintenance. In discussions with Mr. Nanh, we agreed that

FVSO will support the replacement of filters on a regular schedule and will provide funding for this maintenance. The filtered water passes through ultraviolet light to further purify the water before it is used for drinking and cooking.

When visiting the nursery, we noticed only a few issues with scabies. In terms of general health, the children seemed quite well though Bart saw one child who appeared to have a cold. Our visit to the nursery saw us joined by Dr. Thuy who showed us the incubator that had been purchased by another supportive group, Orphans of Kontum - Vietnam, centered in Holland.

After we saw the incubator, a little girl of perhaps 5 years was brought to our attention because she suffers a kidney problem of some kind and must see a specialist in HCMC. Dr. Thuy explained that her distended stomach was indicative of some kind of kidney enlargement that must be attended to if the little girl is to survive. Since learning of this situation we have been attempting to learn what the costs might be to have this child attended to in HCMC. Basically, we have said that FVSO wants the child to see the specialists in HCMC and that we will support those costs and costs associated with sending Dr. Thuy and/or another caregiver when the child is sent to HCMC after Tet. Without attention, this child has only a short life expectancy.

As things developed, we learned on Feb. 12 that the costs associated with the girl's treatment will be 14,300,000 VND or about \$800. The plane tickets to HCMC will be \$55, 30 days of food for the girl and Dr. Thuy, \$166; an x-ray \$17; medical doctor (specialist) fee \$166; and, medicine (surgery) \$388, a total of \$792. We gave Sister Imelda \$800 to cover the costs, and \$600 of this came from Dave's personal funds. That sum should be reimbursed by FVSO. The child who will receive the treatment is named Y Ra, born Feb. 12, 2005. She has a twin sister who remains in the village of her birth. Y Ra comes from the Sedang minority group.

At present there are 211 children at VS-1, approximately 120 girls and 91 boys in the orphanage. Their medical supplies are adequate for the present and we reiterated that these will be replaced when the need is expressed. We also re-stated that photo and receipt documentation is always required.

We delivered discretionary funds for basic needs and for use to support field projects, as well as \$150 for new inner tubes for the tires on the VS-1 tractor. An additional \$50 was provided to service the tractor (change the oil and filters, etc.).

A last point of discussion was the expressed need for a walkway and cement slab that would eliminate the muddy pathway between the recreation room and the boy's dorm during the monsoon. This project would encompass construction of a slab about 18 x 30 meters and a 30 meter sidewalk and cost an estimated \$1,300.

Finally, the four women from Colour4Kids, Dave, and I were hosted for dinner on Tuesday evening, complete with children's' performances at Vinh Son 1. FVSO contributed \$100 to help offset the cost of the dinner.

As we wound down our visit we asked Mr Nanh to have the children draw pictures and write thank you notes for our benefactors. These notes should be delivered to Pat Keegan when he and his son visit in a few weeks. More such notes should be provided when Pat Leary visits in March 2010.

Discretionary funds for basic needs (\$1,000) and for field needs (\$200) were given to Sister Imelda.

Vinh Son 2 - Summary

With 200 children under her care at VS-2, Sister Jeanne provided a walk-about. We learned of the need to repair the baking oven (\$25) and the desire to eliminate breakfast noodles and go back to bread for the morning staple. There was no mention, but this obviously means they will have to purchase firewood to heat the oven and they will have to employ and pay a baker to bake the bread. It also means the purchase of flour and other products that go into bread. Some flour is already on hand, perhaps provided earlier by Dorinda from Canada. Our 2010 planning will be changed to reflect these changes prior to our sending funds in late February 2010. Sister Jeanne believes the bread to be better for the children than the instant noodles.

Note: VS-1 does not want to go back to bread because firewood is too expensive. The oven there is functional but it costs less to serve noodles when the cost of firewood is worked into the equation.

Sister Jeanne expressed a need to clean four of the five wells at VS-2 that had become muddied during the September typhoon. The cost was said to be about \$50 each. We left \$225 in discretionary funds for the purpose of cleaning the wells, and we also left \$25 to repair the baking oven.

Discretionary funds for basic needs (\$1,000) and for field needs (\$200) were given to Sister Jeanne.

Vinh Son 3 - Summary

Sister Gabriel now cares for 46 children. She would have liked for us to provide a keyboard but we ignored that thought with the idea that there might be better priorities for our limited funds. We gave discretionary funds as follows:

- \$6 for eyeglasses for one boy
- \$150 for two new front tires for the tractor, which now has 1200 hours on the clock
- \$50 to change the filters and oil and otherwise service the tractor. We went over this maintenance with the tractor operator. He will get the new tires from Pleiku.
- \$94 for bicycle tires
- \$550 for a generator so that power will be available to pump water when the local grid goes down, a frequent occurrence

- \$50 for medicines
- \$50 for chickens

Sister Gabriel will also make arrangements to replace the filters in the water treatment system on a regular six-month schedule. FVSO will fund replacement filters for their ultraviolet light system.

School fees in the amount of \$472 were left by Dorinda Cavanaugh (co-founder of Terre des Hommes Canada), but FVSO may have to augment this sum because of an increase in the number of children at VS-3. School fees are due in August (along with parasite medication).

Vinh Son 4 - Summary

Sister Lien is overwhelmed because the population at VS-4 has doubled since Typhoon Ketsana destroyed many homes in local villages. Some 110 children now live there, 30 of who are sponsored by another organization, headed by a man named Andre. This means FVSO will fund just 80 of the 110 children for food and other needs.

Sister Monica, quite elderly, frail and stooped, continues to assist Sister Lien with many needs at VS-4.

With the increased population, Sister Lien would like to have a new building (a recreation room), but that is not something we could undertake at this juncture. Estimated cost of such a project would be \$1,525.

Trenching for footings for a new toilet facility have been dug but no progress has been made lately because of the delayed permit process.

Only one pig - a mature sow, was found in the new VS-4 piggery. Sister Lien will buy pigs after Tet and get back into the business of raising hogs for the local market. She has the funds set aside and believes the cost for replacement weaner pigs will be less following Tet.

A new henhouse has yet to be built but Sister Lien has the funds we sent following Typhoon Ketsana for a hen house and chickens.

Colour4Kids is discussing making repairs to the roof of the girl's dorm.

The water filtration system was discussed and FVSO will provide funds for replacement filters on a regular six-month schedule. Mr. Nanh and Mr. Mong will need to follow up on these needs.

FVSO will pay school fees in August 2010.

Discretionary funds were provided as follows:

- \$166 alternator repair for the tractor
- \$50 to change oil and filter and otherwise service the tractor
- \$100 for a new battery for the tractor
- \$20 for eyeglasses for three children
- \$25 for eye exams for three girls
- \$89 for scabies medication
- \$800 to install drainage tile and add windows and stucco to a partially finished building (\$500 re building; \$300 re drainage.)

The building which will be stuccoed sits on the 5 x 50 meter sliver of land acquired by Board approval on October 19, 2009. Acquisition of that sliver of land, situated on the western boundary of the VS-4 compound, also has permitted the construction of a lean-to structure on the westerly side of an existing building. That lean-to structure houses some of the girls who call VS-4 their home.

Vinh Son 5 - Summary (The site is known to some as Jackfruit.)

Sister Y Truk is currently caring for 46 children, 12 boys and 34 girls. All previous calculations for projected 2010 needs were based on 32 children. Our calculations for the months ahead will need to be adjusted to accommodate the increased population at VS-5.

The road leading to VS-5 abruptly ends at a stream crossing because there is no bridge in place. We heard mention that it would be nice if we could provide a crossing, but we ignored that comment because a bridge should be provided by the government.

Both the boys and girls dorms need roof repairs.

VS-5 has a new two-stall piggery with no pigs and a new hen house with few if any chickens. Those facilities may have been funded by FoCH. The old piggery was a one-stall facility containing 6 over-crowded pigs. When the new piggery is stocked, a man from the local village will be employed to live adjacent to the pigs to guard them from theft.

There is an electric pump which pumps water from the creek up the hill several hundred yards to an orchard located behind the orphanage site.

VS-5 has a two-filter ultraviolet light water purification system that we will assume funding of replacement filters on a six-month schedule.

Some building materials were piled about which will be used to construct a new boy's dorm, presumably when the permit process is complete. This is a project likely funded by FoCH.

Sister Truk wants to knock out a wall and enlarge the girl's dorm when the boys are able

to vacate their part of the structure and move into the planned new boy's dorm building. In the present, the roof over the current boy's and girl's room needs repair. The Colour4Kids women are considering helping with this need.

We distributed funds, \$500 for basic needs and \$200 for field expenses.

Sister Truk was sore from crashing her motorbike after someone came in the night and unknown to her had stolen the brake, an issue which caused her to crash the bike.

Discretionary funds left with Sister Truk were as follows:

- \$50 for eyeglasses for four girls
- \$100 to repair Sister Truk's motorbike

Vinh Son 6 - Summary

Sister Labourne has been surviving on little or nothing. There are currently 17 children (16 girls and 1 boy) in residence, plus two nuns who assist Sister Labourne.

The facility has only one working toilet, plus it has a shower room that could be changed around so that part of it becomes a laundry room while part remains as a shower room. Colour4 Kids is discussing the possibility of taking on a project of building a bathroom facility. They might do this alone or they might want to partner with FVSO on this project.

Funds distributed were as follows:

- \$300 for a water filtration system
- \$113 for cook building repair
- \$225 for ten weaner pigs
- \$75 for a starter batch of commercial pig food to mix with banana stalk roughage
- \$120 for three bicycles
- \$45 for repairs on four bicycles
- \$30 for an eye exam and eyeglasses for one of the Sisters
- \$7 for a pair of eyeglasses for one of the Sisters
- \$130 for mosquito nets, bed mats, blankets and pillows
- \$5 for faucet repairs in the shower facility

The water filtration system will be maintained with FVSO funds on the same six-month schedule, as will be set for the other orphanage sites.

Addendum

1. Dave Chaix provided \$600 from his personal funds to help offset the cost of sending Y Ra to the kidney specialist in HCMC.
2. Bill Kennedy (a first-time visitor to Vinh Son and new friend of FVSO) donated \$500 to help fund our projects. He became a principal of sorts by funding a drainage structure at VS-4, as well as permitting the completion of a building at VS-4. The building was acquired together with the property purchased some months ago that immediately adjoined the VS-4 compound. Completion of the building will entail installation of windows and doors as well as stucco to the exterior and interior of the building that may be 5 x 10 meters in size.
3. Bill Kennedy purchased two standing fans for use in the handicapped men's dorm at VS-4.
4. Bill Kennedy funded construction of a safety cage to be installed over the water filter treatment system at VS-5. He gave maybe 200,000 dong for this work.
5. Sister Lien at VS-4 has been providing rice for the 17 children and 3 Sisters at VS-6. The Diocese has not provided rice for the VS-6 site, reasons unknown.
6. In future calculations for food, we need to think about adding in food for the Sisters and caregivers.
7. The incubator at VS-1 was occupied on Feb. 12 by a one-day old baby boy born by Cesarean section to the mother who was in some kind of accident. The little boy is ok and there is a twin brother at home in his village. His name is A Loi. He was near term and weighed about 2 kg.
8. Funds for the Convent sewing class were distributed during a visit at the Convent. During the same visit, funds were left to assist the Novices with their field projects.
9. Funds were left to assist the sewing class at VS-1.