

A Humanitarian Non-profit Organization Approved by IRS Code 501(c) 3 & California Section 23701D

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June 2011 Newsletter

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Mid-Year Update

Delivering On Our Commitments

Each year has its challenges, but FVSO is very pleased to announce that, through your support, we have met all of our 2011 commitments to Vinh Son. All basic needs for food and medicine have been delivered to all 6 sites. That may sound easy, but we're talking about a community of 700 children and their caregivers. In addition, at VS-1, we've invested in the repair of the kitchen and dining room, along with a new generator. A new fence at VS-5 has also been funded.

Looking ahead, we'll continue to fund basic needs, which has always been top priority. In August, partnering with Orphans of Kontum, funds will be allocated for the next school year. Also this summer, every one of our kids will receive dental care, provided by FVSO, East Meets West, and Friends of the Central Highlands. In October, we plan to kick off a building project at VS-6, a new kitchen and dining room. Partners from France and Australia will join us in this effort.

All of us at FVSO express our gratitude for your generous support. Please continue to spread the Vinh Son story. THANK-YOU!!

School's Out!

The 2010-2011 school year has come to an end, and just like last year, many of our Vinh Son students were recognized for outstanding scholastic achievement. "Praise Awards" were handed out to kids from each of the 6 orphanages (128 in total, 24% of all VS students).

All of the children have earned some time off from their studies, but there is always work to be done at Vinh Son. Please join us in wishing "safe travels" to those who will visit friends and family in distant villages during the weeks ahead.

Happily displaying their certificates (VS-1 top left, VS-6 bottom), these children have a right to be proud of their efforts. It's easy to forget that they're attending local schools where Vietnamese is the official language, which is not their first language. Besides math and science, our kids are also learning Vietnamese!

Great Job - Congratulations!!



Diapers for VS-1

Recent on-site visits to the Vinh Son 1 nursery uncovered the need to improve sanitary conditions there. FVSO is now supplying diapers annually for all 17 infants.

Yeah Baby!!

Welcome! Sao Mai (Tu Tam) Orphanage, Pleiku, Vietnam

An orphan girl discovers her past & unlocks the future

1968

U.S. soldiers of the 189th Attack Helicopter Company support the construction and re-supply of a much needed orphanage in Pleiku called Tu Tam.

"If you had told me weeks ago I would be crying like a baby, I wouldn't have believed you. I am most honored to be a member of the 189th and FVSO."

Pat Leary, FVSO Board Member, upon making the connection

The entrance to Sao Mai



1969

A newborn is placed with the Tu Tam orphanage in Pleiku & is cared for by a woman who'd become her special grandmother. At War's end in 1975, they escape Vietnam and come to America.

"I always longed to return to Vietnam to search for my family. I would like to visit the orphanage and children, as they remind me so much of myself."

Former Orphan girl 2011

2011

Using the Internet, and after nearly 40 years of wondering, this orphan girl, originally from a tiny orphanage in Vietnam, was about to find the connection to her past. Through the FVSO web site, she randomly contacted Board members, Clyde Lewandowski & Pat Leary, who would then uncover the proof that Tu Tam was, indeed, her first home. To say the least, it was an extremely emotional discovery.

After the War, the orphanage was moved a short distance and renamed Sao Mai, where it operates today under the guidance of Sisters from the order St. Paul Chartres. While we continue to assess our relationship with Sao Mai, the FVSO Board has recently voted to bring them under its umbrella, and will be adjusting our charter slightly. Besides having much in common with the Vinh Son sites in Kontum, Sao Mai can potentially provide some important learning for us, particularly in the area of higher education and scholarship assistance. Pat Leary (former pilot with the 189th AHC) personally visited Sao Mai this year, and below are some of his observations:

Sister Khiet is in charge of the orphanage, where there are 51 children (18 boys, 33 girls) and 5 caregivers. The majority of children are minorities (Jarai and Bahnar Montagnards). They range in age from 18 months to 28 years (a resident who suffers from severe epilepsy); altogether, there are 9 children with handicaps. The orphanage is financed by local benefactors, with some funding from the St. Paul Order. They receive no foreign donations.

Sao Mai primarily accepts children up to 5 years old. Because they are so young, it is easier to teach them Vietnamese, but most will lose their tribal heritage and language. All kids attend a local Vietnamese school. About age 19, or after high school graduation, they would leave the orphanage. With increased funding, more students would be able to attend college. Two girls are actually in colleges now, one studying accounting, and the other pediatric nursing.

Over 40 years ago, the pilots and crew from the 189th AHC built a facility for the War's orphaned children. One of those unfortunate kids has reached out to her "extended family," made contact, and offered her appreciation on behalf of all those children who have called Sao Mai (Tu Tam) HOME. Now, FVSO has adopted them too. We'll continue to update you on this incredible story.

"I am here today because of your unwavering desire to replace the madness and chaos of the war with kindness, love, and compassion for humanity. It is my hope that this will be the beginning of long friendship. I thank you so much for helping me sort out the confusion of my past so that I can one day be at peace with myself and not continue to wander in this world aimlessly, as a restless spirit. While the history books do not teach about your heroic actions, you will forever be remembered as the light of hope in my life."

Former orphan, now a proud American, from an email sent to Pat Leary & the 189th AHC, 2011

Vinh Son Orphanage Facts

- Population – approximately 680 Montagnard children in six orphanage facilities
- Administered by the Sisters of the Miraculous Medal
- Location - Kontum, Vietnam
- \$12 feeds, shelters, and educates one child for one month

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Donation Information

Please make checks payable to FVSO or Friends of Vinh Son

Donations are gratefully accepted year round

100% of administrative costs are paid by the Board and Officers