

This newsletter will serve as an update of our work here in Hoi An over the last 6 months.

THE ORPHANAGE

New Children continue to arrive at the Orphanage

We have had a lot of new children over the last few months.

Phuong Linh is a 4 year old girl who arrived to us quite ill with severe spastic cerebral palsy, moderately severe malnutrition and recurrent pneumonias. We put her on a special diet to improve her nutrient deficiencies as well as to help her gain weight. She is being fed by one of our physiotherapists who has been trained in feeding children with swallowing difficulties. Once her nutrition improves, she will start with physiotherapy and education.



Duy is a beautiful little boy with Down's syndrome. He is 2 years old and was abandoned by his family. He is becoming more interactive in the playroom, though he is still quite content to sit and play alone. We discovered on our new screening tests that his thyroid doesn't work very well and we are correcting this.

Khoa is a 5 year old boy who was brought to us by his parents. He has cerebral palsy and his family is too poor to take care of him. For the first week after leaving his family he cried all day. After that he became quite interactive and keen to participate in education and therapy. In one month he has learned to count, feed himself and walk with a walking frame. He has become very talkative and is one of the favorites of the staff. He misses his family, but they frequently visit.



Phong is a 5 year old who just arrived at the orphanage. It is unclear what his primary disability is – he is mentally alert and interactive but physically quite limited. We are learning more about him every day and expect good results from him in school and therapy.

Loc is a 16 year old with long standing severe cerebral palsy. He was taken care of at home by his mother but she is unable to care for him any longer. He has very little interaction with his environment and we hope to see improvement with treatment.



In the last few months we have had three children with relatively severe disabilities come and go from the orphanage. We are referring them to Children's Hope in Action (<http://www.globalchia.org/index.htm>), a nonprofit group here in Hoi An that can provide home based care for these children.

Progress of the children

The children continue to make good progress in physiotherapy and school. We recently celebrated children's day and the kids were rewarded for their work. **Phuoc** got a prize for his recent successes which include learning to read and walking independently with a walking frame. **Tuan** received awards for his progress both in school and therapy. His English is quite good now. **Vu, Dau** and **Hien** also got awards for their progress in the classroom.



Goodbye

We are sad to report the death of one of our night guards at the orphanage. He was killed 2 weeks ago on the orphanage grounds. He left behind a wife and two daughters aged 3 and 15. He was well liked by the children and was often seen helping them with their homework. The orphanage has accepted his youngest daughter as an orphan. She will stay at home but receive monthly money. He will be missed.



HIV PROJECT



Nam

Nam is a 10 year old boy living with HIV in the countryside in Duy Xuyen province. He lost his parents and sister to the disease and currently lives with his grandmother. We have been working with Nam for the last 4 years. We support his family monthly with money as they have no income and are quite poor. I have been trying for a while to get testing (CD4 count, genotyping) and treatment for his disease but have faced many obstacles. First and most significant, Nam is severely agoraphobic and wouldn't leave the house. Even after showing up with a car to take him for some testing a few years ago, he adamantly refused and we couldn't change his mind. Secondly, there are few resources here in central Viet Nam for children with HIV. CD4 testing was possible in a nearby city but the treatment consisted of a single pill with 2 antiretrovirals in it. Treating HIV is quite complex and requires different regimens based on the resistance of the virus. So for years we were stuck with giving Nam what was likely ineffective HIV treatment and an antibiotic called Bactrim which helps prevent some of the infections that people with HIV are susceptible to.

Then something changed. A month after I arrived here, Jackie Wrafter and I went to visit Nam and bring them their medicine and money for the month. Nam's grandmother wasn't there and it was just us and Nam. He started speaking Vietnamese with us and

actually smiled – this is rare, as a smile has never been seen on him and he usually hides behind his grandmother when he sees us. Noticing this we decided to push our luck and see if he would go with us on the motorbike to get some clothes. He jumped on the bike and we went to the local market. This was the first time we had taken him anywhere outside the home. This trend continued – he continued talking to us, occasionally smiling and would happily jump on the bike and allow us to take him places.

Shortly after this happened, I contacted Dr. Lisa Cosimi with the CDC in Viet Nam and Dr. Annette Sohn with the UCSF Institute for Global Health. We were happy to find out that they had opened a clinic in Ho Chi Min City (HCMC) for HIV testing (CD4 count and viral load) and treatment (first and second line combination therapy).



We set up an appointment there and flew down with Nam and his grandmother. It was their first time on an airplane and in a big city. The experience was quite interesting. We took them around the city. We went to the mall and played video games which Nam quite liked. Nam and his grandmother had never been on an escalator which we learned the hard way – Nam



ended up tumbling down the escalator as he didn't know how to get off at the top! Luckily no damage was done. We made our appointment and had a full lab and clinical evaluation with Dr. Sohn and Dr. Viet in the clinic. His labs revealed that his disease is quite advanced. They agreed to start Nam on a full regimen of antiretrovirals to treat his HIV. We need to take him back to HCMC every month for the next 6 months for follow-up.



As is stands now, we don't know how much longer he will live with his advanced disease, even with good treatment. But we do know that his quality of life is much improved. He is much happier than we have ever seen him. We have gotten a phone in his house and now he calls us frequently to tell us about his day. We have secured donations for a bike for him. As long as this happiness and openness continues, we will take advantage of it!

Due to the costs of his care, we are looking for directed donations. It costs about \$600 for each monthly trip and \$20 a month to cover the monthly food at home. If you are interested in helping this project please contact me at info@hoianfoundation.org.

Children in Hue

I visited a charity clinic in Hue (a city 3 hours north of Hoi An) run by Catholic nuns. They have many children they take care of who are infected with HIV. Now that we are making monthly trips to HCMC, we would like to help other children get access to this treatment. We are meeting with



them in a few weeks to discuss this and hope to assist in getting these children the advanced care that is available in HCMC.

CLINIC

We have been working for some time now to open a weekly clinic here in Hoi An. As in Western countries, a significant cause of death in Viet Nam is heart disease. Chronic untreated diseases in adulthood (diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol) take their toll. The poor in Viet Nam have little access to health care and medications. We have a clinic planned that will focus on the diagnosis and treatment of these disorders. Dr. Hoa, the health minister of Hoi An, has been very helpful in getting this clinic started. We have planned community health education talks followed by screening for diabetes and high blood pressure. Our clinic will focus on continuous care and education on these health problems. The paperwork and clearance from the provincial government has been a challenge in the last few months, but we are close to opening.

BACH MAI PROJECT

I have been fortunate enough to be able to help Dr. Carl Bartecchi with his work at Bach Mai Hospital in Ha Noi (<http://home.comcast.net/~ckbartecchi/BachMai/about.htm>). Carl has been working with improving the care of patients in the Poison Control Center, Emergency Department and Intensive Care Unit of Bach Mai. He supplies the departments with equipment (monitors,



ventilators etc). He has been coming for many years to train the doctors in the care of critically ill patients. He has also supported some of the physicians to come over to Denver, Colorado to train. I have been able to go to Ha Noi every few months to teach and conduct rounds. Three critical care nurses from St. Anthony's Hospital recently came over for a month to start the training of the nursing staff. The care of the patients in the Bach Mai ICU is superior and continues to improve thanks to the hard work of Dr Bartecchi.

FUTURE PROJECTS

Working with Jackie and Nick from the Kianh Foundation, we have discussed plans for a Rehabilitation Center and Halfway House in Hoi An. The Center would be for the rehabilitation and teaching of children with disabilities in central Viet Nam, utilizing what we have learned in dealing with the disabled children at Hoi An Orphanage. The Halfway House would be a place for the disabled children of the orphanage to go after they turn 18. It would serve as a place to teach them skills that will allow those with mild or moderate disabilities to live independently in the community. We have submitted a proposal to purchase the land for these projects.



SPECIAL THANKS



We have had a productive 6 months here and couldn't have done it without a lot of help. We want to thank those who have given money to support our work here. All of our projects are funded by private donations and your generosity translates directly to work that helps the disadvantaged in Viet Nam. There are also many individuals who give more than their share of time to help us. Our recent volunteers at the orphanage (Amanda Brown, Claire May, Elin Loof, Jennifer Neil and Sue Lamphear) have been great with the children. Brian McDonald has been a great help with our numerous website and computer catastrophes. Ryan McGhan has helped us to get answers to medical problems that are well outside of our knowledge base. Erica Reeve has provided us with invaluable information on the nutritional needs of our children. Chris Otwell and Jim Nall have been working hard to finish a documentary on our work here. Donna McCarthy from AHAC has been a great source of financial support and endless words of encouragement. And last, but not least, my parents, Jess and Diane Solomon, who have been taking care of the financial, postal and various other problems that arise in the states that we are utterly incapable of resolving here in Viet Nam. The list goes on and on! Thanks to everyone for your support.

Josh Solomon
Hoi An Foundation

*See a preview of the documentary at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GO62tTPTRd0>

