

This is the first newsletter of the Hoi An Foundation. It has taken a year to establish a Foundation, get the necessary funding and start using the money to help better the lives of the children at the Hoi An Orphanage. I am proud to say that we are officially up and running at full speed. I hope we can put our individual skills and talents together to make this next year a productive one for the children.

Let me tell you what has gone into the establishment of the Foundation. It took the last 4 months of 2003 to establish a nonprofit organization. After the paperwork was complete, Joe and I worked to get a mailing address and an email address. Joe worked hard to get us a website up and it looks great ([www.hoianfoundation.org](http://www.hoianfoundation.org)). I received the grant money from the Chest Foundation in February and have just recently started using it at the orphanage. Jackie Wrafter and Robyn Morley are organizing all of the work at the orphanage. Jackie heads the Kianh Foundation ([www.kianh.co.uk](http://www.kianh.co.uk)), which is based in England. She has been living in Hoi An since I left in May of 2003. She was joined a few months ago by Robyn Morley, an Australian lady who has been in Vietnam for years and has dedicated her life to helping children in need. Together they have done a lot with funding from the Kianh Foundation and the Hoi An Foundation. The following projects have been completed:

- 1) Thuy is a young Vietnamese woman that I met in Quang Nam Province on the outskirts of Hoi An. She had difficulties with learning and speech and we diagnosed her with a moderate hearing deficit. I initially found outside funding for her hearing aids and first year at the deaf school in Da Nang. The foundation just purchased her an improved hearing aid and funded her next year at the school.
- 2) The disabled children's room at the orphanage was plagued with flies during the summer. They were particularly a problem for Bong, Gai and Xi (they are bed bound due to their disabilities). We paid to have heavy-duty fly screens made for the disabled room to keep the flies out and the windows open.
- 3) Sen, one of the older boys, has cerebral palsy that is isolated to his lower extremities. He had surgery a few years ago but his post-op rehabilitation wasn't adequate. The Foundation just paid to have another surgery (an Achilles tendon release). Sen is back from the hospital and doing well. Jackie and I are working to get one of the physiotherapists from Da Nang to come to Hoi An to help out Thanh (the therapist for the orphanage) so we can keep Sen walking and independent after the surgery.
- 4) Toan is a young man in the town of Hoi An who has severe scoliosis. David Mickler from London (an independent donator) paid for him to have surgery in Ho Chi Min. We have paid for him and his mother to return to Hoi Chi Min to get the needed follow-up care.

The following projects are ongoing:

- 1) The bathrooms in the able-body rooms and in the handicap room are in horrible shape. All of the sinks are on the ground and the toilets have all broken. Collin Schroeder, a volunteer from Australia, is in Hoi An with his wife and they are helping at the orphanage for the next few months. Collin and I walked through the orphanage last year and got together a plan to repair the plumbing and fixtures. The director wouldn't let us do the work at the time but has finally agreed. Under Collin's guidance, they will repair all of the bathrooms in the orphanage. We will also build a low toilet and sink for some of the more independent handicapped children (Vu and Phuc) so they can learn some personal hygiene (they usually use the bathroom in a bucket or the floor). Construction is starting now.
- 2) A new child at the orphanage named Thi Hong has moderate hydrocephalus. A pediatrician from California examined the child when he was on vacation in Hoi An and determined he would benefit from a shunt. We have found a doctor and a shunt in Ha Noi. We are trying to arrange a trip for Jackie and Thi Hong to go to Hanoi for the procedure. A difficulty has been getting permission from the director for the trip. She decided that Thi Hong wouldn't benefit from the surgery. Jackie has been working hard to get permission and we are ready to send her once the director agrees.
- 3) We are looking into renting a separate playroom for the handicapped children at the orphanage. Since the directory doesn't think the children need a playroom, we would actually have to pay a fee to her to use an empty room at the orphanage. This room would allow a place for the volunteers to take the disabled children that aren't in physical therapy and work independently with them. Roe Schroeder, wife of Collin, will be staying at the orphanage for most of the year and could get a lot more achieved with a quiet room.

My ultimate goal in starting the foundation has been to work to establish a future for these children. Handicapped children that reach 18 in Hoi An either sell lottery tickets (which doesn't support much of an existence) or move to an adult shelter where they live in a room for the rest of their lives. I truly think that we can help transition a majority of the disabled children into a normal productive life in the community. Part of this is getting them acknowledged and accepted. When I first arrived in Hoi An, we started taking the children out weekly to the park and down to the river. The townspeople were initially wide-eyed and quite (the children never left the orphanage and were never seen up to that point). After a few "big days out", the townspeople starting talking to the children. The last day out before I left, they would call the children by their names and give them hugs and treats. This acceptance is the first step. The next step is teaching the children to be independent and function in society. This includes basic skills of independent living (managing money, maintaining a living space, etc) but also includes having the skills to earn money. Jackie and I have been talking about ways to do this. We have entertained the idea of buying a house where the volunteers and the older children would stay. We could arrange to have skills taught by the townspeople. We are currently looking into starting the process of skill learning early. We are working to send

Sen and Luu Mai out to a computer education shop run by a handicapped adult in town. I am trying to get the director to allow Vu to go to school outside the orphanage where he can learn from other children. I am going to bring a computer when I return so that the volunteers can teach Phuc and Luu Mai how to use one (a valuable skill in Vietnam). I have also secured the help of some local businessmen (like the owner of a successful internet cafe) to teach the children the skills of working in the town. Though it will take years to see the effects of these interventions, I think giving the children an independent life in the town is the best that we can do for them

That's all for now. I am planning to go for two weeks in October to Hoi An and would really like to have as many of you go as possible. We will plan to get a lot done for the kids while we are there and hopefully take some time to enjoy the beautiful countryside. Please let me know if you think you could make it.

Josh Solomon