

## VIETNAM CHILDREN'S PROJECT

### *2015 Christmas Newsletter*

Greetings!

Another year draws to a close, an important year for our global community as developed and developing countries strive to achieve an equitable and timely approach to address the Earth's changing climate. It seems appropriate that this occurs at the time leading up to Christmas with its message of love and peace toward one another.



Each day as adults we are confronted with unresolved issues, global or local, personal or communal and these can create a sense of despair and frustration in us. So it is even more important that we protect and nurture the capacities of the young child so that they have healthy foundations to creatively meet the challenges of the future. It is therefore no surprise to see such generosity and support from all over the world for the children at Dieu Giac Orphanage and those attending the holistic Steiner Kindergartens in Vietnam.

Our gratitude goes out to all who contribute to the VCP by donating money, time and efforts or by sponsoring the children in Vietnam. We especially thank our faithful sponsors in Australia, ably co-ordinated by Anne Bell and in Europe, co-ordinated by Jenny Lloyd through the Freunde der Erziehungskunst Rudolf Steiner e.V. (Germany) and Shirley Bell through the International Hulpfonds (the Netherlands). The WOW-day initiative by the Freunde calls for special commendation and we thank the students at the Rudolf Steiner Schule München-Gröbenzell, Germany for this year's generous contribution, and heart-felt thanks to the students and co-workers at the Chengdu Training course for their donations to the kindergartens in Ho Chi Minh City.

Sponsorship and donation money provides everyday necessities and a Steiner kindergarten education for the young children from the orphanage as well as others living in poor circumstances. In addition we reiterate our gratitude to the International Association for Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education (IASWECE) whose financial and moral support makes it possible for our kindergarten teacher training programme to continue.

This year there were new developments in the governance of the VCP. We are now an incorporated organisation which means we can receive bequests and it satisfies a significant pre-requisite to apply for tax deductibility status. As part of this process we refreshed our constitution to be more in keeping with our current aims and objectives. This gave us the opportunity to reflect on how the scope of our work has developed and expanded over the 17 years of the VCP's life.

**Susanna Pearson**

*For the Management Committee*

*The members of the VCP wish you a joyful Christmas and a peaceful New Year*

## VIETNAM REPORT – CHRISTMAS 2015

### *DIEU GIAC ORPHANAGE*



Room for new Kindergarten at Dieu Giac

This year I visited Dieu Giac in March, July then again in December. Each time the priority was to find a new location for the Kindergarten class, which had to move from its home of the past 12 years. On the last visit Nun Nhu Tri and I once more went round the orphanage ground to try to pick another suitable site for the classroom. Life had considerably calmed down here now that the



construction of the new temple was almost finished. Some doors and windows still stood empty as holes in the walls and a few welders with fire emitting nozzles still squatted on the path when we had to pass through from the gate to the orphanage buildings. Josh, a volunteer from Australia and currently helping out at Tho Trang kindergarten, accompanied me that day. He has offered to join Dieu Giac kindergarten children in songs and games in the future too. Already they were delighted with him and the playground resounded with laughter as they played together. And so we passed into the clean smooth surface of the orphanage courtyard.

### *Dieu Giac's second generation -*



All was in order and quiet. It was siesta time. We chatted with a few children who for one reason or another were awake and seeming to have fun. They turned out to be members of Dieu Giac's second generation – children of the orphanage's older residents who had now moved on. Some of these children actually live at the orphanage with their parents, or at least their mothers; some stay during the day while the latter are at work, to be cared for by the house mothers alongside other orphaned babies and toddlers. Sometimes the parents choose to come back to work at the orphanage to help Nhu Tri in her tasks. As always,

there are quite a few new children joining Dieu Giac this year, some barely a few month old babies, some are toddlers who've just managed to walk.

### *Special needs -*

**Tuyet Dung** – Dung is a 20 year old resident with special needs at the orphanage. Physically she has blossomed into a healthy, beautiful young woman but her mental capacities remain those of a 6 year old when she was abandoned at Dieu Giac. She is loved and well protected by all the caring adults. She will probably never leave the place as it would be hard to see how she can cope in the outside world. At the moment her daily work is to help in the kitchen of Dieu Giac's vegetarian restaurant and she is very happy there. Her sponsoring family from Sydney has been supporting her for many years with financial contributions and gifts, regularly sending messages of warmth and love.



**Thien Son** – Some of the VCP supporters may be familiar with Son's story - an unfortunate individual with a most radiant expression on his face. Abandoned at Dieu Giac as a tiny baby, Son could not focus his eyes, move his legs or talk. Many helpers, carers, therapists and doctors have attempted to help in different ways and Son has developed over the years to become a healthy, cheerful teenager but still he cannot walk, speak or see clearly. Today, Son moves around with the help of an old two-wheeled computer desk. And there he was, on that afternoon, whizzing about with his table-walker, broadly smiling...“We are still trying to raise funds for a proper walking apparatus”, Nhu Tri confided.



### ***Tertiary students -***



The Tertiary Education Project has been going well, coordinated by Anne Bell along with her orphanage sponsorship task. More and more young people are being sponsored for their studies at University, some nearing graduation. Some of these have reached the age when they can leave the orphanage and settle in an independent life outside. Among these are Van Thai Hong Dao studying Accountancy and Van Thai Phuong Anh majoring in English.



### ***Greetings from Jenni – VCP's Secretary and Kindergarten sponsorship Co-ordinator***

It is a conundrum that giving so easily becomes receiving and vice versa. I feel wonder and appreciation for the many gifts and unexpected blessings that I have received this year within the VCP and at the Steiner school where I work part-time. To be able to witness and interact with



children who delight in life engagements and express spontaneous joy as a result of Steiner education has been an inspiration. Many welcome tips from seasoned educators have also come my way through this work,

I feel fortunate to be part of an education that strives for the betterment of mankind through experiences of beauty and reverence that speak to the heart. Our contributions, as sponsors, donors or admin workers, are true expressions of good will. By these acts, in each of us a flame is lit and a sense of exaltation ignited – a true Christmas spirit.

### ***Fundraising-***

At the annual fundraising event last March, the musicians of Rapunzel's Party, eurythmist Kimberley Hammerton and tango dancer Pedro Alvarez combined their talents in a delightful musical afternoon in the Southern Highlands. The profits once again go to support different projects at the VCP. Our warmest thanks go to all the artists.

### ***Greetings from the Orphanage Sponsorship Co-ordinator - Anne Bell***

Every year when I sit to write for the Newsletter I think – what can there possibly be that is new to say? From the outside admin work is just routine, however I find its smallest details are most interesting and touching. Sponsors arrive, usually referred by someone they know, many for specific reasons such as caring about the need for girls to be educated in developing countries. Quickly they become part of the VCP “family”, and sometimes I am privileged to have email or phone contact with them.

This year the idea of “family” touched me personally. My dear mum, who has been a sponsor for quite a few years, died at the age of 90. She had already supported a teenage girl to adulthood and independence and had then taken on a little boy before she died. I wondered if I would find another sponsor for him ... I didn't have to wait long as one of my friends who had been a sponsor before immediately came forward. The whole process warmed my heart.

Along the way I witness the children grow and develop. Many have been nurtured as young children at Dieu Giac, then gone on to tertiary education, satisfying jobs and independent lives. One such young woman wrote in a letter to her sponsor: *“Although I now live independently outside the orphanage every week I come back to visit my friends and my younger brothers and sisters there... I thank you very much. I have been able to live the life that I have now thanks to you two. Thanks to your assistance to Nun Nhu Tri, with the fees for my study, healthy food every day, good clothes to wear, I am now grown up and capable of looking after myself.”*

Thank you all for enabling this valuable and loving work to continue.



## ***THE KINDERGARTENS***

### ***Dieu Giac Kindergarten-***



Ngoc outside the proposed new classroom

Dieu Giac's makeshift kindergarten has been running smoothly in the orphanage buildings for half a year with the programme reduced to 3 hours a day of free play, singing, movement games, story telling and drawing. This year there are 14 children from 3 to 5 year old, all living at Dieu Giac. The teacher, Thien Ngoc, has completed her University certificate in Early childhood education. This November she was able to start her Steiner training in Module 1 of the Steiner-Waldorf training Course. She plans to continue with the 6 modules.

The search for a new location for the full time kindergarten continued. We have decided on a building, just a few hundred metres from the old classroom. Work still needs to be done to transform the place with its bathroom facilities but the future looks brighter and more certain. We hope to occupy the new venue in April or May 2016. Teacher Ngoc will continue her informal kindergarten at the orphanage in the meantime.

## ***Thanh Lan Kindergarten-***

The educational authorities in Cu Chi where Thanh Lan is situated are strict in every detail – the environment as well as the teaching. Thanh Lan now has 50 children in total, divided into 3 groups, the kindergarten with 20 children and 2 teachers, 2 nurseries of 15 children each with one main teacher and one floating assistant shared by the two classes. Recently a mentor from Thailand, Abhisiree, has spent time in the classrooms to guide the teachers who are not yet experienced. The visit proved to be especially beneficial and was appreciated by all.



Thanh Lan children watching puppet show.

Although visitors to Thanh Lan have said that the classrooms could be improved in regard to sunlight and air circulation, most parents seem happy with the kindergarten's environment. They are particularly impressed with the way children are cared for with warmth and love, influenced by the Steiner-Waldorf educational philosophy. As for the curriculum and methods, the teachers at Thanh Lan constantly face scrutiny and criticism from the educational department. As a result, they can only apply some of the Steiner-Waldorf principles while making attempts at merging and combining the two approaches wherever and whenever necessary. It is a tough line to tread.

## ***Tho Trang Kindergarten & the Steiner-Waldorf Education situation in Vietnam***

A new phenomenon regarding Steiner-Waldorf education in Vietnam has taken place in 2015. It



started with 2 young women – Thao, a parent at Tho Trang, Ho Chi Minh city, and Huong, a researcher in Hanoi. They connected through Facebook and started a series of articles introducing the Steiner-Waldorf philosophy to the public. The result was a great interest among the progressive educational circle, parents, teachers and authors alike.

After the graduation ceremony of the teacher training course in May of that year new developments accelerated at Tho Trang spreading out into many cities.

By November the number of children at Tho Trang has increased to an unprecedented maximum allowed. Parents began to arrive pleading for their child's acceptance. A waiting list of 60 was soon established. Meanwhile, requests for a primary class led to the forming of a Steiner Class 1 on 6 September. A new Early Childhood Teacher Training course was organised for November and a Primary Teacher Training Course due in January 2016. Tho Trang's premises became overflowing with children, parents, teachers and others.

The administrators were now busy looking for new and larger premises to house the proposed 4 nursery classes, 4 kindergartens and all primary grades from 1 to 6.



**Hanoi kindergarten** - A group of students from the Early childhood Teacher Training Course have planned to start a kindergarten in Hanoi for sometime. In December I came to help prepare the classroom and the teachers for the scheduled opening. As a rule we do not encourage people to open



Steiner-inspired Hanoi Kindergarten

kindergartens before they finish their training, but there are exceptions - when the teachers are considered "ready" and especially in pioneering cases. This instance is unique because it will be the first Steiner-Waldorf initiative in Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam. The teachers worked very hard in the preparation and I believe it will be a success. On the 21st of December, the Hanoi Kindergarten opened to the world with 5 children in a moving ceremony. They were "very happy - eat well, sleep well, play well and imitate the teachers' every gesture in the morning circle as if enchanted".

**Other initiatives** – Out of the current early childhood training course several other seeds have also sprouted. A couple of these are in Ho Chi Minh City itself; then one in Nha Trang and one in Da Nang – central Vietnam. The Da Nang initiative seems blessed with strong foundations; they have found land and would begin building soon. A playgroup is starting in February 2016 and other ideas abound.

### ***Teacher Training Report - Shirley Bell***

#### **Vietnam Steiner-Waldorf Early Childhood Teacher Training Course I – Graduation day**



Twelve students have completed the 3 year part time training course I and a graduation ceremony was held in May 2015 to commemorate it. Distinguished guests were Co Suong, the original local co-ordinator who, for health reasons has recently had to withdraw; Helen Cock, director of the Melbourne Rudolf Steiner Teacher Training Seminar in Australia; and the training's Coordinators Thanh Cherry and Shirley Bell. The event began with a marionette performance by the students, beautifully dressed in traditional 'ao dai'. It was moving to hear each student speak of how much the course has meant to them and to see their strength through the tears of happiness. The local press reported the event the next day, igniting great interest and requests for another training course, much to the surprise of the coordinators who thought they may have a little rest before starting again!

There are many people to thank, firstly the IASWECE which has contributed yearly to the program; the North England Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Training (NESWEC) who also raise funds for us; the local co-ordinators Co Suong and Co Thao who took care of the visiting tutors and hosted the seminars. Many thanks to the international tutors who volunteered their time and expertise from 2012-2015, and special thanks to the founder of the Steiner Education movement in Vietnam and chairperson of the VCP, Thanh Cherry, who has worked tirelessly for many years to support Steiner/Waldorf Education in Asia.

## VSWECTT Course II:

This is an exciting time for Steiner education in Vietnam as the many years of voluntary work begin to bear fruit. There were over 30 students in Ho Chi Minh, Hanoi and other parts of Vietnam enrolled in Module I of the second course in November 2015. The training ended on 3 December and it was a memorable event as participants from all over the country expressed their shared ideals, their enthusiasm and commitment to working for a common aim – that of protecting and helping young children to grow and develop into full human beings. However, it was soon realised that there were many more prospective students in Hanoi who were unable to come to Ho Chi Minh City, so from 2016 there will be 2 separate training courses in Vietnam – the Ho Chi Minh Course starting with Module 1 in November 2015 and finishing in 2018 in Ho Chi Minh City; the Hanoi Course started with the last Module 1 in Ho Chi Minh City in November 2015 but Module 2 will take place in Hanoi as with Module 3, 4, 5 and 6.



.Students from Module 1, second teacher training course



Helen He giving painting workshop

Both training programs will be delivered in 6 modules of 2 week sessions over 3 years. The continued financial support of IASWECE is much appreciated and the International Hulpfonds in the Netherlands (IHF) has come to our rescue in donating funds for further training needs. The expenses are undoubtedly greater than our projected budget so we will have to rely on seeking further financial help and to have faith that we can continue. The Waldorf shop in Guangzhou China, has kindly donated and discounted some of the materials needed for the 1<sup>st</sup> module - thankyou to Xiaoyu Li (store mananger) for your support.

If you would like to help in any way please contact us by email at: [shirleyabell2@yahoo.com.au](mailto:shirleyabell2@yahoo.com.au)

*Thank Cherry  
VCP Chairperson  
Mittagong, December 2015*



Hanoi Christmas puppet show

*Blessed Greetings for a Wonderful Christmas and a Happy New Year!*