

REPORT ON THE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION NEEDS OF HOA LONG ORPHANAGE, BA RIA – VUNG TAU PROVINCE, VIETNAM

By Barry Casey, AVVRG

PREAMBLE

This project was initially designed to assess the vocational capabilities of the children at the Hoa Long Orphanage in Vietnam and make recommendations to the AVVRG as to how vocational opportunities can be improved for the orphans.

HOA LONG ORPHANAGE

The Background

The Australian veterans Vietnam Reconstruction Group raised funds during the mid-1990s in Australia to construct an orphanage for the 50 most needy children residing in the Hoa Long/Ba Ria area. The dedication ceremony was performed by the Honorable Mr Tim Fischer MP, Deputy Prime Minister of Australia on 18 August 1996. Most of the older children have resided at the orphanage since the opening day in September 1997.



Orphanage July 2000

Apart from the funds received from AVVRG foster parent scheme, the Vietnamese government contributes 120,000 Vietnamese dong (about A\$15) per month per child to the daily running of the orphanage.

The standard of accommodation, the quality of their care, the health and happiness of the children at Hoa Long orphanage is outstanding, and AVVRG members can be justifiably proud of their achievements. The Director Mrs Hong and her 9 full-time staff appear to show and receive genuine affection from the children. The cleanliness of the living areas and the quantity and quality of their meals is a credit to Mrs Hong and her staff.

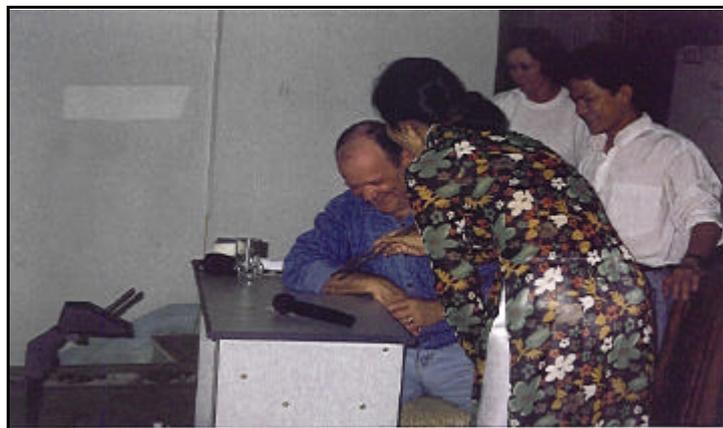
The recently completed vocational classroom block has further enhanced the environment within the orphanage grounds. It was anticipated that vocational

classes would commence in July 2000, with training provided by external visiting teachers funded by both the government (sewing, computers, electrical repairs) and the AVVRG (music and fine arts). Basic level courses in these disciplines would be provided 4 hours each morning for 3 months, with the children attending general education in the afternoon and at night. On completion of the basic levels, 3-month advanced level courses would be available for 4 hours each afternoon, with general education in the mornings and at night.

The Interview Process

As at 13 June 2000, the orphanage sheltered 16 girls and 35 boys, ranging in age from 3 weeks to 18 years. Apart from one girl who is slightly mentally retarded, no other children are mentally or physically disabled. It was intended to individually interview the 17 children (4 girls and 13 boys) born prior to 1988, and ask a standard set of questions related to their current levels of education, their expectations about their future, their vocational dreams and their knowledge of the vocational training which would soon be available to them both at the orphanage and externally.

Most of the first day at the orphanage was spent establishing rapport with the older children. Despite initial concerns that this process may be difficult due to language and cultural differences, it was in fact a most rewarding and enjoyable experience. As most of the staff is female, the orphans interact rarely with adult males. In particular, the older boys were anxious to test their soccer and arm wrestling skills. The less outgoing and the younger children were reticent to become involved at first, but soon lost their inhibitions once they saw that the leaders in their group were happy to interact with the foreigner.

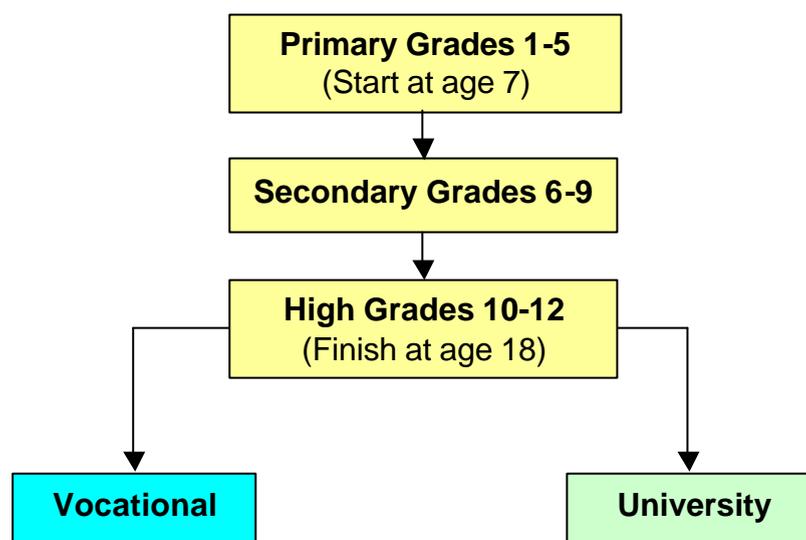


Barry Casey, Barbara Campbell and staff at the Orphanage July 2000

During the course of the first day, Choi and Tam (both 15 years old boys) stood out as respected leaders within the orphanage. If they joined in, the other children did also. They confidently organised the others at meal time and bath time. The younger children looked to them for direction. These two boys were interviewed late the first afternoon. Both initially indicated some anxiety when responding to questions about leaving the orphanage and therefore emphasis was placed on "when you turn 18". That night, Choi and

Tam obviously gave the process their seal of approval because interviews conducted on the following days at the orphanage were free of anxiety and the children were eager to participate. Indeed, their enthusiasm was somewhat overwhelming. The Director, Mrs Hong, was also interested in their reaction to the interview process. She explained that this was probably the first time many of these children had been treated as individuals rather than as just one member of a group. In most cases, prior to entering the orphanage, their lives had been very difficult and this individual attention was having a significant impact on self-esteem.

Vietnam's education system is structured as follows:



Access can be gained to some vocational courses prior to the end of high school. Disadvantaged children can get access to all vocational courses from lower grades provided they continue to study general education as well.

Parents must pay fees for children to attend every level of education. Students are required to pass an examination to complete one level of education and pass another examination to be accepted into the next level of education. Fee waiver and special entry arrangements are available to disadvantaged students (e.g. orphans).

The Interview Results

Ages of the 17 Children:

Sex	18 years	17 years	15 years	14 years	13 years
Female	2	-	-	1	1
Male	-	2	3	3	5

Note: Only 2 girls aged 18 years and 2 boys aged 17 years will have to leave the orphanage within the next 2 years.

Level of Education Attained:

School Grade	18 years		17 years		15 years		14 years		13 years	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
10	1									
9					1					
8							1			
7	1		2		1		1			1
6					1					2
5									1	1
4							1	1		1

Note: Differences in level attained are not necessarily due to scholastic ability. Opportunity to attend school may have been extremely limited for some children prior to entering the orphanage.

The government pays for all orphans to attend local schools. Several also attend night school to lift their educational level.

Expressed Vocational Expectations:

Desired Career	18 years		17 years		16 years		15 years		14 years		13 years	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Sewing	2		1						1		1	
Driving			1				1					1
Electrician												1
TV Repair												1
Mechanic							2		1			
Doctor									1			
Artist												1
Musician									1			1

Note: It is interesting to note that the 4 eldest had very realistic expectations about their immediate options. All 4 of the girls expected to sew for a living.

Expressed Vocational Interests:

Desired Career	18 years		17 years		16 years		15 years		14 years		13 years	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Computer	1							2	1			2
Electrical							1					
Electronics			1									
Art									2			2
Music									1			1

Note: Only 14 of the 17 children had a “dream occupation” that was different to their vocational expectations. The older children were very realistic. For example, one 18 year old girl had a dream that one day she would become a computer operator and a 17 year old boy dreamt of becoming a TV repairman, but both stated that they would first learn to sew, as they could realistically expect to get paid work within 6 months to fund completion of grade twelve and further vocational studies.

Points of Interest

It is important to consider the following points when reviewing the above data:

- Vocational School Fees** DELISA would pay the monthly fees for all orphans who attend Long Dat Vocational College (depending on the course these costs range from 110,000 to 150,000 Vietnamese dong or A\$14 to A\$19 per month). There is also a "disadvantaged policy" which would allow special entry for orphans who have not attained appropriate grade levels. For example, the Principal Nguyen Trung Tra has confirmed that an orphaned student who has Grade 9 education and completed 6 months vocational training at the Hoa Long orphanage will be accepted at Long Dat. All of the realistic vocational expectations and most of the "dream" courses nominated by the Hoa Long orphans are available at Long Dat Vocational college.
- Living Expenses** Parents of students currently studying at Long Dat provide an allowance of around 150,000 to 200,000 Vietnamese dong (A\$20 to A\$25) per month to cover their living expenses and material costs (students can live at the college). Orphans from the Hoa Long facility would need similar support.
- Precedents** Only two 18 year old girls have already left the Hoa Long Orphanage. They have written to the remaining orphans and told them they are very happy sewing in Vung Tau and supporting themselves. Obviously this is the only successful precedent of which orphans are aware and therefore they see it as a realistic option for themselves.
- Anxiety** All of the children interviewed expressed their fear of leaving the orphanage alone and wanted to stay as long as they were allowed. The older ones conceded they could contemplate studying at Long Dat Vocational

college provided one of more friends from the orphanage went with them. It was not appropriate to labour this point with the 13 and 14 year olds - most simply did not want to think about leaving.

5. **Study Attitudes** All valued the opportunity to study and 14 stated they were prepared to continue studying as long as they were able. The remaining 3 said they would study until they achieved their first job.

6. **Staff Counselling** The Director Mrs Hong had previously discussed vocational options with the 7 children 15 years and older. It would seem that these discussions were limited to the vocational training available at the orphanage from July.

7. **Director's Expectations** Mrs Hong stated that she expected that once children had turned 18, and had received basic and advanced vocational training at the orphanage, she would call upon community support to find jobs for them in factories. Girls who married before age 18 were also able to leave the orphanage.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The AVVRG may wish to consider raising funds to support orphans who are accepted as students at the Long Dat vocational College. Cost per student would be A\$25 per student per month for the duration of the course.

2. The AVVRG may wish to consider recommending to their members visiting the Orphanage that they raise A\$100 to cover an outing to the beach (approximately A\$50 for the bus and A\$50 for food for the children)

Barry Casey, AVVRG

August 2000

Barry also produced a Report on the Long Dat Vocational College during this visit – The report is available via the AVVRG Web Site at <http://www.powerup.com.au/~avvrg>