

## AVVRG CONTINUES SEWING TRAINING FOR POOR VILLAGE WOMEN

By Kathryn Gow, Feb 2000

You will be delighted to know that when I arrived at the Women's Union in Ba Ria all the sewing machines that the AWRG has purchased for the training of village women were all laid out in the training room and another program with 36 had just finished (a full 3 month course).

With the \$AU390 we saved on the exchange rate last August, Paul as President approved that these left over funds go straight back into the sewing program and now the 36 women will proceed to the advanced course. I am not sure what went into previous newsletters about this program, but an initial AUSaid grant of about \$AU2000 bought us the first 17 machines and some pattern books; and the committee allocated another \$AU2000 to the purchase of industrial sewing machines. In case that sounds simple, it actually wasn't as Chris Murphy and I had to go and get the machines made up and then deliver them to Ba Ria to make sure they got there. Similarly for the industrial sewing machines last August,

Paul and Chris took about~\$AU700 worth of materials and cottons etc, to the Women's union in early 1999 and in August I allocated another \$AU600 from the Rotary budget as part of the Credit scheme to pay for training costs. Inadvertently another 35,500,000 dong went into the sewing training pool, from another budget line item, so I have to find money to replace this amount.

So all in all we have invested about \$AU7000 and it has been a very good investment. But when Barbara Crawford and I saw the first quote in Vietnamese, it is a wonder anything ever happened; it all looked so complicated and finding people to interpret these papers free is always hard in Australia.

And as Paul noted recently in Saigon, we have to pay for the training teachers fee, transport and lunch costs as well as materials, cottons, patterns, machines, cupboards, etc.

All the sewing machines had bright colorful covers on them: 14 basic machines, 1 overlocker, 2 embroidery machines and the 4 new (second hand) industrial sewing machines. At least half of all the women (over 300 50 far) have obtained work in ~the local factories and so this sewing program is considered highly successful by the province. I have asked for a full report on the program from 1996 to date.

Looking at the fan above me in their office as I type this I wonder if someone would be so kind as to give me some money to replace the ceiling fan, as it is just about falling off. If you do send this money please note that it is for the ceiling fan in the Women's Union.

### Notes: Ba Ria gets a Face Lift

Those of you who went to Ba Ria before 1999 would not recognize the town; it has bitumen roads, paved footpaths with trees planted on the footpath, a new marketplace (costs \$3000U5 for a small booth). Many buildings have been painted and look very smart. It sports lots of new shops and restaurants and some attractive gardens. There are many (every now and again) new beautiful luxurious houses dotting the countryside and one of the locals said the money to build them had come from the overseas relatives of families.

I have just discovered that the very loud broadcasts that blast one from one's bed at Sam in the morning are actually radio news broadcasts. There are 7 radio stations in Ba Ria one for each vWard/Commune. The Local announcer came to see me today about talking about our work, but we had no interpreter and while my intensive Vietnamese course (2 month full Ume course at Griffith university) came in handy, it could not bridge that gap.

There are many older children who would like to correspond with people in Australia, so if you have the time, they have the need.

People going to Ba Ria who are prepared to put in a few nights (1.5 hours) teaching English to the Hospital doctors at Dr Tan's house should drop into his home and let him know you are there and he will arrange for the doctors to come to his house for speaking practice. Barbara Crawford and I commenced this service in 1996 and so far I have diverted many other visitors to his house to teach.

I was surprised to hear my motorbike driver (take your motorbike helmet with you - we are running a road safety awareness program starting with the expats) speak very good English as we drove along; he had worked with the Australians in the war years.

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