

Vietnam Visit Report - June 2000

by Sister Barbara Crawford

Monday 12 June

To Vung Tau by boat from Ho Chi Minh City. Cost \$10 US dollars. Taxi to BaRia.

Accommodation Bach Dang Hotel. Meeting at 6pm with Dr Tan from BaRia Hospital. Went to meeting at Phuoc Hung with AVVRG member Kathryn Gow re: Loans for women of the area.

Tuesday 13 June

To Orphanage for meeting with Madam Huong, Kathryn Gow, Barry Casey, Barbara Crawford and Mr Long (Interpreter). All monies have become available for classrooms. List obtained with all children's names and DOB. Dentist visited in January 2000. Now have 51 children - 24 from age 12. Oldest are 18 years. Also one disabled girl and two babies (Female 20 days - Male 2 months).

In July the classrooms will be ready to be used for:

- Sewing machines
- Computers
- Watch repairing

Classes will be for 4 hours in the mornings for 3 months. Younger children will go to the local school either in morning or afternoon.

Older children for Vocational Education in morning and study at night. When older children start work (eg when 18 years) can stay in Orphanage until they become independent or marry. Wages earned will pay for food. Do not have to pay board. We agreed to pay 10,000 Dong per day for lunch for the days we spend at the Orphanage. Mrs Huong took the money from me the first day but refused to accept the money after that.

The Government per month gives each child 120,000 Dong.

Staff: 9 full time staff including two ladies who only work in the nursery looking after the babies. They each work a 12-hour shift. Eg 5am - 5pm, 5pm - 8am.

Afternoon: Meeting at Vung Tau with Madam Huong Xinh, and members of the Education Department and Vocational Education Centre at Long Dat.

We then went to Long Dat Educational Centre for another meeting and inspection of the Centre. The Army are at present scanning the area for mines. This is the area Kathryn Cow and myself have spent time walking over on our first visit in 1995-96 when the Centre was the Long Dat Medical Centre (To return on Thursday for an Education Program for the teachers).

Contact with Mr Anh. He will take me to Suoi Nghe to look at site for Pre School to be funded by AVVRG.



Evening to Dr Tan's house for English class. Very rewarding. Dr Tan's English has improved during the 5 years I have been visiting him and helping him with his English classes.

Wednesday 14 June



Barbara with the Kids at the Orphanage

Visited new Market in BaRia. Meeting with old friend Mr Dai Loc. English class while I was with him. He is now married with a little boy. His wife works in his watch repairs/clock shop with him and they have established a good business. I feel honoured at the respect and gratitude these people bestow on me. We discussed Mr Loc's health and his visits to his HCMC Specialist. He has not been well and needed to ask my advice of his treatment. I

reassured him.

I spent the next couple of hours in the steaming heat trying to collect all the necessary equipment we would need to prepare for the training day at Long Dat tomorrow.

We spent the rest of the afternoon and evening making posters and suitable training aids.

Thursday 15 June

8am Mr Anh took me on his bike to Suoi Nghe. We met with Mr Tran Canti Thai, Manager for Community Protection for childcare in the Chou Duc District. Suoi Nghe is a village in this district. We went to the site proposed for the Pre School. There is an old shed at the back of the property, which has been condemned. There is to be two rooms for the school at a cost of \$18,000 US dollars. They need the school for September as school starts for the 3-5 year olds.

Mr Anh lives in the village of Suoi Nghe so a new Pre School is close to his heart. It was delightful to see him again. I feel he is looking better than when I last saw him although I am sure he is missing his work. He took me to his house where I met his daughter. He would not accept any money for the morning's work. I feel such rapport has been built between so many of our Vietnamese friends and to have pressed him would have been most ungracious. He was most willing to help in any way he could and I feel we could use his interpreting skills on future trips.

He took me to the Vocational Education College where I spent the rest of the day with Kathryn and Barry at the training program. Madam Houng Xinh and the teachers of the school gave us flowers and a pen.

Later that evening we were taken to see an 11 year old female who was Madam Huong Xinh's niece who was staying with them. She had a very sore left eye with conjunctivitis. We went to the chemist and bought eye ointment and returned to administer the treatment.

Friday 16 June

Barry Casey and myself went to the Orphanage as arranged with Madam Huong. Barry is a Executive Member AVVRG and is doing his Practice for his QUT

Psychology degree in Vietnam. Barry will interview 17 children while we are at the Orphanage. Boys and Girls from 14 years old. Hopefully we will be able to use the information collected to give the children the opportunity to follow up with work opportunities toward their chosen career path. (*)

The babies are beautiful. Kinh Chi Khuyen looks after them during the day shift 5am-5pm. Another female staff works the next shift 5pm-5am. They have the nursery well presented and clean. Two cots, a large change bath table, cupboards for storage of equipment and clothes. They need milk powder formula, Talcum powder, and baby bath solution for baffling. The bottles are cleaned and boiled on a gas cooker in the nursery. The cots are



like a swinging basinet. The babies are fed regularly and are thriving well. **Nguyen Thanh Dat**, baby boy, born 9 April 2000 is doing very well. He is trying to smile and gurgle. He responds well to the staff and children. **Li Thi Lien Huong**, baby girl born 24 May 2000. Both babies abandoned. Baby Huong was left at BaRia Hospital. I think Dr.Tan organised for the baby to come to the orphanage. I took lots of photographs of the children. We were to eat lunch with the children, which was a great treat. We all drew our hands and some feet on a large piece of cardboard. The children were absolutely delighted. I found some of the children were a little shy when we started, but after lunch and lots more interaction they were all in there. As usual it didn't matter about the language difficulties.

Saturday 17 June

To the shop early to buy supplies for the babies, as follows:

- 10 Cans formula at 20,000 Dong per tin (Vinamilk Dielac 1)
 - Johnsons Baby Powder 40,000 Dong
 - Johnsons Baby Bath 36,000 Dong
- Total 276,000 Dong (Approx \$30.000 US)**

I had money given to me by one of my work friends, **Marilyn Kutemann**. She had given me the money knowing I would find some good use for it. I certainly did.

I took lots of photos again that day. It was such a relaxed happy day. We played games, ate lollies. The children played cards, drew pictures and coloured in drawings. They were happy to play without any sophisticated toys or games. Every time a baby woke or cried someone came to get me to help with the babies.....really hard work! Mrs Huong is really good with the children. The baby Dat is often taken out to the area where the other children are playing. Mrs Huong supervises the children nursing and playing with the babies.

All shared lunch, the older children being allowed to sit at our table.

On our return to town, I had our films developed and then went to the market to buy some clothes for the babies. I managed to get two tiny tops and two tops and pant sets. We could collect some baby clothes to send with the next member going over.

Sunday 18 June

We spent the morning at the Orphanage. Barry interviewed the remaining children. I played, nursed and helped feed the babies. Tam glued the photographs onto a large piece of cardboard I had taken out. We had some left from our posters from the training day - the children were delighted. They laughed and pointed at themselves and all others. We headed back to town before lunch. The parting as usual was very sad for me. It is so difficult to leave the children!

Barbara and Barry with the kids at the Orphanage



I hope in years to come, not only myself, but also all AVVRG members have the opportunity to spend time with the children. I don't feel we are upsetting the children by "dropping in" to see them when we are there. For me, after two years, the children recognised and remembered me - to see that look of happiness on their faces at seeing a friend made me feel so fulfilled and for all of us we need to be able to share that love with them.

Barbara Crawford

AVVRG Member (June 2000)

() See Barry Casey's reports 'Vocational Education – Long Dat Vocational College' and 'Vocational Education – Hoa Long Orphanage' on the AVVRG web site at <http://www.powerup.com.au/~avvrg>*