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Dear Family, Friends and Supporters of ASK@VSO,

We have completed our 16th mission to Kon Tum, Central Highlands, Vietnam. I am pleased to tell you that we have found all six (6) orphanages in fairly good shape which is a good indicator that our projects, along with those of FSVO, Diny, Sue Gray and other groups, have and continue to make improvements to the lives of the 700 or so children who call Vinh Son orphanages home.

Rhonda and I linked up at Changi Airport in Singapore. She came in from London. We flew in to Ho Chi Minh City arriving at 11AM on 14 June. We were scheduled to fly on to Pleiku at 5PM so had time to meet good friends Kim Mullett, Gary and Karen Jessup and enjoy lunch at one of our favorite restaurants, Nha Hang Ngon on Pasteur Street. We then headed back to the airport, flew to the new airport at Pleiku then caught a cab to Kon Tum, arriving at about 7PM. The road is really good now. After changing we dropped in to VSI to see everyone there then grabbed a bite to eat and back to our hotel to prepare for our first day on the hustings.

We visited VS4, 6 and the site of our new well. I am pleased to report that the problems with the VS4 kitchen area have now been resolved. This project was funded by Rotary Central. When we visited last year we were not happy with the end result so with a bit of jumping up and down - in the most diplomatic fashion, issues were resolved as shown in the before and after pictures below.

The new dormitory area that Rotary Sunrise funded, is looking great. Plaques from both clubs are displayed in prominent positions so any visitors will know that Rotarians of Townsville have played significant parts in improving the living conditions of these children. Of course any visit to orphanages would not be complete without Mr. Murphy showing up. A newish water tank had fallen off its stand. Thank goodness there were no little ankle biters nearby when this happened. It demonstrated that when quality is overlooked for price, things will go wrong. We sorted this and all is now good.



Vinh Son 4 Kitchen Area before (2015) but supposedly after construction!



Pic 1 New Roof at Food Prep area, Pic 2 Safety Rail and supports at elevated floor, Pic 3 a better dining area. Pictured are Mr. Ho our interpreter, Rhonda and me. Then is the damaged water tank at VS4

It was good to see just how things have improved at VS6. One thing that astounded me was the water filtration system. This was done by a Vietnam charity. They have installed facilities in all the VS which is really great. One went into the kitchen/dining room we constructed as a joint venture with FSVO and Sue Gray. This project had been on the go since 2011. When I first saw the completed work, all was great except for the water tanks. The pictures tell the story.



These pictures show how the water tanks began life, then were enclosed in the new kitchen but initially were propped up with bricks and were clearly unsafe so I insisted something be done. And it was, the stands were cemented in but not enough calculations went into that exercise. Finally the stands were sorted and it was safe for the children. Blow me down, this year the stands are again back on bricks as indicated by that bloke pointing it out to Mr. Ho. I am again insisting this be rectified.



VS3 is in good shape. We hit there about 10AM and as usual the diminutive and very active Sr. Gabrielle welcomed us with her banana wine. I suppose the sun was over the yard arm somewhere. While at VS3, our dear friend Sue Gray asked us to check on a little girl who had tooth problems. She is doing just fine. Sue also asked us to check on the well she had constructed. The mechanics are inside VS3 grounds and the taps are on the outside. This is a much used water source by many local villagers. Sr. G asked if we could supply some chickens. Theft of VS stock, limited as it is, is a serious problem and short of installing security lights and alarms (an extra cost for electricity) there is little that can be done. We arranged for some chickens.

Enjoying Sr. Gabrielle's banana wine. The little girl shows us her teeth. A small village boy collects some water from Sue's well. We weigh in chickens at Kon Tum markets - Vinh Son 3 2016.



We visited VS2 and caught up with Sr. Jeanne who we had not seen for a couple of years. Our sponsored lads Coi and Boi have the job of checking all the water supplies at all the VS. They are paid by FSVO to do this. They are required to send a report each month to FSVO so it is good to instill in them a sense of responsibility. As it happened, VS2 had some serious problems which had not been addressed so with photos to back it up, the lads duly reported to FSVO. One hopes the problem has been resolved.

Left and right are Coi and Boi fixing taps at VS3. Centre shows damaged pipe at VS2 which was beyond their skills. FSVO have been advised and we hope this has been fixed.



When we called in at VS5, there were very few kids around. Most had gone back to their villages for the holidays. It was good to see that VS5 is now completely fenced which is so important for the safety of the children. Sr. Liz was hard at work as usual and we also caught up with the one remaining sponsored girl, Bei. All the other kids who had been sponsored have left VS5 which is a bit sad. Peter and Ann Piro in Wollongong will be happy to see the pictures of Bei. They have been sponsoring her for many years now.

Sr. Liz and children loading fire wood to sell. Y. Bei and Derek and some happy pigs - VS5 2016



The well we commissioned last year is working well and the villagers are giving it plenty of use. We visited our new well before work was completed and then on our last day in Kon Tum, attended the official opening which was a grand affair. We had met some English folks the night before, at a restaurant so invited them to come along. It provided them with a unique experience as this would not have been something tourists would normally get to see.

Derek checking out our first well. With Mr. John at our new well. Village girls welcome us to the official opening. Fr. Buu (Priest) blesses the well. Village Chief A. Be of KonKlor Village invites us to his house to share iar wine and food.



Our other event was to celebrate our sponsored lads birthday but we made it a celebration of all the kids birthdays. Cake and ice cream for all. The pictures show Coi with the cakes, then the cakes - just enough for all, happy kids and happy servers. It was a great way to finish our 2016 mission.



I cannot begin to thank all the folks and groups who continue to support our work in Kon Tum. As you know, all contributions go to our work - 100%. We fund our own expenses. The benefits to the children of the Vinh Son orphanages is immeasurable and the value of the wells - clean drinking water for thousands of village people and their children. It is so vital. This is just not possible without your support. THANK YOU ALL.

My kindest regards

Derek Smith

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