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Friends of the Underprivileged (FOU) and supporters continue to help the poor. We traveled at our own expenses to remote areas in Vietnam to follow up on current educational, social, and health-care projects, as well as assess new projects in Vietnam and Cambodia to benefit the underprivileged.

FOU arranged for students from United World College of Southeast Asia (UWCSEA) in Singapore to spend their project week at Di Linh leprosy camp in March. The five students --Jasper Hancock, Prithvi Batra, Eugene Choe, Pranit Kapoor, and Justin Lee-- led several activities for the children while supporting the nuns who devote their lives to lepers and their families. The students organized and coached soccer, volleyball, basketball, and taught conversational English to children at the camp (Fig. 1). The team confessed, "There was a general consensus among our group members that our time in Di Linh was among the best times of our lives and that our experience was not only enjoyable, but thoroughly rewarding as well. The children we worked with were absolutely wonderful, even though we did not share a common language, their attractive and outgoing personalities allowed us to still form bonds."

The Di Linh leprosy camp in Lam Dong has been our FOU model to other areas. After contributing needed medical supplies and seed funding for sustainable economic development at Di Linh, FOU then provided stimulating scholarships for children to finish high schools. The number of scholarship recipients has increased gradually from 10 in 1995 to 140 in 2012. School dropout rate among the children has drastically decreased, and about 40% of scholarship recipients received honor certificates for their academic excellence each year. This year, we start to support selected top students to attend colleges in Vietnam.

We also visited AIDS center in Binh Phuoc (Fig. 2), Ben San leprosy center in Binh Duong (Fig. 3), Nui San leprosy village in Nha Trang (Figs. 4-5), and Khmer minority groups in Soc Trang and Phuoc Long (Fig. 6). We distributed food and practical gifts to patients, as well as interacted and motivated schoolchildren by handing out awards to students with excellent academic achievement.

We called on tribal villages in Dak Lak where the Montagnard people still live in primitive conditions (Figs. 7-11). The devoted nuns, who can communicate in tribal dialects, have been tirelessly and patiently supporting the tribes with several agricultural, educational, medical, and social programs. We donated medicines for the free clinic, and soaps, nail clippers, as well as hand towels to support their hygiene programs.

With help from the voluntary youths, we assembled and distributed water-filtering systems to 200 families with elderly or handicapped persons who would face difficulty fetching "clean" water from a stream or well away from their homes. The nuns and their assistants will help to maintain and replace filters of these water-filtering systems. FOU will monitor the success of this trial phase and plan to drill wells and donate additional water filtering systems to other families.

We also visited evening classes for the illiterate adults. Despite of pouring monsoon rain, the highly motivated adults walked long distances on rough terrain with their children to attend the classes. We distributed our gifts to students and pledged to continue supporting this program with school supplies and textbooks to all participants.

The tribal children were extremely excited when receiving delicious snacks and unexpected colorful toys. They all seemed to love and treasure their first toys. Although these children cannot communicate with us due to our language barrier, their brightened eyes and happy faces showed appreciation to unknown friends from Singapore and America who gave the toys to them (Figs. 12-13).

FOU would like to thank all donors and friends for helping our programs. Together, we have passed through barriers to help the underprivileged effectively while providing hope to their younger generation.



Fig. 1: UWC students and children at Di Linh leprosy camp.

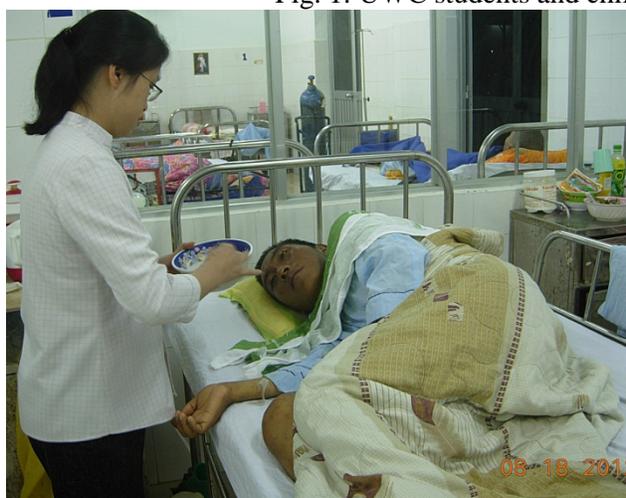


Fig. 2: Sister Thuy feeds an exhausted patient at Nhan Ai AIDS center in Binh Phuoc.



Fig. 3: Bao Ngan distributes gifts to a patient at Ben San leprosy center in Binh Duong.



Fig. 4: Minh Tam and a leper in Nui San, Nha Trang.



Fig. 5: Patients with donated rice at Nui San leprosy village in Nha Trang.



Fig. 6: FOU scholarship recipients in Soc Trang proudly show their honor certificates.



Fig. 7: Sister Mau, the head nurse, provides free medicine to people from minority groups.



Fig. 8: Sister Linh explains to a tribesman how to use and care for a water-filter system.



Fig. 9: Tribal children patiently wait for their mothers at an evening illiterate class.



Fig. 10: Children help to unload water-filter systems in Buon Ma Thuot.



Fig. 11: Young tribal mothers and their children overcome all odds to attend free illiterate classes.



Fig. 12: Dan shares the collected toys with new friends.



Fig. 13: Tribal children in Buon Ma Thuot.



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