



Dining for Women

## Program Fact Sheet

*A Special Note: When Page Walters (chapter leader from Charleston, SC) looked on the DFW Program Schedule and saw Children of Vietnam, she altered her planned trip to Vietnam so that her family could see COV's work in person. We are fortunate that she filmed their visit and that her brother edited her video footage in order for us to experience Children of Vietnam on a more personal basis. More details are included in this month's Food for Thought. Many thanks to Page and her family!*

**PROGRAM:** Children of Vietnam

**WEBSITE:** <http://www.childrenofvietnam.org>

**MISSION:** *To provide direct aid to poor and handicapped children in Vietnam.*

*(DFW will fund family housing, vocational training for mothers, educational scholarships for children, and bicycles for transportation)*

**CHILDREN OF VIETNAM'S STORY:** Ben Wilson, a retired engineer who spent many years working in Southeast Asia, founded COV in 1998 with a budget of only \$5,000. A graduate of North Carolina State University with a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering, Mr. Wilson's experience with construction and organization are invaluable to COV. While traveling and working in Vietnam from 1994 to 1997, he came to understand and respect a very special nation of friendly people; a nation that accomplished a great deal with very limited personal resources.

Mr. Wilson learned that Vietnam is a nation of families caring for each other, sharing long family discussions about which family members will have the privilege of caring for their parents or grandparents in their old age. The children study every night because they know that knowledge is the foundation of any nation and being able to attend school is a significant privilege (schools are not free). This nation of farming families (75% of the population) toil from sunrise to sunset earning the equivalent of US\$30 – 40 per month. The people are protective of their culture represented by 54 ethnic groups, most of whom live in the countryside.

Mr. Wilson witnessed many rural children with afflictions and disabilities due to poverty, dangerous materials of past wars and the lack of medical facilities and doctors. The people challenged death by attempting to recover the metal in bombs, land mines and old ammunition for the little money it brought on the scrap market. Many times this resulted in serious injury or death. Mr. Wilson began buying prosthetics for children, providing food to orphanages, retirement homes and schools for disabled children. In 1999, his efforts resulted in the formation of Children of Vietnam, which received an official permit to operate in Vietnam by the People's Aid Coordinating Committee, a governmental approval agency. Today, COV is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization operating with offices in Winston-Salem, NC and Danang City in Vietnam, serving over 50,000 children and families.

**WHERE THEY SERVE:** the Quang Nam and Da Nang Provinces of Vietnam

**COUNTRY AT A GLANCE: VIETNAM:** Vietnam declared its independence from France after World War II yet France continued its rule until its Communist defeat by Ho Chi Ming in 1954. In the Geneva accords that year, Vietnam was divided into the Communist North and anti-Communist South. Large-scale US economic and military aid to South Vietnam grew through the 1960's in an attempt to bolster the government and slow the spread of Communism, but



US armed forces were withdrawn following a cease-fire agreement in 1973. Two years later, North Vietnamese forces overran the South reuniting the country under Communist rule. Despite a decade of peace, the country experienced little economic growth because of conservative leadership policies, the persecution and mass exodus of individuals - many of them successful South Vietnamese merchants - and growing international isolation. However, since 1986, the Vietnamese economy has been loosened and modernized to produce more competitive, export-driven industries.

The country still experiences small-scale protests connected to land-use issues and conflict resolution among competing ethnic and other minorities. Vietnam has been accused of suppressing political dissent and religious freedom. Human rights groups have singled out Hanoi's treatment of ethnic minority hill tribe people, collectively known as Montagnards. The disparity in wealth between urban and rural Vietnam is wide.

Foreign investment has grown and the US is Vietnam's main trading partner. In the cities, the consumer market is fuelled by the appetite of a young, middle class for electronic and luxury goods. A visit to Vietnam by US President Bill Clinton in November 2000 was presented as the culmination of American efforts to normalize relations with the former enemy. Since 2001, Vietnam's exports to the US increased 900%. After 12 years of negotiations the country joined the World Trade Organization in January 2007. Job creation is growing by more than 1,500,000 people every year, but the global financial crisis will seriously impact this number.

- **Full name:** Socialist Republic of Vietnam
- **Population:** 88.5 million (UN, 2008)
- **Capital:** Hanoi
- **Largest city:** Ho Chi Minh City
- **Area:** 329,247 sq km (127,123 sq miles)
- **Major religion:** Buddhism
- **Life expectancy:** 72 years (men), 76 years (women) (UN)
- **Main exports:** Petroleum, rice, coffee, clothing, fish
- **Literacy:** *total population:* 90.3%  
*male:* 93.9%     *female:* 86.9% (2002 est.)



#### HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS:

*COV's Health & Well-being Initiative* works to make modern medical care a reality for the children of Vietnam. Their efforts include a parasite eradication program helping to reduce growth, intellectual, and cognitive retardation; surgeries for children with heart complications, orthopedic and birth defects, and war-material injuries; wheelchair distribution giving children mobility and independence; and provisions of medications, supplies, equipment, and expertise.

The *Education Initiative* works to give the best start possible to the children of Vietnam. This initiative includes a primary, secondary and university school scholarships for poor, orphaned, disabled or street children; vocational training for the unschooled to learn practical skills to become self-reliant; a bicycles distribution enabling children in the most rural areas to attend school; and a kindergarten construction for rural children.

*COV's Nutrition & Household Food Security Initiative* helps to fulfill the most basic of needs for growth and development to children and families in grinding poverty with monthly rice supplements, and milk, vitamin, and food allotments to orphans and street children.

Finally, COV's *Housing Initiative* builds homes for destitute families often homeless or living in unstable structures with plastic tarps and a dirt floor. Each new home has lighting and sanitation facilities.

**WHAT DFW DONATIONS WILL SUPPORT:** *Please refer to this month's Food for Thought for more details on the women and families supported through DFW donations.*

1. Housing – DFW will **fund houses for five families** where a woman is the head of the household and sole breadwinner. Current housing will be reviewed by the staff of COV to ensure that it meets the criteria of need and that all children within the household are attending school. DFW will receive a booklet for each family, which will include a letter of request from the family, a schematic of the new home and pictures of the family at their old and new houses.
2. Vocational Training – DFW will **fund scholarships for 40 women** at the Vocational Training School supported by COV. The women will learn skills in sewing and computer science. DFW will receive pictures of all the young women, with a brief history.
3. Public School Scholarships – Children in Vietnam do not receive free education. Families are required to pay approximately \$38 a year to send a child to school. DFW will provide **scholarships for 100 girls**. The scholarships will be given in honor of DFW and will be called the DFW Scholarships. They will be presented to the girls at a formal receiving ceremony.
4. Bicycles – Children from poor families have no means of transportation and children often walk 4 – 5 miles to school. DFW will **fund bicycles for 35 girls**. Bicycles will be given to the girls at a formal receiving ceremony.

**HOW PROGRAM SUCCESS IS MEASURED:** Children of Vietnam measures success by the numbers of children and women who are healthy, living in safe home environments and by the numbers in school and enrolled in vocational training programs. Their Board of Directors meets quarterly to review and assess all activities and provides guidance for future efforts. COV staff and President, in addition to the Danang Committee for Care and Protection, conduct regular on-site interviews with recipients of support to determine the effectiveness of programs and needs for continuing aid to specific recipients.

**FINANCIAL PROFILE:** In 2007, Children of Vietnam spent \$197,649 on program expenses; 90% of their total expenses. They directed \$20,949, only 10% of their expenditures, to administration and fundraising.

**DFW GIVING HISTORY WITH PROGRAM:** New program

**SOURCES AND RESOURCES:**

<http://childrenofvietnam.org>

Dining for Women video created by Charleston, SC Chapter Leader, Page Walter

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1gda9FHoOFw>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk>

<http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/vm.html>

<http://www.2guidestar.org>