

Hope Amidst the Suffering



GLOBAL COMMUNITY
SERVICE FOUNDATION

It was simply too much for the new mother.

Her baby girl was born in a tangle of twisted legs and arms. Her spine was as round as a tennis ball.

The mother went to a pagoda, dumped the newborn and simply disappeared.

Eventually the police appeared on the doorstep of Sister Juse Anne Tran Thi Hien at the Lam Bich Center for Children in the central Vietnamese town of Dong Ha and handed the baby over where she is being cared for today.

Vietnam has undergone an economic boom in recent years, but even in such circumstances basic services such as health care and education remain rudimentary at best.

Government institutions are helped by private, religious and overseas institutions to help the particularly vulnerable.

The Washington-headquartered Global Community Service Foundation (GCSF) which has years of experience working in Dong Ha, the capital of Quang Tri province, and central Vietnam, recently began working with Sister Hien.

She and her fellow sisters look after 28 children, orphans, abandoned kids, the disabled and children whose parents simply can't afford to bring them up.

The new baby is the youngest—so young that doctors say she is too small to attempt any corrective procedures except to try to straighten her body a little. She was possibly born deformed because the mother had taken some kind of medicine to try to abort the child.



Sister Hien cuddles abandoned baby girl.

Photo: Ray Wilkinson



Learning to walk again, with a little help.

Photo: Ray Wilkinson

Hong lost both legs from an unexploded mine when he was around two years old. He is 28 now and has been at the center since his accident. But he is a success story. He is currently completing a four-year college degree in IT, is married and himself has a young daughter. He will be able to establish his own home soon.

GCSF has been involved for several years with another children's center at Loc Thuy and Loc Tien villages near the old imperial capital of Hue. The organization financed the building of a hostel for deaf children, a playground with swings and slides, a small soccer field and improved the compound's water supply.

Sister Theresa, fellow nuns and specialists care for some of the nearly 300 children in surrounding communities who suffer from physical, intellectual and mental health problems, speech, hearing and visual impairment or are simply extremely poor ethnic minority children.

Some of the children, aged three to 20 years old, live on the compound, others are bussed in daily.

On one particular day, 20-year-old Nguyen Thi Lieu moved slowly across the playground with the help of a Catholic sister. She giggled incessantly, totally pleased with her progress. When she was three-years-old she became almost totally paralyzed but she receives almost daily therapy and is making good progress.

Nguyen Minh Duc was struck by cerebral palsy when he was 2 1/2 years old. He is eight now and can walk.

In spotlessly clean classrooms colorfully decorated with drawings and paintings groups of children all suffering from various disabilities are undergoing instruction.

At the end of the day a gaggle of excited children and their parents pile into a small mini-bus for the short ride home.