Volunteer
Inquiries about
the Vietnam
Friendship
Village

Mission Statement/Summary

The mission of the Vietnam Friendship Village is to cultivate reconciliation and heal the wounds of the Vietnam War by uniting veterans and caring citizens through international cooperation in the building and support of the Village of Friendship, a living symbol of peace.

This informational brochure was created for the hardworking volunteers at the Vietnam Friendship Village who would like to learn more about the daily life at the Village and how everything works. The inquiries are actual questions that volunteers asked, and we hope that this brochure could be of assistance in fully answering some of the questions that volunteers may have.

Thank you for being a part of this international act of solidarity, and for all the selfless and truly amazing work that you do!

“We cannot change the past, but we can change the present and the future.”

-George Mizo
Founder of the Vietnam Friendship Village
How is it decided which kids get to come to the Vietnam Friendship Village and how does the Village know who has been affected by Agent Orange?

All of the children that come to the Vietnam Friendship Village have been affected by Agent Orange, a toxic herbicide containing dioxin (recognized as one of the most lethal substances ever produced) that was used during the Vietnam War but still has continuing health and environmental effects present day.

The Vietnam Friendship Village works under the management of the Veterans Association of Vietnam, and each of the 34 provinces in Vietnam has their own VA subdivision. Before the Village selects the children, a document containing a list of medical criteria and requirements is sent to the VA of the specific province that helps to classify which children have been affected by Agent Orange. The association reviews the family medical history to see who was directly or indirectly affected by Agent Orange during the war, and whether or not other family members that have disabilities fit the list of particular disabilities known to be caused by Agent Orange. Once this information is relayed back, decisions are made to have the arrangements for the child to stay at the Village.

How is it determined which class or classes the children go to? Do they advance?

When the kids initially come to the Village, their cognitive levels are evaluated by the doctors and teachers in order for them to be placed in the appropriate class. The kids can advance, but that is to the discretion of their teacher depending if learning requirements are met and if the student shows an aptitude to continue to improve. Children with higher learning capacities have also been sent to the local schools for higher education.

In total, there are five classes of special education and four job training classes like information technology, sewing, embroidery, and flower-making classes.

How long are they here for?

According to the policy, every child will be treated and taken care of for two to three years. There are special cases, however, with children staying from up to eight to ten years because of such circumstances of having no family members that can take care of them, or if their family has extremely limited financial resources to do so.

During their time at the Village, the children are provided with a basic education while learning self-help skills (such as cleaning, serving their own food, washing up, etc.) so that they can take care of themselves better. When they go back home, they’ll be in better health (mentally and physically) and that can help to alleviate some stress on their family. One of the key goals of the Village is to provide the children the necessary skills so that they can live a more fulfilling life in their community.

Who takes care of them after school?

There is an appointed “mother” for each house (six in total) who looks after the children; each house mother stays at the Village 24/7, and has about 20 children under her care.

What do the children do in the time outside of school hours?

The children do what all regular children do at their age such as watching TV, reviewing/doing their homework, playing soccer, playing board games, hanging out with their friends, taking walks around the Village, eating and sleeping, etc.

What does the Village grow in the garden and what do they do with it?

The organic garden project provides fresh and healthy vegetables and fruits for the veterans and children without the usage of chemical substances or pesticides. Fruit trees and plants are cared for by organic methods (such as making compost without using chemical fertilizer), and the residents of the Village are able to see the organic growth process of the fresh produce that they eat and enjoy. Around 3 to 3.5 tons of vegetables are harvested each year.

There is also an herb medicinal garden at the Village. The medicinal herb leaves that are grown are processed and made into different kinds of medicine used to treat digestive disorders, nerve diseases and some other common diseases. More than 50 kilograms of medicinal herb leaves have been harvested and processed to make herbal medicines.

How many people work here?

There are currently 60 people that work at the Vietnam Friendship Village.

How many volunteers are currently at the Friendship Village?

At the minimum, volunteers have stayed from one week up to one year and so the current number of volunteers is hard to say considering that there are both short-term and long-term volunteers that work at the Village. With that said, volunteers help the Village with various meaningful tasks such as working and playing with the children, tending to the garden, working in the rehabilitation center, etc.

What percentage of the kids are orphans?

About 10%.

What is the greatest need that the school has? (i.e. money, teachers, etc.)

Education is crucial in a child’s development, and an important need is having the foreign methods of teaching disabled children implemented in the classrooms. In doing so, a wide range of teaching approaches can be applied to the best interest of the child so that they can get the most out of their learning experience.

Another significant need that the school has is to have more modernized medical and educational equipment as well as updated facilities that are better equipped to treat the veterans and children. These updates will increase the efficiency of the Village’s overall healthcare and educational work.

It is also important to note that nationwide, teachers working at special education schools have fewer benefits and are paid less than a traditional teacher. Although this is not a specific need that the school has, changing the government policy for special education teachers to have more equal benefits would be favorable.

Is there tuition?

Once accepted, there is no tuition or any kind of payment needed in order to stay at the Village. As always, the mission is to support all and to care, nurture, and provide treatment for veterans and children affected by Agent Orange.

Every month, there seems to be new veterans that stay at the Village. What happens to the other veterans? Why do they come to the Village/where do they go afterwards?

Because of the limited resources at the Vietnam Friendship Village and the extensive amount of veterans that need assistance, the Village can only accept a certain amount of veterans in rotation. Each month, forty new veterans from three different provinces (34 provinces in total) at a time stay at the Village. All of the veterans were exposed to Agent Orange and stay here to receive medical treatment, examinations, testing, surgery (if needed), acupuncture, orthopedics, rehabilitation, and a nutritional diet. In regards to food, almost all veterans that initially come to the Village are malnourished. However, when the veterans leave after a month of treatment and care, they increase at least one to three kilos in beneficial weight on average with some exceptions of even putting on six kilos.

After their stay at the Village, the veterans go back to their family with significant improvement in their health and happiness. If needed, hearing aids, orthopedic splints, and wheelchairs are provided for the veterans to ensure daily activities can be performed.

We are honored to say that more than 3,000 veterans and 550 children have received medical assistance at the Vietnam Friendship Village since its opening.

Can you give me more information about the embroidery, sewing, and flower-making classes? Do they get paid for the work they do?

The hands-on classes give the students vocational training and experience so that when they graduate, they’ll have the necessary skills to create the conditions for them to reintegrate into the community. All of the proceeds the Village collects from selling the craft products are put into a separate savings account for each student. When they go back home, they’ll have access to the funds to help ease them back into their home life as they find a stable job in relations to the craft (embroidery, sewing, or flower-making) they honed at the Village. Also, when the students go home for Tet (Vietnamese New Year), some of the proceeds from their savings account are given back to the students so that they can celebrate with their family and friends.

Thank you for all the work that you do, and we hope that we could answer any questions!