



December 2016

### RESUME

A short report on key findings and recommendations, from a social workers' perspective.

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## My expectations before the visit

My knowledge about DVA's activities before I went to Vietnam was limited. I attended a few meetings with the Danish-Vietnamese Association and received basic information about the structure of the organisation and the work in focus. The following are the ToR, Terms of References, which are the DVA's expectations of my visit:

- Identify which courses and/or training would benefit staff, if any
- Identify any significant needs that will secure the future of the shelters
- Evaluate the social workers' activities through consultations and observations
- Provide suggestions for new activities and/or examples of various working methods. Include results of survey
- Discuss implementation of new actions to the new projects, when the current project is finished- Take survey into account

## General points

These are subjects I expect to be focused on in my observations.

- Voluntary work
- Outreach work
- Interview techniques
- Child labour
- Drug abuse (Sisa/Glue/Marihuana)
- Sport and recreational activities
- Healthcare
- Healthy diet
- Social Media
- Information sharing and follow up

## Plan and method of engagement

During the entire visit in Ho Chi Minh city, I will be observing the interaction between children and social workers. I will speak to/interview/consult with the professionals and identify the most pressing issues, concerning both the children and the professionals. This report will be a mix of my daily observations and the conclusions I make from those observations. At the last part of the report, I will reflect on my general impressions and make recommendations for the future work of the shelter.

## Program

### Day 1

Meeting with HCWA about Agenda Review at HCWA office

I met the HCWA for the first time. We were given uniforms and went over the program for the week.

### Day 2

Visit school in district 7 and attend talk on “being your child’s friend”

I didn’t know exactly what to expect. To my surprise, I visited two classes engaged in the daily curriculum. The children were between 8 and 12 years old. Downstairs, a HCWA employee started a class for parents headlined; “Being your child’s friend”. The subject of the session was Puberty in general.

List of the school’s advice to the parents:

1. Create good memories for your child
2. Give hugs and love
3. Know your child
4. Speak freely and let your child feel safe
5. Ask questions
6. Find your child’s strengths
7. Compliment your child

The parents settled on an age-definition of puberty as 10 to 19 years of age.

The parents said that their teenagers are concerned with questions of independence. Also, money is a big part of the children’s concerns when thinking about their future.

Everyone agrees that love between families are very important.

Visit Little Rose Shelter and attend meeting with Danish Students from LRWS

When I arrived at the shelter, the girls were doing practical work in the shelter kitchen. I was told that the shelter has 3 paid staff members and frequently uses volunteers. The shelter is not locked which means the children can leave if they want. A thirteen-year-old girl ran away this November, which I will describe in greater detail later. The children are not allowed to have mobile phones in the shelter. The shelter conducts computer education once a week.

Toys and furniture are donated to the shelter by various people.

The Danish students, Stine and Michelle told shared some of their experiences in the city in general. They started by telling that they were told to come back from fieldwork to the shelter to meet a journalist who were supposed to interview them. The students were not happy to engage in an interview since they were doing some important work. But when they met me, it was all cleared out and they were open to dialogue.

The subject of communication is generally a challenge in Vietnam. The students have difficulties communicating with the shelter staff, who speaks English, when it comes to questions about daily life in the shelter. The students are not trusted and are not met with transparency, because the shelter staff think the students are there to report on their work. As an example, the students are not allowed to see official documents like legal papers etc. This makes it difficult to get insight into the challenges for the children,

who lives in the shelters. The staff informed the students about monthly meetings with the children, which serves as documentation for the periods children are there. But the students have not observed one single meeting.

In November, a thirteen-year-old girl arrived at the shelter on November 1<sup>st</sup>. and ran away only a week later. The mother is in jail and the father has died the day before. The girl was sitting alone with all her clothes in her hands, expressing a wish to attend her old school. She and her family has been living on the street for a while.

There was no follow-up plan on the girl.

I was told the students were working in the shelter every weekday from 9 to 15 o'clock. And that they only sporadically visit the Green Bamboo shelter. They tell me, that the boys living there fight a lot.

### Day 3

#### Visit two families in a poor part of Ho Chi Minh City

We drove on motorbike to visit a few families. The first family consisted of a mother, an aunt and two boys aged 16 and 18 years old. The 16-year-old attends college and wants to be an engineer and working for a local Japanese company. The 18-year-old have received benefits from HCWA and vocational training in the past. The training was mechanical skills and the boy now works, full time, on his own. He and the family earns approximately 2 million dong a month. The boys eat every day at school or at work, so all the money goes into the household; electricity, food etc. Both mother and aunt are sick and cannot work. Mother tries to get hold of old rice and bread, which she can sell to pig farmers. They earn around 2.000 dong per kg rice or bread.

The second family consisted of a grandmother and two boys aged 14 and 16. The grandmother works as a cleaning lady at a hotel in the city. The 14-year-old goes to school and helps the grandmother around the home and he does not earn money from a job. The 16-year-old receives vocational training from the HCWA, also mechanical skills. The boy also works a few hours a day to earn money. The family earns enough to manage but the grandmother is worried about the future, because she will possibly have to stop working soon because of health issues. The father is in jail because of drug dealing and drug abuse. The mother is married to another man and lives 20 km outside of the city. The oldest brother does not acknowledge the mother's relationship, so it is only the youngest brother, who still sees the mother. The oldest brother is clearly not comfortable discussing the subject and keeps looking sad and down to the floor. When I ask about his dreams about the future, he lights up and smiles. Then he is very curious about me and my background and reasons for visiting the family.

#### Visit Green Bamboo Shelter

We took the motorbike to Green Bamboo. We arrived early, so we had a chance to eat lunch locally. We met Jonas and the Danish students at Green Bamboo at 14.00 o'clock. Then we met the foreman and was given a tour of the shelter. My first impression of the shelter was not very pleasant. It was dirty. No heated water. They have a solar cell heater, but it is broken. It reminded me of a prison with iron nets by the stairwell separating each floor. The actual facilities consisted of a restaurant on the ground floor, which was also used as the shelter kitchen. The SPI employee had an office with all sorts of documentation archives and a small library of school related books. Also, there was an activity room for sports and a pc-room which is locked. The pcs are available 2 hours every Sunday. The toilet is very unhygienic and the bathroom is broken and random toilet cleaning products are poured everywhere in the bathroom. There are 2 rooms which are used for classes. One with few and old tables and a larger, half empty room, with a blackboard

and a non-working pc. On the top floor, there's a terrace which is used for laundry. It's also here the broken solar cell heater is located.

The foreman has some interesting methods working with underprivileged children. She is knowledgeable and very personally engaged. Her methods are based on professional networking and corporation with the local public schools, local football clubs, outreach workers from three different districts, the police, and shelters in the city.

Green Bamboo has 2 employees. The foreman and one employee with focus on SPI. There are 2-3 volunteers, who works for the shelter at different times and have different tasks, based on their individual skills. Right now, one volunteer teaches English and another teaches pc skills. Another is just hanging out with the children, teaching basic social and group skills.

One volunteer told us about the need for general repairs all over the facility, and the need for more paid staff.

The foreman has made a deal with the local police, when a child is arrested for drugs or other trouble, she can pick the child up after three days.

In the past, a chief stayed overnight, while he worked in the shelter kitchen. A volunteer stayed overnight three nights a week, until two months ago

The foreman also does outreach work. She locates youngsters who need help. Sometimes other local outreach workers bring children to the shelter.

Corporation with other shelters is important to the Green Bamboo. If a child for any reason cannot stay at the shelter, the foreman contacts another shelter and a plan for transfer is set in motion. As an example, in regards to girls, she contacts Little Rose Shelter.

#### Day 4

##### Meeting with HCWA about Status on training of children and staff at a second HCWA office

Jonas and I had a meeting about statistics with the HCWA. I learned a lot more about the HCWA organisation.

##### Discussion with Social Workers about methods

I expected an open discussion on various angles and methods on social work. Street work, outreach work, teaching, activities, social-, economic- and abusive problems. Instead I held a 2-hour lecture on everything there is to gain by reaching out to the local community. We talked about methods to kick-start local involvement and working on social and crime-preventive work. We also had time for questions. The most popular questions were regarding my everyday work with young people in Denmark.

#### Day 5

##### Visit school in suburb of Ho Chi Minh City

The teacher had opened her home for local unprivileged children, who didn't have any other way to attend school. The woman, whose home where also a school, rely greatly on professional corporation with volunteers and HCWA for teaching skills and knowhow.

Meeting with HCWA about Remaining issues and Key Findings, including content and suggested procedure for project extension, at the second HCWA office

At this meeting, we discussed the details concerning yearly funding of the complete shelter program. It was clear, that HCWA needed additional funding and, at the same time, in need of optimizing the available resources.

The Danish students managed to explain how their expertise could be helpful for the little rose shelter in exchange for transparency toward the students. They made an agreement on this exchange.

### Day 6

Off All Day – Had a bad headache and needed to relax and let it all sink in.

I had the chance to collect myself and relax.

### Day 7

Attended a contest on children's rights and Jonas gave a speech.

Attended a fundraising event

Meeting with HCWA, Little Rose Shelter Staff (Danish students attended)

## Findings

I discovered that not much direct outreach work is being done. Most children, the social workers get in contact with, are children looking for help.

There is no follow up on the children, who receives support through HCWA. Follow-ups could be useful for future strategic planning, including systematic use of role models.

Information sharing needs to be more efficient.

Training staff in professional networking. Both to increase awareness about local recourses and to create foundation for future fundraising. There is a clear need for steady income, so that the professionals can focus on the children's needs rather than on economic difficulties. The two areas of work, should be more separated.

Training staff regarding relationship building to gain knowledge of the underlying issues the underprivileged children face.

Training staff regarding all aspects in follow-up work.

Urgent need for 24h staff on Green Bamboo shelter. We were told that, now, there are no shelter staff during the night. The foreman expressed an urgent need for staff to stay during the night to watch the children. They often fight and get into trouble at night, which means complaints and sometimes calls to the police. It is a serious problem, that needs immediate attention.

HCWA and the shelters use Facebook to build awareness about the social work. Little Green Bamboo has a specific website, which among other things, help attract volunteers.

- A suggestion for a new project could be to combine vocational training and school days in the same period.
- Increase local involvement, to help general fundraising, awareness networking, PR, outreach work and the use of social media.
- Counterpart funding
- Health is an important subject to implement into life skills.

## My reflections

My thoughts on the parent's sessions on teenagers:

My questions for the parents:

What is your child's age?

Did you, the parent, go to school?

Which advice will you take with you from this meeting?

Did you learn something new?

Do you live in this local district?

Do you, the parent, have a different plan for your child's future, than your child wants?

How would you react if you found out your child skipped school? the answer was anger because of the disobedience and everyone clapped. The parents tell me that one of many reasons for children skipping school, is social pressure at the school.

My questions for the professionals:

How are the parents chosen by the staff?

What is the parent's motivations for attending?

What characterizes the parents who did not attend?

Could they benefit from separating men and women concerning specific topics?

Was told there is not enough time for much conversation

My thoughts on the little rose shelter:

They had stationary pc's, but they were rarely used. I would recommend increased priority in the use of pcs for general purposes. Ex. knowledge based web searches, guidance in the use of social media, increased online presence to create awareness of the social work etc.

My first impression, when I was given the tour by the foreman was that there were no mattresses. Everything is very low budget and very dirty. A lot of cats all over the place. The children seemed to enjoy playing with them.

The children's physical well-being seems good.

The lack of mattresses was due to the high humidity.

The children are all friendly to me and two girls wanted to teach me how to count to ten In Vietnamese.

The future of Social Work through Shelters would benefit from professional networking in order to secure the local resources.

They help those who want to be helped. The children can leave the shelters if they want.

Theoretical Inclusion by Alan Dyson – Strengthen the Local involvement/engagement

## Conclusion

HCWA and all the local social workers have an opportunity to increase the impact of social work in Ho Chi Minh. Online presence is important to attract continuous funding for the essential social work, which in my opinion, is the work of the shelters and outreach work in poor communities.

My expectations were met in regards to the use of professional methodology. The most pressing issues are resources and funding, which demands attention. Therefore, I believe that both professionals and local partners could mutually benefit from increased networking. This way, expenses will be minimal.

The biggest surprise about the professional methods ...

I need more information about these subjects to be able to conclude ...

## Afterthought

If I had the chance to do this again, what would I change?