

Condom Demonstrations



Over the course of the work-camp, volunteers had spent their spare time hand crafting gift cards and beading bracelets as an extra fundraising effort for VFP. The cards and bracelets were sold for \$AUS1.00 each, on average, however I believe that the money collected would not have even covered costs.



We were also there to represent VFP as an organization, who is a young but thriving volunteer organization. The day gave the Vietnamese youth, in particular, the opportunity to find out more information about VFP, meet volunteers and register their interest.



Other Booths

There would have been at least 30 other organisations at this event, mostly volunteer organizations who work in HIV or with people with disabilities. There were many stalls which displayed and sold arts, crafts and knit wear all made by disabled people, as well as a massage parlour, run by people with visual impairments.



The day's program included speeches from UN officials, singing performances and a fashion show.



Fashion Show

VFP volunteers thought that it was important to spread the message about HIV prevention on this day and decided to make the theme of our fashion show "ABC":

- **A**bstinence – *Kiem Che Tinh Duc*
 - Volunteers wore plain white shirts with the letter "A" on the front and walked out one by one and independently
- **B**e Faithful – *Chung Thuy*
 - Two volunteers walked out on stage attached together at the arm with red ribbon, representing faithfulness to one partner.
- **C**ondom Use – *Dung Bao Cao Su*

- Volunteers wore elaborate costumes made of condoms (headbands, skirts, arm-bands, earrings etc) to promote the important use of condoms. Condoms were distributed to the crowds free-of-charge.



Our creative interpretation of the ABC concept drew crowds across the whole park, who followed our white-and-red coloured troops and loaded with condoms to the stage and waited in awe and anticipation to see what we had to show.





Beauty in Diversity 2005 at a glance

The second annual Beauty in Diversity day to mark World AIDS Day (1 December), International Day of Disabled Persons (3 December) and International Volunteer Day (5 December) was held in Ha Noi on 3 December 2005.

The event is dedicated to highlighting the economic, social and cultural contributions that those living with HIV/AIDS and with disabilities make to our society. At the same time, it presents the diversity of individuals who choose to volunteer to promote these ideals and to work for Viet Nam's development.



"I'm happy to be here to join this event"



UN officials are commending UN Volunteers on their contributions



Young people are very keen getting to know about UNV



Children also like to participate in the fun event



UN Volunteers are demonstrating face painting skills for the visitors of Beauty in Diversity 2005

Organizers and sponsors are sharing the joy with contestants of the Miss Beauty in Diversity contest



This annual report has been put together by the collective effort of UN Volunteers in Viet Nam and Online Volunteers.

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Other work-camp activities

Work-camp life

VFP-VIET has two offices, one in Hanoi and 30 kilometres from town, called Peace House One and Two respectively. Our work-camp was located at Peace House Two, which is actually a rented out building belonging to and adjacent to steel company, Coma 6.



Facilities were basic; with mattresses on the floor as our beds in the office room floors and a make-do kitchen with a gas stove set up in the hallway. At one stage, the light in the bathroom broke and we had to shower by candle-light.

Population in the area seemed scarce except for the employees of neighbouring factories; and shops were limited to a couple little café/bars, a few *Pho* (Vietnamese rice noodle) and a string of *Thit Cho* (Dog Meat) restaurants. The closest hopping centre was 15 minutes

taxi-drive away. Local volunteers went to the local market daily to shop for groceries for our meals we all chipped in to help cook. There was the constant traffic of large industrial trucks, which honked indiscriminately all day and night, and our



wake-up call (a man banging on a large copper bell) came at 5.30am every morning to indicate the start of the working day at Coma 6.

Having had lots of experience, camping with my Scout Group – living inside a building with a normal flushing toilet seemed a luxury in comparison to the great outdoors and I settled into the conditions quite easily. Having a Vietnamese background obviously gave me an advantage and I quickly became a useful asset to the team with my interpreting skills.

Preparing meals, setting up and washing up were great learning and bond experiences. Spending this time together actually gave us a chance to get to know each other, learn about Vietnamese culture or language and share our stories with other volunteers.

Vietnamese Day

A larger group Vietnamese volunteers joined our work-camp to celebrate Vietnamese day, where international volunteers experienced the cultural traditions of Vietnam.

We were taught and played Vietnamese games with rocks, chopsticks and large wooden sticks; learnt





Hanoi City Tour

To ensure international volunteers got to experience the Vietnam to the fullest, a tour of the city centre was organized. We visited the Ho Chi Mosselleum, Ho Chi Minh Museum, The One Pillar Pagoda, Hoan Kiem Lake, tasted the popular wafer ice-cream (Kem Oc Que) and ate Bun Rieu (crab meat noodles).



Weekend Excursion – Halong Bay

Each work-camp features a weekend sight-seeing trip to one of Vietnam’s cultural or tourist hot spots. This work-camp spent two days at Halong Bay, one of Vietnam’s most famous and beautiful tourist destination. It is recognised as one of the World Heritage sites.



International Day

One of VFP’s aims is to learn through cultural exchange, so a work-camp is not complete without the international volunteers having an opportunity to wave the flags for their countries. We hosted an International dinner where volunteers were asked to cook something from their country to share. The Australian contingent received a positive response; we even taught everyone slang expressions, an Aussie drinking chant and “Itsy bitsy spider”.



~ **INTERNATIONAL DINNER MENU** ~

Entree:

Grilled Cheese on Bread (USA)

Main:

Spaghetti Bolognese (à la Mebourne's Lyon Street); with green peppers, onion, tomatoes and garlic; served with olives

Desserts:

*Vegemite & Crackers, Apricot sticks,
Arnotts® Kingstons and Monte Carlo biscuits (Australia)
Apple pancakes with Maple Syrup (Canada)*

Drinks:

1 keg of Ha Noi beer (Vietnam)



Farewell Dinner

After a long day at BID, we were a deliriously tired! So much so, we decided on a “honey-themed” farewell dinner – where honey was added to every dish we cooked from the main meal to the drinks! It was nice to sit down together, share our last meal together and celebrate the great work we’d all done over the camp.

It was unbelievable to think that I was only at VFP for one week. In such a short amount of time I had achieved so much, made such great friends, had created so many unforgettable memories that it was difficult to part ways with the VFP team. I have done a lot of community service over the years, but nothing has been as challenging and rewarding as this! I can’t wait to do it again!



SUMMARY

● **Education is everything!**

I have always held strong beliefs about the value of education. My parents came from Vietnam and due to poverty could not achieve the privileged level of education that is offered to us in countries like Australia. My experience working with VFP on HIV awareness re-iterated the importance of education. Some say ignorance is bliss, but in terms of HIV it can cost you your life. We take for granted the schooling opportunities that we have and it is only when you realize how much other people lack that you begin to appreciate its true value. Moreover, I felt a sense of duty, not just to helping the people of my home country, but in sharing the knowledge that I've been privileged with. I felt it was particularly important to reach out to the Vietnamese youth, for they are the next generation and through their education the spread of HIV/AIDS can be limited if not prevented altogether.

● **Prevention is the cure!**

From everything from cold sores, hyper-cholesterolaemia to STIs – prevention is better than curing. In terms of pharmacy, this project re-emphasized pharmacists' role as health promoters. As equally important as our roles in ensuring patient understanding of their conditions and treatment medications, I think we have huge potential and a responsibility in educating people about healthy habits and lifestyles as a form of preventing disease recurrence or occurrence. In terms of HIV in Vietnam, due to the limited access to anti-retro viral medications for treatment, it was even more important to stress the necessity of prevention. Moreover, the spread of HIV/AIDS in Vietnam is moving from injecting drug user and sex workers into the general population.

● **Cultural understanding**

I learn a lot about Vietnamese culture in that one week; the northern accent, vocabulary and pronunciation, traditions and cultural customs, the history and people. Through the local volunteers, I learnt about the schooling systems, life in the city of Hanoi and how they see the world. In terms of you HIV project, we had to be sensitive to the fact that many students had never talked about sex openly before, and do not believe in sex before marriage. As pharmacists, we also need to keep in mind cultural beliefs and personal opinions when we communicating with patients.

• Volunteerism

Finally, I think I rediscovered what I love about volunteerism. Its challenging, rewarding and you, as an individual, know that you are making positive impact on other people. Both the local and international volunteers had many stories of their experiences; from working at suicide help-lines and hospitals to working for a centre for sexually abused women and building water-wells in Thailand. It opened my eyes to the vast array of opportunities there are both at home and abroad. What made this experience more rewarding than my other volunteer work was that I had a real sense that I was empowering others – that what we were sharing with young Vietnamese students was going to help them help themselves, their families and friends. Now THAT'S what I call making a difference!

