

Making a difference through international service

In 2004, Dr. Jerry Braza was part of a pilgrimage trip to Vietnam in with Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nat Hanh. After visiting schools, impoverished rural areas, and witnessing the despairing conditions at a nursing facility and leper colony, Jerry returned with a determination to offer students an opportunity to enhance their life experiences through humanitarian efforts in this country. He co-created with Mr. Tuan Nguyen, a former boat person and humanitarian, a non-profit organization called the *Forgotten People Foundation* (www.forgottenpeople.net). Its mission is to promote health awareness and provide vocational training for the unemployed, disabled, and outcast people in Vietnam. Students in Health Education have been involved in supporting these programs for the past two years.

This spring, five Health Education students in Dr. Braza's Health Education *Program Planning* class will be using their education to make a difference when they travel to Vietnam for a two week extended "Alternative Spring Break." Anna Ryan, Stormee Anderson, Tracy Crockett, Stephanie Upshaw, and Alicia Vandervelden will be making this journey together with Professor Mark Girod from the College of Education and Debbie Diehm from Student Affairs.

Their first project will be working in Huong La at the *Home for Abandoned and Disabled Children*. This orphanage cares for 16 severely mentally and physically disabled children, all abandoned by family and community. It is run by the Sisters of Our Lady of Unity who are without any medical training. Alicia Vandervelden, a certified nurse assistant (CNA) will be educating the sisters in basic health care.

Another leg of the trip will be spent at the Von Mon Leper Colony, four hours north of Hanoi. Here students will witness firsthand the ravages of leprosy as they aid those most forgotten and shunned. They will deliver much needed survival items, such as blankets and self-care items.

Students on this trip will experience first hand the health and living conditions in a Third World Communist Country. They will undoubtedly be deeply touched by the suffering, and at times the joy, that exists in this beautiful country. One of their assignments will be to conduct a

comprehensive health survey regarding the needs of the people so that future students may be able to create health education programs to support the needs of the “forgotten people”, especially those living at the Home for Abandoned and Disabled Children.

Orphans, lepers, and, people with disabilities are just a few of the people that are often forgotten. Our students through Service Learning are realizing that there are *pockets* of forgotten people in every community that have basic survival needs and are also in need of love and acceptance. It was Mother Theresa who said “We cannot do great things, only small things with great love.”

To make this trip possible, a variety of fund raising events have already taken place. You may have seen the students selling beautiful handmade Vietnamese crafts prior to the recent holidays at the Werner Center. Please watch for the next sale to be held in February around Valentines Day. In addition, students have been giving presentations in their communities and asking for support from family, friends, and employees.

This journey will offer students real-life learning experiences not possible in the classroom. They will offer support to the “forgotten people” and Western Oregon will remain in the hearts of those touched by the care and kindness in rural Vietnam. You are invited to be a part of, and share in, this experience with a financial gift. It will cost each student at least \$1500.00 for this experience. If you wish to donate, or know someone who would, please contact Michael Hampton, the Director of Service Learning and Career Development on campus at 503-838-8648 or hamptonm@wou.edu. A tax-deductible receipt will be offered with each donation.