

WHEELCHAIRS FOR AGENT ORANGE VICTIMS

In July 2019, the Trustees were very pleased to receive an email from Mr Pham Truong, Director of International Relations at VAVA (the Vietnam Association for the Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin) in Hanoi.

Mr Truong had written to inform us that he was hoping to arrange a short awareness-raising visit to the United Kingdom in the autumn for himself, accompanied by General Nguyen Van Rin, President of VAVA, and Mr. Dang Nam Dien, Vice President of VAVA. The delegation was hoping to meet with representatives from the Trustees of MSAVLC, the Vietnam-UK Network, and possibly members of the Vietnam All-Party Parliamentary Group.

Unfortunately, the planned visit had to be postponed due to visa problems; and as a result of the Covid-19 restrictions, an alternative date has still to be fixed. The Trustees were most disappointed at missing the opportunity to meet up with our friends from VAVA. But they resolved to maintain a dialogue with them and find out if they had a need for further equipment which would aid the victims afflicted by the chemicals used in the Vietnam-American War.

Readers may remember that MSAVLC has in the past provided wheelchairs for VAVA victims who are unable to get about. On previous visits to Vietnam the Trustees have met with ex-soldiers and civilians who were directly affected by the



chemicals, and also with some of their children or grandchildren who were born with deformities passed on to them as a result of toxic chemical exposure. The provision of wheelchairs funded by MSAVLC had been a life-changing event for all of them.

It was therefore no surprise when Mr Truong responded to our enquiry by suggesting that more wheelchairs were desperately needed; there are, after all, over three million Agent Orange victims in Vietnam.

This time, however, VAVA asked if we could provide both normal and powered wheelchairs, and they sent us pictures of the styles available.

Following a discussion by the Trustees, MSAVLC sent them a total of \$25,000 US Dollars in May. We

asked if they would use the money to purchase conventional and powered wheelchairs for those in greatest need. The recipients would be identified through the local provincial VAVA support groups.

In September we were delighted to receive details of the purchase and distribution of the wheelchairs and a number of photographs of the recipients. Due to their bulk purchasing, VAVA were able to buy a total of 240 wheelchairs, including 62 powered ones, for distribution to VAVA victims throughout Vietnam.

From Son La in the Northern Highlands to Hau Giang in the Mekong Delta, there are now 240 Agent Orange victims who are now able to enjoy life outside their homes,



thanks to the generosity of MSAVLC's supporters.

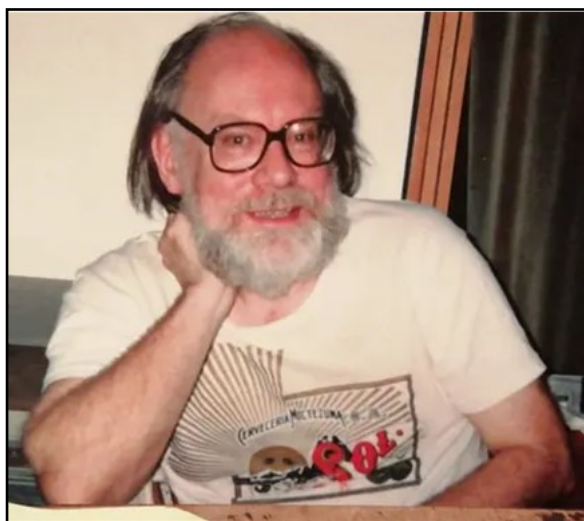
On their behalf, the Trustees of MSAVLC thank you for your donations, large or small, to this humanitarian cause.

LEN ALDIS

Donations collected by MSAVLC in memory of the late Len Aldis, (1935-2015) founder of the Britain-Vietnam Friendship Society, and a great supporter of both MSAVLC and VAVA, were included in the funds sent to purchase the wheelchairs.

HEROES

Our Hero in this edition is Rod Prince, a great supporter of MSAVLC, and an active member of the Trustees for many years. Sadly, Rod passed away in February, but below is an edited article written by his friend Polly Patullo for the 'Other Lives' section of the Guardian published in August. Rod was a great man, an advocate of freedom and justice locally, nationally and internationally.



ROD PRINCE

My friend Rod Prince, who has died aged 83, was a British journalist who worked in Paris (Agence France-Presse, 1968-70), east Africa (Tanzania Standard, 1971-72) and London, where he started the People's News Service (1973-76). He joined Peace News (editor 1965-67), Latin America Newsletters, Caribbean Insight (editor 1984-2001) and he freelanced for the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU).

During the 1963 Cuban missile crisis, he wrote: "We don't mind admitting it, last week we didn't really expect to live more than a few hours, and we printed the paper in a

bit of a daze...".

He was an old-school editor: meticulous, committed to fact-checking and press freedom. His duffel coat, beard, Michael Foot-style hair and corduroy trousers placed him firmly in the world of left-wing politics to which he was steadfastly and honourably wedded.

When I first knew him, he worked from his south London basement flat at a manual typewriter.

When asked by an editor why he typed up his copy and delivered it by hand, he replied he did not want to put printers out of work. On his desk was what he called his "paper mountain" (newspaper clippings), along with the Guardian's cryptic crossword, neatly cut out and often completed. He was particularly interested in Cuba, Guyana and Haiti and wrote a book, *Haiti: Family Business*, about the Duvalier father-and-son dynasty.

All this was remote from a wartime childhood in Beckenham, south-east London. His father, Charles, worked for the Yorkshire Penny Bank while his mother Louise (nee David), a nurse, joined the Labour party and became the first female mayor for

Bromley Common. As a Labour councillor, she fought for the social needs of locals, including the young David Bowie, who visited their home for help with housing.

Rod went to Beckenham and Penge county grammar school and did national service in Colchester, Essex, driving lorries and doing office work. At Oxford, he studied PPE, marched to Aldermaston and became a keen film critic. He was interested in real ale and railways (including an impressive knowledge of the Egyptian railway system), went to Albania and China (on the trans-Siberian Express) and supported the Medical and Scientific Aid for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia charity. He loved France, where he frequently visited his niece, Sam (the daughter of his sister, the writer Alison Prince), and her daughter, Letty.

He met Janie Rees when he worked at Peace News; they married in 1967 and had two children, Lucy and Mischa. They later divorced but for a time continued to live together in a collective household.

In 2011 he moved to a care home in Devon, near to Lucy and her two children, Tom and Chet. Despite dementia, he continued to do the crossword and enjoy outings on the Jurassic coast.

He is survived by his children and grandchildren.

LISTEN AGAIN!

The Bulletin of February 2019 gave an account of the 'Listen.Out.Loud.Kratie!' project. MSAVLC has been funding this two-year project, which was run by All Ears Cambodia (AEC) and started in March 2018. The project provided a program of clinical and health educational services for the local people of Kratie Province in Eastern Cambodia.

Earlier this year the Trustees of MSAVLC were approached by Glyn Vaughan, Director of All Ears Cambodia, who requested that we provide funds to extend the project for a further year. As the project had been very successful, the Trustees readily agreed to a further year's funding.

The services provided in Kratie Province include :

- Primary ear (and nose) health care.

- Diagnostic audiology (hearing aid tests).

- Rehabilitative audiology (hearing aid fitting).

- Ear mould manufacture (hearing aids, swim plugs and nose attenuators).

- Ear and hearing health education.

Clinical services were provided at the AEC base clinic in the provincial town of Kratie, as well as at weekly outreach clinics throughout the province. The project has been a wholly positive, grass roots initiative which included preventative health care, clinical care, aural rehabilitation, community health education and local capacity building. It was designed to help the greatest number of under-privileged people in the most effective way.

The population of Kratie Province is about 370,000. It is one of Cambodia's poorer provinces; most workers are subsistence farmers or fisherfolk and 30% of households live on less than a dollar a day. Most of the people live in small rural towns and villages. Roads and communications are poor, health and education services are limited.

During the first year of the project (2018) a total of 9,764 patients were examined, 3,444 at the base clinic in Kratie, and 6,320 at outreach clinics. Of these about 23% were adults and 77% children. Similarly, during the second year, a total of 10,165 patients were examined, 3,320 at the Kratie base clinic and 6,845 at



provincial outreach clinics. About 20% were adults and 80% children.

The third year of the project, which began in March this year, has been restricted by the coronavirus pandemic, particularly as schools have been closed between March and September. Nevertheless, All Ears Cambodia clinicians have continued with the ear health screening program, with 2,157 patients seen in the first six months, 1,577 at the base clinic in Kratie town and 580 at outreach clinics. Significantly, more than half of the patients examined at the Kratie town clinic were adults, whereas 96% of patients seen at the outreach clinics were schoolchildren, most of them examined in March, before schools were closed.

As a result of the screening, hearing diseases and disabilities were identified and treated, either medically or through the construction and fitting of hearing aids both to adults and children.

A key component of the project was a program of primary ear health education. The 'Listen.Out.Loud.Kratie Show' provided a platform for informal, contagious learning about sound and ear health through an enjoyable, educational, and interactive show aimed primarily, but not exclusively, at children.

The show has been presented at various locations across Kratie Province over the 2½-year period. Venues have included schools, village centres and partner NGO sites, as well as at the AEC office in Kratie.

The show is full of surprises and with lots of opportunities for audience participation. It demonstrates the nature of sound, its importance to humans and the natural world and to the world of science and technology. It reveals the amazing structures that lie within our ears, how our ears process sound and how they sometimes go wrong. It also teaches the importance of ear healthcare, safe listening and the protection and conservation of hearing. The show also aims to improve in-house and partner capacity building, as well as awareness for schoolchildren and people within local communities on issues relating to ear disease and deafness.

Unfortunately, the show, which was designed principally to be performed for schoolchildren, also had to be curtailed due to the measures taken to control Covid-19.

All Ears Cambodia Director Glyn Vaughan and his team are hopeful that with the schools re-opening and the lockdown being partially lifted, all parts of the program will be able to continue with this vital work.

COVID-19 UPDATE

With cases of coronavirus spiralling out of control in the developed world, it is heartening to read that the infection has been successfully contained in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. With previous experience of SARS and bird flu outbreaks in the region, the three governments reacted much quicker to the threat than governments in the west. Borders were closed to foreigners, internal travel was limited, and strict quarantine was imposed on anyone suspected of being in contact with carriers of the disease. Schools were closed and individual cases and their contacts were rapidly identified and isolated.

As a result, there have been only 283 cases identified in Cambodia with no deaths, 23 cases and no deaths in Laos and 1,122 cases in Vietnam, which now has a total of 35 Covid-19 related deaths. The governments of all three countries remain vigilant, fully aware of how dangerous this disease would be if there were to be a resurgence, especially considering the difficult terrain and the rudimentary healthcare facilities.

Nevertheless, the pandemic has hit all three countries hard. All are very dependent upon the tourist industry which has been wiped out for the past six months. The decline in demand for clothing has hit both Cambodia and Vietnam with millions of workers being laid off or put on short time. The fragile economies of Laos and Cambodia have been knocked, and as ever it has been the poorest who have been hardest hit. Cambodia's economy which was growing steadily is expected to reduce by more than 5% this year and the Asian Development Bank forecasts that this will push 1.3 million people back below the poverty line.

With the typhoon season upon them and recent news of flooding across the region, the Trustees of MSAVLC are monitoring our projects, ready to provide emergency help if it is needed.

NEWS FROM NEW HOPE

Cheng Rostitus, director of New Hope Children's Home (NHCH) and his team provide safety and support for orphaned and abandoned children living in the Poi Pet area, in north-west Cambodia. The children receive a loving home, food, clothing and medical care and attend local schools. Most children stay at New Hope for a few years whilst local teams work with the children's families to enable some of them to return to their homes safely.

New Hope relies heavily on self-sufficient, agricultural initiatives to provide food for the Home, with any surplus being sold locally to generate a modest income. Unpredictable weather conditions can have a huge impact on the productivity of the crops.



We are delighted to report that last year the rice harvest was good, with enough rice for the home for the whole year, plus seeds for planting, and rice products to sell.

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, Cambodia's schools were closed in March but the children continued their studies at the Home with the help of staff. The Home was able to use rice fruit and vegetables already stored and obtained local supplies as necessary.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This year's Annual General Meeting was another victim of the Covid-19 crisis. The Annual Report and Financial Statement for 2019 can be found on the Charity Commission's website; www.gov.uk/charity-commission.

We hope to hold the next AGM in London in the summer of 2021.



Facebook

News and pictures of the charity's activities can be found on our website www.msavlc.org and on the MSAVLC Facebook page.

Keep up with all the charity's news and don't forget to 'like' our new posts or 'share' them with your Facebook friends.

DATA PROTECTION.

MSAVLC is committed to making sure that our communications with you are secure, considered and welcomed. We promise to respect any personal data that you share with us, we will keep it safe, and we will not share it with third parties. If you no longer want to receive the

Bulletin and want to be removed from our mailing list, please contact:

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