

A ROTARY WHEELCHAIR PROJECT IN HUE, CENTRAL VIETNAM

Report by Michael Redding Dec 4, 2019

Michael Redding (RC Werribee) and Lorry Rowe (RC Flemington), have completed a very successful project in central Viet Nam - to give self-propelled tricycle wheelchairs to four young people from very poor families. All are living in villages surrounding Hue, in central Vietnam.

Werribee Rotary funded the 2 wheelchairs for **Thanh** and **Moi**.

Lorry Rowe (Flemington Rotary) funded the 2 wheelchairs for **Nhan** and **Khanh**.

The tricycle wheelchairs are made by the Kien Tuong Wheelchair Company in Ho Chi Minh City. They are easily propelled by pushing the steering column backwards and forwards. They are comfortable, very maneuverable and can travel at speeds of up to 10 km per hour on the local roads.

Each wheelchair costs VND 5,350,000 with an extra cost of VND 600,000 to truck it 1,100 km north to Hue – a total cost for each of VND 5,950,000 (approx. \$380).

Michael spent the whole of November in Vietnam, meeting up again with his very close Vietnamese friend Dung (Nguyen Cuu Dung) whom he has known since 2010. Together they purchased the wheelchairs in HCMC and arranged to have them trucked north to Dung's home in Bang Lang village, near Hue.

In Vietnam, people with many types of disability are hidden away, living in their family home and destined to remain there for the rest of their lives. In the Hue area alone, it is estimated there are over 29,000 disabled people, nearly all of whom receive no support. Among this group are many young people who cannot walk but whose lives would be transformed with a tricycle wheelchair. The big challenge is how to locate where they live.

Dung has formed a small team of committed volunteers, comprising himself, his brother & wife and Canadian Ivan Dupuis. Through asking questions to a range of people, the team were able to discover where our four recipients lived. Once the wheelchairs were given to them their lives were immediately transformed. They now have their own mobility and can travel wherever they wish.

The team intends to continue identifying where more young disabled people in the Hue area are living. Any donated wheelchairs in the future they can distribute to the young people they have located.

Information and photos about the 4 young recipients are on the following pages:

Thanh (11 years) is a bright boy who lives alone with his widowed mother in Chau-Chu village about 12 kms from Hue. His father died when he was 18 months old. At age 3 years he slipped on the floor, damaged his lower spine and became a paraplegic.

He started school in Grade 1, with his mother carrying him 2.5 kms there and back each day. By Grade 2 he had become too heavy for her to carry to school and has missed out on 5 years of schooling. When we arrived with his wheelchair he took to it like a duck to water. In a few days was very proficient, moving it rapidly, steering, reversing and going on his own to a village food stall 1 km away to buy his breakfast. With his new wheelchair Thanh will be returning to school after the New Year for the second half of Grade 6. He wants to catch up with his studies and then go on to secondary school, located 5 kms away.

Thanh is a boy with real potential and a wonderful future could lie ahead for him.



Thanh – before



Thanh & mother - before



First time



Mother, Thanh & Michael



Thanh & mother - after



Thanh arrives at the thankyou farewell

Moi (30 years) lives in Hai Cat village with his family. He became a paraplegic at 14 years of age as a result of him falling off a motor bike.

He has spent the last 16 years lying on a bed at home. His family has been caring for him, but as there is no wheelchair in the house he has not been able to leave his bed and move around. He is a perceptive young man who has missed out on a normal life for the past 16 years. He could only look forward to a very bleak future, remaining immobile on his bed.

As soon as he was carried to his new wheelchair he was able to move on his own for the first time since his accident 16 years ago. He very quickly became proficient with his wheelchair. The following day he took himself off to a village roadside café 2 km away to have coffee and to socialise with people. He has continued this each morning since.

Moi also wants to start catching up with things he has missed out on. He wants to complete his education by retuning to secondary school to finish Grade 12. Perhaps he may go on to further education after that. Moi also wants to make the 12 km trip from his village into Hue, as a challenge for himself and to see how the city has changed over the past 16 years.

With his new wheelchair, Moi's life has been suddenly transformed in the most unexpected way for him and a whole new future has been opened up.



Moi – 18 years on a bed



First time in his new wheelchair



Underway



Moi 30 years old



Nhan (11 years) lives in Vo Xa village with his very poor family. He has been a paraplegic from 3 years old when he fell and hit his head on the hard floor. He lost the use of his legs and may have suffered some kind of brain damage. Each morning his mother takes him to school on her motorbike, where he is in a special class. At home, the only way he can move is by sitting on a very low stool and shuffling forward about 1 or 2 cm at a time. There is no chair or wheelchair in the house for him to use.

As soon as Nhan was in his wheelchair his mother guided him on to the road outside and encouraged him to use it. He was soon moving it along, both on his own and with her help. Nhan lacks muscular strength in his arms because he has not been using them fully for many years. His parents will be taking him out each day to practice using his wheelchair to develop strength in his arms. In the near future it may be possible for Nhan to travel the 2 km to school each day in his wheelchair.



Nhan's house



Nhan & mother



First time in new wheelchair



Nhan & mother



Nhan 11 years old



Michael, Nhan & mother

Khanh (16 years) lives in Lang Lai village alone with his father. He was born with a major disability (cerebral palsy) and has limited communication and almost no speech. However, he can use his hands with his right arm very strong and easily operating the wheelchair. His left arm is quite weak, but could become stronger when he exercises it by holding onto the wheelchair's steering wheel.

Khanh's family situation is quite desperate. His parents have 3 boys, with him being the eldest. The local government authorities requisitioned the family home for land development and relocated his family of 5 into a very small three-roomed concrete house with a front room, one bedroom and kitchen/bathroom/toilet area. This semi-rural area is impoverished, with little work available. Because of this, the two younger brothers have been taken away from the house by Khanh's mother and a female neighbour, to move to another district to find employment. He and his father now live alone in the house.

His father gets a bare subsistence income as a river fisherman. From his small canoe he sets a drag net, in the hope of getting some small fish to be sold at the market. Each day while he is away fishing, he places Khanh in a plastic chair and uses a chain to tether the chair to the bars on the front window. From here all Khanh can do while his father is away is to look at the people passing by the house. He can expect no other future than this.

When the wheelchair arrived, Khanh's father carried him out of the house and sat him in it. Immediately Khanh began making very loud, excited sounds as he started moving on his own for the first time in his life. The neighbours became very involved with Khanh and also helped him with his new wheelchair.

Khanh will be able to leave the house and travel on the minor road outside, which mainly has motorbike traffic and almost no cars. While he is at work, his father may allow Khanh to go in his wheelchair up and down the road on his own. It is highly likely that the neighbours and people living along the road will be able to keep their eye on him while he moves along in his wheelchair.

Khanh is a now very happy boy with his wheelchair.



Khanh's house & father



Everyday at home



Watching the world outside



First time in his wheelchair



Khanh 16 years Underway



Father, Khanh & Michael