



Oct / Nov / Dec 2013 No.38

Solar Serve News

Dear friends

We just finished the Mid-Autumn Festival, with gifts, lanterns, drums, lion dances and special dishes to eat. A very special dish is the moon cake. Companies buy expensive moon cakes for their workers or customers. This year the festival was surrounded by rain and storm, so many children could not participate in it and many moon cakes were left over. For us it was more a start of new excitement, which we would like to share in this letter.



Dreams and visions

One day we asked a student what his dream was for the future. He could not say anything positive. Many young people have no goal for life and sometimes they study at a college or university without any purpose. As Solar Serve we were challenged to make up our mind. What would we like to accomplish during the coming years? Do we want to stay as we are or are we willing to work hard by multiplying our products for a needy world? There is so much to do. We are working now on a new strategy to see our dream (goal) accomplished.



An extra mile

We had to install more water heaters lately. Because of the construction of new houses, it is suitable for our heaters, but that is not always the case. Last month we had to make a whole new and complicated framework on a roof. It was quite difficult and our staff had to work 'the extra mile'. Also communication between our deaf and hearing workers is sometimes a challenge. So they walked up and down a lot. It took two days and they were pretty tired. But it was great and especially when the customer showed his appreciation.

Additional effort

In Danang, with a population of nearly 900,000 people, there are around 16,000 people with special or severe disabilities. 5.1 million people with disabilities live in the country, more than 6 % of the total population. Most of the disabled people in rural areas are dependent on their parents, relatives and social benefits. It is very difficult for them to get access to medical services, education or vocational training. So there is a whole group of disabled people to be considered. Many of them are excellent workers and social entrepreneurs should employ them even if it costs some effort.

After 40 years found

Last month Vietnam was in the news again. During the war, a father with his 1 year-old son fled into the jungle, when a landmine exploded near their house. They lived 40 years in a hut, hidden in a tree. They survived on vegetables and hunting animals. All those years they had no contact with the outside world. Recently they were found by residents of a nearby village, when they discovered the hidden hut. The 41 year-old son was dressed in a loincloth and could barely communicate. The 82 year-old father had to be treated in a hospital.



Termites at our center

We discovered that the termites have been busy again. This time not in the kitchen but in the living room on the second floor. They ate already a small part of a window and door frame. We asked an expert to help us. He said that the queen must be caught if we really want to stop it. The trick was to catch her, because she produces thousands of eggs all the time. Six boxes with food were placed at key points. After ten days they were full of termites who go back to the queen with other food which will finally end her activity of destroying our property.



Staff news

Thuy Vy, our bookkeeper, gave birth to a baby girl. For Vietnamese people, a baby weight of 3.5 kilos is a little bit much, so she had to deliver the baby by caesarean section. We received some beautiful pictures and we all agreed that the parents must be very happy and proud. See it for yourself. We were also invited to a birthday party for the son of Vu, our deaf worker. The first birthday of a child is very important in Vietnam. There were around sixty people invited and we had a great time with his family and other invited guests.

Goal achieved

A Dutch grandfather and his son in law and their two (grand) children walked for four days in order to sponsor our projects. While walking, we called them from Vietnam and they did very well. They finished the final day without any blisters and muscle pain. After several weeks we received 1405 euro from them. What a great result! It was used for making a shelter beside our kitchen and for a cover for our bicycles and motor-bikes. Here is a picture of the four after 4 days and our new shelter.



Other sponsor activities

One of our support groups was invited for a flea market. The Solar Serve dragonflies were a success and they also had a jar of marbles for people to guess. A few weeks later they were invited to a mini-camping. In the morning they were very busy. After lunch the wind became so strong that they decided to leave early. This was different at another camping. They stood at an open square with lots of sunshine. They were able to boil eggs in the parabolic cooker and had lots of attention. All these activities are great! It means a lot to us.



Taking care of a widow

Tho, the wife of our director, often helps an old woman near our center. She is a widow and lives alone. Tho helps her with shopping, because her family lives far away. Because of her age and mental stage, she cannot keep her house clean. In Vietnam older women often chew betel nut, which gives them a mild stimulation and a red color in their mouth. The widow sometimes spit the red stuff on the floor of her house. So Tho and some of our staff decided to clean her house regularly and take care of her. Yes, we are called to serve!

Work in vain?

A company in the south asked us if we could install on their factory many solar panels. We had to make a detailed assessment and that kept us quite busy for a while. We made three options. It would be a great financial project if we had to install so many panels. When we finally sent our calculations, we soon got an answer ... that they had no money at the moment. We learned again to serve and to let it go, knowing that all things work for good.

Overwhelming

The workgroup in Holland was invited for a charity gathering of 2.500 people. There were more people than they expected. It started with rain, but slowly the sun appeared and they were able to show our parabolic cooker at an open space outside. They had prepared many small things for children. It was a day of excitement, because so many people were interested in our work. The workgroup could hardly finish the day.



An early wedding

Some staff members were invited to a wedding in the countryside. They had left early and arrived in the village at 7:30 in the morning. To their surprise, they were the last guests. The wedding was already over. Sometimes in the country side, a wedding starts very early in the morning, so that people can go to work afterwards. A real dinner will be served, which is not a breakfast. After the last dish is served and eaten, everyone stands up, they thank the family and will go to work.



Introduction

Two of our staff flew to Saigon to meet a group of young people who were interested in starting a social enterprise. The time together was very stimulating. Our staff shared a lot of experiences, especially our director. They also showed some video clips of entrepreneurs who had made a big impact in society. They were especially stimulated by a man who started gardens in South Africa. His principles could be applied in Vietnam too. A big challenge for all of us.

In closure

We have been rewarded with an award and have been nominated for another contest. We are not able to give you more details till it is officially announced. We hope in our next letter we can tell you more. In the meantime two of our staff have been invited for a national gathering in Australia in November. They will introduce our work. It took some effort to get their visas. After sending two parabols in boxes for this gathering, the boxes were first denied. After adjustments and being wrapped in plastic they were finally accepted and shipped. We are also expecting a delegation from the EU to visit our center on October 10th. So we are very excited for it and are very thankful that you are standing with us.



Greetings,

Solar Serve team

Called to Serve

More information: www.vietnamsolarserve.org/ or write to: solarserve@yahoo.com