

Talking Ho Chi Minh City

The latest news from speech pathologist Marie Atherton



Marie and visiting clinician and lecturer Felicity Megee

Xin chao again! from Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) Vietnam where Year 1 of the Speech Therapy Training Program has concluded, the Mid Autumn celebration is approaching, and the wet season is very much making its presence felt. For those of you who may not have read my article in the April 2011 edition of *Speak Out* in, I arrived in HCMC in June 2010 to develop and coordinate a 2 year Speech Therapy Training Program at Pham Ngoc Thach University of Medicine (PNTU), in partnership with Trinh Foundation Australia and Australian Volunteers International. The Program was launched in September 2010 with the enrolment of 18 health professionals. Given the students have now just commenced Year 2 of the program, I thought you might be interested to hear a little about what's been happening in relation to the program and the plans for the next 12 months.



Marie at the ENT Conference in Dalat

But firstly, key events since April 2011: In June it was wonderful to welcome Janella Christie to HCMC and to the Speech Therapy Program. Janella is here for 12 months with Australian Volunteers International in partnership with Trinh Foundation Australia, and has assumed the role of Coordinator of the

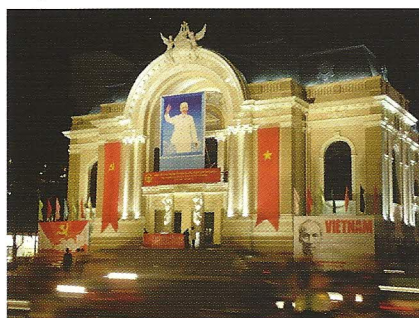
Clinical Education component of the program. It is fabulous that there are now 2 of us "on the ground", not only sharing and developing ideas, but also sharing the experience of living in HCMC. For it would be fair to say that at times living and working in HCMC is challenging... rewarding yes! ...but also challenging... and to have collegial support and friendship is wonderful.



With work colleagues celebrating Parents Day

The speech therapy students continue to be a committed, motivated group of individuals who show no waning in their enthusiasm for knowledge and clinical experience in speech therapy. They have been delighted by the many visiting lecturers and clinicians who have travelled to HCMC to give of their time and expertise, and have reciprocated with wonderful hospitality, friendship, and support. There are definitely worse things in life than being introduced to the best HCMC has to offer in food, cafes and shopping precincts! And from all accounts the visiting lecturers and clinicians have loved this introduction, as I too have. What better way to learn about a city than through its people!

As for the next 12 months?...well, a very busy period lies ahead, with more Australian lecturers arriving in the coming months, and clinicians already indicating they will be here Dec – Feb, then June-Aug 2012.



The Opera House

It very much feels that before I know it, September 2012 will be here, the first cohort of speech therapy students will have graduated from PNTU and my time working in HCMC will be over. And it is with these thoughts in mind that I have begun to think about who may take over once Janella and I head home....who will take up the challenge and call HCMC their home for 12 or maybe 24 months and welcome in the 2nd cohort of speech therapy students? And so, to anyone who may be having these same thoughts, here are a few of my impressions of living and working in Vietnam...

Vietnam in general and HCMC specifically can be challenging places to live, for many reasons, not least because Vietnam is progressing economically at such a rapid rate, with all the associated hiccups (and benefits) along the way; and HCMC is a huge city of 16 million people... its easy to be consumed by the place, with even the initial challenge of crossing the road being a big one! And obviously there are the challenges of an unfamiliar culture, unfamiliar language, and the potential for social isolation.



Saigon Traffic

But the positives are immense and far outweigh the negatives – the opportunity to live and work alongside absolutely wonderful people and motivated, supportive students; to contribute to the progression of a profession that has the potential to so positively impact the lives of people of Vietnam; the opportunity to be immersed in a different culture and way of life, to meet locals and expats doing so many diverse and amazingly interesting things! And the opportunity to establish life-long friendships that are forged whilst living a life that's both challenging and stimulating.

I would really welcome the opportunity to chat with anyone who may be thinking about embracing this opportunity, there is so much to tell you ... please just send me an email Marieaatherton@yahoo.com.au

And so until the next update, which will likely be towards the end of Year 2...

Chúc may mắn và tất cả các tốt nhất....
Good luck and all the very best!

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Celebrating a class members wedding



Sharynne Mcleod with speech therapy students and examples of speech assessments