



# The 15<sup>th</sup> May School

by Natalie Newman



On my most recent visit to Vietnam, I was invited to visit the 15th May School in Saigon. I had not heard of it before and was intrigued to go along. I have to say it was one of the happiest schools you could possibly imagine. Founded in 1986 as a direct response to the growing needs of disadvantaged children in Saigon and in particular street children, the school is named after the date of "Youth Awareness Day" in Vietnam. Now 25 children live at the school, and almost 250 attend at different times throughout the day and evening.

Children up to the age of 18 attend classes in algebra, geometry, science, Vietnamese culture and language, sport, music and vocational training. A Japanese firm sponsors the girls sewing classes and they are able to sell some of what they make to the Japanese market. The boys used to have electronics training, but unfortunately the firm sponsoring them fell onto hard times and had to withdraw their support.

The government pays for the building and for the teachers, but

everything else is provided by outside donations. The children do not pay to go to the school, like other children in Vietnam. They are there to keep them off the streets, and give them something constructive to do with their days.

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The main fundraising event is a monthly performance of the Sunflowers. Most of the children get involved, either singing or dancing, or participating in a fashion show, wearing the clothes they have made. Unfortunately, my visit didn't coincide with a performance, but I was able to watch a video of a previous show. The room gradually filled up behind me as the children who weren't in lessons, sneaked in to watch themselves perform. They soon joined in with what was happening on the screen and I was treated to an impromptu performance all of my

own. "When is our next performance?" they were asking the volunteer who showed me around.

They are so excited about the opportunity they have to be creative and about everything at the school, we felt that as a company we had to support them in some way. So, if you are going to Vietnam with Audley Travel, make sure you ask us whether or not your visit coincides with a Sunflowers performance at the 15th May school. We suggest a 15 dollar donation per person per performance, and we will match this donation.

If your visit does not coincide with a performance, we can always make an appointment for you to have a look around the school and meet some of the children. This will need to be arranged in advance, and again a donation of 15 dollars would be appreciated, which Audley will also match. If you prefer to donate children's books (in Vietnamese or English), clothes, shoes and sports equipment (e.g. bats and balls) these would also be very warmly welcomed.

Natalie works as a South East Asia specialist for Audley.