

# Translating Care: The Phu My Experience

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A documentary journey from  
rural Australia to Vietnam.





## Translating Care: The Phu My Experience

### Synopsis

***Translating Care* will trace the personal and professional journey of final year rural Australian University students as they participate in a six week placement at an Orphanage for Handicapped Children in Ho Chi Minh City.**

The School of Community Health at Charles Sturt University (CSU), Albury-Wodonga has been running a student training program that sends final year students studying speech pathology, occupational therapy and physiotherapy to work at the Phu My Orphanage in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The Phu My Orphanage was founded in 1875 and is now home to roughly 300 children with disabilities. The goal is for the students to support and train the staff at Phu My to better care for and rehabilitate the often severely disabled children in their care. In return the students gain a unique insight into the lives and experiences of people from a vastly different culture, while further developing their own clinical skills. Though supported for some of the placement by CSU staff, it is an intense professional experience that forces the students to trust in their own skills and judgement.

This exchange has been running since 2001 and is currently in its seventh year. As many as 12 students travel to Vietnam and live in Ho Chi Minh City for six weeks at a time. Many of the rural students have little experience of life in an urban setting in Australia let alone in a thriving, bustling city such as Ho Chin Minh City, with a population of over 9 million people. On arrival the students are immediately thrust into this foreign environment and are teamed with an interpreter, who is a Vietnamese student studying English, to help their transition. The Interpreters, however, are often confronted with their own form of culture shock in the Orphanage - learning to interact with children who have major disabilities, while acquiring the necessary specialised medical vocabulary to translate for the students.

On a personal level the film will explore how people of differing cultures are able to come together in re-evaluating and challenging their perceptions, often working outside their comfort zone, in order to achieve long lasting improvements in the lives of the children of Phu My.

From the open hills of rural Albury to the tightly, packed streets of the Ho Chi Minh City metropolis, this documentary film will follow the significant challenges these students must face and the relationships they develop as they undertake this professional and life affirming experience.



“My experience in Vietnam was life changing. Overall it was an experience that I will never forget and that I honestly think has changed my morals, thoughts and beliefs of the world”.

- Andrea, Occupational Therapy Student, 2006



## Introduction

*Translating Care: The Phu My Experience* is essentially a story about young health care students rising to the challenge to help people from another culture care for some of the most needy people in their community. This film will demonstrate that people from vastly different cultures can come together and overcome their differences and difficulties in order to achieve a common goal, in this case to care for children with disabilities.

It will closely follow a select group of students on their physical journey from Albury to Ho Chi Minh City and back. A combination of video observational coverage and the students own video diaries will provide an insight into the emotional and professional journey they must also undergo.

Initially the documentary will focus on the students' preparation and perceptions prior to leaving Albury. It will portray the rural environment the students live and study in, including how the Albury community helps with fund raising.

The majority of the film will follow them on the trip to Ho Chi Minh and into Phu My Orphanage. It will look at the critical incidents that shape their learning, following them on the often difficult path to understanding how to work within the cultural and physical constraints of the Orphanage. The Charles Sturt University students have to apply the skills they have learnt studying and working in Australia and adapt them to the special circumstances of the Phu My orphanage. It will look at the contrast between the familiar and the new and unknown both working in the Orphanage and living for six weeks in Ho Chi Minh City.

The focus of the story will be on how relationships develop between the Students, Interpreters, Staff and kids at Phu My. What the Students learn about themselves and their fellow students will have a huge impact on them both personally and professionally.

Finally the documentary will return with the students to Albury as they attempt to integrate the experience back into their lives and professional practice in Australia.

"I still remember how overwhelmed I felt on my first few days at Phu My. It was the most intense feeling of insignificance, mixed with guilt, pity, sorrow and uncertainty. I remember saying to myself over and over again - what am I going to do? As it turned out it was one of the greatest learning experiences I have ever had".

- Catherine, Occupational Therapy Student, 2006







# Background

## The CSU University Students

The Allied Health Students study at the Albury Campus at Charles Sturt University (CSU). Albury and Wodonga are twin inland cities situated on the Murray River border between New South Wales and Victoria. They have a combined population of approximately 90,000 people.

The students have trained for at least three and a half years in either occupational therapy, physiotherapy or speech therapy prior to commencing their placement at Phu My. Each of the disciplines they study share common key goals, including the development of an orientation to service the community, preparation for work in culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and preparation for work in multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary teams.

Students are selected according to clinical merit for the program and are required to cover their own travel and accommodation costs as the program is purely voluntary.

On commencing the placement the students are often dealing with not only the cultural, social and linguistic difficulties of working in a foreign country, but also a working environment that is much more difficult than previously encountered. The number of children in the Orphanage and the level of disability is also confronting for the students on initial placement.

## The Phu My Orphanage

Phu My Orphanage is home to roughly 300 children with disabilities. Most have cerebral palsy though a number of children also have autism or other disabilities, often in combination with cerebral palsy. The orphanage also hosts a day care program designed to assist families to keep their children with disabilities at home, and not feel the need to surrender them to the orphanage or other care institutions.

From 1875 to 1976, Phu My had been a refuge for the homeless, the aged, those dying of incurable diseases and orphans. The Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres were responsible for running the refuge and still work there. It was one of the places that orphaned children were evacuated from on mass by the Americans towards the end of the American-Vietnam War. There is a rich history surrounding the Orphanage that will provide an interesting back-story.

When the Social Welfare Department of the Vietnamese Government assumed control in 1976 it was re-designed as a home exclusively for the care of abandoned children with disabilities.

## The Interpreters

The program is mostly self-funded by the CSU students and as such funds are limited and do not cover professional interpreter fees. The translators are drawn from students studying English in Ho Chi Minh City. Interpreting staff are carefully selected each year and the University invests in their skills development so that the interpreting experience they have can provide an opportunity for them to access other positions and expand their career paths.

The Interpreters play a pivotal role in the operation each year as not only do they translate often highly technical information, but they are also expected to work as cultural informants to some extent. This means that they provide guidance to the students on social and cultural values and appropriate behaviour, which are crucial in developing successful interactions between students and orphanage staff.





## Audience

**The documentary is aimed at three primary audience groups. The largest will be a general national broadcast audience. This audience will be drawn by the real life drama, joy and intensity of the interactions and relationships, and the visual juxtaposition of the rural v's urban environments. This sector will be reached primarily via television and film festival screenings, DVD sales through retail establishments and website distribution. A youth audience would also be attracted to this project as the main protagonists are young adults in their early twenties – enjoying all the highs and lows of living in a foreign city. A third distinct group would be a non-theatrical audience.**

The documentary will be used as a teaching resource in university courses and training healthcare professionals. In addition, the film can be screened to community groups to raise the program's profile and attract future funding. This audience will be reached by a combination of DVD sales / rentals, local screenings, the website and accompanying educational support packages.

In consultation with The School of Community Health at Charles Sturt University (CSU) a study guide for healthcare professionals will be developed, primarily looking at cross-cultural communication, clinical decision making and training local staff to implement rehabilitation techniques.

The accompanying website will include a greater range of transcripts, student reflections and research papers related to the Project. The website will also include extra video footage, interviews and discussions areas. It is envisaged that the website will provide an ongoing resource for CSU students on overseas placements to share their knowledge and experiences.

## Social and Educational Benefits

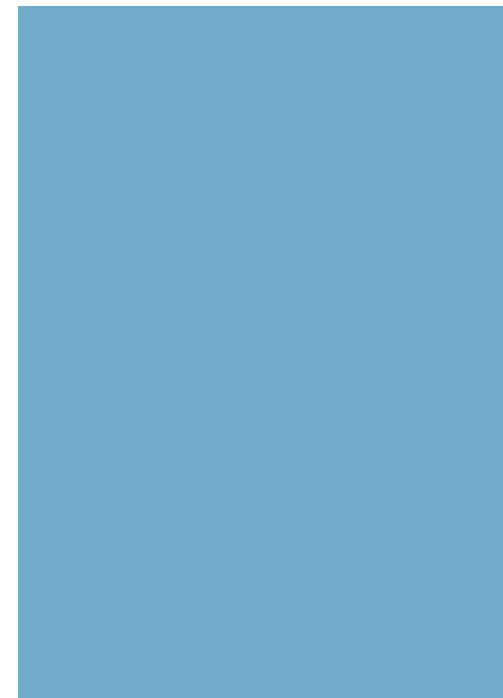
**This documentary aims to bring greater awareness to the crucial role rehabilitation and healthcare play in the lives of people suffering with disabilities. The film seeks to draw attention to this often neglected area of health care. Far from the life and death, blood and surgery of most TV medical drama and documentary are a host of professionals working to improve the lives of children and adults with disability or undergoing rehabilitation. The goals of rehabilitation are often slow to manifest but have a huge impact on the patients and their carers. These are not stories of overnight miracle cures but hard won advances that require patience, care and hard work from everyone involved.**

In addition the Phu My placements provide a clear example of a strategy to strengthen educational and cultural bonds between countries, not by simply showering aid money but by providing support at a ground level for Vietnamese people that are working incredibly hard to help vulnerable, disabled children.

It demonstrates that money spent on University education has both immediate outcomes for people within Australia and overseas, plus in the long term provide Australia with vital members of the workforce trained to work across cultures. Students attain specific skills to work with Australia's large Vietnamese population and more generic intercultural skills to work within a multicultural society. These are not University courses that are able to generate business investment to garner profits nor generate high-yielding patents arising from research, however they do provide essential healthcare services to the community and thus require Government and public support.

As mentioned previously the film will also provide a teaching tool for the University to use - providing students contemplating the My Phu placement with an insight into what they can expect. It will also provide a more general teaching resource, demonstrating the issues that can arise in cross-cultural communication between health professionals and carers.

Another major outcome will be to raise community awareness through television and film festival screenings, as well as presentations to service clubs like Rotary, Country Woman's Association and youth orientated groups.



# The Filmmakers

## Troy Beer - Producer / Writer /Director

Troy has a Master degree in Communication Disorders, having been a lecturer at Sydney University and a practicing Speech Pathologist. He undertook a Post Grad Diploma in Electronic Arts, at the Australian National University in 1999.

Since then he has worked as a writer, producer and developer of video, web and multimedia projects. Clients and employers have included ABC Science Online, NSW Health, Teacher Training Australia and Capture Photographic magazine.

He has written and directed two short films: THREE EASY STEPS (2004 dur 11min) was funded with an ACT Arts grant. This was one of a three part series that he worked with Dean Golja to produce. It was shown at the Seaside Film Festival Cronulla and the Novidad Digital festival in Portugal. THE GIFT (2007 dur: 6 min) is a short film based on a poem by British author Sophie Hannah. It was shortlisted for Tropfest 2007 and screened at the Popcorn Taxi Best of the Rest screenings and the St Kilda Film Festival.

## Louisa Achille - Co-Producer

Louisa is an independent producer / director residing in Sydney, Australia. Louisa is currently producing PANGU, a documentary film about a Chinese punk band forced into exile after performing at a pro-Taiwanese independence concert in 2004. The film has just received a number of international grants and is slated for production in September 2008.

Louisa's previous credits include producing, directing and writing the award winning documentary THE NAKED FEMINIST. The film has been invited to screen in over 30 international film festivals and picked up the Audience Award in the Emerging Visions category at the SXSW Film Festival in 2004. The film recently screened at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Rotterdam as part of the prestigious BODYPOLITICX exhibition, which features the work of 25 international visual artists including Robert Mapplethorpe, Cindy Sherman and Bruce Le Bruce.

## Dean Golja - DOP/Camera and Stills

Dean Golja has a Master degree in Electronic Arts attained at the Australian University of Australia in 2001. His list of photographic clients included major projects for The Department of Health & Ageing, Veteran Affairs, National Museum of Australia and Oxfam. He has travelled extensively as part of photographic projects in Vietnam, Eastern Europe & Central America.

His video work has been shown at major art festivals and galleries including the Zagreb Biennale and the George Pompidou Centre in Paris.

Dean Golja is also an educator and curator with an ongoing program of videos to music under construction for the 2009 season at the Australian Centre for Photography.

## Rachel Walls – Editor, Graphics and Animator

Rachel has over 10 years experience as an off-line and on-line editor (competent in AVID, Final Cut Pro Studio) and her experience spans across multi-media, broadcast and cable environments. Rachel is also currently completing her MA in Animation at the University of Technology in Sydney.

Rachel's background is a mixture of television production and senior creative roles across a range of media. With a strong flair for styling and presenting media, Rachel's primary joy is in bringing her ability to develop strong narratives to the table. Rachel has worked with Louisa Achille as editor and designer on THE NAKED FEMINIST, and looks forward to assisting her and Troy in realising TRANSLATING CARE: THE PHU MY EXPERIENCE.

## Sonal Joshi – Sound Designer

Sonal has been working as a freelance Sound Designer and Editor for the last 12 years in both film and television. Her list of credits is extensive including films such as AUSTRALIA, HAPPY FEET and LORD OF THE RINGS. She has worked on a number of magazine style documentaries for Beyond Television and the ABC and has won multiple awards in the field of sound including both Golden Reel and AFI awards.

## Mary Finster – Composer

Mary is a renowned composer and has lectured at Universities throughout the world and is currently a lecturer at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and the Australian Film and Television School in Sydney.

Mary has composed notated scores and electro – acoustic soundscapes as part of multimedia events for the Zagreb Biennale 1999 – 2005; Le Nouvel Ensemble Moderne for the Adelaide Festival, Strasbourg and Montreal in 2000; Ensemble Intercontemporain and IRCAM for the George Pompidou Centre in Paris 2001 and the acclaimed Ictus Ensemble for performance in Lille and Brussels 2004.

In 2006 Mary received a Churchill Fellowship for her continuing work in the film industry and earlier this year composed music for the recently released Hollywood movie DIE HARD 4.

# Schedule

**The film is currently in Development. A preliminary research shoot took place in Ho Chi Minh City in July 2008 to discuss and formalise shooting arrangements with Charles Sturt University staff, Phu My staff and Vietnamese government officials.**

The filmmakers also conducted interviews with current students enrolled in the program to determine the type of stories, opportunities for shooting, what type of environments (relating to working conditions at Phu My Orphanage and living conditions in Ho Chi Minh City) to prepare for.

**Production** is set to take place in early 2009 (March-April), which will entail one week's filming in Albury-Wodonga of students enrolled in 2009 placement; documenting community fund raising efforts and observing their current environment. Further production will take place in June 2009; 2-3 days of filming in Albury-Wodonga of students final preparation and leaving plans, flying with students to Ho Chi Minh city and following the students progress during the 6 week placement. In July and early August 2009 the filmmakers will film the return of the students, their travel back to Albury, video debriefing interviews and finally their return to living and studying in Albury-Wodonga.

**Post Production** will take place over a 14 week period from August – November 2009. Schedule for release late 2009.



"You get your heart broken 10 times a day".

- Natalie, Speech Pathology Student, 2008

