

Dear Friends

ABOUT PLATYPUS

The Platypus Bill is the newsletter of the Platypus Foundation. Recent issues are published on the Platypus Foundation website at www.platypus-charity.org/newsletters/

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

After a period of COVID-induced disruptions, 2023 has been all about re-establishing friendships, working relationships and our charitable programs. In this newsletter we thank our supporters for their ongoing and exceptional generosity and report on 2023 program outcomes.

VERY BIG HEARTS

In May this year Amy & Jeff Burch, and not for the first time, very generously hosted the Platypus major fundraiser. We were struck mightily, once again, by a happy band of charitable folk (old friends, strangers who were keen to become friends, and anonymous good sorts) who opened their hearts, volunteered their time and skills, donated wonderful prizes for our auction, and then emptied their wallets in support of our programs. And the generosity did not end there with several more donations, including \$10,000 from one of our foundation supporters to emphatically underwrite our education program, arriving from supporters in the weeks that followed. Our champions are a very enthusiastic lot when it comes to sustaining Platypus.



Amy Burch greets guests at the Platypus Cocktail Party

SELF-HELP PROGRAMS

MICRO-BANKING

Now in its 10th year, the Platypus micro banking scheme, which provides interest free loans to entrepreneurial women in poor communities, received a major boost in 2022 with an anonymous AUD \$100,000 donation (The Anon Gift). One year on, the Anon Gift is already hard at work in the communes of Ha Giang province with 138 loans totaling AUD \$77,000 approved. Women of ethnic minorities Pà Thên, Nùng, Dao, Tay, Hmông, La Chi and Giay now raise pigs for meat or breeding and some have buffaloes, chickens, ducks or sewing or knitting machines to cater for a booming domestic tourism market. Word has spread that loans work for the diligent and over the duration of the program 241 women (and their families) have to date benefited from the generosity of our supporters. We are delighted at the geographical and ethnic diversity of borrowers that our partners, the Vietnam Women's Union (VWU), has achieved. We want loans spread in decent chunks in order to benefit and help educate women who have never had funds to operate with.



A Pà Thên lady in her traditional ethnic costume

GIFT OF ANIMALS – “PASS THE PIG”

Traditionally many country folk are wary of lenders of money due to unscrupulous operators in the northern mountains. They also lack confidence in their ability to repay debt, so we gift a single sow to a household and watch the woman of the house become an entrepreneur using the proceeds from the sow's litters to diversify into all manner of beasts. Recently our local partner, the VWU, after a COVID-induced hiatus, has resumed reporting on the outcomes of this program. Across seven phases 280 households in Ha Giang province in the Northeast region of Vietnam, have received pigs. With ongoing supervision from the VWU, including veterinary services, a great majority of these households have been helped to develop their family economy, increase their income and raise their living standards. This contributes to the women's economic empowerment and achieves greater gender equality in the province.



Ha Giang Province, near the Chinese border.

Success, of course, cannot be guaranteed on each and every occasion. In an area of particularly difficult and uneven terrain with severe weather conditions and a lack of reliable clean water, virulent animal and, most recently, human diseases, a number of households lost their livestock. Almost all households are so poor that they cannot invest in good foodstuffs and medicine for their livestock while also struggling to keep family members fit and well. But this is not a reason to withdraw, but rather to look at how we can increase our support.

RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS

From time to time, we are asked by our in-country partners whether we can support a 'random act of kindness.' In September 2022, the VWU approached Bob Greer with a proposal to help an ethnic minority Tay deaf-mute lady, from Ha Giang province, who had been subjected to brutal attacks on two occasions, to lift her family off the bottom rung of poverty. A private members' collection has the mother starting off as a pig farmer, with a magnificent sow-housing structure, and stipends for her Year 8 son and Year 11 daughter to finish school. Our Anonymous donor is also happy for the daughter to enjoy higher education if she wishes and her marks are satisfactory. Our charity run motorcyclists will visit her in December and the Platypus Secretary, Jon Stubbs, will assess the family situation further.



Pig farming essentials: A farmer with lots of courage, two young Vietnamese Pot-bellied pigs, a new sty and a bag of balanced feed. After a gestation period of about 115 days, Usually, Pot-bellied sows birth between 7and 12 piglets per litter.

EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIPS

The provision of scholarships has been at the core of what we do since 2012 when an initial cohort of 50 Vietnamese children from poor families were supported. Ten years on, 242 kids throughout Quan Nam and Ha Giang provinces are currently in receipt of scholarships. This number includes an extra cohort in 2023 in the Quang Binh district of Ha Giang funded by a serendipitous AUD \$14,000 donation from a US Vietnam Veterans' organisation. Scholarships were bestowed upon 31 girls and one boy from five ethnic groups comprising Dao (25 students), Hmong (3), Lai Chi (1), Phu La (1) and two Tay students. They have support until high school graduation courtesy of the Veterans, and we will also look to micro-bank in Quan Ba when funds become available. Jon Stubbs visited Vietnam in August to award the 242 scholarships to students drawn from a range of ethnic groups enrolled in Grades 6 through 12 at a series of ceremonies organised by the VWU. You can read Jon's report and view a photo presentation by clicking on these links: (1) [Report](#) (2) [Photos](#) .



Education award ceremony to ethnic minority students in Quang Binh district, Ha Giang province, Vietnam. Pictured are students, teachers, the school principal, our representative, and staff of the Vietnam Women's Union.

CHRIS REES MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Our young Chris Rees Memorial Scholarship veterinary science student is now in his 4th year awaiting the outcome of his scholarship to Sweden or Israel, although the latter is unlikely at present. Sung Thin Pha has had another set of good

results and has an offer of a government job as a veterinarian should he choose to accept it. He may be the first Hmong vet.

RIDE WITH PLATYPUS

Very shortly the participants on our fourteenth guided motorcycle tour of north Vietnam will be flying to Hanoi before heading out to the mountains of Ha Giang and finishing with a day to unwind on Cat Ba Island in Halong Bay. Along the way riders young and old, men and women will experience magnificent vistas, unparalleled hospitality from the communities we visit, and great camaraderie. And it is a great way to raise funds for Platypus and learn about our programs and the people we support. We are currently advertising tours in March and April 2024. They are both suitable for qualified riders with a range of experience. We also have room in a support vehicle for non-riders who enjoy a great trip. Click [here](#) for more information. If you, or someone you know may be interested, please contact Bob at rob.greer@bigpond.com.

THE BEST OF THE FESTIVE SEASON TO EVERYONE

And so, another surprising and marvelous year is nearing an end and on behalf of all of us at Platypus, as well as 240 youngsters and their families and a heap of terrific micro-banking clients we wish you a marvelous Festive Season. May your sock, or trunk or whatever contain all the good stuff you have been hoping for and may 2024 be as sensational as you undoubtedly deserve!

Yours sincerely



Bob Greer
Platypus Chair