Project Background

Teams of Podiatrists from the Australasian College of Podiatric Surgeons have been providing treatment for foot and leg deformities in children and adults on a voluntary basis in Central Vietnam since 1996. During this time networks have been developed within the local community and other aid organization. The East Meets West Foundation’s local knowledge and “on the ground” support from their office in Da Nang has been valuable in assisting with logistics. Until 2005 the majority of work has been self funded with some donations of medical supplies and equipment with some patient cost being provided through the East Meets West Medical Relief program.

Clubfoot
- While working in Vietnam since 1996 it has been noticed that there seems to be a disproportionately high incidence of clubfoot.
- This perception is due to the high number of uncorrected clubfoot encountered that need comprehensive surgery.
- The estimated number of clubfeet would be somewhere between 2200 and 6300. When considering the population of Central Vietnam and the rates of clubfoot in Western and Asian medical literature,
- During and following the Vietnam War, and up until sometime after the lifting of the economic and trade embargo, many health issues in children including cerebral palsy, polio and clubfoot were often unrecognized and untreated. This was due to the scarcity of medical resources, most of which came from the former Soviet Union which at the time, was also in decline.
- The use of defoliants during the Vietnam War was wide spread and has been implicated as a cause of birth defects including clubfoot. Research of 8,280 women Vietnam-era veterans in the USA has show a higher incidence of clubfoot in children of US servicewomen who served in Vietnam. [“Pregnancy Outcomes Among U.S. Women Vietnam Veterans,” American Journal of Industrial Medicine 38:447-454 (2000).] The US government now provide for certain benefits and services for children of female Vietnam veterans’ with certain birth defects of which clubfoot is one. Follow this link for more information: Vietnam Veterans Disabilities Program for Children

In Australia and other developed countries problems associated with clubfoot is negligible due to recognition and treatment at birth. Most children in central Vietnam are not born in hospitals but in rural and remote villages where there is minimal awareness about clubfoot particularly the ethnic minorities living in the mountain areas. Problems arise due to a lack of identification and resources for the treatment with present resources directed at much more involved, expensive surgical procedures. Families are too poor to be able to afford the cost of travel to hospital or other treatment facility as well as the cost for accommodation and food during the period of treatment.

It was for this reason that in 2004 a proposal was developed and funding sought for a program aimed at the early detection and treatment of clubfoot. Along with the cooperation of the Director and staff at the Da Nang Orthopaedic and Rehabilitation Centre. They have been instrumental in providing support to our project work since 1996.