
VietHope Newsletter

Issue I

September 22, 2003

VietHope is a non-profit organization dedicated to Vietnam's socioeconomic development. We at VietHope believe that the wealth of Vietnam lies in its human capital and its prosperity is dependent on the harnessing of this human capital. As such, we believe that good education is indispensable to Vietnam's growth and future.

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WORD FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

By Kim-Son Nguyen
President and Director

It has been over a year since a group of Boston-area students and young professionals formed VietHope. It is now time for us to pause and ask what we have accomplished in these 15 challenging, and at times frustrating, months and to share with our supporters our progress and accomplishments. How has VietHope grown since its inception on that sunny spring day in 2002?

We have succeeded in providing much-needed scholarships to 19 students in Dong Thap and Ca Mau, two of the most impoverished provinces in Vietnam. This past summer VietHope also funded the construction of a two-classroom elementary school, along with a fresh-water well in Ca Mau. You can read more about these projects on pages 2 and 3 in this newsletter. All of our work was made possible only by the generous financial and mental support of all of you, the friends and donors of VietHope. Even though a small staff (based in Boston, Washington D.C., Los Angeles, and Frankfurt, Germany) operates/runs VietHope, it in essence belongs to all of you, from all over the world. In this past year we have been fortunate to receive support from individuals from Hawaii to the U.S. East Coast, from Hong Kong to Europe. We are extremely grateful for your support, and we will continually strive to make the best use of your valuable contributions, taking upon projects that we believe are beneficial to the education of the poor children in Vietnam.

Through this newsletter, it is our intention to keep you informed of VietHope activities, share with you the challenges that VietHope faces, and bring you as close as possible to the

decision making process. We would love to hear your opinions, advice, or questions. This newsletter is not only the voice of the VietHope staff, but it should also serve as a communicating forum for everyone interested in our mission. You can always reach us via email at info@viethope.org or me personally at president@viethope.org.

I hope you enjoy the first issue of our newsletter, put together by the always-dedicated Nam Tran Nguyen, one of our directors. In the months ahead, we hope to have your continued support in improving the lives of the children of Vietnam.

NEWSLETTER OUTLINE

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Word from the Board of Directors | 1 |
| Updates on VietHope Projects | |
| Scholarship Program | 2 |
| School Construction | 2 |
| New Project Proposals | 3 |
| VietHope Voices | |
| Trip to the Mekong Delta | 4 |
| What VietHope Means to Me... | 5 |
| Issue in Education | 6 |
| VietHope Updates | |
| VietHope Officers in Vietnam | 7 |
| Fundraising Update | 7 |

Scholarship Program:

The Scholarship Program currently funds 19 students in the Ca Mau, Dong Thap, and Vung Tau provinces.

School Construction Project:

VietHope provided the funds to construct a primary school in Ca Mau.

Currently there are 78 students enrolled in the school. VietHope expects enrollment to increase significantly by next school year.

New Project Proposals:

- Construct a library
- Upgrade a kindergarten
- Scholarship Fund for university-bound students

UPDATES ON VIETHOPE PROJECTS

The Scholarship Program

By Lynn Huynh

The Scholarship Program provides opportunities for students in poor rural areas to excel in their academic studies by financially supporting their education. The program is headed by the Scholarship Committee composed of 4-6 dedicated VietHope members. The Committee develops brochures, establishes contacts with VietHope partner organization, Nhiep Cau Xanh (NCX), monitors students' progress through report cards, and builds strong connections between the sponsors and students.



VietHope scholarship recipient in Dong Thap province.

Currently, the Scholarship Program supports 19 students in Dong Thap and Ca Mau by providing students with stipends for tuition, books, school supplies, tutoring session, and miscellaneous school-related fees. The students are selected based on their merits, motivation to excel, school's recommendation letters, and financial need. The students who meet these criteria are automatically placed in Group A of the Scholarship Program, which consists of the 19 students mentioned above. In addition to Group A, VietHope has adopted a General Education Fund for Group B students. The objective of establishing Group B is to assist a diverse group of students. Students in this group have great

potential to excel but do not meet all the requirements that VietHope sets forth; hence, these students receive a smaller stipend for tuition than Group A students.

The Scholarship Program is funded by sponsors and donors. Sponsors are those who donate \$180/year to support one student in Group A. Of the \$180, \$120 goes to the Group A student while \$60 enters into the General Education Fund, which is distributed to Group B students. Donors are those who give specifically to the Scholarship Program but do not commit to the \$180/year.

Currently, due to limited number of sponsors, the General Education Fund has been used to support the students in Group A who do not have individual sponsors. Until there are 19 sponsors to match the 19 students in Group A, the General Education Fund will be used to support Group A students. It is VietHope's objective to expand the Scholarship Program in the upcoming year to 1) find sponsors for all Group A students and 2) increase the number of scholarship recipients.

School Construction in Ca Mau

By Lynn Huynh

During the month of May 2003, VietHope successfully raised \$3,700 to build a new two-classroom primary school in Nha Phan hamlet, Ca Mau province, 368 km south of Ho Chi Minh City. Within a 3-week period, VietHope members devoted their time to raise money for the new school in hope that students in this region will become more motivated to excel in school and possibly be nominated for the VietHope Scholarship Program. The new two-classroom school replaces the old school, which was in a dilapidated condition with a leaky thatched roof and crumbling walls. This old building, prone to collapse during the rainy season, did not provide a safe and habitable site for the 78 students. Thus, there was an urgent need to

VietHope Scholarship Recipients:

Lam Thuy Mo
Ly Thi Phuong Anh
Nguyen Thuy Linh
Le Hoang Giang
Nguyen Thi Lon
Nguyen Thi Phuong
Ngo Thi Kim Nam
Pham Kim Quyen
Vuong Xuan Dieu
Nguyen Thanh Tam
Tran Thanh Hai
Nguyen Hue Minh
Ninh Thi Bao Ha
Nguyen Hong Mich
Tran Huynh Nhi
Nguyen P. Nam
Pham Ngoc Tram
Le Thanh Truc
Noan Thi Kim Anh

build a new school before the start of the new semester in September 2003.

The construction of the building was completed in early June 2003 before the start of the flood season in the Mekong Delta region. VietHope's President, Kim-Son, and Project Manager, Van Thi, visited the newly constructed school in August 2003 and were happy to report that the school meets all VietHope standards. VietHope expects student enrollment in the new school to increase significantly from last year's enrollment of 78 students due to spacious area and better facilities. The school currently has 4 teachers, 2 teachers per morning and 2 per evening session. VietHope will continue to monitor the school with regular follow-ups on students' progress and enrollment rate.



VietHope President, Kim-Son (far left), and Project Manager, Van Thi (second left), in front of the newly constructed primary school in Ca Mau.

The original cost estimate of the school construction project was \$3700. However, due to unexpected increase in cost of construction materials and manual labor, a grand total of \$4,200 was spent to complete the project. The additional \$500 came from membership fees and one-time donations.

New Project Proposals

By Van Thi Huynh

Over the summer, VietHope received two new project applications, both coming from

Mr. Khan in Phu Binh, a small village in Thanh Hoa – one of the poorest provinces in the northern part of Vietnam. Phu Binh's population earns their living from farming, generating an average annual income of 300kg of rice or \$43 per capita.

Working as a catholic priest in Phu Binh, the children's education is of particular importance to Mr. Khan. He has asked VietHope to assist in the implementation of the following two projects:

1. To establish a library in Phu Binh;
2. To upgrade the existing kindergarten.

Mr. Khan has worked on the idea of building a library in Phu Binh for quite some time. To date, he has collected \$200, money he has directed towards the purchase of bookshelves. Mr. Khan also has located a room that could be converted into a library. He now asks for VietHope's help in furnishing the library with books and media devices (i.e., TV, CDs, a computer, etc.). The amount needed to fully equip the library is estimated at \$1,800.

With regards to the 2nd project request, there already exists a kindergarten in the village, but it lacks fundamental infrastructure such as clean floors, tables and chairs, a toilet, a well for clean water, or a playground with toys. The kindergarten must therefore be upgraded in order to provide the preschool children with a better environment in which to learn and play. The total amount needed for this project is estimated at \$7,000.

In addition to these two project applications, VietHope is discussing the possibility of establishing a second scholarship fund dedicated to university education. The objective of the fund would be to support university-bound, highly capable students who simply cannot afford a university education.

VietHope's Executive Committee will meet soon to review these new project proposals.

Ways to Support VietHope:

VietHope welcomes anyone who shares our mission. There are a number of ways in which you can support VietHope.

Financial Support:

- Donations to the Scholarship Program
- Become a sponsor by committing to support a student for \$180/year
- Become a donor by donating a flexible amount
- Donations to other VietHope projects
- Membership: Membership fees go to cover any shortages in funding for VietHope projects and to cover operations expense

Active Participation:

Please contact us at info@viethope.org if you want to actively participate in VietHope activities.

VIETHOPE VOICES

Trip to the Mekong Delta

By Kim Son Nguyen and Van Thi Huynh

From 08.15.03 to 08.18.03 we went on a trip to the Mekong Delta with two destinations in mind: Dong Thap and Ca Mau. The purpose of visiting Dong Thap was to meet the nine students who received VietHope scholarships, and to also meet with Mr. Hung, the local coordinator of the scholarship program. Our primary intention in visiting Ca Mau was to see the primary school sponsored by VietHope, and also to meet with the five scholarship recipients there. We had in our company Quynh-Chau, a member Nhip Cau Xanh (aka of Green Bridge), VietHope's partner organization in Vietnam.

During our stay in Dong Thap, we were able to meet with seven students and their families. These students, all coming from very poor families, were selected to receive scholarships because of their outstanding performance in school. We spent 10-20 minutes with each family, asking questions to learn more about the circumstances in which the students were living, their current preferences and future plans. Without a doubt, all seven students are highly talented, and in need of financial help to continue their education.

One case was particularly touching: Ha, 14 years old, had just finished 8th grade with a GPA of 8.8, which corresponds to an A-. Her home is a little hut built with coconut leaves and other plant material. She lives by herself, because her mother and stepfather have left the village to go find work in Vung Tau. Ha refused to go with them because she wanted to continue with school. With the support of her grandparents, who live next door, Ha has been able to make ends meet. So far, she has used the scholarship money to buy a bicycle (to get to school) and to enroll in a computer course. When asked about her career plans, she said she wants to become a

teacher. We encouraged Ha to keep working hard and gave her 200.000 Vietnamese Dong (about \$13) to mend her leaking roof.



VietHope scholarship recipient, Ha, and her grandparents in front of her humble home.

We left Dong Thap deeply impressed by the students, and convinced that VietHope's scholarship program indeed gives students "an opportunity to reach his or her full potential."¹

From Dong Thap we journeyed to Ca Mau. We visited the homes of three students and again witnessed the poverty that has made education a luxury in the life of these farmers. It was with a sober sense of pride that we saw the newly built two-classroom school that VietHope funded, standing next to a pile of molding wood that used to be the old school.

After three days visiting the sites, we each returned to our homes in Saigon, Boston, or Frankfurt. The images of shy and thankful students, of equally grateful parents remained inside all of us. We have strived to look at statistics to select and implement our projects, but seeing the students in their homes, struggling to go to school in such difficult circumstances, clearly validated VietHope's mission. Touched by what we observed, we are even more determined to continue our work, striving to make the difference in the life of one child at a time.

¹ VietHope's mission statement

What VietHope Means to Me...

By Hansel Pham

"You are so lucky to go to Harvard. You can do anything you want!"

The statement was harmless, but it startled me nonetheless. I instinctively scanned her tone, searching for a tinge of jealousy or at least a hint of wistfulness. She certainly would have been entitled to it. There was nothing except a genuine and selfless happiness for me, even though our only link was that our fathers had shared the same *que* many decades ago. I still don't know her name. I don't even know her age, except that she seemed young but was apparently old enough to work in the fields alongside her 80-year old grandmother (who was permanently hunched over from a lifetime of planting rice seeds). Nor can I remember my stumbling reply, as I tried to recover remnants of my native tongue that had long ago been traded for English.

Instead, what I remember most is how bright and selfless she was, and I recall contemplating the unfairness of the vast disparity between our respective situations. I was probably only a few years older than her, and certainly no more intelligent or hardworking. Yet because of the randomness of history, I would soon have the opportunity to study at an institution whose reputation managed to reach this young girl in Ninh Binh, while she seemed to be consigned to a life of agricultural labor. I'm not claiming that everyone should agree that my life is necessarily better than hers, just that this particular girl clearly possessed the potential for much more.

I was initially ashamed of my relative fortune since I couldn't come up with any reason why our roles shouldn't have been reversed. But the memory of her utter lack of envy and self-pity was life changing in that it forced me to stop wallowing and begin earning the opportunities that had been given to me. In

college, I studied economic development in East Asia, searching for policies to alleviate poverty in Vietnam. In law school, I specialized in international law, seeking to facilitate foreign trade and investment to create jobs and transfer technologies.

However well-intentioned my efforts were, they were strictly at the macro level, dealing with governments and huge multinational companies. Thus, I saw working with VietHope as the perfect personal complement to my professional calling. Through VietHope's localized grassroots educational projects, I've been able to support the schooling of 19 students, whose names I know, and help construct a school building that I can physically touch and visit. If anything, being able to see and track the direct effect of my efforts has been even more rewarding than the conceptual satisfaction of affecting nationwide policies and legislation.

An integral part of this rewarding experience has been the fact that I get to work closely with a dedicated collection of students and young professionals who have become my best friends. In our group, we have a diverse array of abilities—future doctors, business leaders, lawyers, writers, and engineers—all focusing their time, talents and energies towards the common goal of improving the lives of Vietnamese people. Deep down, I think all of us share in the common realization of how blessed our lives have been. Through my participation in VietHope, I personally seek to honor and thank that young girl in Ninh Binh, and to help other children in Vietnam feel that they too can do anything they want.

General Information on Vietnam:

Population = 80.5m

- 80% of population resides in rural regions
- 45% poverty level in rural areas
- 71% of rural population without access to clean water

Gross National Income per capita = US\$430

Education in Vietnam:

Primary Enrollment rate:

- Female = 90.7%
- Male = 92.1%

Lower Secondary Enrollment Rate:

- Female = 62.1%
- Male = 61.3%

Upper Secondary Enrollment Rate:

- Female = 27.4%
- Male = 30.0%

Source: World Bank, UNICEF

ISSUE IN EDUCATION

Vietnam Announces \$244 Million Primary Education Program

By Hansel Pham

Over the past fifteen years, Vietnam has taken steps to improve the quality of and access to its primary education programs. Vietnam took a major step in 1991 when the government promulgated the *Law on the Universalization of Primary Education*, which mandated free and compulsory primary school education for all children between 6 and 14 years of age. Although Vietnam could not realize its ambitious goals, it did achieve significant gains. Between 1990 and 2000, Vietnam's primary school net enrollment rate rose from 80% to nearly 94% and the rate of primary school completion increased from around 50% to 66%.

However, beneath these general successes lie a number of serious issues which remain to be addressed. There are still severe socioeconomic, geographic and gender disparities prevalent in all aspects of primary school education. More specifically, children who are poor, live in rural areas and/or female often have both worse and less educational opportunities than those who are wealthy, in urban areas and/or male.

In recognition of and response to these continuing problem areas, in June 2003 Vietnam initiated the *Primary Education for Disadvantaged Children Project*. This \$244 million program received nearly \$139 million in aid from the World Bank, while the Governments of Australia, Canada, Great Britain, and Norway combined to fund another \$65 million. The *Primary Education for Disadvantaged Children Project* is a five-year campaign from 2003-2008 that focuses on enhancing primary education access and quality of education through hiring more teachers, building new schools, and providing other facilities and equipment.

Even more notable is this Project's explicit focus on "disadvantaged children", estimated at 3 million children. Moreover, most of the funding will be directed towards Vietnam's poorest 189 districts, where approximately 70% of Vietnam's educationally disadvantaged children reside. In addition, ethnic minorities make up at least 50% of the population in fully two-thirds of these chosen districts.

We at VietHope welcome and applaud this new *Primary Education for Disadvantaged Children Project*. However, it must be remembered that this project is a major advance, but not the completion, of the goal of universal education. VietHope will continue to work to improve the educational opportunities of those primary school children that this *Project* does not reach, as well as the millions of other deserving students at the secondary and university school levels.

VietHope Executive Committee:

Kim Son Nguyen,
Director and President

Lynn Huynh,
Director and Scholarship Program Manager

Van Thi Huynh,
Director and Project Manager

Chau Nguyen,
Treasurer

Nam Tran Nguyen,
Director and Fundraising Manager

Oanh Nguyen,
Co-Communications Manager

Hansel Pham,
Director and Operations Manager

Uyen-Khanh Quang-Dang,
Co-Communications Manager

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VIETHOPE UPDATES

VietHope Officers in Vietnam

By NT Nguyen

During the summer, three VietHope officers (Kim-Son, Oanh, and Thi) headed to Vietnam for work and adventure. Kim-Son spent the summer working in Hanoi with the Center for Disease Control on AIDS related research. Oanh interned with the United Nations AIDS project. Working in Vietnam proved to be bureaucratically challenging yet a great learning experience. Thi ventured to Vietnam to work with local non-profits before returning to the Boston Consulting Group in Germany. Thi split his time between VietHope and Nhip Cau Xanh and brings back a fresh perspective on the local environment along with two new project proposals ("New Project" article on page 2).

While in Vietnam, Thi and Kim-Son also visited Dong Thap and Ca Mau to meet with VietHope scholarship recipients and to inspect the newly constructed school sponsored by VietHope. They are happy to report that both projects are in good order (refer to "Trip to Mekong Delta").

Fulbright Fellow – Lynn Huynh

By NT Nguyen

This September, VietHope officer Lynn Huynh, departed for Vietnam to pursue the prestigious Fulbright Fellowship. Based in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), Lynn will collaborate with the University of HCMC to conduct research on Hepatitis B. While not working on her research, Lynn will help to facilitate VietHope's projects. Lynn plans to visit Ca Mau to monitor and report on the status of the Scholarship Program and school projects. In addition, Lynn will collaborate with VietHope partners to implement new projects.

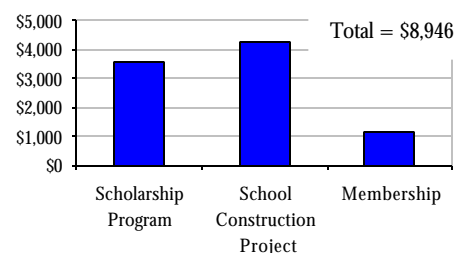
Fundraising Update

By NT Nguyen

VietHope is extremely grateful to all our supporters for their encouragement, time, and emotional and financial support. In an effort to keep our supporters updated with developments within VietHope, particularly our financial health, we have decided to disclose information and data that we hope you will find useful.

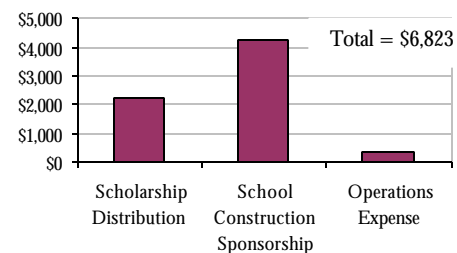
To date VietHope has been financed by donations and membership fees.

Breakdown of Cash Contribution



100% of donations to the Scholarship Program and other projects go directly to those projects. Operations expense is financed by membership dues.

Breakdown of Cash Distribution



Our financial support base includes 23 members, 32 donors/sponsors to the Scholarship Program and 36 donors to our school construction project.

We thank you for your support. Together we can work towards a more prosperous Vietnam!