

Macalester College
Cultivating Peace: Virtual Learning Buddy in Rural Vietnam

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” – Nelson Mandela

Who: Ngan “Jasmine” Nguyen (Vietnam)

Where and When: Vinh Phuc Village, Hanoi, Vietnam June 1 to August 17 2014

What is Peace and the Project Purpose

Everybody deserves a proper learning environment where they can learn and pursue their dream. Peace is when young people have access to the basic human rights of education, so that as literate adults, they may engage in civic activities. I am passionate about providing the underprivileged high-school-age youth in Vinh Phuc Village in rural Vietnam with access to computer education through the establishment of a sustainable “**Interactive Learning Center**” and basic computer-skills training programs. I will also host two supplementary workshops to prepare the students for job placement. This community initiative would engage them in intellectual development in which they would not only learn how to use technology to facilitate their learning, but also begin to see and engage the world in more positive ways, using the skills to build a peaceful future.

Background Information: Vinh Phuc Village and History

Having grown up in Vietnam, I devoted myself to several local community-service projects to provide social service and leadership in public education systems in Vietnam. Especially for the last three consecutive summers, I co-organized, promoted, and raised funds with **Solidarités Jeunesses Vietnam (SJ Vietnam)** for the “Summer Education Project for Rural Schools,” which recruited urban students to be volunteer teachers in rural areas in urgent need of year-round teachers and proper educational facilities, including the Vinh Phuc community. The remote Village of Vinh Phuc in the Red River Delta of northern Vietnam is characterized by subsistence farming, abject poverty, and a dilapidated school. Of its roughly 500 inhabitants, more than 200 are school-aged youth, approximately half of them high-school age. Spending every day working and interacting with the students while I was there, I became aware of the poverty situation they were suffering. What surprised me most is that, despite their poor infrastructure and low standards of living, the students were still so eager to study. However, the only school that serves the entire community still lacks year-round teachers and adequate educational facilities. According to the Vietnam Education Department, about 40% of students drop out of school as a result, getting exposed to human trafficking and underpaid labor. Macalester has given me a solid liberal arts education, especially in my Educational Studies major, providing me an unparalleled opportunity to build a deep reservoir of interdisciplinary knowledge and develop life-long global citizenship. Through the Davis Project for Peace fund, I aspire both to provide the rural youth in Vinh Phuc community with resources and skills, and nurture their potential to become peaceful contributors to society.

Project Description: Phase 1 - Preparation (4 weeks)

Solidarités Jeunesses Vietnam (SJ Vietnam) is a youth NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) managed by and for young volunteers with the support of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Vietnam. Its work focuses on sustainable community-development projects emphasizing education and peace-building at the grassroots level in Vietnam. Having run the volunteer projects in Vinh Phuc Village for more than three years, SJ Vietnam has successfully earned local residents’ trust and built a close relationship with the community. I discussed my idea with **Ms. Phuc Do**, the director of the organization, **and the group is committed to provide the logistic planning and coordination support necessary to insure the success of the project.** With the coordination of SJ Vietnam, the community leader has ascertained that an Interactive Learning Center would be welcomed and assured me of the community’s support for my project. In the beginning of June 2014, I will refurbish the existing shelter building to create a newly painted 100 square-metre room called **the Interactive Learning Center**. I will then purchase:

- 20 sets of tables and chairs
- 20 new sets of desktop computers
- A projector and a screen
- 5 webcams
- 2 printers
- 2 bookshelves of different computer software guides and manuals, English books, science books, and literature books
- 8 fluorescent lamps
- Educational software of technology and English skills

The project fund will also subsidize the first-year costs of Internet access. My father, **Mr. Trang Nguyen**, a senior engineer in a nationally renowned technology corporation, will help me procure computers at a **discounted cost**. My brother, **Mr. Thang Nguyen**, a senior computer technician at Microsoft Corporation in Vietnam, will help me oversee the process and set up the center **at no cost**. He will also provide me with maintenance services and handle any technical difficulties on a voluntary basis during and after the project. Together they offer knowledge critical to this project.

To promote the project, I will post the flyers and posters in the local school, market, and temple. The community leader will introduce my project in the monthly community meetings and school meetings.

Phase 2 – Implementation (7 weeks)

Sixty high-school-age youth will participate in the basic computer skills training. Every weekday, two other qualified volunteers selected from SJ Vietnam and I will teach three 2-hour sessions (20 students per session). Throughout the sessions, the students will all learn how to use the Internet and different educational software to facilitate self-learning. They will learn how to use MS office and E-mail, which are vital for job placement. I have presented this 7-week curriculum to the partner organization and school and have received very positive feedback. This three-level curriculum, along with the installation of internet access and software, will lay foundation for the students to get employment.

Level I - Basic computer training (Typing skills, troubleshooting skills, MS office, etc) (3 weeks)

Level II - Internet training (Web surfing, e-mail use, etc.) (2 weeks)

Level III - Educational Software Training (2 weeks)

At the same time, I will provide two one-day workshops focused on employment on the weekend. The first one will discuss career orientation and the second one will equip students with important interpersonal skills in team work, leadership, communication, etc. Guest speakers who are successful in each field will visit to inspire students. I will recruit three volunteers from SJ Vietnam to help me with logistics. The workshop will offer information directly and also offer posters, brochures, and small take-away souvenirs as reminders to the attendees. Food, gifts, activities will also attract more students and community residents to the workshop.

Phase 3 – Evaluation and Follow-up (1 week)

I will organize an evaluation session with the community leader, members, and participants and will celebrate the project's success with a small party to thank the community and SJ Vietnam. I will then work with SJ Vietnam and the community leader to publicize my project on the organization's webpage and local newsletter.

Expected Outcomes and Prospects for Future Impact

The students in Vinh Phuc Village will have access to improved studying conditions and excellent educational resources. Above all, the knowledge and skills students acquire from the Interactive Learning Center are the keys to success in a world that relies heavily on technology. The workshops will nurture their dreams, sow seeds of hope for a bright future, and help them avoid social hazards.

With their new experience, the volunteers are more likely to initiate other volunteer projects. I hope that my project will have a ripple effect that empowers Vietnamese youth for further actions on public education.

Sustainability

After my departure, the school can incorporate the Interactive Learning Center into its curriculum. Even when no or few teachers are available, students can use the educational software and continue learning on their own. Since their learning progress is recorded in the software, I can easily access it and evaluate how often they use it. Other volunteers can keep track of student learning progress from the database and adjust the teaching materials.

Community members are more than welcome to use the resources in the evening. SJ Vietnam has promised to send **long-term volunteers** to supervise the project and provide security. My partner organization and I will continue to supervise the project and seek additional sponsorship for computer procurement and maintenance by publicizing the project in local newspapers and popular websites, and connecting the networks of other community organizations. On top of that, SJ Vietnam has agreed to update my ongoing project on its website. Most importantly, the skill sets I teach the students will be transmitted not only to future students but also to the Vinh Phuc community. Therefore, the project significantly contributes to the enhancement of Vinh Phuc Village.

Awareness of My Project at Macalester

To keep the Macalester community abreast of my project, I will create a Facebook page that I will update every Wednesday and Sunday. I will upload my short reflections, pictures, videos, and interviews with the participants. With the help of Macalester's Asian Languages and Cultures department, I will present my project as a department event to share my experiences with Macalester students who are interested in Vietnam. I will also work with Macalester's Communication Office, Advancement Office, Admission Office, and Institute of Global Citizenship to create visual materials that can be presented to Macalester's parents, alumni, and prospective students.