



International
Labour
Organization

ENHANCE* Project

*Enhancing National Capacity to Prevent and Reduce Child Labour In Viet Nam

Our impact, their voices

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Background: The ILO ENHANCE Project

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is implementing the Project, Enhancing National Capacity to Prevent and Reduce Child Labour in Viet Nam (ENHANCE) with funding from the US Department of Labour. The Project operates in partnership with the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, among other stakeholders. In addition to assisting national level efforts to prevent child labour through awareness raising and capacity building, the project implements direct intervention models in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and An Giang. This involves livelihood support for families and educational support for children engaged in or at risk of child labour. The following testimonials illustrate the lasting impacts of these interventions.

Student, Tuyen, avoids falling into child labour and goes on to excel at school

15-year-old Tran Thi Bich Tuyen lives with her parents, three older sisters and younger brother in a small rented room in Tan Binh District, Ho Chi Minh City. The family used to own a house in a province south of the city, but when Tuyen's younger brother was diagnosed with a heart problem, the family had to sell their house and leave their hometown to pay for his treatment. To make ends meet, Tuyen's parents sell lottery tickets and vegetables on the city's busy streets. Despite their difficult circumstances, they strive to prioritize the education of their children in the hopes of securing them a better life. However, the two oldest girls had to drop out of school to help provide for the family.

Given the family's financial struggles, it seemed likely that Tuyen would also have to drop out of school. However, the family was then approached by local authorities who connected them with Saigon Children's



Charity (SCC) who assessed Tuyen's educational needs and, with support from the ENHANCE project, arranged for her enrollment at a continuing education centre. With her school fees and bus travel covered by the project, Tuyen is currently studying at an institution 30 minutes from her home, where she learns literacy, maths and science at grade 10 level. Despite additional family commitments, Tuyen is excelling academically, and she recently won an award from her school for her impressive achievements.

Tuyen's dream is to become a designer, and she is also considering teaching. To help Tuyen narrow down her future career options and work towards her goals, SCC provides career orientation and guidance. She also attends life skills training once a month where she builds communication and teamwork skills. "Through my studies, I am learning to develop strong principles", she reflects, with an air of wisdom beyond her years. Tuyen hopes to continue studying at the education centre for a further two years during which time she can gain the knowledge and skills she needs to work towards a better life for herself and her family.

Former child labourer, Binh, is finally able to pursue her lifelong dream

Nguyen Thi Tu Binh is 17 years old and lives in My Thien Hamlet, An Giang, with her mother and disabled father and older brother, neither of whom are able to work. To help her mother support the family, Binh dropped out of school in the eighth grade to work as an agricultural labourer, for which she earned only 13,000 Vietnamese Dong (around US\$0.50) per hour, leaving Binh with minimal skills or future prospects.

However, in 2019, Binh's life changed course significantly, when the family was approached by commune officials and staff at An Giang University who introduced them to the ENHANCE project's work supporting young people to access vocational training. Through An Giang University, with the project's support, Binh was connected with Thao, the owner of a local beauty salon, who is currently training Binh to become a hair stylist.

Binh now travels ten minutes to the salon every day to learn her new trade. So far, Binh has learnt hairwashing and is now working on colouring skills. During the first few weeks, Thao explains, Binh was very closed and unsure of herself, but she has grown exponentially in confidence over the months. "Binh is a good listener with a focused attitude, so she's picked up the work quickly", says Thao. As a result, within just four weeks, Binh started working with customers. Besides technical skills, Binh is also learning a lot about customer service and how to resolve difficult situations. "The most enjoyable and rewarding part of the job is making people feel good about themselves", she explains.

Binh is earning a daily allowance of 30,000 Vietnamese Dong (around US\$1.30) per day, which Thao explains will increase soon. Binh's life now is unrecognizable from her years spent working the fields. Now in a much happier place, she is finally able to envision a brighter future for herself and her family.

She plans to continue with her training at the salon, and eventually, with Thao's support, she will move on to learning to cut hair. At an outside training institution this



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would cost around 6-8 million Vietnamese Dong for fees alone, in addition to costly equipment, which would be impossible for Binh to afford. However, if the young student continues to work hard and show promise, Thao will teach Binh at the salon herself in exchange for a minimal fee to cover equipment.

Between her training and helping her mother with cooking and chores at home, Binh doesn't have much time to spend with friends, most of whom still attend school. However, she enjoys the learning process and is committed to becoming an accomplished stylist. "It would have been impossible to pursue this dream without the training and I would have probably continued working with my mother in the fields", she stresses. Her ultimate goal is to own her own salon one day so that she can support her family.

14-year-old, Thanh, is no longer selling lottery tickets but learning a trade

Chau Truong Thanh, 14, lives in My Duc commune, An Giang, with his mother, father and younger brother and sister. Thanh's family have been faced with a number of health problems over the years, the most serious of which affects his father, who is terminally ill and needs regular care. Without the financial means to cope with this unforeseen tragedy, the family have been unable to keep Thanh and his 12-year-old brother in school. Instead of learning, Thanh, whose favourite subject at school was maths, has been selling lottery tickets on the streets to help support his family. Thanh's younger sister who is 8 years old and currently studying in the second grade is the only child in the family still in school.

After years of selling lottery tickets, last year, Thanh's life took a dramatic turn. His family was approached by a teacher and local official who informed them of an opportunity to undertake vocational training with support from the ENHANCE Project. Today, instead of working on the streets, Thanh is training to become a mechanic at a local motorbike repair shop a 15-minute bicycle ride from his home. Four months into his training, Thanh is thriving. With the support of Du, the owner of the repair shop, Thanh is learning by doing. A fast learner, he started working on motorbikes after just two weeks of learning the theory. His favourite part of the training is installing new parts.



Despite the family's difficult circumstances, Thanh's parents fully support his training as an opportunity for him to establish a better life for himself. While the training is a lot of work, it is also an opportunity for the 15-year old to spend time with boys his own age. In addition to training Thanh, Du also teaches two other young students supported by the project, which makes for a lively atmosphere at the motorbike repair shop. Du plans to continue training all three boys for as long as they need, with a view to eventually hire them. "I'd get bored here at the shop if they left", he laughs. With over 20 years of experience, Du has schooled over 11 students during his career who now all work as mechanics.

"My dream is to eventually open my own repair shop so that I can help my family".

"The demand for skilled mechanics in the community is high", he explains, "and if you're good at the job you can do well".

If it hadn't been for the training, Thanh predicts that he would still be selling lottery tickets on the streets with no clear route out of poverty. Now, he has a clear vision for the future. "My dream is to eventually open my own repair shop so that I can help my family", he says with an air of quiet determination.



Orphaned teenager, Lap, given the chance to better himself through training

Truong Tan Lap became an orphan at age 14 when his mother passed away from cancer. He now lives with his 88 grandmother in a small one-room house in Ho Chi Minh City and works part time at a local restaurant to help put food on the table. Lap is now 16, and most of his friends have gone on to study at high school. However, unable to afford the school fees, continuing with formal education was not an option for Lap. In the summer of 2019, Lap's luck began to change when he was approached by a commune official and connected with Saigon Children's charity (SCC)- a local NGO working in partnership with the ENHANCE Project to help vulnerable young people to access vocational training opportunities.

With the project covering his school fees, Lap is six months into a three-year IT course at Ly Tu College. In addition to learning computer skills during the week, on Sundays he attends life skills training. On a typical day, Lap gets up at 6.30 a.m. to get to college for 7 a.m. After classes, he returns home to cook for himself and his grandmother and usually spends two to three hours studying at home. In addition to this, he is also able to hold down his restaurant job for three days a week, enabling him to contribute to the income of his small family. "Unlike my friends who continued with high school, my schedule at college allows me the flexibility to work and earn money in my spare time", he explains.



"If it weren't for the training, I wouldn't have enough skills to consider this kind of future".

Despite being just six months into his course, Lap has already decided that he would like to go into web design. He is also considering attending University in the future. "If it weren't for the training, I wouldn't have enough skills to consider this kind of future", he says. Visibly beaming with pride at her grandson's achievements, Lap's grandmother expresses her relief that he has been able to continue his education so that he can go on to better himself. "Now I know that when I am no longer around, Lap will be able to be independent", she says.



School provides refuge for orphaned former street vendor, Thuong

Thien An Primary School, located in Ho Chi Minh City, was founded by the local church in the year 2000. All of the school's 340 students are from disadvantaged backgrounds, with the majority from poor migrant families who moved to the city from rural Viet Nam. Many of the students have to work to help their families make ends meet. To keep these children in school and out of child labour, the project has supported students with learning tools and health insurance cards, and an extensive school library has been established. Most importantly, the project provides all of the students with lunch in order to encourage families to keep their children in school for longer.

Thao, who helps to run the school, explains that, prior to the provision of free lunch, the children were going directly from the school to work on the streets selling lottery tickets and other items. Not only is a balanced, nutritious meal good for the students' health, it encourages their caregivers, all of whom are financially struggling, to keep their children in school.

In exchange for the daily support of a free meal, the students' parents and caregivers have made a formal commitment with the school to keep their children enrolled. The teachers and staff work hard to convince vulnerable families of the long-term benefits of investing in their children's education as opposed to relying on the short-term financial gains of child labour.

For 14-year-old student, Thuong, gathering with her friends for lunch in the busy hall is her favourite part of the school day. Thuong has been studying at Thien An school since grade one. Thao explains that the teenager is currently living with her at her home, where she also houses 11 other students with no family to care for them.

Thuong doesn't know her parents. Before she started at Thien An school, she was in the care of her maternal grandmother, who took the young child and her brothers to beg and sell sundry items on the streets to make ends meet.



"The teachers here love us- they're like our friends".

When the struggling grandmother turned to the church to ask for support, Thao began to feed the family and eventually managed to take Thuong and her younger brother, Thanh, to Thien An school.

Unfortunately, Thuong's maternal grandmother didn't have the resources to support the three children, so their paternal grandmother from Cambodia is now taking care of the youngest, Thien. Occasionally Thuong's brother, Thanh, comes to visit the school for a meal and the staff are still working towards enrolling him at the school.



Despite her difficult circumstances, Thuong is thriving at Thien An school and her favourite subject is maths. "The teachers here love us- they're like our friends", she says. The young student, who loves to dance, dreams of becoming a movie star one day.

Single father supported to keep his children off the streets and in school

At just 8 years old, Le Van Huynh takes care of the household chores and cooks dinner for himself, his 7-year-old brother and his father, Trinh, who works as a construction worker. Just over a year ago, Huynh's mother left the family shortly after they arrived in Ho Chi Minh City where they had moved from the countryside in search of a better life. With their mother no longer in the picture, Huynh's father was unable to make ends meet and struggling to take care of his two sons. In order to survive, the single father had to send the young boys to work selling lottery tickets on the streets to supplement the family's small income.

No longer able to cope and desperate for his sons to be able to attend school, Trinh eventually sought support from Thien An School for disadvantaged students. The project has been collaborating with Thien An since June 2019 in an effort to prevent child labour amongst its 340 students. According to Thao, who helps to run the school, to facilitate the boys' enrollment, the ENHANCE Project agreed to extend the provision of free lunch, health insurance cards and learning tools to an additional two students.

Thao recounts that when she met the boys, they had no shoes or clean clothes and they both had severe vision problems. After enrolling at the school, the teachers gave the boys sandals and clothes and arranged for them to have their eyes tested. The children have now been studying at Thien An school for one year, and, according to Thao, the change in them has been dramatic. "When they started at the school, a huge transformation occurred- it was as though their brains started working", she stresses.

For the boys' father, their enrollment at Thien An marked a new beginning for the family. "The children were so happy after their first day of school that they cried", he says. Now looking to the future with hope, Trinh wants his sons to have access to the opportunities he never had. "When they're grown, I want my boys to be able to choose a life for themselves and to have a stable income so that they can be independent", says the construction worker. "Learning is very important for their future", he adds.



"The children were so happy after their first day of school that they cried".



8-year-old Huynh, who is now in first grade learning literacy and arithmetic, loves to draw. Like most of the students, his favourite time of day is lunchtime, when he sits down with his friends to enjoy his main meal of the day. He no longer has to sell lottery tickets, though he still helps with household chores, visits the market and cooks dinner for the family while his father works. When asked if he might have a future as a chef, he nods in agreement with a coy smile.

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