



**BetterWork**  
Vietnam

**Stitching a future:**

**Stories of Hope and Success in Vietnam's  
Garment Industry**



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# Preface

Better Work Vietnam is pleased to present the photo diary “Stitching a future: Stories of Hope and Success in Vietnam’s Garment Industry”. Bringing together a range of personal stories from workers from across Vietnam, this photo diary offers a unique insight into the lives and experiences of just a few of those employed in the garment industry today.

Accompanied by expert photography, the stories highlight the diversity of the factory workforce, as well as showcasing both their individual talents and common aspirations for the future - both for themselves and their families.

The stories also provide an account of the often difficult life circumstances faced by factory workers, and the inspirational journeys many of them have made to overcome adversity and achieve success and recognition in their field.

As well as inspiring workers to seize opportunities for personal and professional development, it is hoped that this photo diary can be a source of enjoyment for readers of all backgrounds.

This publication could not have been completed without the generous financial support of the Levis Strauss Foundation.

Better Work Vietnam would also like to extend its sincere gratitude to the staff and managers of the following factories:

- ◆ Kwang Viet Garment, Ho Chi Minh City
- ◆ Eland Vietnam, Trang Bang Branch, Tay Ninh
- ◆ Saitex International, Dong Nai
- ◆ Far Eastern Apparel, Binh Duong
- ◆ Eins Vina, Binh Duong
- ◆ B.R.O Sun Garment, Ho Chi Minh City
- ◆ Eland Vietnam, Long An Branch, Long An
- ◆ Golden Top, Hai Phong
- ◆ Esquel Garment Manufacturing Vietnam, Hoa Binh
- ◆ V.J. ONE Garment, Thai Binh

Our special thanks must go to the workers who were willing to share their personal and inspirational stories with us. This diary is dedicated to them, and all those employed in the garment industry.



**Nguyen Hong Ha**  
Programme Manager  
Better Work Vietnam



## Vu Thi Hien

**Human Resource Manager,  
Kwang Viet Garment, Ho Chi Minh City**

Hien was still young when she decided to move from her native Nam Dinh province to Cu Chi, Ho Chi Minh City. Unlike many workers whose only motivation is to earn enough to support a family, Hien's wish was a little different: she wanted to save enough money to go back to school and develop her career.

The job at Quang Viet factory gave her this opportunity. After using her savings to study in the evenings and weekends, Hien started looking beyond her sewing job. Then, one day an opportunity came to her. The factory was looking for a human resource staff – a position which she applied for and to her surprise, she got. Hien faced many challenges in this role. She had to learn local dialects to communicate well with other colleagues, as well as remember the correct words and expressions to use in different contexts. However, with both time and effort, not to mention patience and support from her managers, she mastered it all. Now, 16 years later, Hien is a human resource manager at the same factory. As an experienced and loyal team member, she has received many acknowledgements for her attitude and diligence both within her factory and outside –including the People's Committee of Cu Chi District. When asked about the secret of Hien's success, her colleagues say it's the fact she genuinely cares for workers' wellbeing.

When she discovered one worker had been diagnosed with cancer, she rallied the trade union and other workers to raise almost 50 million Dong for her treatment.



“ I hope I can help workers to improve their life while contributing to the factory too. I'm also keen to learn new skills and knowledge that will help me do my job better.”



*Accompanying the manager to meet production workers*



*Talking with a colleague*



*Checking jackets with colleague*



*Human Resource Department where Hien is working*



*Discussing with HR colleagues*



*Helping her son with his homework*



*Spending time with family*

# Nguyen Thi Mong Tuyen

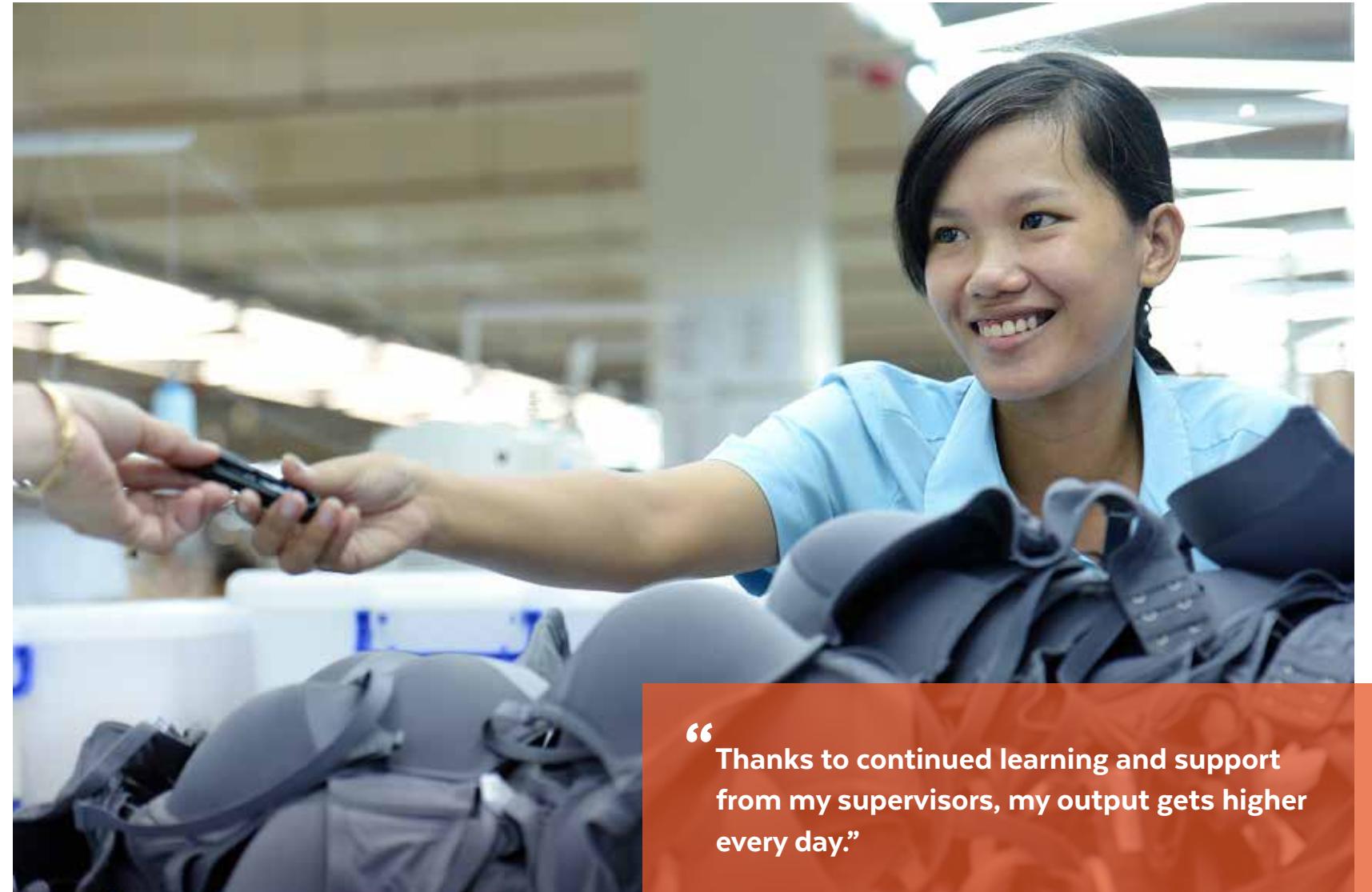
## Sewing Worker, Eland Vietnam, Tay Ninh

Tuyen works on a sewing line at Eland Trang Bang factory in Tay Ninh, North West of Ho Chi Minh City. She has been working here for two years, along with her husband, who works in the cutting section. When she first started, Tuyen used to follow a few simple steps to sew sport clothes together. But as she became more skilled, and the factory's order volumes rose, she moved onto more intricate and complex items such as underwear. This was a challenge at first, and her output was far lower than her managers expected.

Tuyen thought long and hard about how to improve her productivity; it even kept her up at night. She approached her supervisors,

who showed her new sewing techniques and also helped her to use more specialised machines for new products. With practice, her skills developed rapidly. Today, Tuyen says every day at work is a good one. She is always looking for new challenges, and thanks to the help she received from her seniors, she is now an expert at her new sewing technique. Her productivity of 750 pieces a day far exceeds the 400 she was producing just a few years ago.

According to Tuyen, worker productivity depends on supervisor support. That, and a desire to work hard and learn new skills. "Learning by doing is always best for work like this," she says.



“Thanks to continued learning and support from my supervisors, my output gets higher every day.”

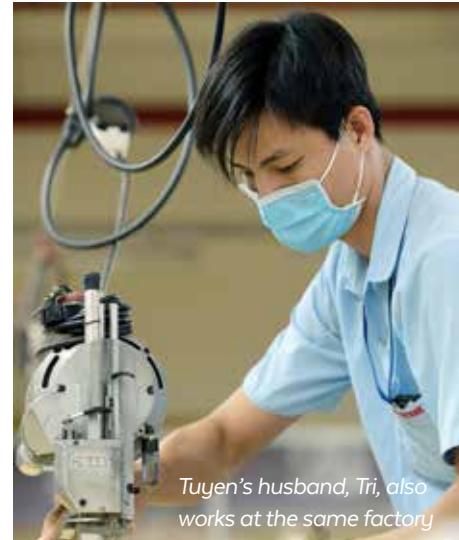




Talking with two managers at her sewing line



Picking up children after work



Tuyen's husband, Tri, also works at the same factory



Tuyen's family

## Tran Trung Thinh

**Quality Control Officer,  
Saitex International, Dong Nai**

One of six sons born in a poor family in Can Tho province, Thinh lost his right leg to Polio aged two. Shortly afterwards, he ended up in an orphanage for disabled children in the southern province of Dong Nai. Luckily, when he was 16 years old, a generous donor paid for him to travel to the United States for a life changing operation.

With improved mobility following the operation, Thinh used a brace to get around and even started to ride a motorbike. With new-found confidence, Thinh found a job at Saitex, a garment factory in Dong Nai.

“Now at Saitex for four years, my main responsibilities are to check finished products, monitor order progress and coordinate with the Quality Control team to ensure all garments are finished on time and to standard.”

Now 27, Thinh has no trouble completing his duties and never lets his disability stand in the way of his dreams. Now in a supporting role, his next target is to become team leader, where he says he can grow and contribute more to the success of the business.

“  
Always  
do your  
best.”



*Checking piles of jeans in the QC area*



Checking materials with colleague

Checking the products with QC colleagues



Updating order status with colleagues



Scanning boxed garments before moving to the warehouse



In his spare time, Tinh volunteers with nuns at a local school for orphans and disabled children in Dong Nai



Talking with children over lunch

# Pham Thi Duyen

## Senior Production Manager, Far Eastern Apparel, Binh Duong

Duyen is a senior production manager where she supervises nearly 1,400 workers across 36 sewing lines, cutting and folding sections at Far Eastern factory in Binh Duong.

Originally from central Quang Binh province, Duyen started as a sewing worker 13 years ago, when she was just 21. Seeing her potential and impressive work ethic, managers steadily promoted her through the ranks, first to supervisor, then to deputy manager, manager and finally, senior manager. Always striving to do better,

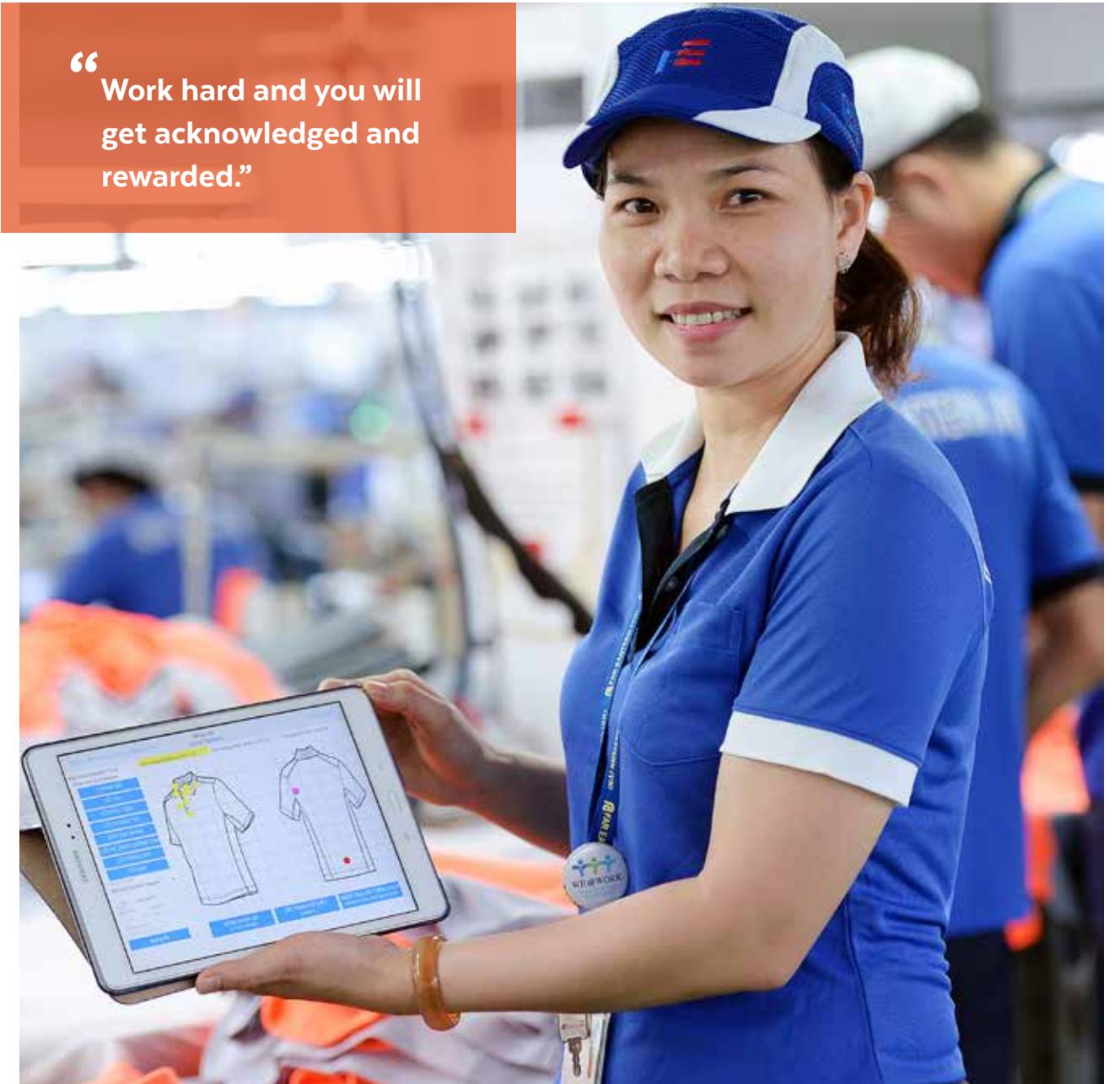
Duyen believes the best way to get acknowledged and get to the top is through simple hard work. Seeing her work her way almost to the top of the company, Duyen is admired by both managers and workers alike.

Never one to shy away from a challenge, Duyen is now tackling the difficult task of learning Chinese, which she says she needs in order to communicate better with her senior bosses. Against the odds, she is making progress, with support from her bosses and her family, especially her husband.



Duyen delivers training on Garment Sewing Data (GSD) for supervisors and sewing workers

“Work hard and you will get acknowledged and rewarded.”





Checking Standard Allowed Minute (SAM) at the sewing line



Guiding QC staff in checking product quality



Offering some quality tips to a sewing worker



Checking daily targets on the production line

|                        |                      |                     |               |
|------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| MỤC TIÊU 1 (日)         | KHÔNG CÓ TAI NẠN (日) | THỰC TẾ 1 (日)       | THỰC TẾ 2 (日) |
| KHÔNG CÓ TAI NẠN (日)   | CÓ TAI NẠN (日)       | THỰC TẾ 3 (日)       |               |
| CHẤT LƯỢNG (質量)        |                      | GIAO HÀNG (交貨)      |               |
| MỤC TIÊU 2 (日)         | ĐẠT 100% (日)         | MỤC TIÊU 3 (日)      | THỰC TẾ 4 (日) |
| THỰC TẾ 4 (日)          | CHƯA ĐẠT 100% (日)    | NHẬP SẢN XUẤT (入生産) |               |
| SỐ LIỆU HÀNG GIỜ 毎小時數別 |                      |                     |               |
| Loại sản phẩm          | Đơn vị               | 10:00-11:00         | 11:00-12:00   |
|                        |                      |                     |               |



## Bui Thi Thanh Nga

### Sewing Worker, Eins Vina, Binh Duong

Nga was born in Nghe An, but lived in Dak Lak from an early age, where her family grew coffee. When she was six, on the way home from the school, she fell and injured her legs. Despite having treatment at a local hospital, an infection later led to growth deformities which affected her mobility and prospects for work.

Fast-forward almost two decades, and Nga moved to Ho Chi Minh City where she enrolled in a sewing course at Vinatex college. Upon finishing her studies, she landed a job at Eins Vina. It was Nga's first real job, and after several years, it's now the place she calls home.

"At first, I was very afraid that the factory would not want me because of my disability. But, to my surprise, they accepted me."

Nga is known for her diligence and radiant smile. As shown by her earlier studies, she believes in continuous learning, and finds happiness when performing well and mastering her job. Her sewing line consistently exceeds productivity targets.

"Thanks to my job, I have overcome my physical condition and I no longer think about how I walk."



“Finding joy in my job, together with the encouragement of colleagues, has helped me overcome my disability.”



*Nga works on a sewing machine on the critical operation line*



*Nga checks product quality with a colleague*



*Adjusting her sewing machine*



Nga with a colleague



## Pham Thi Thanh Thuy

### Sewing Worker, Eland Vietnam, Long An

Thuy has been working at Eland in Long An since 1999. After several years in the job, she discovered a tumour in her large intestine, which threatened not just her career but also her life. Coming on the back of a series of similar illnesses in her family, Thuy considered quitting. However, she knew that without this job, she could not afford to get the treatment she needed.

But then her factory intervened, paying for her to be treated in South Korea. Following the operation, Thuy returned to work in good health and ready to repay her managers for their generosity.

Although she continues to receive treatment for the tumour today, she says her colleagues and managers are supporting her all the way, and she remains committed to meeting her productivity targets.

Thuy is a versatile worker who can do anything from sewing to ironing, button pressing to machine programming. This means she is often called upon to support workers in other areas.

Her tenacity is an inspiration for everyone facing life changing illnesses.



“My illness sometimes gets me down, but whenever I think about my family, I know I can overcome it.”



Working on her sewing machine



Cleaning pants before packing



Working in the feather room



Having a routine medical check-up at the factory clinic



Thuy (left) works with her two younger sisters at Eland, Long An

## Ho Ngoc Tuan

**Vice Supervisor,  
Golden Top, Hai Phong**

Tuan is a vice supervisor at Golden Top factory in the northern city of Hai Phong. Having started as a glue presser, he worked his way up to his current role –all while studying at university in the evenings. While balancing work and study wasn't easy, Tuan has no regrets, and points to his numerous accolades as a model staff member as reward for his efforts.

Now graduated, Tuan is able to apply new management skills alongside his dedication to quality and efficiency on the production floor. Looking forward, he still wants to help others change their mindset – “from the farm to the sewing line”, as he calls it – so they too can be successful in their factory careers.



“ This job puts me under constant pressure. But I am working hard to fulfil my responsibilities and ensure I produce a quality product.”



*Applying colour coating to shoes*



*Pressing shoe bottom*



*Operating the shoe shaping machine*



Tuan inspects footwear quality with the factory director



Spending time with the family

## Bach Thi Hau

### Sewing Worker, Esquel Garment, Hoa Binh

Hau comes from the Muong ethnic group and hails from Vai Dao village in rural Hoa Binh. Before joining Esquel, a leading garment factory, Hau's family relied almost entirely on her husband's salary from a brick factory. Times were hard. Knowing that few people from minority backgrounds get jobs outside farming, Hau was apprehensive about working in a factory. But once she gave it a go she quickly realized she could not just do one but several different jobs –and she felt happy to be producing products that create huge export earnings.

“At the beginning I did not know whether I can cope with a garment job; but now I am very happy with this work.”

Hau reflects on her long and tough journey to where she is today. She had to adapt to new ways of thinking and working to succeed in the factory environment. However, by observing others and being willing to embrace new experiences, she has been able to overcome her inhibitions, integrate well and build a career to be proud of.

Beyond everything though, Hau's priority is still her family.

“The most important thing to me is to have a permanent job that allows me to take care of my children.”



“  
Two things in life make me happy: having a steady job  
and hearing my children laugh every day.”



Hau and her colleague are visited by Esquel's General Manager, Mr Kent Teh



Adjusting her sewing machine



Cutting fabric



Preparing fabrics for cutting



Measuring the sample





## Vi Thi Hoi

**Supervisor, B.R.O SUN Garment,  
Ho Chi Minh City**

Hoi's day starts at 6 am and ends at 7pm when she arrives home from her sewing job at B.R.O Sun Garment in Ho Chi Minh City's Thu Duc District. Despite a long commute of up to three hours per day, Hoi remains upbeat. What keeps her motivated is the desire to bring success to the 12 sewing lines she now supervises.

This is no easy task, but it is one that she embraces and enjoys.

"The long distance doesn't bother me because I love my job. By remaining passionate and committed to this work, I hope that I am showing my children a positive lesson for the future."



**“Passion for your work can get you through almost any challenge or difficulty.”**





*Gathering finished garments at the sewing line*



## Nguyen Thi Hanh

### Sewing Worker, V.J. ONE Garment, Thai Binh

Hanh comes from a family of rice farmers in Thai Binh. Whilst growing up, she saw farming was hard work with little reward. She decided to try her hand at factory work, knowing that the salary could support her young family. VJ One Factory was ideal as it opened close to where she grew up.

Put to work initially on the sewing machines, Hanh was nervous and couldn't make sense of the barcodes, labels and technical terms she encountered. Everything was just so new and confusing. However, she surprised herself at how quickly she adapted. With positivity and hard work, she quickly learnt a range of sewing techniques, and before long, started receiving awards from her factory for her efforts.

Hanh is now a top performer at VJ One. A skilled multitasker who can work across various sections, she often covers for colleagues when they are off sick. Hanh is also on the executive committee of the trade union, where she supports the wellbeing of other workers.



“ Before, I was just a farmer who knew nothing about factory work. Now, I am very confident. I know how to perform many sewing skills and all my colleagues trust me.”



At a Union Executive Committee meeting with colleagues to discuss about safety at the workplace



Hanh inspects product quality at the end of her line



Enjoying the lunch break with fellow workers



Hanh's line manager watches over as she stitches waistbands



Hanh and her husband still farm for additional income



In her free time, Hanh also raises livestock



Hanh with her son and husband

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