Most Significant Change Stories

Haiphong, 2010
WORLD VISION
COMPREHENSIVE CARE AND
SUPPORT PROJECT FOR
PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV

With additional stories from

Ho Chi Minh City









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Translator: Nguyen Duy Thang
Editor: Kimberly Reynolds

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Table of Contents

A Project That Changes Lives	05
Haiphong Most Significant Changes Stories	80
Thanh Cong Dong: A Woman Who Warms Hearts	09
I Will Raise More Fish	13
Sadness Is Over Now	14
The Shining Dawn	17
Oh, I See!	21
We Have Overcome Pains In Our Life	24
You Are The Pride Of Our Village!	25
Sincere Gratitude To World Vision	27
Ho Chi Minh City Most Significant Changes Stories	28
My Love For World Vision	29
I Love World Vision!	32
We Are Construction Workers!	33
I Will Try My Best To Study Better!	35
Our Plan	36
A New Life Full Of Smiles Would Be Beautiful	37
Quotations About The World Vision Project	39
The Project and PLWHA	40
The Project and OVC	42
Sustainability of the Project	45





Main achievements up to April 2011

4,632 eligible adults and children received at least minimum care services

439 households received loans or in-kind support for family economic

development with **1,449** beneficiaries

A Project That Changes Lives

The "Comprehensive Care and Support for PLWHA" Project was started in the context of serious stigma and discrimination against PLWHA, OVC, and their families. The situation prevented them from accessing health and socio-psychological care and also limited their participation and contributions to daily life in the community and in society

Funding and technical support for this project were provided via USAID implementing partner Pact, under PEPFAR. World Vision Vietnam directly organizes and implements project activities. The project has been operating for 6 years (2005–2011) in Do Son urban district, Thuy Nguyen and An Lao rural districts in Haiphong and District 4, 7, 8 in Ho Chi Minh City. The overall goal of WVV's work is to improve quality of life of individuals and families affected by HIV/AIDS through building community capacity.

The project launched a Most-Significant-Change (MSC) writing contest in Haiphong in October and November 2010. Most-Significant-Change (MSC) is a community-based positive evaluation method that reflects the impacts of interventions on individuals and community groups. The contest received 213 stories, including 72 stories written by children. Each district formed a four- or five-person jury, with the participation of project partners such as the Women's Union, Youth Union, health workers, and people living with HIV, to select the top 10 stories from that area (children were studying during this time and could not take part as jurors). Half of each story's score was based on the degree of change and sustainability shown, and half based on detail, style and presentation. Then an eight-member jury representing all three districts reviewed the 30 finalists. The judges awarded 3 collective prizes, 1 excellence prize, 3 first prizes, 3 second prizes, 3 third prizes and 20 consolation prizes. A feedback workshop informed participants about the process and awarded prizes to the writers. Eight complete stories and some quotes from other stories of the finalists are included in this booklet.

A smaller contest conducted in Ho Chi Minh City received 57 success stories, including stories written by children. Six full stories and selected quotations from other stories are also included here.

The contest received enthusiastic response and participation from individuals and community groups such as PLWHA, orphans and vulnerable children (OVC), their relatives, community-based core children's groups, home-based caregivers, local state agencies and Project Management Boards from project districts. These prize-winning MSC stories vividly demonstrate the many ways in which PLWHA and OVC have been affected by the project, illustrating the benefits that have accrued as a result of physical care as well as psychological, emotional, and spiritual support provided by the project. In addition, the contest has also given individuals and community groups opportunities to propose initiatives and prepare future plans in the project transition year of 2011. The lessons from these stories provide a sound, rigorously selected guide and inspiration as we develop World Vision's program into the future.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to so many individuals and community groups for their enthusiastic response to and participation in the MSC contest. Our gratitude also goes to donors: USAID, Pact, and World Vision for their great assistance to the successful project implementation, which has been indicated with the results of this MSC writing contest. We would like to thank photographer Pham Hoai Thank for taking truthful and lively photos that reflects real stories. Special thanks to Mr. Nathan Wilkinson, Communication Officer, Pact, for his enthusiastic and professional support to design this booklet.

Project Management Board of Directors

Do Son – An Lao – Thuy Nguyen, Haiphong

District 4 - District 7 – District, Ho Chi Minh City

Comprehensive Care and Support Project for People Living with HIV

Purpose

- Increase PLWHA access to comprehensive, quality home-based care
- Ensure PLWHA access to full range of treatment, care and support services
- Improved economic resilience of PLWHA households
- Provide OVC in project site with health care and nutritional, educational psychological and social supports

Main activities

- Home-based care for PLWHA and HIV infected and affected children including health care, socio-psychological support, nutritious and spiritual support
- Communication to reduce stigma and discrimination against PLWHA and HIV infected and affected children
- Enhance capacity of PLWHA, their self-help groups and linkages
- Strengthen participation and well being of HIV infected and affected children
- Support family economic development of PLWHA and HIV infected and affected children through credit programs and vocational training





Thanh Cong Dong: A Woman Who Warms Hearts

By Tran Van Hai From An Lu commune, Thuy Nguyen district, Haiphong

If you come to An Lu commune, Thuy Nguyen district to ask about Thanh Cong Dong (Community's Thanh), all the local people will know her: she is an HIV/AIDS health educator there.

As her next-door neighbor, I know more about her than others do. This poor woman, now age 36, lived in a village where drug use and HIV were prevalent. Thanh's husband died of AIDS in 2005, leaving Thanh alone to care for an elderly mother and 3 small children. Thanh's heart was heavy with grief at the death of her husband and her overwhelming family responsibilities, but she knew she had to dry her tears and continue with her life. One day, after receiving counseling from a community health worker, Thanh and her three children went for HIV/AIDS counseling and testing. Unfortunately Thanh's HIV test result was positive. After receiving her test results, Thanh was very sad and weary. She did not want to talk to anyone, but instead remained in her house, just crying and crying. Knowing that she was feeling alone and lonely, I came to her house to talk and share with her. She talked to me in a voice choked with emotion: "I feel very miserable and ashamed. I know that people in the neighborhood are staying away from us." But, with time, Thanh tried her best to carry on day-by-day, and reminded herself how fortunate it was that her children were healthy and HIV-free. She thought: "Luck still came to my children! They are the joy of my life."

In July of 2007, Thanh started to experience diarrhea and weight loss, and she went to the community health center for treatment. There, she was invited to become a volunteer in the Comprehensive Care and Support for PLHIV project funded by World Vision. Participating in the project, she received training in HIV/AIDS knowledge, communication skills, and best ways to care for people living with HIV and for orphans and other vulnerable children. She also began receiving antiretroviral therapy (ART). Her health improved, and she developed optimism and energy to become reintegrated into her community.

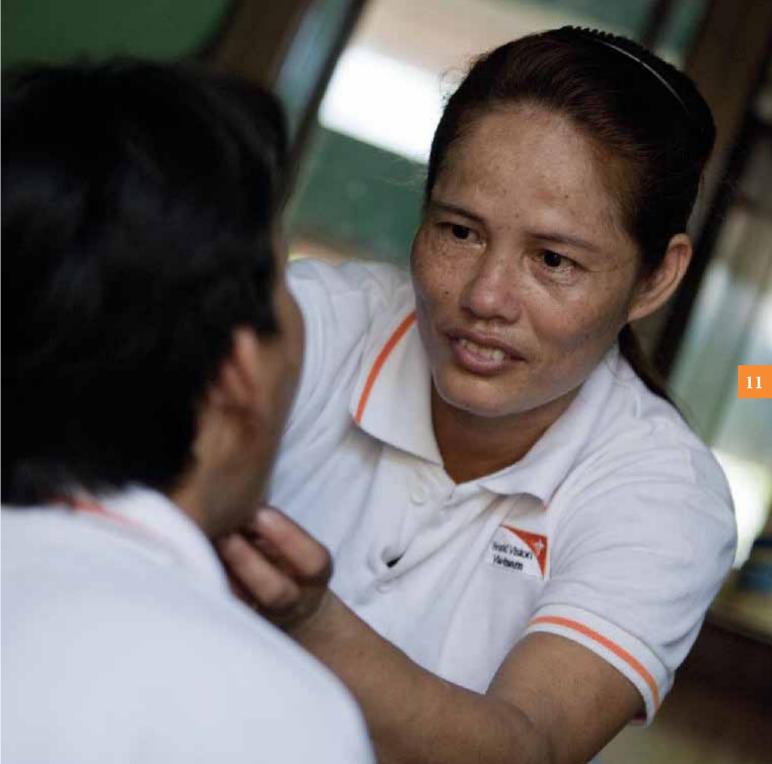
Thanh had watched her husband die of AIDS, and she had experienced cruel stigma from her family and villagers, and she therefore understood and felt sorry for people in the same circumstance as her. Because of this, Thanh patiently came to visit other PLHIV in her community, offering them emotional and spiritual care, bringing them material support supplied by World Vision, and referring them to needed counseling and treatment services. With support from World Vision's home-based care team, Thanh became the main organizer of community events in Thuy Nguyen district to reduce stigma and discrimination against PLHIV and OVC. She said to me: "I believe all people with HIV should be integrated in the community." Following these community-education events, many of the people who received ongoing care from Thanh have decided to disclose their HIV infection and are now willing to participate openly in the Comprehensive Care and Support for PLHIV project.

People in An Lu village call Thanh a lovely name: Thanh Cong Dong. This means, the community's Thanh. Thanh laughs and replies that it would be okay with her even if people called her Thanh SIDA, meaning Thanh AIDS.

Apart from her work with the home-based care team, Thanh has to take care of farming work with her family. Fortunately, her children are all well behaved and good students. She still struggles to support herself and her family, but her economic condition has been less difficult thanks to the project material support, which has provided Thanh with such things as bicycles, school fees, hospitalization fee, nutritious food, and a loan for raising animals. Seeing her dedication to community activities, I asked Thanh, "When the project phases out, will you continue to do what you are doing?" Thanh answered confidently, "Of course! I will stop once people with HIV no longer face stigma and discrimination."

I admire Thanh tremendously. Thinking about her, I remember a sentence in a poem by the famous Vietnamese poet To Huu: "Living is not for one's self."

I hope that our community, the project, and all members of society can come together to help make Thanh's dream of a world free of discrimination and stigma come true. All of us need to understand and sympathize with people living with HIV; we must work together to reduce HIV/AIDS.







I Will Raise More Fish

By Hoang Thi Xuan

From Vung residential quarter, Van Son ward, Do Son district, Haiphong

After being informed by Mr. Dinh - a World Vision staff member - that a "Friends" group (a self-help group of PLHIV) would be receiving a loan from World Vision to raise fish, I decided to go to Mr. Son's house in Cong Hoa village one sunny afternoon. Mr. Son participated in the "Friends" group, and I wanted to hear more from him about the group's activities. Seeing me from afar as I approached his home, Son smiled and welcomed me very warmly.

Son was born in 1978. As a student, he was handsome, with a round face, bright eyes and a beautiful smile. After he left high school in 1999, Son went to learn cooking in Hai Duong province. During this time, though, he became involved in some wild living, and he did not understand about HIV. He started injecting drugs and sharing needles. When he later learned that he was HIV positive, Son was shocked. Being afraid of discrimination and stigma, Son kept his health status a secret, and his health declined. Son stayed in bed all the time and thought that he was dying. Knowing Son's situation, the home-based care team of the Comprehensive Care and Support for PLHIV and OVC project, funded by World Vision, came to encourage Son to go to a health clinic for a check-up and treatment. With the care and support of doctors, his family, and community members, some months later Son's health improved. Once he felt healthy, Son joined the "Friends" group. Since then, Son has been different: He feels happier and more comfortable because people understood and shared with him in his sadness and joy. Son had a chance to meet and talk with different people and to learn from them. Through various training projects offered by the project, he gained knowledge that he had lacked before.

Today, in front of my eyes, Son was absolutely changed. He looked very healthy and strong in his fashionable clothes. Talking to me, Son always shows his optimism. He stated:

"Now I weigh 70 kilos. I can carry a package of cement easily. You know what, each member of our group has just been provided with 1,000,000 VND as initial non-repayable grant and 2,000,000 VND as a loan to raise fish. We have located a big pond in Dong Neo, repaired it, and spent 10,000,000 VND purchasing baby fish to put in the pond. We will take turns caring for the fish, with each member of the group being assigned a different day. Now that we have work, we all feel happier and healthier. Everyday when I look at the fishpond, I am delighted. I feel optimistic and comfortable because I have been receiving a lot of care and support from World Vision, neighbors, and the entire society."

I asked Son what he planned to do in the future.

He responded by saying that he and his "Friends" group were determined to take good care of the fish so that they could soon provide fish for people in the area. He also said that the group's members were saving a little money each month, so that they could always maintain their fish business.

Saying goodbye to Son to go back home on a very hot, sunny day, I still felt extraordinarily cool. I wished that the "Friends" group members in general and Son in particular would be able to realize their dreams!

Sadness Is Over Now

By Dinh Thi Van

From Pha Le commune, Thuy Nguyen district, Haiphong

Currently my mother is working in Do Son. As usual, today my mother will return home to get her medicines. I will go to the bus station to pick her up. Seeing my mother, I feel very happy. Coming home and seeing our neighbor, Ms. An, my mother smiles and talks to Ms. An from far away:

"Hi Ms. An, how are you?"

"You are already here! You look better these days," Ms. An replies.

My mother then starts to prepare for lunch. Looking at my mother, I remember the image of her 8 years ago, before she began participating in World Vision's Comprehensive Care and Support for PLWHA and OVC project.

My mother's name is Dinh Thi Tam; she lives in Pha Le commune, Thuy Nguyen district, Haiphong city. When my mother learned that she was HIV positive, she became so depressed and exhausted that she did not dare to talk to anyone in our family. She just held me and my brother and cried a lot.

Even in my sleep, I could still hear her crying sadly.

"Mom, are you feeling hurt?" I would ask her.

She did not say anything but hugged me tightly and her tears dropped down on my face. As a small child, I did not know what to do but cried along with her.

Time passed by, and my mother's health declined. The disaster disease made my mother tired, and external symptoms started to be visible: her skin darkened; she developed boils in her armpit. She became very weak. She could no longer hide her disease. The news that she was positive HIV became known to everyone. Many people did not understand about HIV – they lacked sympathy; they would stigmatize and look at my mother with disregarding eyes. Even within my family, my grandparents would only talk to my mother from a far distance, because they were afraid of infection. During meals, my mother ate alone. My mother no longer dared to hug me and my brother because she was afraid of transmitting HIV to us. My mother lost confidence and felt unworthy. She did not know what to do to protect herself or others. She just lay in the house, not going out because she was afraid of frightening other people. She became more and more quiet. My mother did not talk and smile like before, and I felt very sad and sorry for her.

In that hopeless time, my mother met a caregiver from the Comprehensive Care and Support for PLWHA and OVC project, which started in Lap Le commune in 2008.

In the first meeting with the caregiver, my mother was still closed and did not dare to share her thoughts. Step-by-step, through open and sincere talk by the caregiver, my mother started to open her heart. The home-based care team visited my family often. They were like candles lighting up my mother's life. Then my mother was referred to an outpatient clinic for ART. Since then, my mother's health has improved day by day. She got out of her bed, did housework, went to the market, cooked meals, and returned to her previous daily work routine.

My mother was eager to take part in training classes organized by World Vision and to assist with community education events in our village, because she wanted to use what she had learned to help community members understand about HIV. My mother knew that this was an important part of her recovery and that it would help her to look after her family.

After she joined the project, we received not only social support and information about HIV, but also a small loan to develop a family business. We feel that our lives have become much better than previously. Of particular importance, people have become friendlier to us.

At present my mother is a peer educator in the village. She helps people in the same circumstances as us to live more positively. Through her work, my mother has regained balance in her life. Now her wish is for a stable job that will enable her to take care of the family financially.

I have promised myself that I will always try to do my best in my studies, to please my mother. Through this story, I would like to convey the message that people with HIV need sympathy, support, and sharing from relatives and community members. We need to stand hand-to-hand to combat this pandemic disease. People with HIV need to know that they can have healthy and bright futures!





The Shining Dawn

By Do Thi Tham
From An Lao town, An Lao district,
Haiphong

My name is Do Thi Tham. I was born in 1974 in Hoang Xa, An Lao town, An Lao district, Haiphong city. My family was so poor that I had to stop school early to earn money for my family. ▶

I got married and had a happy family with a cute son who looked just like his father. However, due to economic difficulties, my husband had to work far away from us to be able to make money. While my husband was living away from the family, he became addicted to drugs and infected with HIV. When he returned home, his body was emaciated; when we later found that he had transmitted the virus to me, he was filled with regret. Living with that torment, he finally killed himself, leaving me alone with a young child. My husband was dead; my child was still small; and I had a deadly disease... All these thoughts made me so frightened! Things got even worse as I found that my family, neighbors, and friends kept away from me. Our house became colder and colder. My health declined severely, both physically and mentally. I lost weight. I could hardly recognize myself when I looked in the mirror. My skin darkened, my face became paler, and my eyes looked soulless and hopeless. That was the state I was in when I met Ms. Hue, a project officer for the Comprehensive Care and Support for PLWHA and OVC project funded by World Vision. She encouraged me to participate in the project. I began taking part in different training classes, such as HIV/AIDS knowledge, prevention of HIV transmission, and life skills. After taking part in those classes, I used the knowledge and experience to share with people who did not yet understand about HIV/AIDS. Then I became volunteering with the project as a caregiver, and I became a community liaison between the project, PLWHA and OVC.

I find my life busier and more meaningful when I am able to help people living with HIV. Every month I bring food from the project to PLWHA and OVC. Severely sick clients receive things like milk, cereal, green been powder, rice, and cooking oil. I have also asked the project to provide emergency support to people living in extremely difficult circumstances. In this way, eligible families have received financing that they need to repair their homes or to access clean water. This has reduced the burdens in their lives. My child has received both social and material support, including a desk, a bike, rice, cooking oil, textbooks, and tuition fees. In addition, children involved in the project have had the chance to attend training classes on child's rights and life skills, have been taken on visits to Hanoi, and have been able to watch movies in the Plaza. This comprehensive support from the project has really brightened our lives. Now I no longer get stares whenever I go out in public; instead, I receive sincere understanding and support from everyone I meet. And I have spread my arms widely to receive this love and support from people. Love for life has become much stronger in me.

The project gave me a micro-loan that allowed me to buy a sewing machine to generate income for my family. I have promised to myself that I will always work as a home-based caregiver, contributing to the HIV prevention, treatment, care, and support, and using my energies to bring encouragement and happiness to more people in my community.







Oh, I See!

By Truong Thi Cuc

From Phu Ninh commune, Thuy Nguyen district, Haiphong

I was on the way to one of my friend's house in An Lu commune when I heard a sudden call, "Hey, I want to talk to you about this!" I stopped to look around and saw a familiar-looking woman, although I did not know her name. She waved her hand to ask me to turn back. As I got closer, I realized that she was Ms. Sen, someone that I had met in the previous communication session in An Ho village, An Lu commune, Thuy Nguyen district.

She said to me: "Where are you going? Are you preparing to hold a communication event somewhere now? Your meeting yesterday was very interesting. Now I see how wonderful World Vision is! Thanks to your event, I have learnt a lot of things."

I asked her, "So, what did you learn? Can you share that with me?"

She then told me, "Uhm, you know what, I used to be very scared about HIV. I thought this disease was very dangerous and easy to catch. Now I know that it is not that easy, but is only transmitted through 3 ways: blood, unsafe sex, and from mother to child." I smiled when I heard her saying that: I knew she had learned well at the session.

She continued to talk, saying, "When you said that you were HIV positive, I could not believe it because you look very strong. I used to think that HIV positive people died very soon, but now I am surprised to know that there is medicine to help them live longer and healthier."

I nodded in agreement. She took my hand and said, "Keep going on! You're living great! I believe that sooner or later there will be medicine to cure people with HIV like you."

"Thanks for your encouragement!" I told her.

Then she said, "By the way, I have a couple of relatives who are also HIV positive and look very weak. Can you come with me some day to visit, encourage, and provide counseling for them?

"Yes, of course, you just arrange a time and let me know when I can go with you. Please take my phone number!"

"OK, thanks. I'm going to the market now. I'll tell my friends there about what I heard at yesterday's meeting. I don't think they know much about HIV and they are probably afraid of people who are HIV positive. I'll also tell my family and neighbors about the meeting."

"That's fantastic!"

"If you hold other community education events, do you think you could do one in my village? Please ask the project to do more activities to reduce stigma and discrimination against people with HIV/AIDS."

"Yes, we will try our best."

"OK, we'll talk soon to arrange a time to go to visit my HIV positive relatives – please go with me, OK? And then drop by my house afterwards. Now I have to go. Bye!"

"Bye!"

She left without forgetting to say, "By the way, send my thanks to World Vision, OK?"

"Yes, of course I will!"

As I said good-bye to her, I had an almost indescribable feeling of happiness.



We Have Overcome Pains In Our Life

By Luu Thanh Huyen

From Quarter 1B, Ngoc Xuyen ward, Do Son district, Haiphong

At the present time, my mother works in the home-based care team of World Vision. She is very healthy and happy. Looking at her now, I remember my mother of 3 years ago, before she had become involved with the project.

My mother is Tran Thi Hang, 32 years old, living in quarter 1B, Ngoc Xuyen ward, Do Son district, Haiphong city. My father died of HIV when I was just 5. It was very unfortunate for our family, as my mother got HIV infection from my father, and then she passed the infection along to me when I was born. After she found out about her diagnosis, my mother fell into a terrible decline: she wanted to neither eat nor drink. She became really sick then. She stayed in bed for one year, and my maternal grandmother had to come out from the countryside to look after my mother. Knowing that my mother was living with HIV, relatives and neighborhood stigmatized and kept away from her. Some people would stay outside our gate, refusing to come in to our home. Some wore long-sleeve shirts and masks to talk to us!

One year has passed, and my mother's health is now much better.

I still remember when I was in grade 2, I was very weak and had to be on ARV. I once asked my mother: "Mom, why do I have to take medicine?" At that time, my mother just hugged me in her arms and said, "Honey, any one who is sick has to take medicines." Later on, people from the home-based care team of World Vision came to help us. They encouraged my mother and me to join the project's activities. We had a chance to listen to stories and methods to take care of ourselves and methods to prevent HIV transmission within the community. Eventually relatives and neighbors became more friendly to us, and this helped us gain back confidence in life.

For me, one of the most important things is to try to study better. As a result, I have done very well in my studies, and over the past few years I have received awards for being an excellent student. And I and my mother now are living a new life!

You Are the Pride of Our Village!

By Hoang Thi Xuan

From Vung residential area, Van Son ward, Do Son district, Haiphong

"Daddy! Daddy!" I cried out at my father's funeral. Everyone who was in attendance there was shedding tears. I myself felt as if someone was pressing on my heart. Everybody felt very sorry for my father. Because of the AIDS pandemic, he was gone forever, at the age of only 30. He left behind his 75-year-old mother, my mother, and his two young children: I was only 10 when he died, and my sister was only 7 months old.

I felt very sad after my father's death. When I was at school, some classmates called me "H AIDS." They kept away from me because they were afraid I would give them the disease. At that time, I did not know what AIDS was, but I felt very lonely and sad, and I often cried to myself. I played alone and did not dare to come near anyone. In the evenings, my mother would hold me and my sister in her arms while her tears streamed endlessly. I would ask my mother, "Mom, why do you keep crying?" I would see my mom just staring at the photo of my father, saying nothing.

One day, volunteers from World Vision come to my house to encourage and advise my mother to go for an HIV test. Then three of us (my mother, my sister, and I) went for the test, and the result came out to be negative for all of us! We have received a lot of care and support from World Vision, both spiritually and materially. We have gotten gifts during Tet and on our birthdays; we received food items to support good nutrition; I got a desk, chair, and textbooks so that I could study better; and I received a bicycle so that I could get to school. I feel very happy about that, and it has encouraged me to always try my best in my studies. As a result, each year I have been awarded the student of excellence in my class. In grade 9, I won the third prize in the city-level Geography Competition. My teachers have supported and trusted me, and I was appointed by my schoolmates to be the Head of Young Pioneer Detachment of Van Son Secondary School. It was my great honor that on 14 September 2009 I went to Hanoi on behalf of Do Son district's children to attend the "Goals for Children" conference. At the conference, I had the opportunity to meet Mrs. Nguyen Thi Doan, Vice-president of Vietnam. I also had the chance to discuss child-related topics with several leaders of Vietnam. At the conference, I was given the award "Young Leader of the Future," along with a laurel wreath. This award, given by Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union and selected by Pioneer Newspaper, is a very high honor. Returning home from the conference, I was congratulated by our entire neighborhood. They told me, "You are really a pride of our village!"

Besides my studies, I also participate in the Mang Non (Bamboo Shoot) club of Do Son district children. When participating in this club, I use my intelligence and energy to disseminate information about HIV/AIDS. I encourage and support friends in the same circumstances as I to overcome difficulties in their life, to become good students in their school, and good children in their families.

When people ask me what are my dreams for the future, I tell them I want to pass the entrance exam to Vietnam Foreign Trade University. I would like to attend there, then earn a lot of money so that I can support my mother and sister. I also want to continue to help other orphans and disadvantaged children.



Sincere Gratitude To World Vision

By Le Thu Lien

From An Lao town, An Lao district, Haiphong

"Ah, Mother Lien has come!"

When I hear the happy greetings from the children, I am very pleased; I really appreciate the sentiment the children have for me.

I am a teacher at Quang Hung School. I love the children there with the kind of love that a mother has for her children. I feel so much love for them! All the children come from different circumstances, but each of them have faced major difficulties. Little Trang in Thai Son commune is parentless. Little Khanh in Quang Trung commune is fatherless and lives with his paternal grandparents. His small face sometimes looks so sad. Little Nhung is also fatherless and has two siblings. Her mother is jobless, so their lives are very difficult. Sixty orphans have 60 different complicated living circumstances that they have done nothing to deserve. That's why I love them and always want to do my best for them.

I still remember the days when I first met with the children: they were all shy and timid. They did not want to talk or participate in group activities.

Over the past 10 months, the project has maintained 2 club sessions each month. During those sessions, I have tried my best to create fun recreational activities for the children. We had done such things as crosswords, ringing the golden bell, drawing contests, singing, dancing, and learning life skills. Time goes by, and I know my efforts have not been wasted because I have seen positive changes in the children. Pure childhood has come back to them. They now participate eagerly in group activities and put on confident talent performances. Witnessing their successful performances in the musical shows during the World Vision annual conferences and at mid-autumn festivals, I am amazed and thrilled by what a good job they are doing.

I would like to thank World Vision for giving me the chance to work with disadvantaged children in An Lao district. It is a pleasure to create meaningful activities for their participation. This humanitarian World Vision project has contributed to relieving the pain in these children's souls; it has brought happiness back into their lives.

One day they will grow up, but they will never forget what they have received from the project.

For me – a teacher who is lucky to have a chance to participate in such valuable activities: I will continue to contribute my energy to this work, especially in school-based communication events to educate students about life, love, and compassion for PLWHA. If I have the chance, I would also like to organize exchange programs between orphans and other community children, to allow them to become closer and closer to one another.

I will continue to stand side by side with disadvantaged children. I hope to increase their love for life!





My Love For World Vision

By Huynh Ngoc Tuyet Quyen From District 8

Love exists in everybody. For myself and other children like me, we have received great love from the World Vision staff.

It is obvious that World Vision staff have helped us enthusiastically over the years. They have organized many interesting and useful training sessions for us. To begin a training session, we are often asked to introduce ourselves, giving our names, ages, and class. Then we play fun and exciting games. We sing, do puzzles, and play many other games that always make us laugh. Topics of the training sessions are about things like child rights, HIV, decision making, and life skills. During the training sessions, we listen attentively to the trainer, and we all raise our hands to answer the trainer's questions. Once the teacher gave an exercise: "Every group draws a picture about HIV." Staff gave us everything we needed to draw - colored pens, paint, brushes, and white drawing paper. Then the drawing competition started, and the teacher went round the room to see how we were doing. When seeing a beautiful picture, she would smile. Looking at other groups' drawings, I could see them drawing drug addicts using doping substances. At the end of the competition, all the pictures looked nice and interesting, which will give the teacher a headache to decide the winner! Seeing our nervous faces, after a long time the teacher announced that all pictures were worth a prize, and the prize for us was a big round of applause from all our friends. The atmosphere was really funny and exciting! I cannot count all the training sessions, but all of them have been helpful to us. On special occasions like the annual International Day for Children or the Mid-autumn festivals, we have had the chance to meet and play with each other with lanterns of different shapes like stars, gold fish, piglets. The lanterns sparkle in our hands, and we sing lots of songs.

In child club sessions, most of the club members want to go swimming in a pool or bathing in the sea or go to see movies. I am the one who like bathing in the sea most. The project staff and caregivers organized a visit to Can Gio beach. All of us were very excited about it, because it was the first time any of us had been to the beach. On the morning of that day, the sky was blue and everybody said that going out on that day would be wonderful. We all had bags on our backs to carry our belongings. As we drove to Can Gio beach, we could look out the windows of the bus and see the scenery, which was green and fresh. Birds were singing and flying around; winds were blowing. All of that made me feel very comfortable and happy. The bus finally reached the beach. From far away we saw colorful dots on the sea waves – there were little boats in the water. Many children were swimming with their parents or playing in the sand. First we swam, then we all had lunch together and rested on the sand, which was very relaxing. Soon came the afternoon. I thought to myself, "Dear sea, I don't know when we will be able to see you again! I hope it will be one day in the near future, when we can get together and share happiness with friends. I have to go now. Good bye!"

I would like to express my sincere thanks to World Vision for having helped us children over the years, with visits and excursions to enable us to learn a lot and to have fun. I promise to try to learn to my best to please my teachers, parents, and the kind-hearted people from World Vision project. My wish for the future is to become a useful citizen for our society.

I would like to remind everyone that there are still many children living in difficult circumstances: street children, homeless children, orphaned children. Please promise to give them your helping hand!



I Love World Vision!

By Thao

From Ward 10, District 8

My name is Thao, a student in grade 6. I am one of the disadvantaged children receiving support from World Vision. Since grade 1 up to now, I have received a lot of support from the World Vision project such as school supplies, uniforms, a bike, presents, and opportunities to go to the cinema or water puppetry that all children dream about.

Additionally I have had chances to take part in training for other children with similar living circumstances like mine. Thanks to the project, over the past 6 years I have never been lacking any school supplies. I am not inferior to any other students in my school, but I never waste anything. When my school collected school supplies to support children in flooded areas, I did give some of my school supplies to those friends. I think that everyone felt happy when seeing me caring for other unfortunate children.

Everybody says that the orphan children like me will not have the things we need, but that is not true. The project has provided me and other children like me with not only sufficient school supplies for our studies but also opportunities to participate in very exciting recreational trips. Just thinking about going out tomorrow keeps me awake tonight! Maybe I will sleep tomorrow, but not today! These activities not only entertain us but also help us to learn many things from the outside world.

Many years have passed, and I have been very delighted. The thing I have always been longing for – a bike – has finally has been provided for me. I clean it everyday carefully. I hope that the project will continue to support me and other children. We will never forget the kind-heartedness the project has had for us. I wish the project every success and I wish everybody good health always.

I love World Vision!

We Are Construction Workers!

By Tran Thi Tuyet Nga

From Ward 2, District 8

Since I began participating in the project, I have reached many people – both children and adults living with HIV. They all have special, challenging circumstances. I feel especially sad when I see the children living with so many difficulties. Because of fear and lack of knowledge, orphans, vulnerable children, and HIV-positive children are often stigmatized or treated cruelly.

The project has been very helpful in combating this situation. It gives children not only material support but also spiritual and emotional support. It provides a solid foundation of love for them. I have witnessed many cases of children who become stronger with this support and love and are able to take care of themselves. Huynh Ngoc Yen Nhi is one such child.

Yen Nhi has never had a normal life, because she was born an orphan and with an incurable disease. Since she was small, she has been aware that she was different from other children. Many people, even adults, with her condition would feel scared, pessimistic, or angry, but Yen Nhi just accepts the disease calmly as a part of her body. If someone asks Yen Nhi about her health, she will answer optimistically and happily. Some people say that Nhi is too young to understand or to be frightened by her disease. But I know that she knows and understands: she has lived with this disease for 12 years and has seen family members die from it. But still she is not sad and does not get angry. Yen Nhi has a grandmother who, despite being weakened by a stroke, does her best to take care of Yen Nhi. Yen Nhi never wants to see her grandmother look sad or worried, so Nhi tries to be as optimistic as any other child. The certificates of merit the Yen Nhi has won for her study efforts are the biggest consolation to her grandmother. And seeing her grandmother happy and proud is enough to make Nhi happy.

What we have done for Nhi in comparison to the long time she has been with us is limited. But seeing Nhi's maturity, we feel very proud. Nhi is the example we often use to talk to other children to encourage them to have hope. Perhaps you will ask me why I tell about Nhi when there are so many children in difficult circumstances. It is because I admire Nhi's unyieldingness and optimism. I have never seen such a spiritually strong child. I hope other OVC can also have that kind of positive attitude for living. I hope that each passing day can be meaningful to OVC themselves and also to their families and society.

The project is going to end sooner or later, but the OVC will not be abandoned. I believe those who have participated in the project will still continue to be a solid support for these children. The project has laid the foundation, but it is we who will continue to build up from that foundation. If we continue to try, I believe one day in the near future orphans and other vulnerable children will be treated like all other children. They will have the chance to go to school without fear, and they will play with other children comfortably and will become useful members of society. It is high time that we adults make sure that all children have better understanding, support, and love.



I Will Try My Best To Study Better!

By Truong Thanh Liem

From Ward 15, District 4

My name is Truong Thanh Liem. I was born in 1998, and I am now living in Ward 15, District 4 of Ho Chi Minh city.

My father got infected with HIV. During the AIDS stage, he had a lot of diseases, although he had registered to learn and have treatment in the Education and Employment Center number 5.

But soon after that he died, and my mother got married to another man and they had a child. Seeing me abandoned, my paternal grandparents (they are 70 years old now) and my aunt brought me home to take care of me. They gave me the chance to continue to go to school even though my aunt had 3 other children to take care of. I feel very grateful to her.

My life was really lucky when some people and the staff from the Health Station of Ward 15, District 4, Ho Chi Minh City, came to encourage, support and provide me with textbooks when I was in grades 6 and 7. I also received school uniforms, a desk, and a bike so that I could get to school every day. In addition, during special occasions like the Tet holiday, they gave me gifts.

I am really moved and grateful for the kind-heartedness from staff in Health Station of Ward 15, District 4, especially Ms. The, Mr. Lam, and Mr. Thanh. World Vision has given me lots of care and has helped me stay healthy.

I promise that I will not disappoint the people who have helped me. I will try my best to study so that when I grow up and graduate, I can join the project to maintain and develop care and support activities for PLWHA and OVC and can help disadvantaged orphan children like me.

Our Plan

By Vuong Kien Thanh

From District 4

Since World Vision Vietnam began providing support to people living with HIV in district 4 of Ho Chi Minh City, I have seen many positive impacts on the lives of PLWHA there. Specifically, World Vision has collaborated and cooperated with the local authorities and mass organizations to give spiritual and material support to those of in district 4 who are HIV-positive. This provides great motivation to help PLWHA feel confident: we know that we are not alone; all around us are communities and families that can help us overcome life's difficulties together.

By organizing playgrounds and offering small gifts to orphans and other vulnerable children on Tet, the midautumn festival, and international children's day, I and other families in district 4 have seen the happy smiles on the faces of these children. I have witnessed the speechless delight of PLWHA, their family members, families and people affected by HIV.

It is the helping hands that have reduced the stigma and discrimination of the community against PLWHA and OVC. The situation has improved a lot compared to 3 years ago.

In addition, the business development training and the small loans provided to PLWHA and their family members have been remarkably helpful in allowing people to improve their quality of life.

As for me, when the project phases out and everything is handed over to the community, I will still contribute my energy to continue what the project has done. As the head of a self-help group, I will maintain the monthly group meetings with all members in district 4. We will continue to share with and update each other on HIV-related knowledge in general and rights and responsibilities of PLWHA in particular. We will continue to help drug users to stop taking drugs, will work to prevent drug addiction relapse, and will talk about HIV prevention. I would also like to focus more support on women living with HIV or women at high risk of getting infected with HIV. In addition to that, I and all the core members of the self-help group will look for support from international and domestic organizations, local mass organizations, religion organizations, and individual philanthropists so that we can provide more support to disadvantaged OVC to improve their life.

Regarding the transfer of successful models to the community, I hope that there will be effective job creation models for PLWHA through vocational training centers and collaboration groups in district 4 of Ho Chi Minh City. And of course I hope that the loan program will be maintained for PLWHA and their families.

Lastly, I would like to send my best wishes to all staff of World Vision Vietnam, members of the Project Management Board, and the home-based care team. Thanks again!

A New Life Full of Smiles Would Be Beautiful

By Lang Thanh Binh

From Ward 6, District 4

Lang Thanh Binh won the title of excellent student for 9 consecutive years. He was gifted at singing and playing organ and even studied at the National Conservatory of Music. In grade 6, he placed third in the district in table tennis, and he was also good at basketball and sometimes played at Phan Dinh Phung stadium. Binh's family was well off financially, and his parents provided everything he needed, with hopes that he would be successful in his studies and would have a bright future. Despite all his talents and good fortune, Binh somehow got on the wrong track. He became addicted to heroin. He spent 15 years living a hard, reckless lifestyle. During that time he became HIV positive; he also contracted hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and tuberculosis.

Disappointed with his life and feeling hopeless, Binh no longer seemed like his former self. He could not get along with relatives and friends and he was not involved in the community in any positive way. It was at that time that he was approached by World Vision.

Binh began to receive support from many people: Dr. Van (the head of the community support and counseling department), Mr. Dung (from the monitoring department), Mr. Cuong (a home-based caregiver), other health staff from the Ward Health Station, other World Vision staff, and members of the home-based care team. Although all these individuals have busy, demanding jobs, they still made time for Binh, encouraging and counseling him to give up drugs. They explained to Binh about the bad effects of drugs, provided health care, gave him information about HIV/AIDS, and told him about where and how to get free health care and support services. As Binh completed a home-based drug addiction treatment program, the staff came to visit him every day. With this great support, as well as his own improved awareness and determination, Binh has been successful in giving up drugs.

After receiving recommendations from other World Vision home-based caregivers, the Board of Directors of the Preventive Health Center of District 4 gave Binh an opportunity to become a home-based caregiver of Ward 16 in the World Vision project area. Binh is very grateful to everyone who has supported him in these accomplishments.

In addition to this, every month Binh and other beneficiaries receive material support from the World Vision project, including things such as sugar, milk, cooking oil, cookies, Tet gifts, small loans, hospitalization fee support, and tuition payments for the project children; Beside that, project clients and their relatives in district 4 have received a great deal of emotional and spiritual support. They are often visited and encouraged by home-based caregivers and are supported when they are sick. The project also provides bicycles for people living with HIV, so that they have the means to get to work and to pick up their medicines according to the right schedule. Clients have received emergency support as needed, such as a few pieces of sheet iron to repair their leaking or dilapidated roofs. Some have received long-term micro-credit loans with low interest rates; with these loans, clients have been able to undertake income-generating activities so that they can take care of themselves, their children, and their families financially. All this support has allowed the project's clients to regain their confidence and has encouraged them to seek health care and to stick with treatment. Overall, it has greatly reduced the burden for families and for society.

Once more time, on behalf of all beneficiaries, Binh would like to express deep gratitude to World Vision, his brothers and sisters in the home-based care team, and the People's Committees at the district and ward levels. Their collaborative efforts to reduce stigma and discrimination have allowed many people living with HIV to once again find their optimistic smiles and to lead brighter lives. Thank you!

Binh and other project clients in Ward 16, District 4 sincerely hope that, even when the World Vision project ends, people will still join hands to maintain and advance the achievements of the project. Non-governmental organizations, corporations, the government, domestic and foreign faith-based organizations, and individuals can all continue to support people with HIV and orphans and other vulnerable children. As for Binh himself, he intends to do his best to continue his contribution to home-based care and support activities for PLWHA and OVC.



Quotations About The World Vision Project

The Project and PLWHA
The Project and OVC
Sustainability of the Project

The Project and PLWHA

People infected and affected by HIV often tell stories about lacking knowledge of their condition; of being weak, sick, and hopeless; of being shunned in their communities; and of not knowing where or how to get help.

"Feeling sad and hopeless, she looked at her young children and cried but she did not dare to hug them because she was afraid that she might infect them. She lost weight and became very pale and sick. She felt terribly sorry for her children but was only waiting for a good hour to leave them forever."

- Written about an HIV-positive woman in Haiphong, before she became a participant in the project



"The darkest day finally came when her husband passed away. She cried until she fell over in exhaustion. She was tormented and did not know whom she could rely on and share with. It felt like a disaster – a huge wave sweeping her and her family away to a place from which they could never return."

- A story about a family intimately affected by HIV

"Despite all his talents and good fortune, Binh somehow got on the wrong track. He became addicted to heroin. He spent 15 years living a hard, reckless lifestyle. During that time he became HIV positive; he also contracted hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and tuberculosis. Disappointed with his life and feeling hopeless, Binh no longer seemed like his former self. He could not get

along with relatives and friends and he was not involved in the community in any positive way. It was at that time that he was approached by World Vision."

- A former injecting drug user tells about his life

"When I received the test result, I did not know anything about this disease. I just thought that being infected meant death. So I let myself fall deeper into drug addiction to forget my misfortune and hopelessness. My wife and children became very sad and exhausted. Our economic condition had already been difficult, but then it became even worse."

- A drug user in Haiphong describes his decline

Project staff encountered people who were facing great difficulties. Staff offered information, health services, spiritual care, encouragement, life skills training, and many other supports. These ongoing supports and services helped many project clients regain meaningful lives.

"Then people from the World Vision home-based care team came to her life. They encouraged her and let her know 🕨

about a clinic where she could get ART. After a period of time, her health gradually recovered, and she felt her life improving. She said to her children, 'I am alive and I will be able to take care of you!"

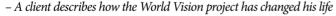
- Written about a project client in Haiphong



"Binh received support from many people. Although [project staff] all have busy, demanding jobs, they still made time for Binh, encouraging and counseling him to give up drugs. They explained to Binh about the bad effects of drugs, provided health care, gave him information about HIV/AIDS, and told him about where and how to get free health care and support services. As Binh completed a home-based drug addiction treatment program, the staff came to visit him every day. With this great support, as well as his own improved awareness and determination, Binh has been successful in giving up drugs."

- A former injecting drug user tells about his life

"Luck came to my life once more when some members of the Truong Son Xanh group (a self-help group of PLWHA) found me and introduced me to the Comprehensive Care and Support for PLWHA and OVC project funded by World Vision. The project gave me a grant and a small loan to so that I could start a business. I was able to take part in study tours and exchange sessions with other self-help groups of PLWHA - we learned from one another. They had special activities for my children, and I learned better parenting skills. Thanks to the kind-hearted care, support, and encouragement from World Vision's homebased care team, I have now given up drugs, and my health has recovered remarkably. Now I have a stable job, and my wife and I are working to generate income for our family."





"I don't know how, but I was approached by the World Vision project peer educators. They explained to me about HIV/AIDS and I felt as if I was born for the second time. The most valuable support was the opportunity to attend a training course on motorbike repair. Now I have completed that course, and I am using the skills I learned to earn money."

- A testimonial from a client in Haiphong

"It was a big surprise that when Huong reached home, her mother came out to hug her, and Huong's younger siblings carried her bags into the house. Everybody cried and smiled when talking to each other... That Tet was very meaningful to Huong and her family."

- Describing the homecoming of a client who had previously been shunned by her family



"Since Tham participated in the World Vision project, she has become different. She used to live in pessimism and hopelessness, but now she has found joy and light in her life. Tham and her son are living a hopeful life with plans for the future. Tham is looking to buy a sewing machine to start a home-based business."

- A project client looks towards the future

"Her job as a member of the HIV/AIDS prevention project management board of Do Son district is very meaningful to her. She was recognized as an excellent communicator in the battle against HIV/AIDS. With support from local authorities and World Vision, she founded a self-help group of PLWHA called "Friends' Club" to provide care and support to PLWHA and OVC."

- A young women writes proudly about her mother

The Project and OVC

Children whose parents are HIV positive are often isolated from the community, even if the children themselves are not infected with HIV.

"All the children come from different circumstances, but each of them have faced major difficulties. Little Trang in Thai Son commune is parentless. Little Khanh in Quang Trung commune is fatherless and lives with his paternal grandparents. His small face sometimes looks so sad. Little Nhung is also fatherless and has two siblings. Her mother is jobless, so their lives are very difficult. Sixty orphans have 60 different complicated living circumstances that they have done nothing to deserve."

- Words from a teacher at an OVC project



"I thought often about a thin, pale little boy with never seemed to have enough to eat. Although he was still young, he was already aware of his health status. Thus he played only by himself. He would often tell his grandmother, "The other children are always teasing me. They say that I am a SIDA and they don't want to play with me."

- Stigma and discrimination can set in at an early age

"Knowing about the cause of death of the couple, everybody in the family wanted to keep away from the two orphan children because they were afraid of getting infected with HIV/AIDS. Even neighbors and other children in the residential area did not want to be near the children."

- Written by an OVC caregiver in HCMC

Project caregivers love and support the children they work with wholeheartedly. They advocate in their communities for increased support for OVC issues.

"Since Huy began participating in the "Comprehensive Care and Support for PLWHA and OVC" project, his life has improved. Project staff made sure that he had the chance to go to school with others of his age. When Huy is sick, he is visited and encouraged by the project caregivers. He is getting healthier and happier now. People's awareness about HIV/AIDS is getting better too."

- Written about an HIV-positive young boy

"Q.N. has received tuition fees, nutritional support, and necessary school supplies. In addition, he has been given chances to participate in recreational activities and visit places that he otherwise would have only been able to dream about. He has been camping, gone to the cinema, and seen the water puppets."

- From a report by the home-based care team



Many wonderful changes are seen in the OVC. They have improved study conditions and become top achievers in their schools. They now dream of bright futures. They become confident, take responsibility for their lives, and demonstrate an eagerness to enhance their communities.

"Time has passed and Huy is now in grade 2. He is a very hard-working and well-behaved boy. His health is stable, and his physical condition is like any other child his age. Huy is very excited to take part in collective activities in the center. Huy says he wants to become a doctor when he grows up, so that he can help cure people."

- Written about an HIV-positive young boy

"[The Project] has encouraged me to always try my best in my studies. As a result, each year I have been awarded the student of excellence in my class. My teachers have supported and trusted me. At [a children's conference in Hanoi], I was given the award 'Young Leader of the Future.' This award, given by Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union and selected by Pioneer Newspaper, is a very high honor. Returning home from the conference, I was congratulated by our entire neighborhood. They told me, 'You are really a pride of our village!"

- Words from a young participant in the project

"I have seen positive changes in the children. Pure childhood has come back to them. They now participate eagerly in group activities and put on confident talent performances. Witnessing their successful performances in the musical shows during the World Vision annual conferences and at mid-autumn festivals, I am amazed and thrilled by what a good job they are doing."

- Told by a teacher in Haiphong





"He will try his best to realize his dream to become a talented doctor in the future so that he can bring good health to people, especially to PLWHA."

- An MSC story contest participant writes about a young cousin

"I promise that I will not disappoint the people who have helped me. I will try my best to study so that when I grow up and graduate, I can join the project to maintain and develop care and support activities for PLWHA and OVC and can help disadvantaged orphan children like me."

- Words from a young participant in the project

"When people ask me what are my dreams for the future, I tell them I want to pass the entrance exam to Vietnam Foreign Trade University. I would like to attend there, then earn a lot of money so that I can support my mother and sister. I also want to continue to help other orphans and disadvantaged children."

- Words from a young participant in the project



Sustainability of the Project

Project participants, community groups, and entire communities have developed plans to prepare for maintaining project outcomes after the current funding ends.

"For me – a teacher who is lucky to have chance to participate in such valuable activities: I will continue to contribute my energy to this work, especially in school-based communication events to educate students about life, love, and compassion for PLWHA. If I have the chance, I would also like to organize exchange programs between orphans and other community children, to allow them to become closer and closer to one another. I will continue to stand side by side with disadvantaged children. I hope to increase their love for life!"

- Told by a teacher in Haiphong

"The project is going to end sooner or later, but the OVC will not be abandoned. I believe those who have participated in the project will still continue to be a solid support for these children. The project has laid the foundation, but it is we who will continue to build up from that foundation. If we continue to try, I believe one day in the near future orphans and other vulnerable children will be treated like all other children. They will have the chance to go to school without fear, and they will play with other children comfortably and will become useful members of society. It is high time that we adults make sure that all children have better understanding, support, and love."

- From a project staff member in HCMC

"When the project phases out, there will not be a barrier to prevent us from collaborating together in the battle against HIV/AIDS. To support PLWHA and OVC effectively, we will link with local partners such as Ward People's Committee, Women's Union, Youth Union, the Elderly Association, etc., to mobilize their participation and support."

- Hopeful thoughts from Ho Chi Minh City

"Based on what the project has created here, I believe our residential area can form a volunteers' group with representatives from all related parties such as: Children, Youth Union, Women's Union, Veterans' Association, and Farmers' Association. Various group members will directly take care of and support PLWHA and OVC. The group can raise funds from organizations and individuals who are interested in supporting disadvantaged people. Once we have achieved good results, we will use lessons learned to replicate activities in our whole ward and district."

- A plan from a member of the Women's Union in Haiphong

"We will continue to develop the effectiveness of the project. The entire society needs to get involved, improve awareness, change behavior, and work together. We need to consider HIV transmission prevention as a political responsibility to ensure social welfare. We should also think about organizing more training classes and mobilizing more people to work as volunteers to help the community. We should think of providing vocational training to HIV-positive people, using money from the social welfare fund, as well as raising funds through other methods."

- A community leader in Haiphong speaks out

World Vision 2011

4th floor, HEAC Building 14 - 16 Ham Long Hoan Kiem District Hanoi

+84 4 39439920

www.worldvision.org.vn