

**Books for Peace
Vietnam
St. Lawrence University
Thao Nguyen '22, Vietnam, St. Lawrence University**

Introduction: As a Vietnamese, I grew up without books because most of them were expensive to buy and my schools only had mainly textbooks and reference books on school subjects. According to Deputy Director of the Center for Vietnam and South East Asia Studies Thanh Phan, at least 28% of Vietnamese children do not read books—on average, kids in Vietnam read 4 books per year, 3 of those are textbooks¹. Despite being in the top 10 of countries with the most public libraries², these library spaces are poorly stocked and secluded from the community. Similarly, most schools, while having large spaces and classrooms, either leave them empty or poorly furnished, a trend that adversely affects the kids' well-being. Thus, it came as no surprise that per 2014 research, 78% of Vietnamese children under 6 years old use digital devices³. Kids then stay inside most of the time and are reluctant to make friends. This is a problem because spending the majority of time on screens will negatively affect kids' mental health and cognitive functions while also increasing their social anxiety.

Needs to be Addressed: This lack of physical books gives kids no other alternative than to turn to phone screens. The Internet and fast-moving YouTube videos prevent kids from thinking creatively and using their imaginations, 2 critical functions directly related to their welfare. In comparison, the tactile experience of exploring a library leads to more diversity of thought and healthy separation from the screen. Lastly, the lack of libraries limits the social nexus of children in classrooms, where they feel intimidated to socialize and make friends. Through this project, I will address the lack of imagination, autonomy, and socialization skills that kids face without access to books and school library spaces. I will focus on these 3 major problems in the city of Hanoi through grassroots efforts. My project will build 1 library in an existing unused elementary school classroom in my own neighborhood Tay Mo of Nam Tu Liem District, a community in the outskirts of Hanoi. Second, we will build book carts for 2 additional schools in the Nam Tu Liem District. Finally, since Hanoi lacks social programs, this project will provide a new platform for high school and college students who want to improve community welfare.

Project Goals and Objectives: My goals are to secure 1 unused room in Tay Mo Elementary School and work with 2 other schools in Nam Tu Liem District that need book access but cannot provide classroom space. I will work with our partner, Kidzone, a language center teaching English to kids ages 5-11. Next, the school administrators, Kidzone founders, and I will begin developing our vision for a kid-friendly library and inviting book carts that students will want to use. I will return to Vietnam after graduation to begin recruiting volunteers, oversee the building of bookshelves and carts and room renovation, and run a summer-long book donation effort. Although the active project phase is limited to the summer, partnerships with school librarians and Kidzone, as well as publicity, will potentially keep the book donation going into the future. We are confident that having the library in 1 school and book carts in 2 others will help reduce screen times for children in this district, encourage their interest in books, excite their imagination, and allow them to be a part of a communal space where they can socialize and make friends.

Project Activities: According to statistics and my own observations, elementary schools in Vietnam typically have 500-600 students each. To provide engaging reading space and a range of books for this scale of students, our core team includes engineers, educators, and promoters. My sister Ms. Hang Nguyen is the founder of the Kidzone language center serving children ages 5-11. After 3 years of operation, her center now has more than 300 students, demonstrating her strong connections to local elementary schools, parents, and teachers, which combined with her background in education, will help us identify the ideal school partners and run the book drive. Thanks to my previous social projects in Vietnam, I am acquainted with Ms. Thao Tu, Program Officer of the Center for Sustainable Development Studies (CDCS), who coordinates programs to improve the quality of life in Hanoi communities. She also has many connections with local high school and university students, which will help with participant recruitment. I will be a good project promoter and recruiter based on my previous experience of founding a musical project in 2017 and running social media sites for 4 organizations.

¹ <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/education/157558/how-many-books-do-Vietnamese-read-each-month-.html>

² <https://www.mapsofworld.com/answers/regions/country-public-libraries-world/#>

³ <https://tuoitrenews.vn/society/23930/78-of-vietnam-children-under-6-use-digital-device-survey>

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/legatoproject2017>

I have also worked on securing venues and artists in the past, which will help with legislation processes and securing permissions from the schools. Another project partner is my lifelong friend Mr. Tuan Viet Ngu, a university student in Vietnam majoring in Engineering and Infrastructure Building. His links to groups of engineers in Hanoi as well as his personal experience with building and interior design will be very useful in securing an expert construction consultant. He will also work with the volunteers in designing shelves, book carts, tables, and chairs for the building process. My St. Lawrence classmate Maurice Berk-Wakeman, though unable to join the project this summer, will contribute his camp counselor knowledge to creating a safe and engaging space for children. We will engage the school educators to assist with purchasing books and guiding book donations, as well as organizing books received and continuing the library and book drive after the summer. School officials will also help with project promotion to parents/guardians, thereby expanding our network.

Project Plans and Timeline: To kickstart our project, I have already consulted with Tay Mo Elementary School administrators to use their classroom space and coordinated with Ms. Hang Nguyen to find two other interested schools. We expect to confirm the partnership with Tay Mo Elementary School and the 2 additional schools by the end of April. I am also working with Mr. Tuan Ngu to design the bookshelves and bookcarts and plan for inviting interior furniture (e.g., tables, chairs, sitting platform, bean bag). Mr. Ngu has identified 2 potential consultants from his university for safety training and building, and I have identified a local carpenter to help with the building process. In May-June, I will focus on recruiting volunteers to begin the building sessions with Ms. Thao Tu from CSDS. Using social media and publicity materials, we will recruit 20 volunteers, mainly high school and university students, who will help build book carts and assist with the book drive. I will utilize my backyard (a factory yard for my family's business) to gather volunteers, build shelving, etc., and store donated books. In Week 1 (mid-June to late June), the safety instructor will work with us in training volunteers before building book carts. In Weeks 2 to 5 (late June to mid-July), I will take charge and organize weekend meetings to build and decorate book carts with volunteers while Mr. Ngu works with the experts and the local carpenter to build shelves, the librarian desk, and other furniture. Ms. Tu and I will start promoting on social media in Week 2-5 for our book donation program while our school partners, Kidzone, and volunteers help spread the word to parents and guardians. We will also buy books and paper materials from small Hanoi bookstores because this supports local businesses who in turn can promote the project to their customers. In Week 6 (mid-July), the team will bring the built items to Tay Mo Elementary School and finish installation in two intensive days. The same week (Week 6), we will bring our book carts (fully furnished with books) to the other 2 schools. From then to the beginning of the school year, we will continue to promote the book drive and make the library as inviting as possible. When the school year starts, we will have an opening ceremony at Tay Mo Elementary School for children to come in, read, and check out books. This opening ceremony will be a good publicity opportunity to share this project with a wider audience through social media platforms and inspire them to participate in the next session. In the 2 other schools, we will be on site to move the book carts from classroom to classroom (ideally one class year/day) to give out books. Our plan is to have students take home books to keep as their own, with the option to exchange for more books. We will use social media outreach and partner with the schools' administration to keep the book drive running into the school year so that students will consistently have new reading materials. The most active part of the project will be June, July, and August, with my direct oversight ending in September.

Long Term Impact: This project will have a significant impact on the lives of those involved. With a physical library in the first school, children will have a communal space after class to read and make friends, while the book carts will serve as a "mobile library" in the other 2 schools. We are positive that these resources will help decrease children's usage of digital tools and increase their social and cognitive functions. After the project ends and the schools see the impact that book access can have on kids, we're confident that the school will be eager to continue accepting book donations and set aside a budget for library books, staffing, and future renovations. Furthermore, this project will be one of the first in bringing the concept of Habitat for Humanity into Vietnamese society. Project participants—our partners and volunteers—will be able to use this model as a reference point to create future physical spaces that enhance the community welfare. Mr. Tuan Ngu will use his engineering skills after this project to continue designing more libraries, and Ms. Thao Tu will showcase this project to high schoolers who are seeking ideas for volunteer projects they want to create. Therefore, the cycle of making changes and promoting peace will continue long after this summer project ends.

Name: Thao Nguyen
 Project Name: Books for Peace
 School: St. Lawrence University

TOTAL FUNDS REMAIN:
 0

Total Additional Funding: 0

TOTAL EXPENDITURES:
 10000

| Student Expenses | | | | | Project Expenses | | | | |
|----------------------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Travel (Including Airfare) | Lodging | Communications | Food (Biweekly) | Miscellaneous | Non-Student Travel and Lodging | Direct Equipment and Supplies | Marketing and Event Support | Staffing Costs | Miscellaneous |
| 1300 | 200 | | | | 200 | 12 | 25 | 900 | 15 |
| | | | | | 300 | 20 | 18 | | 120 |
| | | | | | | 2500 | 50 | | 886 |
| | | | | | | 1000 | | | 254 |
| | | | | | | 100 | | | |
| | | | | | | 2000 | | | |
| | | | | | | 100 | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | Total | Total | Total | Total | Total | Total | Total | Total | Total |
| 1300 | 200 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 500 | 5732 | 93 | 900 | 1275 |

Total Student Expenses:
 1500

Total Project Expenses:
 8500