

Title of Project: *Cultivating Peace with Youth in Binh Dinh, Vietnam*

Country of project implementation: Vietnam

Sponsoring College: International House NY

Designated Project Leader: Thuy Hang Tran

**a. Goals of your project:** This project aims at fostering peace with the youth of war survivors in Binh Dinh, Vietnam. This will be achieved through building a community learning center and implementing a sustainable summer peace program for youth.

**b. Fund-raising efforts:** Many Vietnamese-Americans find this project meaningful and want to contribute. Some donated upon hearing about the project (\$1,000 in total). I will host official fundraising events once the community center is built. Beyond monetary means, people can donate through books, technology devices, and volunteering. Workshop leaders will be university students from Vietnam, the US, and other international locations. They will be recruited and paid through university sponsored-summer internships.

**c. Idea for project:** I grew up in Vietnam and firsthand experienced the repercussions of the War. My undergraduate research with war survivors provided me further understanding of the war and its violent aftermath. Because of generational trauma and the lack of social mobility, youth are greatly impacted. I am concerned about the lack of educational opportunities available for children in the villages. With my Masters' in Education Policy, I believe that building a community center back home is feasible and necessary.

**d. Issue project is responding to:** The proposed center is located in a rural former battle site during the Vietnam War. Illiteracy remained high during the Vietnam War, particularly in the countryside. Civilians experienced bombs, explosive devices, and were heavily sprayed by toxic herbicides. Today, educational resources are scarce in the countryside; there isn't a library, community center, or bookstore nearby. Although Vietnam has made strides in education reforms, much progress reflects improvements in urban cities rather than rural areas. Research shows that rural education in Vietnam remains weak in quality, efficiency, and equity. Post-war, many civilians did not resume school and became farmers or merchants while their children received poorly funded education. Structural violence harms survivors in the form of poverty and educational inequities. Only about 62.2% of the province's population attended upper secondary school and only 1.6% attended junior and college

**e. Choice of host site to work in:** The host site is my deceased grandmother's home, which is unoccupied and owned by family members who agreed to the project proposal. The home will be renovated into an educational space for youth that resembles a library/interactive learning center. Working at this site (virtually for now due to the pandemic) means an incredible opportunity to give back and sustain my relationship with community members.

**f. Challenges with project/Changes and Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic:** The pandemic was the greatest impediment to my project. The timing of my project was not as I originally planned, both because of funding and the coronavirus. I was not able to travel there since Vietnam's borders have been closed to foreigners and will continue to be so as Vietnam is experiencing devastating high infection rates. Major constructions and outdoor gatherings in Vietnam are restricted. Despite times of uncertainty, I communicated with people through Facebook and phone calls. And, having a longer timeline and working on the project remotely had advantages — it made me realize that having more time to coordinate more planning and community work will make the program more. A team member or I will fly there for the center's opening, to be completed by summer 2022. The peace education program will most likely begin in summer 2023 due to Covid

**g. Communicating Challenges:** Challenges involve construction planning including renovation and costs. I communicated with host site members for design ideas and finalized contracts for \$5,000. We begin with minor renovation, plumbing work, repainting existing rooms, and building an additional reading room. Afterward, we will have \$2,000 for books and digital devices.

**h. My definition of peace:** Peace is multifaceted but at the core, it consists of freedom from unwanted internal and external violence. It entails living in harmony with oneself and with community members, along with equal resources and opportunities.

**i. How the project contributes to peace:** By providing a free educational setting for youth after school, this center will eliminate delinquency and violence in youth in the short term. Workshops and mentorships on education, public health, and community building mitigate poverty, post-war economic scarcity, and trauma in the long term.

**j. Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has it changed you?**

The pandemic slowed down my work but enabled me to process the process, which is critical as I am implementing Western methods and principles.

**k. Highlights and challenges of conducting a remote project:** The education program will be a hybrid learning type in which vaccinated members can be at the center while others will participate remotely. Remote programming will enable more international leaders/volunteers involved because they don't have to fly there. One challenge with remote work is ensuring accessibility for participants who do not have laptops or cell phones or internet service. Therefore, I will fund an additional \$2,000 to allocate more technology devices.

**i. Advice would you give to future PfP grantees given the pandemic-related challenges:**

- 1) Focus on relational building and logistical planning which can be done through online communication
- 2) Have remote programming as a backup and make your budget/programs accommodate participants who have access to digital technology and communication.

**Personal Statement.** This project exposed me to the importance of digital technology and peace education in times of catastrophes. This project is personally valuable because it invests in youth -- leaders of current and future generations.

## Section II: Photographs



**Before**



**After**

