



A 2023 REPORT FROM
MAI NHA
Children Foundation Vietnam



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Dear friends of
Mai Nha,



You're like family to us.
Your faithful support of the children and scholars of our
foundation not only secures their hopes and dreams, it
empowers them to have ambitions.

In these pages, we'd like to share with you the triumphs and
milestones of the little children you've known for so many years.
Oh how they have grown and how big their smiles now stretch.



mái nhà

Noun. Literally means roof, also a term for home

One roof. One house. One child at a time.
One wonders often how it can be enough.
What change can **one** do
In this big, big world of indifference?

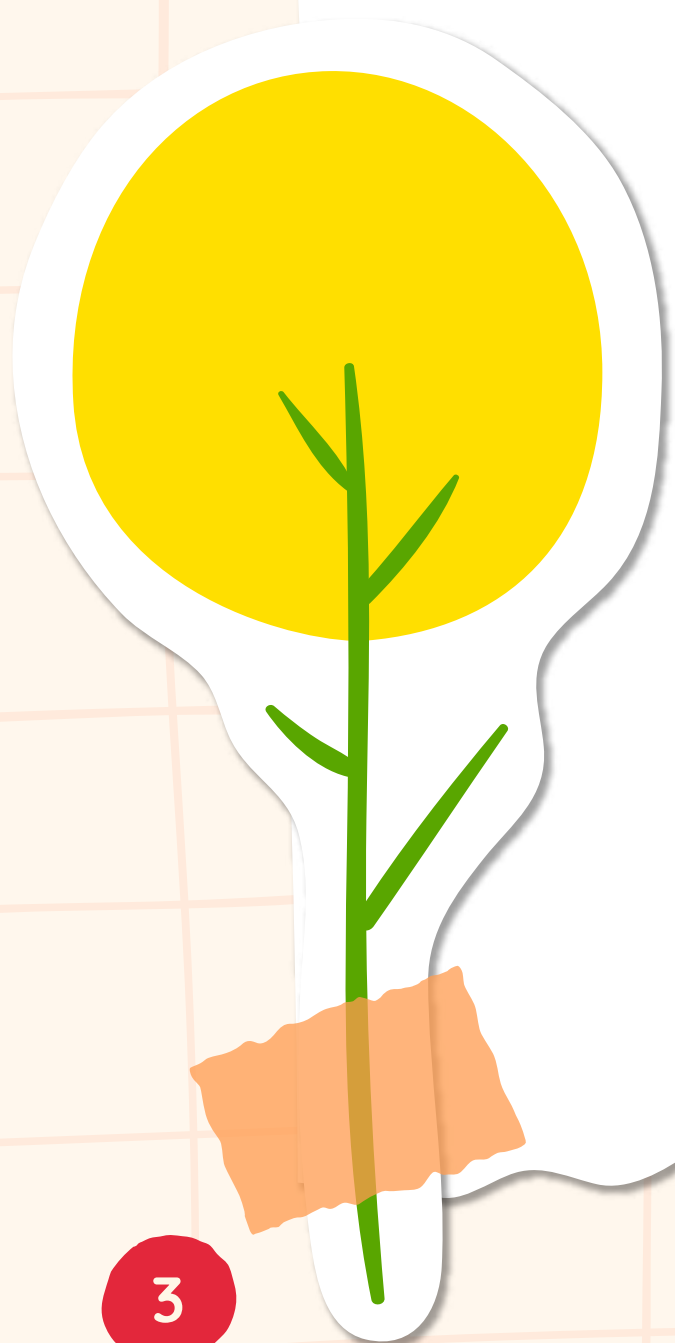
One story. One village. One little boy
who once felt alone, abandoned
and unimportant, now has brothers
to run to, and a place to call home.

One moment she was frightened
One day she wakes up safe.
One stranger's act of kindness
For one little girl, can be all it takes.

After many nights of hunger,
If one day they are well fed.
One little tummy forgets to worry
One big heart can hope again.

One cannot change much,
Or so many believed,
But anyone can be the one
Who turns one nightmare into a dream.

One home, one family... for many,
Mai Nha





FROM THE ELDEST TO THE YOUNGEST

“When I turn 18, do I have to leave Mai Nha?” asked Tuyen, the eldest who is now in her first year of high school. It was a heartbreaking question, but also an opportunity to explain to her that Mai Nha is her home and that we will always be there for her.

Unlike the usual orphanage set up, we operate as a family. All 16 of our children have been raised as brothers and sisters. They will be each other’s support system when they grow up just like regular siblings. When most of them decide to leave the nest, Mai Nha will be ready to welcome the next generation of children in our existing home. But we will continue to provide a place where all our children can gather. Children deserve the love, care and consistency of family.

We thought that would be our toughest question to face. Until our youngest Duong, in all innocence softly declared, “I don’t want to grow up.” A bit taken aback, we had to ask why?

Duong answered, “If I grow up, that means you will too.” And as our age is obvious to children’s eyes, we felt her fear of being orphaned yet again. We underlined loud and clear to Duong and her brothers and sisters that we will do our best to take care of our health. We will always be there for each of them and visit as often as possible.

AN’S ART

One of the biggest changes this year is homework! All the children seem to have more daily homework now that many are attending middle school and will soon enter high school.



Tutors regularly come to Mai Nha, 5 days a week. An English teacher comes every Saturday and Sunday. Both teacher and tutor confirm that all the children are either average or well above average. They have confidence that all have a promising education and can handle high school. And that includes An, our physically handicapped baby girl.

An just started middle school this year. That probably means she’s not a baby anymore, but what parent would admit? Anyway... An has been having trouble with something most kids struggle with - math! But she always does her best and is so far coping well.

She told us she wants to be an art teacher. It’s no surprise to us really. She’s indeed very gifted and creative. She has bravely undergone hand surgery as far as 3 times to allow most of her fingers to grow. What used to be just a physical, medical procedure now paves the way for her passions. Along the way, she is gaining lots of self-confidence. Our baby girl is growing up to be a fine lady indeed.

BIG SISTER TIEN STEPS UP

The story of Tien and her little brother Tam is extremely hopeful and best illustrates the impact of Mai Nha to the children we welcome.

They both arrived 10 years ago at the age of 4 and 3.



Their grandfather was the only family member taking care of them. Because of his age and health condition, he could no longer handle the daily load. He brought Tien & Tam to Mai Nha and, in literally 2 minutes, left them there and disappeared. It led to both children being in total disarray and shock at being abandoned in such a cold rush.

For the first few years, Tien & Tam were both shy, introvert and almost always carried a sad and fearful expression. Improvements happened but slowly, very slowly. Until 5 years ago, when our child psychologist Mrs. Hoa and child psychiatrist Dr. Minh initiated regular and personalized psychological support to overcome her anxiety, extreme shyness and lack of confidence.

After 3 years of therapy by a dedicated child psychologist visiting from Saigon, we're happy to see Tien as a cheerful, sociable and even funny teenager. When the eldest got busy in high school, Tien took over the role of big sister for everyone, looking after them and supporting them with their homework on a daily basis.

Tam, who used to be skinny and kept himself, has also grown into a joyful and outgoing boy. He loves playing sports and has lots of friends at school.



ALMOST A BULLY, NOW MR. CUDDLY

9 years ago, Dung was brought to Mai Nha at the age of 2 from a local state run orphanage. Without adequate resources, he did not receive the right care in the first 2 years of his life.

That left Dung with an aggressive behavior, looking alternatively angry and sad. He struggled with rules and would often have outbursts. Needless to say, he was a challenging boy for the nannies.

Despite Dung's erratic behavior, the local staff and volunteer child psychologists poured in lots of love, care and encouragement. Now an 11 year old, Dung has grown to be an extremely kind, smiling, gentle and sensitive boy. He loves helping his brothers and sisters and the nannies are all too happy.

The impressive changes in Dung's behavior shows the power of having a family and being surrounded by a feeling of love and security.

MRS. HOA, THE HEART WHISPERER

It's true it takes a village to raise a child. Mai Nha is so fortunate to have the commitment of local staff and Mrs. Hoa, a Saigon-based child psychologist. Currently, Mai Nha has a lean but devoted team of 11 full time staff. We have **6 nannies, 1 supervisor, 2 cleaning staff, 1 cook and 1 night security**. The children also have **3 tutors and 3 child psychologist/psychiatrist**. Some of our support team are based in Saigon or in other villages. 1 child psychiatrist is based in Saigon and the two child psychologists endeavor to travel every month 400km round trip to visit Mai Nha.

Mrs. Hoa is our senior child psychologist. She is so committed, she visits every month and calls every Sunday to talk to the children and the head Nanny. She has been with Mai Nha for over 7 years. Many of the children have gone through traumatic experiences. Over half of them were abandoned the day they were born, some left to fend for themselves when they were merely 2-5 years old. Together with fellow child psychologist Mrs. Lan, Mrs Hoa provides the individual attention that helps each child in psychological and emotional healing. It is a continuing effort, but to see the joy and confidence in the children's faces today affirms we're on the right track.



This year, one welcome change is that the children were more vocal. Many of them requested individual conversations during Marc and Pauline's last visits. It is a positive



evolution as it allows each child to build a personal relationship with their 'mom & pop' with trust and involvement. These conversations happened in the presence of Mrs. Hoa, who also acts as the children's translator. Her insights based on the context of the conversation and their body language helped the children open up and feel heard.

WELL DONE GRADUATES!

Aside from the home, this year Mai Nha decided to support 53 students, including 13 university students. This year, join us in congratulating our scholars who graduated from university last June, 2023 - all 6 of them!

The scholarship selection process has been optimized to ensure the beneficiaries qualify for financial support. Mai Nha's scholarship program started 12 years ago. Today, its tangible effect on the optimization of education for the children of Thien Nghiep village is visible and commended by local authorities.

Given the increasing number of scholarships in Saigon, we continue to develop and enhance Mai Nha's program. In 2023, we launched a small scale one-on-one mentoring program. Local professionals, many in senior management positions, are involved in the management team. They play a coaching role for the scholars and provide practical life advice. It can be a challenge to face the big city coming from a rural village that is Thien Nghiep. We are also working with several companies in opening up opportunities for our graduates. These companies are often financial sponsors of Mai Nha as well.

The scholarship story does not end after graduation. Mai Nha's senior management is putting more focus on organizing events where alumni can share their experiences with current scholars. Their human stories of real challenges and triumphs create a bond among our scholars and build momentum for the next generation, and the next, and the next...



A PERSONAL NOTE



It has been quite a journey for us at Mai Nha, but meeting the kids every year fills us with fresh and invigorating energy. This year, we got to visit twice. We got to observe the progress in all areas - from their height to their shift in confidence, is just pure joy.

So much has changed over all these years. So much has changed just this year.

It's generally positive with the family home thriving and the scholarship program continuing to make solid progress. Over time, we're looking to support hundreds of children to reach their potential. Over 1000 annual scholarships have been granted since the start of our program. This holistic approach to helping the underprivileged children of Thien Nghiep village is proving to be effective and significant for the local community and local authorities.

While we have much to be thankful for, with all the good progress we have seen in Mai Nha, we continue to dream. This innovative concept of home versus orphanage is worth pursuing over time in Thien Nghiep and we hope others will replicate our concept and philosophy behind raising abandoned or orphaned young children based on: care & quality, long-term involvement & commitment, tight financial management & integrity - and make it 100% local. Passing on the concept to Vietnamese resources allows the true integration of the idea in local community building.

Finally, we do fully realize time and again that Mai Nha would never have been able to get these significant and tangible results without the loyal and relentless support of all involved: be it our financial sponsors or in kind service providers in areas such as our legal and accounting/audit obligations and communication as well as the Board members of the various Mai Nha legal entities. THANK YOU SO MUCH!!

As with any home, there is always more work to be done! But we should always take time to relish in the joys and wins of our children.

We very much thank you and wish you a wonderful holiday season and a happy new year. Best regards,

Marc & Pauline Witlox
Co-founder-President & Vice-President Mai Nha Children Foundation Vietnam

P/S: This year we decided to change completely the layout, graphics and spirit of the newsletter thanks to the generous initiative and extensive involvement of drcom.

drcom

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