

From Youth House to Youth Center: A story of disadvantaged kids and volunteers at Fisher Village

After 8 years establishing in Hanoi, Youth House of SJ Vietnam, the independent branch of SVI Belgium, will become Youth Center, a place for exchanging international voluntary activities and interaction among disadvantaged kids, their parents from Fisher Village with international and local volunteers. Youth House was an 8-year voluntary charity project to help poor, street children and their parents. Since 2004, SJ Vietnam has encouraged the children from Fisher Village to go regularly to the non-formal school called Youth House for free basic education and nutrition food. The Fisher village consists of more than 40 families living on temporary ragged boats on Red River. Their lives are extremely difficult: badly polluted surroundings, no tap water and electricity.

In the late 2011, Youth House has succeeded to send 20 of the children to public schools where they can acquire a proper education and be integrated into the society. 10 teenagers from formal Youth House who couldn't go to public schools for lacking of qualification will be supported and sent to vocational schools to learn professional skills as waiters, waitresses, bartenders, etc. It was a place to provide lunch everyday and organize extra activities for the children. The project is also to increase awareness of people living at Fisher Village about education, which can help them to get a simple job and a better future to ensure their independent living, economic self-sufficiency. During last 6 months, from Starbucks grant, five training courses for volunteers and the parents were organized on capacity building and skills enhancing in order to set up a strategic plan to sustain the project and strengthen cooperation among the actors and beneficiaries. There were 40 volunteers and 20 parents actively participated in the training. As the result, the new idea of Youth Center is created.

On 1st June, 2012, to celebrate the success of Youth House and prepare for grand opening of Youth Center, a big festival with parties organized by volunteers for the children with lots of games, performance, songs and dancing. Everyone is looking forward to a new image of the project.

Youth Center now is a social business model to continue supporting disadvantaged children as well as the community, youth development. It is multicultural space of learning and sharing about culture, language, active citizenship responsibility and social integration. Youth Center is expected to be a better place for the children of the Fisher Village to live and involve in manual and professional activities such as the refurbishment of old furniture, the participation to the handmade corner.

Youth Center is composing 3 innovation ideas:

1, - **a cafe** (at very cheap price of drink) for volunteers, local and international youth, NGOs staff, social workers who would like to have intercultural exchanges and foreign language speaking environment. The profit of the cafe will contribute to pay for daily free lunch of 20 disadvantaged kids at Fisher Village under Long Bien bridge. The cafe is also a job oriented training for the children and youth in the future.

2, - **a charity shop** of second-hand and hand made products for resell at very lost cost to support local community with the income to pay monthly school fee of 20 children who used to be beggars and rubbish collectors and have been sent to public schools by SJ Vietnam for 1 year. Charity shop will be the place of consumption of donated stuff and handmade products by the children.

3, - **language classes** for Vietnamese youth and children to learn/practise foreign languages (English, French, Korean, Japanese, Spanish, etc) and for foreigners learn/experience Vietnamese coordinated by international and local volunteer teachers. There is also a library of books in different languages from many countries for free reading, exchange and borrowing (with some condition of returning the books). Many activities of cultural exchanges will be organised weekly by SJ Vietnam volunteers for participants. People who involve in Youth Center's activities can improve language skills, be more confident in communication, especially with foreigners, and develop their relationships. In addition, foreigners who come to Youth Center will better understand Vietnamese culture. Training courses for youth, the kids of Fisher Village and their parents would be provided regularly.

Through the extracurricular activities among members in Youth Center, children in Fisher village can remove their inferiority and be more integrated in life.

Youth Center would be an interesting place for disadvantaged kids, youth who love volunteering, social workers and NGOs staff to meet up and exchange experiences and culture.

The most important thing when people come to Youth Center is supporting in youth development and helping disadvantaged children when they are interacting with the volunteers, parents and their kids who have very difficult life but promising dreams to pursue a better future.

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