



# Vietnam

Lyndsey Allen reports from two weeks volunteering in Hanoi in an audiology centre and at a university

The socialist republic of Vietnam, formed in 1976 after one of the most famous battles of living history, is home to an estimated 180,000 children with hearing loss. With limited financial and educational resources, the professions – speech and language therapy, audiology, and Teachers of the Deaf – are in their infancy. In 2008, Paige Stringer saw limited opportunities for children with hearing loss in Vietnam when compared, for example, to those born in the UK or USA.

For Paige it was personal. Born in the USA with severe to profound hearing loss, she had all the benefits of early identification, the best hearing technology available and early intervention support services. Paige, who used listening and spoken language to communicate, achieved a master's degree in marketing and business. Inspired, she founded the Global Foundation for Children with Hearing Loss and began raising funds to make a difference in Vietnam and other developing countries.

Global Foundation's Programme in Vietnam offers:

- Year round curricula in audiology, early intervention and auditory verbal practice (provided by leaders in the field of audiology and auditory verbal practice)
- A mixture of lectures and hands-on practical support for teachers, therapists, medical professionals and audiology technicians
- Hearing aids for children in need
- Partnership with local professionals and agencies for sustainability and shared accountability to improve services for children with hearing loss.

Supported by the Ear Foundation and with eager anticipation, I accepted the invitation to volunteer for two weeks.



Lecture group

## Hanoi

Population 6.5 million. Crazy, motorbike filled city that never sleeps – and my home for two weeks.

### Week 1 Hanoi Hospital, Audiology and Speech and Language Therapy Centre for Children

Many things made me smile. Everyone removes their shoes, but for trips to the 'facilities' communal flips flops are shared by parents, therapists and medics alike. When I wasn't looking, the temperature of the air conditioning would magically change to 26 degrees but the participants would still shiver in coats.

But what really made me smile was the commitment to learning, the openness to new ideas and the universal love shown to children. Teaching new therapists we focused on beginning skills – assessing auditory comprehension and making sure activities for developing language were based on a child's thinking not language age. ENT medics and technicians received audiological training, information about newborn screening programmes and practical support with testing such as Automated Brainstem Response (ABRs).

Vietnam has special schools that provide education for children from the age of 5. The country has an inclusive education policy and is motivated to include all children in the mainstream. But with average class sizes of 50 children to every teacher, that's a huge challenge. Parents often pay for individual support in school in addition to covering the 'health costs' related to medical investigations, hearing tests and hearing aids. With an average monthly salary of £100, adequate support is outside the reach of many families.

### Week 2 Hanoi National University of Education

Aim: deliver training on speech acoustics and speech production for teachers who speak Vietnamese. Now there was a personal challenge. Thankfully, the Vice Dean of the special education department, Thiep Thi Tran, served as my collaborator and interpreter for the

task as we combined knowledge to communicate information about speech frequencies, formants and facilitating vowels. After two days of lectures, therapists worked in teams to prepare and deliver individual sessions to children and their families. They'd often travelled many miles to be part of the programme over three practical days. The focus was on integrating goals for language and speech into conversation and natural, everyday activities.

### Vietnamese Language

- Very little research on typical development – thought to be similar to Mandarin
- Tonal – intonation changes the meaning of the word and is shown by diacritics (small symbols over the letters) E.g. ma means 'ghost' whereas mà means 'but'
- Words are made up of consonant vowel sequences, unlike English where many consonants are sequenced together (e.g. s-t-r-e-a-m)
- Words are primarily single syllable although some multi-syllabic words do exist e.g. apple – táo, banana – chuối

### The power of parents

Travel the world and you'll find parents of children with hearing loss who change the lives of many. That's how the Ear Foundation started. It's the same in Vietnam and the mother's name is Chu Thi Thanh Huong. Now aged 9, her daughter has a severe to profound hearing loss. Through her experience, Huong recognised that parents need access to support and education so they become advocates for their child. She founded the Vietnam group for parents of children with hearing loss and is working tirelessly to ensure parents have the information they need to make informed decisions. We hosted two evening sessions during our stay. At both, parents sat with fearful expressions and asked questions personal to their child. They hoped someone could say 'your child will be ok. They will grow up happy and healthy'. But as professionals we are bound by ethics, frustrated and unable to comment on children we don't know. Parent groups offer this reassurance, share experiences and come together to lobby for better futures. They educate parents who in turn demand highly trained professionals; improved education for all children and fairer pricing from hearing technology manufacturers.



University group

Most effective and long lasting change is always achieved when professionals and parents work together.

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### A huge thanks to the team:

- Paige Stringer, MA – Founder and Executive Director, Global Foundation For Children With Hearing Loss (<http://www.childrenwithhearingloss.org>)
- Sally Tannenbaum, MEd, DTH, CED, LSLS Cert. AVT Co-Director, Pediatric Hearing Loss and Cochlear Implant Program at the University of Chicago Medicine, USA
- Stacy Claycomb, AuD. Audiologist, University of Colorado Hospital, USA
- Megan Mansfield, AuD – Audiologist, Cook Children's Medical Center Fort Worth, Texas, USA
- Adam Chell – Audiologist, Phonak UK



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