

NHIP CAU FOUNDATION

Providing free vocational training for people with disabilities



“Let us help ourselves before asking for help from outsiders.”

An offspring of the Can Tho Club of People with Disabilities, the Nhip Cau Foundation was conceived in 2002 with the vision of bridging the social gap between the “disabled” and the “undisabled.”

The Foundation’s work helps people with disabilities in Vietnam’s Mekong Delta Region achieve self-reliance and integrate into community life by offering free training courses on producing handicrafts.

Since its inception, the Nhip Cau Foundation has provided vocational training to 121 persons with disabilities and benefitted 825 people indirectly, including those family members of its trainees who have also become involved in handicraft production and the participants of vocational courses run by the Foundation’s graduates for other organizations.

Background

The Nhip Cau Foundation, with its vocational training centre for people with disabilities, was formally established in 2003, following

an “Innovation Day” organized by the World Bank and sponsored by the Canada Fund. The idea sprang from the work of Mrs. Bui Thi Hong Nga, founder and president of the Can Tho Club of People with Disabilities, and pilot vocational training initiatives in the Mekong Delta Region (undertaken in 2002)—a household sewing project and a coconut handicraft workshop—showed just what was possible. People with disabilities created employment by and for themselves using locally available materials such as coconut shell to make handicrafts, demonstrating not only their skills and abilities but also how quickly vocational training can be applied in viable small scale enterprise.

The story of the Can Tho Club is itself a remarkable story. Initially with a small membership of 20, it set out to prove it could play a major role in reducing the isolation experienced by people with disabilities and improving their participation in community life. After six years of building up its activities with volunteers and small-scale fundraising initiatives, the Club’s membership had grown to 233. With this number it was able to register as an Association—Can Tho Association of People with Disabilities—with an expanded agenda involving vocational training, various support programs (including rehabilitation, provision of small start-up grants and scholarships, and so on), awareness raising, recreational activities, and social welfare services. The Nhip Cau Foundation is part of this Association, dedicated to providing free vocational training and creating employment opportunities for people with disabilities residing in the Mekong Delta.

The ABCD Process

From the very beginning, the Nhip Cau Foundation has employed the principles of an asset-based approach. This is evident not only in how it has creatively mobilized resources to support its training programs, but also in how it has identified the capacities and strengths

of people with disabilities and other resources that could be harnessed to enable them to be fully independent contributors to their communities. The core principle guiding the Foundation's work has been captured in the motto, "Let us help ourselves before asking for help from outsiders."

When it came to envisioning the ways in which people with disabilities could benefit from vocational training, the Foundation's leadership used a variety of ABCD tools to generate ideas about existing skills, capacities, and resources and the opportunities these presented. For example, skills of the "Head, heart, and hand" among the Can Tho Club members were listed at the pilot stage to generate awareness of everyone's different capacities. Included in this list were the cultural traditions and values that encouraged hard work and efficiency. A "Leaky Bucket" tool was used to analyze the local economy to see what opportunities existed that the vocational training offered by the Foundation could take advantage of. Then the various social and institutional assets were discussed, such as the good relationships people had with government institutions and local organizations, including private companies that showed the potential for displaying, selling, and marketing products made by the Foundation's trainees. Locally available natural resources, such as coconut shells and fibre, were also identified as the principal source of raw materials for handicraft production.

Resulting Developments

Beginning with the pilot courses offered in 2002, the Nhip Cau Foundation has provided free vocational training to 121 persons with disabilities from across the Mekong Delta Region. In addition, it has benefitted a total of 825 people indirectly. These include the family members of the Foundation's trainees who are currently assisting the latter in handicraft production (150 persons) and 675 individuals who have attended vocational training courses run by the Foundation's graduates for other organizations. A little over a third of the people benefitting are women. The Nhip Cau Foundation serves as both a workshop and a showroom, with people with disabilities acting as guides to visitors.

Perhaps the most significant achievement of the Nhip Cau Foundation is the change in attitudes. As a result of attending its vocational training courses, people with disabilities have gained confidence and pride in their potential as individuals and community members, including the capacity to sustain themselves financially. Earlier they had internalized the idea of their "uselessness," and this perception of themselves prevented them from seeing the opportunities they could tap into. The ABCD approach has helped them recognize their own inherent worth and power as active members of society. With this newly gained self-esteem, they have also been able to foster a positive change in attitudes towards people with disabilities among the general public.

*The
Foundation's
mission can be
summarized in
the formula:*

*Education
+
Employment
=
Empowerment*



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