

BRICK BY BRICK BUILDING PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE TO SUPPORT CHILDREN WITH HEARING LOSS IN VIETNAM

Establishing support services for children with hearing loss in developing countries involves many elements such as hearing aid distribution, training and education, parent support, collaboration, and sustainability. The Global Foundation For Children With Hearing Loss has established a unique model that addresses many of these touch points and needs. By Paige Stringer.

Our multi-faceted Vietnam Deaf Education Program is helping to address gaps in the pipeline of health and education services for young children with hearing loss in Vietnam. Our program focuses on the key people in the network of support for children with hearing loss including parents, teachers, therapists, and doctors. We offer training across disciplines in audiology, speech pathology, auditory-verbal education, and early intervention, on a large scale with 38 schools and 2 hospitals across 20 provinces in Vietnam enrolled. Because we are collaborating with the Vietnamese, our programs are customized to their needs. And, by working with the same core group of participants over time in this multi-year effort, the participants build on their knowledge. Our Vietnam Deaf Education Program is benefitting over 900 children with hearing loss. Participants in our program are sharing learning with others, making the benefits exponential --- and sustainable.

The Global Foundation's Vietnam Deaf Education Program model may be one solution to the challenges associated with the provision of ongoing therapy and habilitation support for children that receive hearing aids from nonprofits and audiology missions. We provide hearing aids, but our emphasis is on training a core group of professionals and families within the 38 schools and 2 hospitals over time. With this focus, we empower teachers, medical teams, and families with the expertise to provide the necessary therapy and education support to the children who receive hearing aids from us and other charitable organizations.

STARTING A GLOBAL FOUNDATION FOR CHILDREN WITH HEARING LOSS

There is a quote - "the blessing lies closest to the wound". It is not clear why I was born with a severe to profound hard of hearing into a family with no history of hearing loss. Likely a genetic mutation, the doctors concluded. Certainly my hearing loss has added color to my life - and to

my face at times -- but it also has fueled my commitment to the Global Foundation For Children With Hearing Loss as its founder and Executive Director.

I benefitted from early identification, access to hearing aids, and the support of trained professionals early in my life in the UK and US to learn to communicate through listening and spoken language. I was mainstreamed at kindergarten and attended neighborhood schools alongside hearing peers for the rest of my academic career. After earning a tennis scholarship and two advanced degrees, I embarked on a 12-year marketing career that included positions held at Amazon.com and the Clorox Company.



Global Foundation professional Martha Harney fits hearing aids as part of the Audiology Program clinic

My life's path would not have been possible without the strong early intervention and audiology support that I received when I was young. I started the Global Foundation For Children With Hearing Loss in 2009 to help young children with hearing loss in other parts of the world have access to at least some of the same opportunities for success in life that I was fortunate to have. The Global Foundation's approach is one of the few in the world that focuses on large-scale, sustainable professional development programs that spans language development and auditory support for

children in developing countries after they are identified with hearing loss. Such support is essential for these children to benefit from hearing technology, develop spoken language, and successfully integrate into their hearing communities.

VIETNAM DEAF EDUCATION PROGRAM

The Global Foundation's Vietnam Deaf Education Program launched in 2010 as a collaboration with Thuan An Center for Hearing Impaired Children and Ho Chi Minh University of Education in Vietnam. The goal is to empower professionals and families from 38 schools and 2 hospitals with the expertise and processes to help young children 0-6 years of age access sound through hearing technology and learn to develop listening and spoken language. With such skills, these children are prepared to join their hearing peers in mainstream schools and reach their potential in our hearing world.

The Global Foundation has a team of professionals that have worked together for the past few years to develop the multi-year curriculum and then travel to Vietnam to teach the material. The professionals represent universities, hospitals, school programs, and private practice across the US, Canada, and Hong Kong and bring decades of experience in speech and hearing sciences and auditory verbal deaf education. The Global Foundation covers the costs of the professional's international travel, room, and board as well as operational costs of the program in Vietnam. The Global Foundation's Vietnam Deaf Education Program is an integrated model comprised of Teacher Training, Audiology Training, Mobile Missions, and Hearing Aid Distribution initiatives. Each summer, participants travel to Thuan An Center by motorbike, bus, and train to board and to attend the program.

TEACHER TRAINING

The Teacher Training component features a multi-year curriculum for Vietnamese teachers of the deaf

covering audiology, speech therapy, early intervention, and auditory verbal education. Over the past two summers, 130 teachers have participated in a series of lecture, practicum, and hands-on workshops focused on listening and spoken language development in young children with hearing loss. The teachers take a final test at the conclusion of each summer program and progress to the next level with each passing score. Top performers from the higher levels are asked to help support the training of teachers in the lower levels to encourage sharing of knowledge. The Teacher Training Program also includes an evening Family Program which provides parents and caregivers with lectures and practicum about audiology and strategies for listening and spoken language development that they can use with their children at home. Our early intervention and deaf education professionals also offer individual consultations to each family to address their children's specific developmental issues and needs.



Global Foundation Executive Director Paige Stringer with Vietnam training program participants

AUDIOLOGY PROGRAM

The Vietnamese expressed a need for deeper understanding of audiology best practices and protocols amongst their medical teams and educational audiology support staffs. To meet this objective, the Global Foundation launched a parallel four-week Audiology Training course at Thuan An Center during the 2011 Teacher Training Program for 18 school staff, employees of a hearing aid dispenser, and medical professionals. This course provides more in-depth pediatric audiology training than what is being taught to teachers in the Teacher Training program. The participants engage in lecture and practicum about pediatric audiology. During the second part of the training, children are brought in for hearing tests and hearing aid fitting. The Vietnamese participants team with Global Foundation professionals to counsel parents. Besides providing hearing aids to children who need them, these family clinics benefit the Vietnamese students as a real-world opportunity to apply what they have learned. This ensures sustainability of the hearing aid distribution effort. Our third summer Teacher Training and second Audiology Training workshops will take place at Thuan An Center in July 2012.

MOBILE MISSIONS

The Vietnamese participants in our first Teacher Training workshop requested that the Global Foundation supplement the summer curriculum with on-site visits during the year. The goal is to help teachers implement the auditory-verbal teaching techniques and strategies they are learning into their own classrooms. They also requested audiology training for their staff members who provide audiology services at the schools. In response, we created a Mobile Mission series. In January, 2011, a Global Foundation team of audiology and auditory-verbal deaf education professionals traveled to five participating schools in our Vietnam Deaf Education program. They mentored teachers in the classrooms, provided audiology training, and led an evening parent program. We also conducted a Saturday lecture about spoken language development and audiology to over 200 medical professionals, teachers, families, and students in Ho Chi Minh City.

Our second Mobile Mission, which was completed in March 2012, expanded in scope to include three pediatric hospitals. ENT doctors and hospital therapists received education about topics such as newborn hearing screening, diagnostic audiology, cochlear implant mapping, and habilitation support.



Global Foundation professional Judy Simser gives an auditory-verbal therapy demonstration

BUILDING PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY

The uniqueness of the Global Foundation's model lies in its integrated approach. There exists a topical knowledge of audiology and auditory-verbal deaf education amongst professionals in Vietnam. However, because there are no degree programs in speech and hearing sciences, there is a need for more depth. The Global Foundation's Audiology Program is providing doctors, technicians, and educational staff with deeper knowledge of pediatric audiology including the grander view of why certain tests are conducted and how to interpret results for optimal case management of each child.

Meanwhile, our auditory-verbal deaf education professionals are helping teachers and therapists in our Teacher Training Program with assessment and lesson planning to ensure that children with hearing loss are progressing in their listening and

spoken language development. The Mobile Missions reinforce the training during the summer programs with on-site visits to the participating schools and hospitals. Across all our programs, the Global Foundation's teams emphasize the need for parents, teachers, and audiology professionals to work together to help each child reach their full potential - a concept that the Vietnamese deaf education community is starting to embrace and are trying to implement across education, health, and family sectors.



Audiology Program students conduct VRA test on young Vietnamese girl

MAKING AN IMPACT

Brick by brick, program by program, participants are empowered with the tools and expertise to help their children with hearing loss -- and then are prepared to train each other. We believe improvements will come quickly in Vietnam because of the desire of families and professionals to improve services and education for their children with hearing loss. Though there is still much to address, change is already taking place.

As one of our team members reflected in her own blog, "The Global Foundation For Children With Hearing Loss teaches the people in Vietnam the tools that they need to provide quality services to their own people. It is one thing to go to other countries and do the work for them, but it is a whole different thing to teach those who want to learn how to do it themselves."

JOIN US

The Global Foundation For Children With Hearing Loss is looking forward to continuing this important and life-changing work of helping children who are deaf and hard of hearing in Vietnam and other countries around the world access the hearing technology, language, and education they need to achieve their full potential - no matter where in the world they live. We welcome talented audiologists who have a spirit of adventure and teamwork to contact us about how to get involved with our programs in Vietnam and elsewhere. For more information, please visit www.childrenwithhearingloss.org.

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