



"The programme helps children reach their full potential."

Good Morning Vietnam

It is always about making a difference, but sometimes making a difference is also about money. Then it's great to have a case so noble, powerful and important that it can be supported by an organisation like the Oticon Foundation.

The Oticon Foundation supports the Global Foundation for Children with Hearing Loss - a relationship that has emerged not least due to efforts of tireless and fiery Paige Stringer. Meet the director and founder of the association on her way to Vietnam, where she will follow the organisation's education programme for teachers and other professionals involved with hearing-impaired children.

Being able to make a difference is a privilege, and Paige Stringer knows how privileged she is. Through the Global Foundation for Children with Hearing Loss she has been able to help deaf and hearing-impaired children in developing countries, where limited access to education resources, hearing solutions and support services can prevent these children from realising their full potential.

Living proof

Paige was born with a severe hearing loss. Since the condition was identified early, she got hearing aids at the age of 11 months, and help from qualified professionals. This enabled her to be fully integrated in kindergarten and later, to enter the education system. The results speak for themselves: two graduate degrees plus management positions in marketing and business development at some of the world's largest companies.

In 2008, Paige left the established business community to start her own freelance marketing company. A writing assignment took her to Vietnam where she found her true calling; she would use her personal experience with hearing loss and her professional background to help hearing-impaired children in developing countries to gain access to some of the resources she was lucky enough to have received. Hence her decision to found the Global Foundation for Children with hearing loss.



For two years, Paige has been working with the Thuan An Center in Vietnam to develop and implement a broad training programme designed to fill gaps in expertise in the fields of health care and the education of children with hearing loss.

Making a difference

Paige is not alone. As director and founder, she is surrounded by an outstanding team of professionals, consultants and board of directors. Together they support the organisation's charitable purposes through sustainable programmes.

More specifically, the organisation offers training and mentoring for teachers and specialists; access to audiological services and hearing instruments, and health and education programmes for deaf and hearing-impaired children. The organisation also strives to raise public awareness of hearing loss, how it affects children, and how the subject should be approached. Research into the education of hearing-impaired children is also performed.

The Oticon Foundation has been supporting and funding this worthy cause organisation since 2010.

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In Vietnam

Currently the focus is on Vietnam, where over 180,000 young children have been diagnosed with hearing loss. The government has considerably decided to adopt an inclusive education policy, which aims to integrate these children into the mainstream school system.

However, implementing this policy demands an ability to identify hearing loss at a very early stage, and to provide access to appropriate hearing solutions and experts capable of helping children to handle sounds they have never heard before. An ability to speak comes with the ability to hear - and since a child's brain is programmed to acquire basic language skills during the first six years, a concerted effort at an early stage can make a world of difference.

On her way out

Fortunately we managed to catch Paige a few days before she had to leave to monitor the education programme. Commenting on her mission, she explains: "This programme was launched in July 2010, and over the next few years it should empower over 300 teachers, doctors and families to help small children with hearing loss to develop their hearing and a spoken language."

"I will be meeting with the Vietnamese Government to discuss our work and how we can support their efforts to introduce early intervention for hearing-impaired children," Paige continues. "I will also be meeting with schools and hospitals to prepare for our next Mobile Mission programme, which starts in March 2012."



Training Experts

The ambitious programme in Vietnam includes further education courses for specialists; special 'mobile missions', and the distribution of hearing instruments. Participants include 38 schools for the deaf in 20 Vietnamese provinces, plus two children's hospitals in Ho Chi Minh City. A variety of teachers, doctors and therapists will attend the courses. The three-year programme will run as a 'Summer School', with workshops covering audiology, speech therapy, and the value of early intervention and auditory/verbal training.

'Mobile Missions'

This year, Paige's team of professionals will visit some of the participating schools and hospitals to run 'mobile missions'. The purpose is to support the three-year training programme, and to provide local audiological support and training for educational staff, medical teams and hearing instrument dealers.

"The mobile missions will complement our Summer Schools with local visits during the year. We will also offer hospital doctors training in newborn hearing screening paediatric audiology and therapy," Paige explains. "And during training courses and mobile missions, we will fit children from low-income families with hearing instruments funded by grants, private contributions or direct donations."

The education curriculum is being developed by speech and hearing specialists, teachers of the deaf at universities; hospitals, specialist clinics and private practices. Collaboration stretches from the US and Canada to Hong Kong and Vietnam. Experts travel to Vietnam to teach the material, and while all costs for travel, food, lodging, interpreters and facilities are covered by the association - and hence also the Oticon Foundation - their invaluable contributions in terms of time and expertise are totally free of charge.

A joint effort

The Global Foundation for Children with Hearing Loss is unique in the sense that its programme addresses the touch-points and needs of hearing-impaired children in a broad, highly integrated manner. Parents, teachers and doctors are involved. The organisation offers support services; distributes hearing instruments, and provides large-scale training across disciplines. The advantage of working with the Vietnamese authorities is that programmes are tailored to the needs of the population. Also, working with the same group of participants year after year enables them to continuously expand their knowledge.



Positive results

It is impossible not to be gripped with Paige's enthusiasm. "The effect of our programme is both exponential and sustainable," she explains proudly. "The participants share knowledge, and this affects many people over time - which is the whole idea. Until now, more than 900 children with hearing loss have benefited from our course."

"Compared to the 2010 course, the further education training performed in July 2011 produced a measurable increase in expertise and comprehension among teachers," Paige continues. "After the first summer school the 2010 team came home and shared their experiences with colleagues who then participated in the 2011 programme for the first time. This is the essence of what we are trying to accomplish - to empower Vietnamese teachers to train each other so they collectively can become even better at supporting and developing hearing-impaired children in their country."

Thanks to the Oticon Foundation

"We could not have achieved this without the Oticon Foundation," Paige emphasises. "It's true! When we presented our vision and plan for 2009, the programme wasn't even ready. I will always be grateful to the Foundation for believing in the value of this work and for providing the generous funding that has made all of this possible. Not only has it financed the majority of our first Summer School; it has continued to provide substantial support. We are already making plans for our next course in 2012 and our next mobile mission this coming March."
