



# DISABILITY RESEARCH AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Newsletter

October 2017

## INTRODUCTION

Disability Research and Capacity Development (DRD) was established on December 3rd, 2005 under the sponsorship of the Ford Foundation. DRD functions as a non-governmental and non-profit organization and is operated by and for people with disabilities.

DRD and the community are building a support model based on the rights of PWDs in an effort to promote equal opportunities for PWDs, encourage and create favorable conditions for PWDs to participate fully in all activities like other members in society.

Until now, the DRD has been supported over 3,500 PWDs in HCM City and a network of over 30 disability groups in the southern of Vietnam. With many diverse activities such as introducing internships, employment, skills training, advocacy campaign, moving assistance, scholarships, computers devices, assistive devices, information consultation, peer counseling, propagations, seminars and events raising awareness on disability issues, ... DRD is rated as one of 20 non-governmental organizations efficiently operated in Vietnam and is the leading one in supporting the PWDs to integrate into the community.

DRD would like to send to all sponsors, partners, friends and PWDs community the Newsletter as a channel of information sharing.

**Kind Regards.**



*Ms. Dang Huynh Mai - Former Minister of Department of Education and Training (DET) – President of Vietnam PWD's Union*

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### 1 Improve access to education for students with disabilities

On Oct 23th, 2017, DRD hold the workshop “Improve access to education for students with disabilities”. The workshop was hold to create more favorable conditions for students with disabilities to access education; collect opinions and find solutions from relevant departments about improving access to education for students with disabilities.

Was honor to have the participants of Ms. Dang Huynh Mai – Former Minister of DET– President of Vietnam PWD’s Union; Mr. Hoang Truong Giang – Primary School Education Office, HCMC DET; Ms. Truong Thi Hoa – Lawyer; Ms. Tran Thi Thanh Hang – Director of Vocational Training and Job Service Center for PWDs; and representatives of Management and Operation Center for Public Transportation; HCMC Social Work Club; the universities and colleges in HCMC and students with disabilities, parents, etc.

In the beginning of the workshop, Ms. Dang Huynh Mai – Former Minister of DET, shared that she used to solve directly some cases related to students with disabilities. “There is a student who has excellent performance but the university in Ha Noi refused their record because it has not the separate examination board. We commanded the university to establish the separate examination board for the student. Fortunately, the student has studied very hard and achieved a good result that made me proud.” – she said.

The story that made Ms. Mai concern is the student with mobility impairment – the child of Agent Orange Veteran – studying in Mecial University. This student saved the point because of not learning exercises; then the student shared with Ms. Mai, and DET directed in remission of learning exercises.

Ms. Mai said: “I knew I did incorrectly when going to foreign countries. In

some universities in other countries, they still have their separate movement which suitable for students with disabilities to learn. This is also student’s right and benefit. We need to change the awareness in opportunities for students with disabilities.”

Mr. Le Huu Thuong – Coordinator of DARE project (the project that improve access to education for students with disabilities) in University of Pedagogy and University of Science, Society and Humanity, shared: “According to Mr.Le Huu Thuong, visually impaired students get some barriers in studying like accessing materials or difficulties in following the lessons. They need to buy some devices such as recorder, scanner, magnifying glass, or translator, personal assistant with high cost.”

Besides, students with disabilities are hard to find accommodation, especially mobility impaired students who need to pay more money in finding house.

## Activity

"The tuition fee remission for students with disabilities is also limited. Because schools often require them to belong to severe or particularly severe disability, with the condition of being poor or near poor, they are entitled to this policy," – Mr. Thuong said, and he think that these requires are overlapping.

About student with hearing impairment, at the workshop, Ms. Duong Phuong Hanh – Director of CED also had the presentation about the reality of these students who have too many barriers that they need to face, such as: difficulty in communication, lack of services and support devices in learning and daily life, lack of personal assistant, etc. In fact, the higher the learning level is, the more difficult the students get, especially related to society's awareness, difficulty in doing exam, the constraints in examination rules and opportunities in finding jobs, etc.

At the workshop, Le Minh Tu – freshman of Psychology major, Van Hien University (HCMC) – student with hearing impairment that needs translator. Tu shared her story by the small hands: "Graduated from high school, I submitted my record to the college near my house, but they refused because I am hearing impaired person. My father took me to another college with the hope that they would accept me, and then they did."

Nearly to go to school, American Polytechnic College knew that Tu is hearing impaired, and they called to her father to refuse her. The student with good performance in many years felt sad and disappointed. With the strong passion in studying, she submitted record to Van Hien University; and she were welcomed there.

She was not only accepted but also had scholarship and had her own translator. Tu shared happily: "I'm studying about 2 months already, university program is hard but I will try my best."

Mr. Tran Khuong, parent of Tran Le Kha Nhu – hearing impaired and non-vocal student (sophomore of Graphic Design major, Hoa Sen University) shared: "I let my child join inclusively others. She is good ad aptitude subjects, but she learns harder in English. Teachers cannot afford to spend their time and have separate methods for hearing impaired an non-vocal students. English teachers change frequently; it is difficult to get acquainted and understand each other."

According to Mr. Khuong, he often went to high school to support and study with his child, but he could not do that when she studies in university. He think that some students with disabilities should be allowed not to learn some subjects, and his child does not need to learn English. He has to have disability certificate of his child; then he came back to District 12 to take certificate about his child's severe disability where the officer said: "I saw her stand and go around like other people. The severe disability means they cannot do alone like wearing clothes."

Hearing impaired people get a lot difficulties and dangers in life; they cannot hear and speak that make them have less knowledge than other disability forms. To help his child follow her study path, he always support and study with his child.

Therewith the representatives also shared student's difficulties in buying support device with high cost, having

no translator for hearing impaired and non-vocal students in some schools. If they do not have any support from community and schools, it is hard for them to continue studying.

At the workshop, the participants join in discuss group to find solutions for these above problems and answer the question: "What is the best solu-



*Ms. Duong Phuong Hanh led the discuss group of students with hearing impairment*

tion for visually impaired students, hearing impaired students and students with mobility impairment to access completely to education?"

At the end of the workshop, Mr. Ha Le An – Vice Director of Management of Operation Center for Public Transportation said: "There are now many bus stops designed for wheelchair users. The visually impaired people are also not so worried; some stations have electronic boards announcing the arrival. There will have many loudspeakers and electronic boards in the bus and at the station so there will not be missed."

"Particularly for schools, we recommend the schools to compile a list of students with disabilities to send us. We will make free bus pass for students and send them to schools." – Mr. An added.

**Kim Phung**



## 2 DRD's notion is that not going alone, but must cooperate with other partners, especially government agencies.



Picture: From left to right: Mr. Nguyen Ngoc Lam- MSD President, Ms. Huynh Kim Phung-DRD Staff, Mr. Nguyen Van Cu – DRD Vice Director and Ms. Nguyen Phuong Linh – MSD Director.

The CSOs 2017 Event - Best Tap - Inspiring CSOs 2017 - HONORING PARTNERSHIP IDEA CSOs for the EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT attracted 27 contestants spanning all three regions from the North to South of Vietnam. DRD passed the application round and has been in the top 10. On October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017, DRD has been in Hanoi for presenting and reviewing the evaluation board.

The program honors development partnerships for effectiveness within the framework of the Inspiring CSOs 2017 program organized by the Center for Management Research and Sustainable Development (MSD) for the purpose of seeking, honoring and spreading practical ideas for building and developing partnerships with social organizations and state agencies; Social organization with the en-

terprises; and Social organization with social organization.

Each model / initiative is an endeavor for achieving sustainable development goals, contributing to the development of Vietnam

DRD joined the program with the purpose of celebrating the partners that DRD cooperating with is the Center for managing and operating public passenger transport in HCMC in promoting the friendly and humane bus system.

The program has 3 items sharing models including:

Categories: Social Organizations and Government Organizations: RIC; DRD center; Center for Support and Development of Thien Chi community.

Social and Enterprise Organizations: REACH; Vietnet Information and

Communication Center (Vietnet ICT); Coordination, Research and Development Center (CoRE); Vietnamese Fund (VSF)

Social and Social Organizations category includes: Center for Sustainable Research and Development (CSDS); Research Center - Social Work Counseling and Community Development (SDRC); Association for the Development of People with Disability (AEPD).

With the criteria: Value Partners and Commitments; Partners transparency and accountability; Learning Partnerships and Mutual Capacity Building; Fair partner. Additional criteria: Creative and Inspirational partners.

DRD Center has won Category I: Social Organizations - State agencies with a reward of 30.000.000 VND; Center for Sustainable Research and Development (CSDS) got the first reward in the Category of Social Organizations with Social Organizations; and REACH Center got the first price in the Category of Social Organizations and Enterprise.

In addition, the Vietnet Information and Communication Center (Vietnet ICT) was awarded an inspirational award as an efficient working organization with the support of Microsoft over the last five years to bring information technology to poor communities.

The program finished in joy and cooperating between the organizations.

**Kim Phung.**

## 3 “How to make workers with disabilities feel integrated in their workplace” at SCHENKER Company.

On the morning of October 19, 2017, DRD has received an invitation from SCHENKER Company to hold a briefing for managers and company staff to narrow the gap between management and colleagues with workers with disabilities.

The session took place in an open, relaxed atmosphere. It began with the managers and staff of the company “playing the role” of a person using crutches, a wheelchair or of a person with visual impairment. Their mission was to move around the workplace, use the equipments of the office and come back after 10 minutes.

At the beginning, most of the players were curious and interesting to try; but soon after, people began to say: “Is there someone to show me the way, I don’t see anything” or “I remember that the stairs are nearby but why can I not find them” or “a wheelchair will never pass through this door”.

### Right after returning to the meeting room, everyone shared:

“I’m tired, when I used crutches I felt so tired, especially in the stairs”, Mr. Tung shared after experiencing the use of crutches.

Mr. Nhan shared that he was slow, using a wheelchair was very uncomfortable : “The furniture in the office made me very difficult to move. I usually go in and out of the warehouse but when sitting on a wheelchair, I realized that it was impossible to go in.”

Mr. Hai (playing the role of a person using crutches) said: “When I have to open the door, I have to keep my balance while opening the door. It was very difficult.”

Mr. Nguyen Van Cu – Vice director of DRD shared: “People with disabilities often face many barriers, barriers



*Experiencing being a person with visual impairment*

from themselves, from family or barriers from the point of view of the society. What you have just experienced is an environmental barrier. With my experience, I find that the barriers from the person with disabilities is only a small part; it is important that the society recognizes the abilities of people with disabilities and creates opportunities for them to be integrated.

Mr. Nguyen Van Cu added: “Employment is the main important key for people with disabilities to integrate into society. It is why DRD always strives to convince companies to create appropriate conditions for workers with disabilities so that they have the opportunity to show their ability and coordination; to integrate well into the business environment.”

Mrs. Tra My – warehouse manager at Schenker, added: “Working directly with people with disabilities, you are willing to find out if your employees have any difficulties, if they are comfortable with their work. A good business don’t find suitable solutions alone.”

Mrs. Phuong – Customer Care Divi-

sion, shared: “I am suffering from a discal hernia, so I can understand the restrictions when I want to do something but I cannot. I can understand the difficulties of people with disabilities.”

Mrs. Thuy Duong – Customer service department, shared that after this sharing, she will recruit more people with disabilities for the department she is in charge with the support of DRD and SCHENKER. She will send a recruitment notice and ask DRD to introduce PWD.

At the end of the meeting, representatives of the Department of Safety - Security - Health Care of SCHENKER also shared that the department will adjust some places in the company to recruit more workers with disabilities and ask DRD for advices.

Sharing in enterprises is an important activity to help businesses “get ready” when hiring workers with disabilities so that they know how to create the right place to work.

**Kim Phung**



## 4 Kids do physical therapy on Mid-autumn fest too!



*Nụ cười của các em khi tham gia chương trình*

On morning of October 4, DRD, in collaboration with Department of Career and Corporate Relations - RMIT University Alumni Office and A New Day Social Work Group, held a celebration and presented 80 gifts to 80 children who were inpatients and outpatients at Ho Chi Minh City Orthopedics and Rehabilitation Hospital (1A Ly Thuong Kiet Hospital). The presents include: Mooncakes, lanterns, notebooks and a pack of milk cartons.



Since photo-shooting is against advice of the Department of Mental Health, DRD does not have picture

of this ward (40 children). We are proud to share some pictures of children celebrating the mid-autumn in Department of Children Calisthenics (near 25 kids joined us in the morning, and the staff helped us send 15 more presents to the afternoon shift child patients). The activities were concise with on-site games because of our kids' finite physical conditions, but still so fun and exciting all the same.

Bao's parent shared: "Physical therapy is needed on mid-autumn day as well. thank you for coming with the children and showing them a good time."

Some parents also teased the organizers: "I also want gifts, when I was a kid I didn't get to celebrate the Moon fest." Those words really just put DRD and RMIT over the moon.

**Kim Phung**

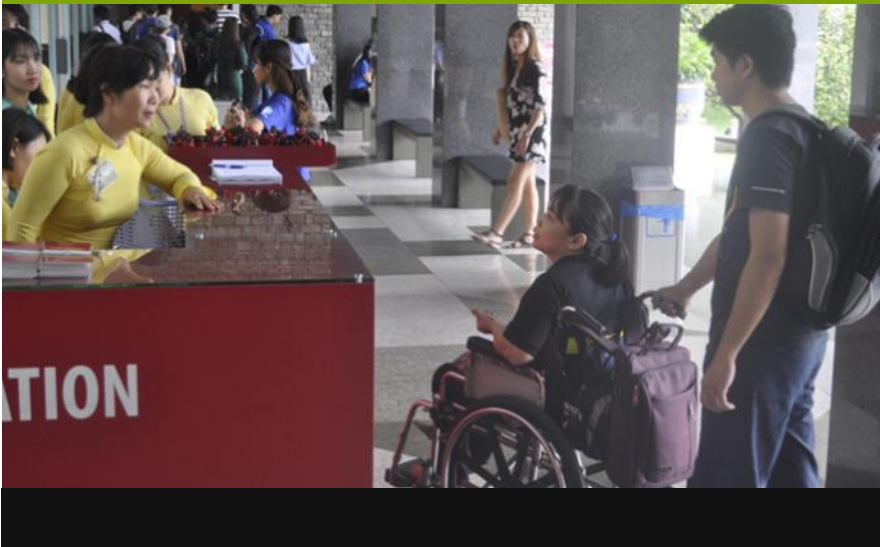
## List of donors October, 2017

1. Mrs Hương and Mr. Sơn donated for 1forchange campaign of 1.000.000 VNĐ
2. The Glen group (Australia) donated for Sholarship of 1.100 AUD
3. Mr and Mrs "Minh – Hằng" (Australia) donated for Sholarship of 200 AUD
4. Mrs Đỗ Thị Thu Hồng for Sholarship of 1.000.000 VNĐ

## Upcoming events in November, 2017

1. Nov 23th, 2017: One World For All - round 5 in Binh Dinh
2. Nov 24th, 2017: Q4 Management Board meeting in Binh Dinh

## How accessible is saigon for people with disabilities?



Imagine you were blind and living in Saigon. Imagine crossing the streets of this frenetic city. Imagine its thick stream of vehicles flashing around you while you don't even know that rickety city bus with its 20-year-old brakes is coming right at you. Imagine dodging the impromptu parkings, mobile food stalls, unequal paving stones and unsecured construction sites on the sidewalks without actually seeing them. You'd rather stay at home? Welcome to the world of the more than 2,000 visually impaired of Saigon!

I'm out with Ms. Loan, Acting Director of the Centre for Disability Research and Capacity Development (DRD), her colleagues Mrs. Hieu, who's in a wheelchair, and Mr. Vu, the DRD's Accessibility Technician, as well as Mr. Nha, who's working for the Ho Chi Minh City Blind Association and visually impaired himself. And it is just now that I realise how hard it is for people with disabilities to live in Saigon.

The story they have to tell is both sad and full of hope. If accessible means that people with disabilities (PWDs) can move freely, Saigon is anything but that. And still, Ms. Loan

insists,

***"I'd say, Saigon is partly accessible."***

But she also sees the problems: "There are many difficulties for PWDs here. The biggest one is the accessibility of public areas. Another one is public transportation." While she's saying that, we're in the gardens of the Independence Palace in the heart of Saigon.

### Defining Disability

Vietnamese with disabilities cannot access Saigon's most important historical site. Case in point: restrooms. The ones on the ground floor are literally inaccessible as the doors are not broad enough for a wheelchair to go through. Taking the elevator (thankfully, there is one) to the second floor, we find two other restrooms with large enough door cases—but in one of them the cabins are so small Mrs. Hieu cannot close the door, and in the second and bigger one there's a step right in front of the toilet.

Would you go to a place where you can't go to the restroom? Which leads us to the question how to define disabilities.

"In Vietnam," Ms. Loan explains, "we focus very much on the impairment itself. But internationally, the definition covers not only the disability but also the social barriers that come with it." Social barriers as in: not going to places because you're afraid you might find them (or the restrooms) inaccessible when you arrive.

### Open Ears in Transportation

This is why the work of the DRD, founded by PWDs and officially subordinate to the Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations (VUSTA), is so important. Not only do they provide information on which locations are accessible, they also approach venues and institutions to encourage them to raise disabled-friendliness.

***"The transportation department is one of those institutions that we used to send letters to asking them to improve accessibility three years ago," Ms. Loan says. "And they listened to us. Now, the main bus station has been upgraded with ramps, for example."***

And there's more under progress: an audio system for the blind, screens for people with hearing impairment and wheelchair lifts. The ambitious goal is to make buses fully accessible by 2020.

Until then, the DRD runs its own transportation service with disabled-friendly three-wheel motorbikes. It used to be offered free of charge, but the sponsor pulled out last December. Now it costs VND4,000 per kilometre. Still too much for many PWDs. Because here's another problem: PWDs often completely depend on their families.

### Barriers of Independence

Ms. Loan outlines three cases:

***"The first is: the child is treated***



***equally, they go to school, to work. This is very important for PWDs. Other families are over-protective. They do take care of their child, but he or she completely depends on the family. The kid can't even go outside by themselves. The third case is that the family ignores a child that has a disability."***

And even if a PWD gets the family's support, the concrete barriers are still out there. Ms. Loan mentions a common question for people in wheelchairs who are searching a job: "How can I access the workplace?" Most offices are not disabled-friendly. And in 2011, a new law on disabilities waived the fixed percentage (2.3 percent) of PWDs companies had to employ before. Vietnam put history into reverse.

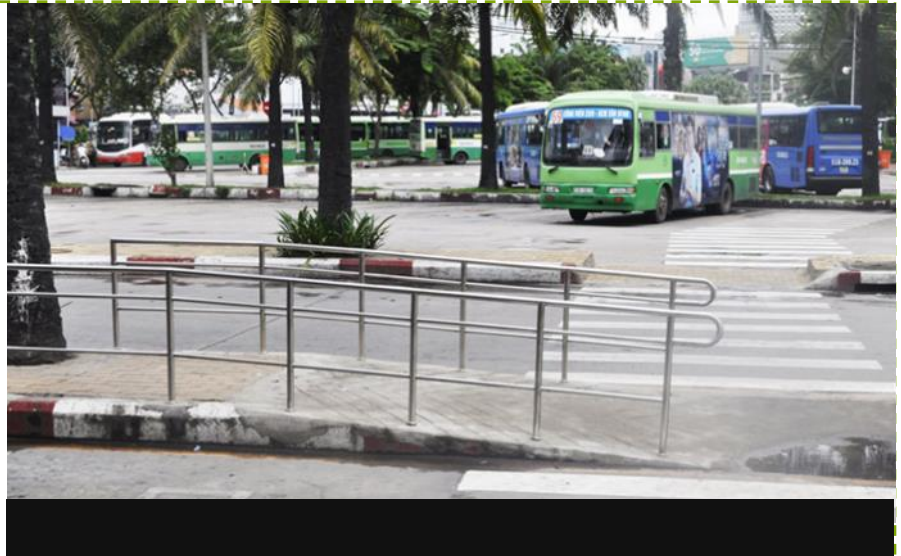
Even local people's committees argue at times that PWDs don't have to go to public institutions themselves to do paperwork—they could just ask their family members to help. This is how barriers are raised.

In their free time, PWDs are often faced with the same problems. Bar or restaurant owners time and again reject the DRD's requests, saying: "PWDs don't come here, why would we make this place accessible?" What a poor argument is that? You could just as well say there's a need to ensure accessibility in order to allow PWDs to come.

### **Don't Forget to Be Aware**

It's all about awareness, that other big word in the world of the disabled, and that is something one has to learn. The DRD has put on several programmes to help teach awareness, at universities or for business leaders.

While I'm out with Mr. Nha, several people on the street recognise that he's visually impaired and offer their help. He experiences all kinds of



reactions every day, he tells me.

***"Many people are helpful and friendly, even support me to cross the street. Some others are not nice. When I bump into them by mistake or touch them, they curse at me."***

### **A New Hope**

Engineering marvels like talking smartphones (his speaks Vietnamese and even gets the accents right!) or voice recognition software on his computer allow him to live an independent life. He praises initiatives like Noir restaurant where guests dine in the dark, served by blind waiters, because they focus on the abilities, and not only on the disabilities of PWDs. They help to give people an understanding how it is to be blind for an hour or two, and how, sometimes, it can be enriching not to see.

In downtown Saigon, many sidewalks have been upgraded with tactile paving (textured pavement to help blind people orientate), and the Nguyen Hue walking street even got a set of talking traffic lights. If this was the case across the city, Mr. Nha says, he might actually be able to move independently.

For now, especially crossing the street is an impossible mission for

him without assistance: "If it's a busy street, you cannot find your way through; and if it's a quiet street, people risk to run you over at high speed." Either way, a helping hand is more than welcome.

***"Saigon is definitely the disabled-friendliest city in Vietnam. People are open-minded, have a good attitude."***

Ms. Loan's conclusion might be surprising at first glance. She has lived and studied in Washington, D.C., a city that she calls "fully accessible". But one has to take into account what has already been improved in Saigon.

And when we talk about sidewalk-clearing campaigns or that utility and futility of upgrading Saigon's bus fleet, perhaps we should give a thought to those more than 13 million disabled people living in Vietnam.

For more information on the work of the DRD, visit [drdvietnam.org](http://drdvietnam.org).

Banner image source: Arik

Source: [citypassguide](http://citypassguide)



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