

Saigon Children's Charity

Thang Long School

Ninth Annual Report

2003 – 2004

Saigon July 2004

THANG LONG SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORT 2003-04

Introduction

Thang Long School is Saigon Children's Charity's vocational training school in Ho Chi Minh City. The school is located in District 4, one of Saigon's poorest districts. SCC works in partnership with the education department of District 4. We are a positive presence in an area where children who may not otherwise have educational opportunities can find themselves involved in what the Vietnamese refer to as "social evils" – drugs, prostitution and theft. This report covers the school year September 2003 – July 2004.

Our programme has been running continuously since 1993 and this school year, 2003-04, has been a banner year for us. We have added some programmes and expanded others. Hospitality training is a new course wherein students develop the attitudes and skills which prepare them to work in hotels and restaurants. In the computer lab we have added a number of new computers and have developed an instructional course in computer basics. We've refined the art and photography courses and the sewing and hairdressing courses have been restructured.

The look of our classrooms has been changed with the addition of new furniture and our library is being transformed with new materials and a new configuration.

Objective

The purpose of Thang Long School is to equip our students with skills that will enable them to find decent jobs to help them escape from poverty.

Beneficiaries

The students, boys and girls aged 12 – 19, are drawn from the poorest families in District 4. We serve a total of 300 students. We choose students with great care selecting according to criteria designed to determine greatest need and greatest potential for success. We choose children not only for their lack of material wealth but also according to the circumstances in which they live, their vulnerability and exposure to risk.

Many children come from broken homes, some are orphans, some live in pagodas and some sleep on the streets. Almost all have to work to survive or to help support their families. Typically they work selling lottery tickets or noodles, working as servants, kitchen assistants, or in shops. This is poorly paid work and the children have little or no control over what they do or the hours they work. When they come to us they have little confidence in their ability to control or change their lives. Once enrolled at Thang Long they begin to see what they are capable of achieving. Getting them to believe in themselves is our first important task and the singing, art and dancing classes help in this transformation.

Training

We provide training in skills which will lead to reasonably well-paid and stable employment in growth sectors of the economy.

- **English** is the core programme. A young person with good spoken English skills can access a variety of employment opportunities in Ho Chi Minh City.
- **Hospitality Training** targets the expanding tourism sector in Vietnam. We give students basic training and through an arrangement with local hotels and restaurants we extend their training with work experience placements and on-the-job internships.
- **Computer Training** A school objective is to improve pronunciation and vocabulary development and the computer lab supports this effort. Students also learn computer basics and typing. We have an emerging partnership with a Saigon software firm

which advises us and will, we hope help to place some of our advanced students in entry level jobs.

- **Sewing/Tailoring** Practical skills which prepare students to work in a shop or factory or start a home based business.
- **Hair Dressing** With cutting and styling skills students qualify for an apprenticeship in local shops. Manicure/pedicure skills can lead to a job in a salon or an opportunity to start a home based business.
- **Art** Painting and sketching is designed to open up the soul of the child and to give the boy or girl a chance to express his or her feelings on paper.
- **Photography** Class instruction and field trips aim to develop the "eye" of the photographer. Student work forms an important part of exhibitions in Ho Chi Minh City and abroad.
- **Dancing and Singing** These classes are greatly enjoyed by the children and by the audiences at our public performances each year.

The Thang Long Approach

1. Class sizes are usually around 15-25 students per class. In our classes we encourage an atmosphere of mutual respect among the students and between teachers and students. We teach social skills and use co-operative learning strategies to enable students to work successfully in groups and to become successful in interpersonal relationships.
2. The emphasis in the English and hospitality programmes is on speaking and listening. In small groups, using a variety of creative activities, teachers increase student-to-student interaction. Skills develop and confidence grows.
3. The Vietnamese teachers at Thang Long School ask for professional development to improve their skills. Foreign volunteers, some from local foreign language schools, give workshops and share materials with our staff. Teachers develop new skills and implement new strategies that improve the quality of instruction at the school.
4. Classroom learning is supported by a library/resource centre. Two full time teachers work throughout the day to assist students in activities designed to consolidate skills and enrich the learning experience of all students. The library is a comfortable place where students can sit and read a story or listen to a tape in a relaxed environment.
5. Support systems are in place at the school including a school social worker. Staff members take a personal interest in students and are available to give help and be advocates for children when required.

Progress over the year

English Programme

Employers in Vietnam actively seek people with good spoken English skills. In industries like hospitality and tourism people with good English skills, even if they don't have paper qualifications, can get good jobs and ascend the ladder to success.

This year we have extended and expanded the English training programme.

In addition to the four year programme we are now offering a fifth year to selected students. These students receive training in hospitality skills and an additional component focusing on English specific to the hospitality industry.

New textbooks are in use at every level. We chose the series *English Time* for the bright engaging format constructed around themes relating to the lives of children everywhere.

In line with our goal, quality spoken English skills, we encourage person-to-person contact. Old style bench seating has been replaced with small tables and stools allowing small group interaction. The students are active; the teacher designs and guides the activity.

Sewing/Tailoring Programme

A new structure features a three year programme of graduated skill development. The level of skills has improved such that the secondary objective of the program is being fulfilled - students are able to make their own clothes.

A consultant helps us with programming and works with us to place students in jobs. Placing students has so far been a weakness of the programme. One future strategy will be to recruit students who have an aptitude and interest in sewing as a career.

Expanded Computer Lab

A number of new computers have been added to the computer lab. A process is underway to develop basic programmes and to use the lab to support the English programme goals – improving speaking and listening skills.

Full Time Teachers

Two teachers have been appointed to be full time members of staff. Their task will be:

- To develop the library/resource centre and expand daily usage for students.
- To work with the computer teacher to ensure effective use of computers and integration with English programme goals.
- To prepare resource material for use by English teachers.
- To assist with the ongoing professional development of English teachers in cooperation with professionals in the community.
- To refine the English programme syllabus.
- To timetable courses.

Hairdressing

The hairdressing programme is flourishing. Students are trained in hairdressing and manicure skills. They practice on each other before being taken on as apprentices at local hairdressing shops in the neighbourhood.

Upon completion of training the instructor is able to place graduates with local shops. During the year four girls found work in local shops and several others reached the necessary standard but decided to continue with their other studies instead.

Photography

The photography course began five years ago. It has grown considerably in scope since then. We train students in photography for two reasons:

- To discover and harness the innate ability latent in our students
- To give students a new interest in life and to encourage them to explore their world in a more inquiring mind

Along with everything else taught at Thang Long photography classes are designed to lead students to work. For some of our students, many of whom are free and independently spirited, photography is an ideal choice. But photography also opens up the horizons of the children. It helps them to look at the world around them and perceive their own special part in it. Photography is, for many, the first opportunity they have had to think and express themselves creatively and freely.

During the year we held three expeditions, two in Saigon and one in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Exhibition was held in the prestigious Foreign Correspondents' Club.

We held an exhibition in Saigon in November 2003 which was opened by the Consul General of the United States. In July 2004 we held an exhibition at the Ho Chi Minh City Fine Art Museum which was opened by the British Consul General. Students from Thang Long put on a spirited dance performance at both exhibitions much to the pleasure of guests. Sales of pictures make a useful contribution to the running costs of photography courses.

We are pleased to acknowledge the kind support of HSBC who generously funded the photography project for a fifth year.

Problems Experienced

- On a sad note, the headmaster of Thang Long School, Mr Vinh Khue, died in mid-September 2003. Staff and students attended the funeral ceremony and grieved the passing of Mr Khue. Unfortunately the school has been without a headmaster for too long. In July 2004 we are still awaiting the appointment, by District 4 Bureau of Education, of his successor.
- A number of dwellings around the school have been demolished to permit new apartment construction. These old slum dwellings were home to many of our students who have been displaced to other districts. We now have to attract students from further afield which raises difficulties in them getting to school.
- Instability in student lives makes regular and consistent attendance difficult for many of them. To address this issue and to allow students to rejoin classes after absences we are attempting to modularise our courses. This means that in the sewing course students learn buttons and button holes, for instance, and have this ticked off on their record of achievement.

Future Plans

In 2005 we plan to hold photography exhibitions in Munich, Berlin, Hong Kong, Singapore and Paris.

Future development will focus on the expansion of some programmes, on improving processes such as recruiting students, and placement and follow up of students in work experience or internships, and on refinements in methodology of teaching English.

The selection of candidates for hairdressing and sewing needs to be improved. More appropriate candidates, ie: those with an aptitude and greater interest in working in sewing will be chosen and guided toward a career in this field.

The hospitality programme will be expanded. There are many opportunities in a thriving Saigon market for students who have completed the four year English programme supplemented by the one year hospitality training. Partners like New World Hotel and Renaissance Hotel, both part of the Marriot Hotel group have agreed to cooperate with us. They have been a presence in Thang Long School and offer employment to our graduates, extending their training to training on the job. Continuous improvement will be our goal as we work with partners in the local hospitality industry to strive for a relevant, high quality training programme.

In order to equip students with English skills required to compete for jobs, we look for continuous improvement in the methodology of teaching spoken English. To this end, workshops facilitated by the staff of ILA, a highly regarded foreign language school in HCMC, will be offered to teachers. And finally the efforts of the classroom teacher will be supported by the expanded computer program and the expanded use of the library resource centre.

Funding

The expenditure and income of Thang Long School is detailed in the table below. We are pleased to place on record the support we have received from the following donors without whose generosity the opportunities we open up to hundreds of children would not be possible. *Children for a Better World*, in Munich has supported the Thang Long Vocational School for four years. *HSBC* has sponsored photography courses for five years. Instead of sending Christmas cards *C. Illes & Co* donated to SCC. *Saigon St Andrew's Society* donated funds for furniture to enable new classroom configurations. The *Taunton Branch of the English Speaking Union* has supported the project over a period of many years.

Expenditure	US\$
English	12,844
Sewing	2,352
Computing	787
Hairdressing	1,224
Photo and Art (incl exhibitions)	12,617
Scholarships	499
Social welfare	3,136
Work training	1,931
New furniture	1,700
Electricity, water and telephone	2,550
School administration	4,641
Total	44,281

Income	
Children for a Better World (Munich)	5,000
Saigon St Andrew's Society (for furniture)	1,700
HSBC (Vietnam) for photography	5,248
C Illes (Hamburg)	5,000
Hope for Children (UK)	2,568
English Speaking Union (Taunton Branch)	500
Photography sales	5,366
From Saigon Children's Charity	18,899
Total	44,281