

Vietnam Assistance for the Handicapped (VNAH)

Vietnam Assistance for the Handicapped (VNAH) is dedicated to assisting the disabled in Vietnam on an equal access basis without regard to social or political status. They operate exclusively for humanitarian, charitable purposes. Through their support for rehabilitation clinics in Vietnam, they are enabling the disabled to get on their feet, regain their dignity and walk toward a new, productive life.

History and Activities of VNAH

In 1990 Ca Van Tran made his first visit to Vietnam after nearly 15 years in America. He was greatly disturbed by the conditions he encountered. His reaction was swift. Upon his return he was determined to finding a way to bring help to the disabled. In 1991, he established VNAH with the help of a small group of supporters.

During 1992, Disabled American Veterans participated in a visit to Can Tho Prosthetics and Rehabilitation Center. A private group donated eight prefabricated artificial limbs and VNAH purchased several more at a cost of \$800 per limb. Noted during this visit were several major considerations. Not only was there a huge disabled population waiting to be served, but also the quality of wheelchairs and prosthetic devices needed improvement. Later in the year, Disabled American Veterans made the first large donation of \$30,000, which launched a pilot project to manufacture prosthetics on-site in Vietnam with available raw materials and supplies. This enabled VNAH to reduce the cost to \$25 and custom fit each limb to the amputee.

In 1994, VNAH hosted several U.S. government delegation visits to the Thu Duc center production facility, which included representatives from the departments of Defense, State, and Veteran Affairs as well as prominent members of Congress. VNAH secured its first major grant of \$250,000 from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), among the first humanitarian assistance programs funded in Vietnam when the country opened diplomatic relations.

The first training programs were designed and conducted at the Thu Duc and Can Tho centers to improve the knowledge and skills of the technicians and production staff, which resulted in higher quality prosthetic devices and wheelchairs. VNAH organized its first air lift of donated pharmaceuticals and medical supplies, in conjunction with other relief organizations, in response to a major flood by the Mekong River.

During 1995 VNAH secured a grant from the Nippon Foundation of Japan to expand the rehabilitation and vocational training facility at the Thu Duc center. The foundation also supported water systems and a temporary patient-boarding-facility reconstruction project. Vietnam's Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) made its first \$200,000 grant to support these efforts, bringing life back to a center that had been neglected. Improved facilities enabled VNAH to expand its efforts and to develop a training component allowing the disabled to work in the manufacturing facility where they gained vocational skills. VNAH initiated outreach missions to bring services to remote surrounding areas. VNAH participated in two more airlifts of nearly \$7.5 million of donated pharmaceuticals and medical supplies.

In 1996, VNAH hosted a delegation of Vietnamese officials to visit with the U.S. President's Committee on Employment of Persons with Disabilities (PCEPD), Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) and others to exchange information on barrier-free access and employment of the disabled. VNAH expanded renovation efforts at Thu Duc center that resulted in improved space for housing and vocational training. VNAH organized and delivered donations of computer equipment, instructional tools, medical equipment and supplies, and clothing.

During 1998, VNAH secured two new major grants from the U.S. Agency for International Development that will allow their technical assistance programs to greatly expand. The first grant, the Prosthetics and Rehabilitation Project, will support their primary mission to provide wheelchairs and prosthetics to the disabled, as well as train medical and educational personnel, manufacturing technicians and other

volunteers at the three main centers at Can Tho, Thu Duc and Ho Chi Minh City. The second grant, the Barrier Free Access Project, will support their expanded mission to establish a full time technical advisor in Hanoi who will coordinate disability programs and policy on the national level. Both grants are for a 27-month period, which will provide funding through the year 2000.

In 1999, VNAH and the PCEPD jointly announced the opening of a new Office of Disability Technical Assistance in Hanoi. This new office will help lead an effort to advance the full social and economic integration of Vietnamese with disabilities into all aspects of life. It is a unique public and private partnership that brings together a U.S.-based nonprofit voluntary organization, VNAH, with PCEPD and the USAID, both public organizations. The project will focus on the design and implementation of policies and programs that benefit the disabled. The project will work closely with the MOLISA, the Ministry of Construction and other Vietnamese entities.

Disability Policy & Program Project

The Disability Policy and Program Project (DPPP) is an unprecedented cooperative effort to advance the full social and economic integration of disabled Vietnamese into all aspects of life. It is a unique private/public partnership that brings together U.S.-based VNAH, PVA, PCEPD, and USAID with the government of Vietnam, MOLISA.

Background

It is estimated that there are over seven million disabled Vietnamese

Vietnam has one of the highest, if not the highest, disability rates per capita in the world. Since 1991, the United States has provided prosthetic assistance to disabled Vietnamese through private voluntary organizations such as VNAH. This DPPP is a direct and logical follow on to these efforts.

Project Plan

An Office of Disability Technical Assistance has been established in Hanoi. A team of American disability experts will staff this office. It will be the focal point for efforts to expand and improve Vietnamese policy, programs and opportunities for people with disabilities. The technical advisers will work with relevant Vietnamese government ministries, other nonprofit organizations and private sector resources through a variety of activities:

- Promote implementation of the recently enacted Disability Ordinance.
- Help to establish a Vietnamese National Committee on Disability to coordinate all government activities for the disabled.
- Assist the Ministry of Construction to implement "barrier-free" access in the construction of all new public facilities.
- Encourage people with disabilities to take on leadership roles in the design and implementation of policies and programs.

While USAID has provided initial funding for the project, additional support is needed to meet requests for technical assistance as well as to provide training and employment opportunities for the disabled.

Disability Laws Adopted

The Standing Committee of the Vietnamese National Assembly recently adopted a new comprehensive ordinance to assist the disabled. In a landmark decision the assembly approved The Laws for Disabled People, that contain eight chapters and 35 articles concerning, among other important issues, barrier-free access, allowances, preferential policies for education and employment. MOLISA and the Committee on Social Affairs of the National Assembly are among key government agencies coordinating this effort.

Massive post-war construction and new infrastructure development offers an unprecedented opportunity to provide barrier-free access to new facilities. This law will assure Vietnamese with disabilities equal access to buildings and transportation as they assimilate into productive society. Over the past several years, VNAH has worked closely with the PCEPD and others, to share with Vietnamese officials the American experience of formulating and implementing disability policy. Several provisions of the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act are important components in the Vietnamese comprehensive ordinance. VNAH coordinated several exchange missions and a National Conference on Disability in October 1997, in Hanoi, resulting in high-level meetings, educational workshops and site visits in order to promote viable policies to address and implement disability programs in Vietnam.

Since 1995, VNAH and the president's committee have jointly facilitated exchange visits, conference and workshops for Vietnamese disability experts and government officials as they crafted a framework for disability legislation. The National Assembly adopted the Disability Ordinance in November 1998; Vietnam joins other nations to formally recognize the humanitarian and economic importance of supporting the rights and opportunities of people with disabilities.

Since 1992, VNAH has provided over 25,000 artificial limbs and wheelchairs to disabled children and adults in Vietnam. In cooperation with MOLISA and its regional prosthetics and rehabilitation centers, VNAH has donated custom-fitted prostheses and wheelchairs to victims of polio, landmines and accidents. Rehabilitation and vocational training services have helped the disabled regain their dignity and become productive members of society.

PCEPD is one of the U.S. premier disability policy organizations. As an independent U.S. government federal agency, it promotes private-public partnership between national and state organizations as well as individuals working together to improve the lives of people with disabilities by increasing their opportunities for employment.

Contact Information

Vietnam Assistance for the Handicapped (VNAH)
P.O. Box 6554
McLean, Virginia, 22106
USA
Phone: (703) 847-9582
Fax: (703) 448-8207
Email: vnah1@aol.com
Website: <http://www.vnah.com>