

Growing Up in Different Ways

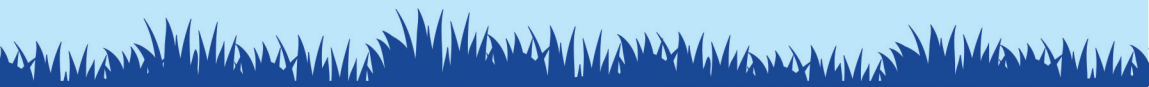


ROOM TO READ'S

GIRLS' EDUCATION PROGRAM



Room to Read®

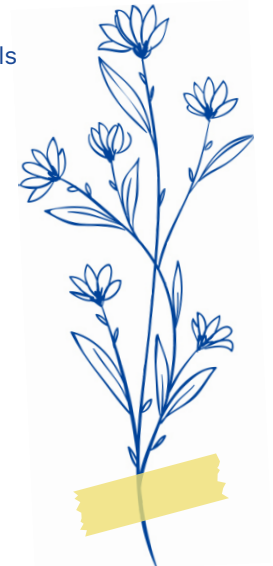


GROWING UP IN DIFFERENT WAYS



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Founded in 2000 on the belief that World Change Starts with Educated Children®, Room to Read's innovative model focuses on deep, systemic transformation within schools in low-income communities during two time periods that are most critical in a child's schooling: early primary school for literacy acquisition and secondary school for girls' education. We work in collaboration with local communities, partner organizations, and governments to develop literacy skills and a habit of reading among primary school children and ensure girls can complete secondary school with the skills necessary to negotiate key life decisions. Room to Read has benefited 18 million children across more than 30,000 communities in 16 countries.



Thế Giới Thay Đổi Khi Trẻ Em Được Đến Trường.

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Room to Read's GIRL'S EDUCATION *Program* (GEP)

The Girls' Education Program (GEP) is an effort to support girls to stay in school longer, progress towards completion of secondary school, and acquire life skills they need to make informed choices about their lives and realize their potential. The program consists of four main components: (i) Life Skills Education, (ii) Mentoring, (iii) Family, School and Community Engagement, and (iv) Material Support. All students benefit from the program from Grade 6 through Grade 12.



Why has this Alumni book come to life?

This booklet is Room to Read's Alumnae initiative. Our alumnae are girls who participated in the GEP and graduated from upper secondary school. This book is a collection of stories written by alumnae as a channel to share their experiences, inspire future generations of girls, and is also a truly meaningful picture of the values that GEP has brought to each girl throughout seven years of support.

Foreword

Is it hard to achieve extraordinary deeds in your ordinary daily life?

The book in your hand comprises short stories of life experiences on the journey of many of our alumnae from early to late adolescence. They have been through moments of self-doubt, learning difficulties, relationship challenges, insecurity, academic setbacks and struggle to juggle multiple jobs or facing the risk of dropping out of school.

But they conquered it all! They made it! They completed brilliant journey of high school with a lot of efforts and determination. Some of them already have, and some of them are working to overcome barriers to become courageous young ladies, with good communication skills and capacity to step out into the real world.

The intention behind sharing these stories is, on one hand, to realize that the difficulties & challenges these alumnae have been facing are not much different from the worries and challenges that our current students have been and will experience in life; and on the other hand to acknowledge our alumnae's incredible resilience and inner strength to achieve their dream. Extraordinary things began from the moment they dared to dream, persevere, and commit.



Đoàn Tâm Đan

GEP Senior Program Manager

Dear girls, you all are able and competent:

The life skills you have learnt from school and life will become valuable assets for you all throughout your life. Believe in yourself and know that you have companions besides you, to help you all stay strong. Discover your passion, live with purpose, learn to push past your limits, build strength and never give up. Your perseverance will help you to unlock the future and shower you with opportunities. You are capable to pursue it.

We've included many stories about overcoming adversity, building confidence, and communicating effectively in this booklet. We hope that you will find inspiration and motivation in these pages. Strive for a meaningful and intentional life with positive energy that can inspire others.

Overview of GIRL'S EDUCATION Program (GEP)

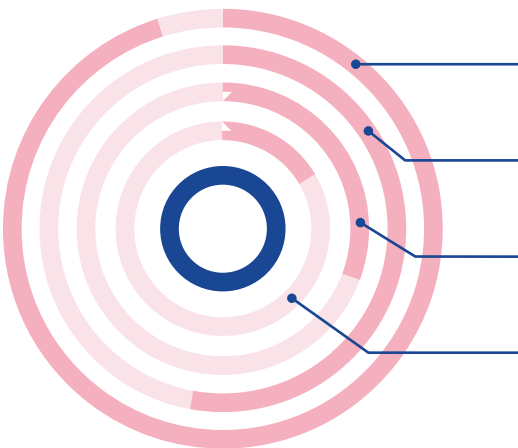
Worldwide

Room to Read operates in **16 countries**. **8 countries** implement Girls' Education Program, with more than **95.000 girls**.

Vietnam

6.140 girls benefited from the Girls' Education Program (Up to 1/2020)

Alumnae data (by 12/2019)



1.356

Alumnae completed GEP

1.317 97%

Alumnae graduated from high school

772 57%

Alumnae proceed to tertiary education

434 32%

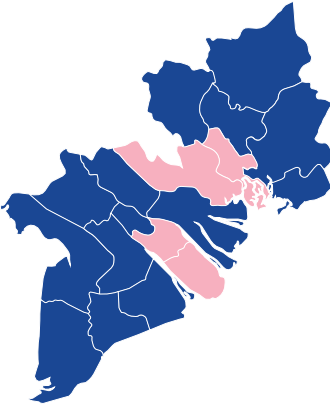
Alumnae go to work after graduation

150 11%

Others (stay at home, married, lost contact...)

Areas of operation:

Ho Chi Minh City, Long An Province, Vĩnh Long Province, Trà Vinh Province.



Activities:



Life Skills Education



Mentoring

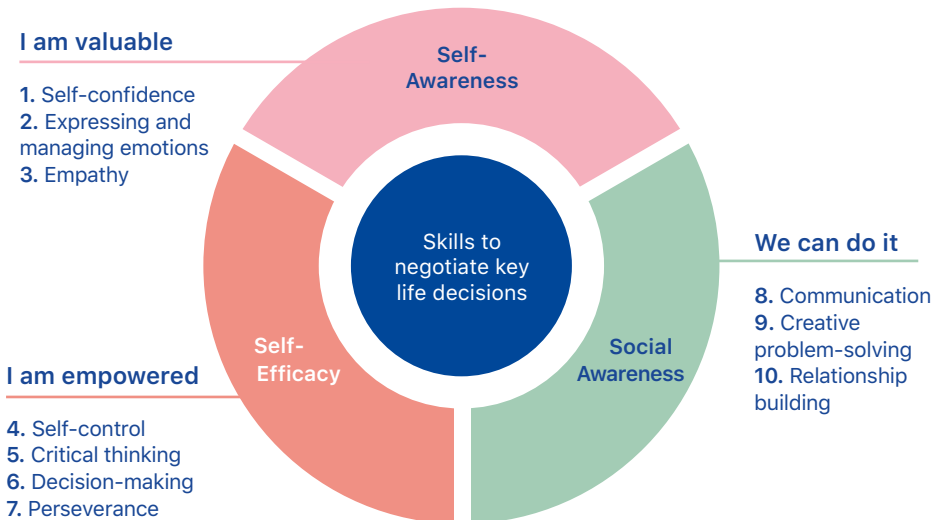


Family, School, and Community Engagement



Material Support

In this program, the girls learn 10 life skills divided into 3 sub-groups:





Exposure visit at an organic farm, Tra On



Life Skills Class, Long An

GIRL'S EDUCATION program

Activities



Life Skills Class, Trà Cú



GEP Graduation Day with the participation of former Miss Universe Vietnam H'Hen Nie in 2019, Trà Ôn



Summer camp 2019, Trà Cú



Facilitated discussion, Long An

I AM
VALUABLE

i am confident



Understanding values of oneself is one of the essentials for success in school and life. In Room to Read's Girls' Education Program, girls learn self-awareness skills such as self-confidence, managing emotions and empathy. How have these lessons helped them in real life? Let's find out.

UNDERSTAND AND LOVE YOUR BODY

For Loan, some of the most useful information when participating in the program was learning about puberty and the physical, psychological, and emotional changes in the life skill classes.

No one, not even her own mother, had informed Loan about these changes, mostly because they are somewhat sensitive and awkward to talk about. It was only after the lesson that Loan knew how to take care of herself properly and practice self-love. Knowing the true meaning of self-respect has allowed her to always cherish and has the courage to pursue her dreams.

Despite the family's financial circumstances and their inability to cover university tuition, Loan actively sought for scholarships from different sources, especially the ones which she believed that she would qualify for. Within the first semester, Loan received a scholarship of VND 1,500,000

(USD \$65) from Tuổi Trẻ News. After that, the local authorities also acknowledged Loan's efforts and supported the family with additional VND 1,500,000 (USD \$65)

Today, Loan is now a student of Trà Vinh University, majoring in Office Administration. Looking back on her journey and her accomplishments, Loan says that it's her hard work and dedication that got her where she is now. "I am ready to step into the future to set an example for my younger sister to strive for her dreams!" she says.

*According to Kiền
Loan's narrative*



Ngô Thị Kiều Loan

Joined GEP in 2010
(Long Hiệp secondary school)
Current: Student of Trà Vinh University

I CAN DO IT!



Nguyễn Thị Hoài Băng

*Joined GEP in 2011
(Vĩnh Xuân secondary school)
Current: Student of Cần Thơ University*

Recently, I signed up to compete in a student fashion show, organized by the Department of Foreign Languages in our university. I was not very confident in front of a crowd, and I had very little experience in catwalk, let alone performing on a big stage, in front of the whole school.

All of those inner voices telling me “I

can’t do it” was the major struggle when I considered whether or not to fill out the registration form. I also did not have a lot of money to rent beautiful costumes or pay for makeup service like others. In the end, after much contemplating, I still decided to apply, just because I think it would be a pity if we don’t try to push our limits when we’re still young!

Since I already signed up, I had no choice but to give my best, overcoming other obstacles, think

I'd like to share a simple story, but for me it was such a pride, a lesson for myself about "Believing in yourself"

out-of-the-box and being creative: Instead of renting outfits, I went back to my hometown to borrow white áo dài dress (Vietnamese uniform for girls at secondary school) which was a gift from my high school literature teacher. Rather than going to a costly makeup salon, I joined in a Facebook group of makeup trainees who need models to practice on and had my makeup done beautifully on the contest night for only USD \$3 for cosmetic expense.

My classmate kindly helped me practice catwalk and in a short while I had greatly improved. With all the preparation, I was still very nervous

before stepping on the stage. What I had for this contest was only a simple dress and a strong personality, while there were many prettier girls who were also more well-dressed, but I encouraged myself by thinking "I am beautiful!". I had to be confident because confidence is what makes a girl attractive. As a result, I exceeded my existing limit and overcame my anxiety to perform on the stage. Although I was not the winner, it was such a memorable moment of success for me. I truly realized that we can achieve anything if we dare to do whatever we put our mind to.

BELIEVE IN YOUR CHOICE

*A girl studying veterinary?
That's totally fine!*



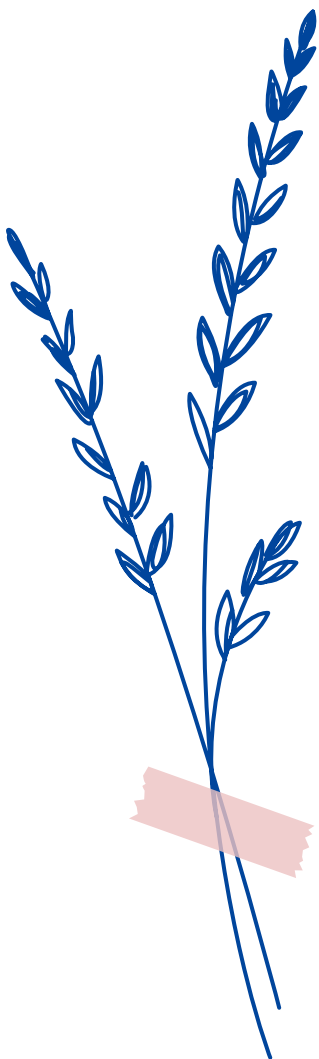
Trần Thị Bích Phương

Joined GEP in 2010 (Hàm Giang secondary school)
Current: Student of Trà Vinh University

I am Trần Thị Bích Phương, currently in my 3rd year of Veterinary at Trà Vinh University. I still remember the day I received the admission letter from the university. My entire family was elated and proud of me. When I told my father about the tuition fee of USD \$260 to complete the admission process, he just smiled and said nothing. I was aware that my family was in a very difficult situation at the time - with my parents being sick, which concerned me a lot. I wondered if I should quit school in order to work and help my parents. Then again I was thinking to myself: a job would surely bring immediate income, but my future would be uncertain if I could not earn any degree. Would I want to be a manual worker for my whole life, or should I pursue higher education that would promise a stable job and a less stressful future?

There were nights when I did not sleep at all because I couldn't stop thinking about the options and was under terrible stress. It wasn't until I did more research into the policy for underserved ethnic students in extremely difficult communes like mine that I found out the tuition fee could be reduced by 70%. My feeling was mixed: a combination of excitement and worries, which are so hard to put into words.

Upon commencement, there were people laughing and gossiping about me when they learnt that I chose veterinary medicine. I was so sad at the time and kept thinking about why they would do that. Not sure whom to talk to, I often wrote about those sad feelings in my diary, and would feel much better afterwards. Thereafter, whenever someone said anything to me, I see it as a source of motivation and desire to prove to them that I have made the right decision. Whenever someone asks about my profession, I confidently talk about it, thanks to the life skills lessons I have learnt throughout secondary school. I am a vivid proof that girls can study veterinary and earn a rewarding job.



THE SECOND CHOICE

Lê Thị Huỳnh Như

*Joined GEP in 2010
(Hàm Giang secondary school)
Current: Student of the University of Social
Sciences and Humanity in Ho Chi Minh City.*

2016 marked a milestone in my life when I took my university entrance exam. At that time, I had wished to get a degree in Police Studies, but that dream did not come true when I learnt that I had failed the entrance exam. For a long time, I felt like a failure and loser.

After that, my mother suggested I take the exam again, and I agreed. I moved to Cần Thơ City with my aunt to prepare for the exam as well as to find a part-time waitress job at a restaurant to gain more experience and help my family.

The day finally came, I applied for Police Studies with confidence after months of preparation, but I could not make it either. Unsure of how to deal with my disappointment, I felt inadequate and pessimistic and sometimes I just wanted to give it all up on my academic trajectory. I was tormented by my own thoughts – “I have given my best, why am I still not succeeding?”

After pulling myself together, I thought that maybe I am just not destined for this job. Besides, I could not further disappoint my parents, teachers, and Room to Read who have supported and encouraged me throughout my academic years. I still had my second choice at University of Social Sciences and Humanities. At last, I received an offer of admission from the Department of Cultural Studies.

During my time at university, I have had a valuable and exciting journey of self-discovery and experiencing an independent life away from home. After more than two years of study, I have achieved the goals I have set, which were participating in various extracurricular activities, gaining experience for myself, and achieving a fair academic result. The challenges I have been through have made me stronger and more responsible for my decisions in life.

MULTIPLE PATHS TO COLLEGE



Lê Thị Hồng Luyên

*Joined GEP in 2011 (Vinh Xuân secondary school)
Current: Student from the College of Economy and
Technology of Cần Thơ.*

My first and greatest dilemma so far was when I was at a crossroads of choosing between going to school or work. When I learned about my university offers, I was simultaneously overjoyed and anxious. Many people told me: "What's the point in studying when you would end up working in a factory, just like your sister, your aunt?" Their words got to me. I was so worried and discouraged that I couldn't decide. If I decided to go to school in a big city, I was not sure if my family could afford the expenses. If I got part-time jobs, I was afraid of not being able to handle extra shifts for it would affect my studies. After a whole month juggling multiple options, I decided to go to college in Cần Thơ City, which was affordable, convenient, and I could be close to my parents. Regardless of what people had to say, I gave my all and followed my intuition. I am so grateful to be able to go to school. My efforts have finally paid off with an Honor Roll scholarship, which I never thought I would receive. The decision to pursue higher education came from attending Room to Read's career orientation program. It helped me to see the bigger picture and clearly identify my best suited path. I am much more mature and confident now, compared to when I was in Grade 6. I have a message for our future girls:

"Be hard-working. Participate in every Room to Read's activity and class, as they really help to direct your future journey."

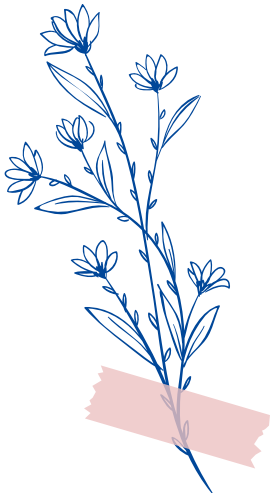
BE A BLOSSOMING FLOWER




IN YOUR OWN WAY

Kim Danh Tha

*Joined GEP in 2010
(Hàm Giang secondary school)
Current: Working in Yazaki Corporation*





Everybody has a dream. I also dreamt of dressing up in an áo dài dress (Vietnamese uniform for girls at secondary school) every morning, going to school to teach children. My twin brother and I both planned to go to the university. We often confided to each other about our personal dreams. However, for some reasons I began to give up on that dream, and was filled all over with anxiety and disappointment instead.

After high school graduation, I hesitated a lot before deciding to leave for Sài Gòn to make ends meet. Working as a laborer far away from home was exhausting. I went a whole month without any restful nights. After all that ordeal, I returned home with guidance and assistance from a teacher whom I am very grateful for. We did everything we could to save up for my school expenses so I could pursue my dream. The fund could only keep me in school for one month before I was out of savings and had to sell a ring to cover the fees for the upcoming semester, as my family could not pay for it. One day, I came home to my father's tears which I have never seen before, and he said: "Tha... Can you quit school? Our family cannot afford to provide for both of you at the same time". I was not surprised. I could only say, "Yes papa". A "yes" that was killing me inside. Ever since, my dream of becoming a teacher was crushed. I was seemingly depressed and completely disconnected from everything around me. Day after day, disappointment and depression had taken over me, even made me think about death sometimes. However, after rain comes sun. I still remember this one quote: "The difference between school and life? Schools teach you lessons and then give you a test. Life gives you test from which you draw lessons." After everything, I learnt to be more open and optimistic. We all have dreams and desires to go to school, but our ultimate goal in life is to be happy, isn't it? And it is up to us to have our own definition of happiness.

I am currently working at a Japanese firm. Work is hard but I always try harder. I have found happiness in my work, and with a stable income I can somewhat provide support to my family, and even help my twin brother to go to school. Though my dream did not come true, remaining an optimistic and positive view in life is what I have learnt from the program at Room to Read. Women are like beautiful flowers, and flowers will bloom most beautifully in sunshine. Likewise, women are most beautiful when they have the will and courage to lead a life of fulfillment.

LIFE SKILLS HELP BOOST MY CONFIDENCE.

Since primary school, my teachers commented that I was conscientious, studious and shy. Due to my timidity, I usually could not speak up and stand up for myself and was even bullied several times.



*Huỳnh Thị
Phuong Khương*

*Joined GEP in 2007 (Phước Lại lower secondary school - Cần Giuộc upper secondary school)
Current: Engineer at Bình Điền II Fertilizer Joint Stock Company.*

Life went on until I reached middle school and joined Room to Read program. In addition to financial support, the program also organized life skills classes. As a Grade 7 student, I was not really familiar with “life skills” but I simply thought “I’ll just join and find out”.

During the first few lessons, I was still quite passive, but things changed gradually when I recognized the enthusiasm and smiles on the faces of our social mobilizers, and I was no longer shy. The program created an environment that allowed us to unleash our creativity, express ourselves, push past our limits and come out of our shells.

I started to take initiative in teamwork and volunteer for presentations. I felt more confident and comfortable as though I just removed a giant armor I was wearing for years. Just like that, I began to realize I am actually not shy at all and I can communicate with confidence. The program surely brought out the best in me: a fearless and energetic girl who loves to bring joy to others.

The program has also given me a strong foundation, which has prepared and enhanced my university experience. I did not feel anxious or nervous about presenting in a large lecture hall or defending my thesis in front of the faculty committee. Even when graduating with no experience, I was not worried. Despite having no experience, I still have a fortune, which is my self-belief.

My confidence helped me win over the employer and landed my dream job. I became an active and dedicated engineer. I feel utterly blessed to be where I am today and sincerely hope that many other girls will find themselves and be themselves.

Seize the moment because some opportunities do not come twice. Explore your potential and strengths. And who knows, you may actually be a gem among stones, which will shine if you are truly yourself.

CONFIDENCE IN THE BIGGER WORLD

Võ Thị Thùy Dung

*Joined GEP in 2003 (Đỗ Văn Dậy lower secondary school – Lý Thường Kiệt upper secondary school)
Current: Sales manager at Discoverland real estate company. Owner of Happyshop convenience store in District 9*



(Excerpts from a speech in English by alumna Võ Thị Thùy Dung (Dzung) at Room to Read 2018 Gala in Switzerland)

“My name is Võ Thị Thùy Dzung and I’m a graduate of Room to Read’s Girls’ Education Program. I was born and raised in the suburb area of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam in a family of five. I graduated from Sài Gòn University, where I majored in Executive Secretary Studies. Today, I am a sales manager of a real estate company in Ho Chi Minh City. I’m very proud of where I am, but it was not easy to get here.



When I was in Grade 7, I first had the opportunity to enroll in Girls' Education Program with Room to Read. For me, it was such a huge joy because it gave me an opportunity to continue going to school. At that time, education expenses for me and my two brothers have become overwhelming for my father who supported us as a motorcycle taxi driver. It became clear to me that I may have to leave school, because my family traditionally believes that boys should be more prioritized in education than girls. So, if someone needed to drop out, it would be me. But I refused to accept that. I decided to focus all of my efforts on school. So, my parents would see I could accomplish great things if I continued my studies. I'm proud to say that I ranked first in class in grade 6 and 7. From there, Room to Read's support greatly expanded my opportunities.

Room to Read not only support me financially with tuition fees, uniforms, books and stationery, but also taught me life skills that have been so meaningful in my life. Back then, I never thought I'd stand in front of a big audience like this with confidence. For me, it has been a long road of improving myself. Before, I was very shy. I always stood in the corner of the room because I didn't believe in myself. Thanks to Room to Read's life skills lessons, I had opportunities to participate and present during activities. I learned from other girls and discovered it's good to speak up, to stand for what you believe, and to make good decisions in your life - decisions you can look back and be proud of.

I am very inspired by Meghan Markle. She said: 'Girls with dreams become Women with vision.'

I wish to tell all girls to believe in themselves, know their value and achieve what they deserve."

I AM
EMPOWERED

*I am
persistent*



*to achieve
my goals*

Having dream and striving for their dream is what has helped these girls overcome all kinds of obstacles. In Room to Read's Girls' Education Program, girls learn Self-efficacy skills to prevent problems, to face challenges, to build resilience and perseverance. They keep in mind these lessons and have been able to achieve their goals in their own way.

TO THOSE WINGS SOARING AGAINST THE WIND

I would like to refer to the Room to Read staff as “the sowers”. Beyond the financial aids are emotional supports and encouragement that I am so grateful for. Those are the seeds of hope and dreams that foster in the mind of kids like me.

1. Sowers who scatterseeds

I was born and raised in Long Hậu, Cần Giuộc, a district of Long An Province. My parents are farmers. Spending all day at the field probably prompted them to expect a different path for their children and education is one of the doors to that path. Every day, I woke up at 5am to walk through the dike that stretches to the top of the main road, then take the bicycle from there to finish my commute to the school. Those years made me realize that my road to pursue knowledge is very arduous. In those days, children like myself only had two options: Going to school or staying at home to help the family. My choice was to go to school. My family at the time was not very well off either, but since my academic achievements were relatively well, I was usually granted scholarships from the school to further my studies. My house is situated in a very remote area thus there was no electricity around the year of 2005

to 2006. My father was concerned about the brightness of the oil lamp so he came up with a way to make a small lightbulb connected with a battery, which offered more light for my study time. He also built a wooden desk with bookshelves for me to study. My parents encouraged me to study and hoped that I would become a teacher. I was still too young to understand why I had to study so hard and the reason behind my parents’ desire. But I did know one thing: I had to study. Going to school is a way for me to get closer to my aspirations.

During Grade 6, I became a member of the Girls’ Education Program. Annually, I would receive new textbooks and that took a burden off my parents’ shoulders. The life skills classes have made me more confident and calm when facing problems.

2. Apple tree in bloom

In Grade 12, I decided to take the entrance exam of the C category (*testing in Literature, History and Geography, for Social Sciences major – Translator’s note*) to apply for the faculty of Literature and Linguistics at the Ho Chi Minh City University of Pedagogy. Back then, teachers usually advised their students to avoid applying for

Pedagogy because “it is not rewarding”, but I loved literature and I admired my teachers who inspired me to be more courageous to pursue my passion.

Around the same time, a disaster struck my family. My father had a stroke and was hospitalized for months. At that time, my high school graduation exam was only one month away, and my application for the university entrance exam was still incomplete. My family life was completely disrupted. Upon receiving this news, many teachers at my school and in Room to Read program were looking out for me, encouraging me to stay strong. The day I received my university entrance exam results, I burst into tears of joy. I realized that I could achieve anything if I really work hard. In August 2013, I moved to Ho Chi Minh city for university and the Room to Read staff had been with me throughout four challenging years. During my first year at university, I was really confused. Most students in this faculty have taken advanced literature classes before, while I had nothing but the love for literature and being an avid reader. I did not have any background in literary criticism nor literary science. I could only observe and learn from people around me and do research on my own. I spent most of my scholarship to buy books. As time passed, I eventually finished my thesis defense, graduated and became a teacher.

After all, I deeply get the poem “Our Lane” by poet Lưu Quang Vũ:

“If this life were only ugly tales
Why would the apple tree bloom
How could the water in the gutter be
so clear?”

The apple tree still blooms because there are still sowers in this life. The sowers for hope and dreams.



Lê Thị Phương Tâm

Joined GEP in 2006 (Long Hậu lower secondary school –Cần Giuộc upper secondary school)

Current: Teacher at Albert Einstein school

3. Only those who dare may fly

Ernest Hemingway once said: “A man can be destroyed but not defeated”. This life consists of countless difficulties, challenges, and unfavorable circumstances that can happen to anyone. Perhaps your starting point is not as advantaged as many others, perhaps you have yet to discover any outstanding talent of yours, and there may be numerous areas that need improvement. However, as long as you are aware that you need to change in order to excel, as long as you remember to always try your best, you can always make progress. There will be times when you are just like a bird against the wind, but do not let this stop you from soaring. You have potential and you are passionate, but you also need courage. “Only those who dare may fly” (Luis SéPulveda)

THE WILL TO OVERCOME ADVERSITY

Nguyễn Thị Thanh Nhi

Joined GEP in 2009 (Phước Lại lower secondary school – Cần Giuộc upper secondary school)

Current: Student at Ho Chi Minh City Medicine and Pharmacy University



I am Nguyễn Thị Thanh Nhi, currently in my fourth year at Ho Chi Minh City Medicine and Pharmacy University. During my high school years, a major upheaval happened to our family. I was diagnosed with nephrotic syndrome at the end of Grade 11 and got long-term treatment and monthly check-ups at Chợ Rẫy Hospital. My parents had to get a big loan for about USD \$2,000 to pay for the treatments.

At that time, I was feeling sad, scared and self-pity. Just around the time when I feel most hopeless, Room to Read staff from Girls' Education Program called to check in on me and encouraged me a lot. They looked after me with care, kindness, and love. They have not only given me emotional support, but also helped me with medical treatment cost. That was a great motivation which has given me the drive to pursue my education. Despite battling with nephrotic syndrome which caused cracked skin, swollen face, fatigue, and stomachache due to medication

side effects, I still pulled through to study. Throughout Grade 12, I managed to win awards for top students, and strived to become the best student among other Grade 12 students in my school. It was the life skills lessons and the attention from Room to Read staff have shaped me into an enthusiastic, hard-working, and strong-willed individual.

When it was time to leave the hometown for university, I did not feel worried at all, for the skills learnt at Room to Read made me feel a lot more confident. I was quick to get along with the new learning environment and new friends from many parts of the country in my university.

I am sincerely grateful for Room to Read's Girls' Education Program, where I have learnt crucial life skills, perseverance, and independence, where teachers have us believe in the future, where our girl students have risen above storms and realize that:

"Our journey is not hardened by high mountains or deep rivers, but by our shortage of will" (Nguyễn Bá Học, Vietnamese author)

NEVER TOO LATE TO PURSUE YOUR DREAMS

*Huỳnh Trương
Thị Mỹ Lệ*

*Joined GEP in 2005 (Nguyễn
Hồng Đào lower secondary
school – Nguyễn Văn Cừ
upper secondary School)
Current: Nurse at 175
Hospital*



Mỹ Lệ grew up on the outskirts of Ho Chi Minh City, where immense rains caused flash floods, which flooded their home. Mỹ Lệ and her sister would huddle together in their bed, waiting for their mom and dad to come home from work.

Lệ soon realized the difficulty of pursuing her education. Her parents are manual laborers and collect firewood as a source of income. The family is recognized as a poor household in the district, and the three sisters constantly face the risk of dropping out of school. Fortunately, when Lệ was in Grade 3, Room to Read's Girls' Education selected her and fully supported her until Grade 12. Since then, Lệ has remained to be an excellent student, then got admitted into the Accounting and Finance department of Ho Chi Minh City University of Food Industry.

However, things do not always follow a straight line. Lê developed a burning passion for medicine after an unfortunate incident. "When I was in Grade 9, I was sick and admitted into the hospital. I was well taken care of by the doctors. That started my dream of pursuing Medicine. At my first university entrance examination, I failed medical school and had to go with my second preference. I did well with Finance and Accounting but after many nights considering, I still prefer to pursue medicine, so I decided to retake the university exam the following year." Lê studied hard, determined to retake the exam, and got admitted into the Nursing Department of Phạm Ngọc Thạch University of Medicine.

Lê was an enthusiast and a hard-working student. She actively participated in social work clubs at school, visiting and offering diagnosis and treatment, building schools, and teaching children in remote areas all over the country. Besides, Lê is also an active member of Room to Read's alumnae group, who often participates in events and social gatherings, as well as assists Room to Read in new girls' survey. "My life has completely changed for the better with what I have received from Room to Read. I hope that through various community support and social work services, I can offer support to those in much more difficult circumstances than I once was," Lê shared.

In 2018, Lê graduated with a Bachelor of Nursing and is now working at the Intensive Care Unit in the Military Hospital 175. Besides, she is still volunteering tirelessly in community service clubs that connect and bring hundreds of doctors to visit and support poor patients in 63 provinces across the country annually. "When I first started, there was so much pressure, not to mention patient's severity that made me sleepless. However, I already get used to it and feel so proud that I can care for and save people's lives, and not give up on my dream," Lê said with sparkling eyes.

(According to Mỹ Lê)

MY MOTHER'S PRIDE

As time swiftly flying by, it seems like yesterday when I was still in school, but now I am working and have grown so much.

Twelve years of education is twelve years of burden on my mother's shoulders, and Mom is all I've got for family. She had to handle everything, including the debt of my father who left us when I was just 15 months old. She had to work multiple jobs, from catching snail to picking crab until her hands were swollen. When we moved to Cần Giở town, we had nothing. Some kind people offered us a piece of land to build a house, but nothing could be built since we had no money and had to stay at grandparents' house. Every day, even at 1 AM or 2 AM early morning, my mother went out to the forest and catch crabs to sell in the morning, then help select crabs to earn some more and save every penny to provide for me.

I did not have a good start in life and had to work harder than others, but I was not alone. My Mom always

encourage and support me. I have Room to Read who has always been by my side throughout my school years. Room to Read gave me my first ever textbooks and notebooks. I have always cherished every single page and have stored them carefully. I have still kept that first grade Vietnamese textbook for more than a decade already.

I remember while other children would enjoy the summer days, I would get up at 5:30 AM, riding my bike to the church for tutoring lessons because it was free. Every year, I would earn a place among excellent students of the school. Rain or shine, I would never miss any class, because going to school is an opportunity for me to learn, to reflect on myself, and be my Mom's pride and joy. Moreover, I also want to make efforts and show Room to Read staff that I am trying my best.



*Thái Thị
Cẩm Thu*

*Joined GEP in 2003 (Tam
Thôn Hiệp lower secondary
school – An Nghĩa upper
secondary school)
Current: Nurse at Tu Du
Hospital*

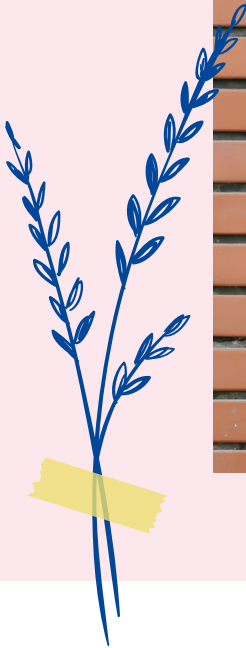
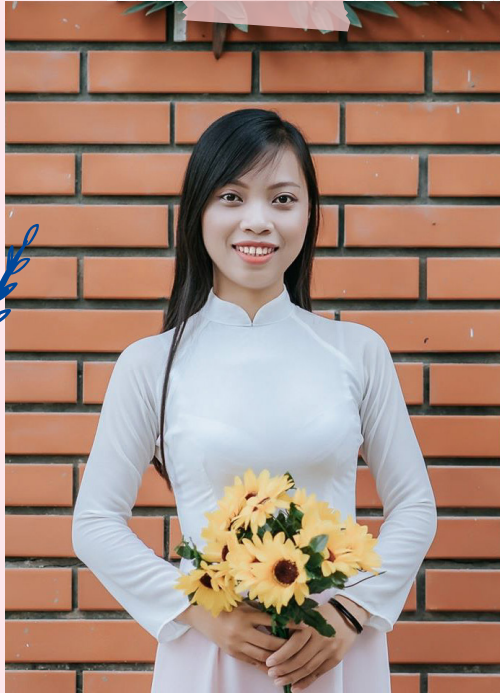
The ladies at Room to Read not only helped me financially, but also gave me knowledge, life skills and emotional support. Today, when I stand in front of people to give a speech, confidently organize a volunteer program, stand up for myself in any situation - I am grateful that Room to Read has given me the skills that I have been cultivating since I was in school.

It was also the program's career orientation that has helped me choose my favorite major: Becoming a midwife, so that I can support

more women. With that in mind, I got accepted into the prestigious Ho Chi Minh City Medicine and Pharmacy University after finishing high school.

When I was at university, Room to Read staff still often visit and offer their support. I have now graduated and been working at a good hospital where I am learning to become a good medical staff to help others. I hope that one day I could team up with Room to Read to contribute in bringing lots of joy and happiness to children.

THE SECOND MOTHER



Đào Ngọc Phụng

Joined GEP in 2007 (Tân Thành lower secondary school – Thủ Khoa Thửa upper secondary school)

Current: Employee at Giặt Ủi Xanh company

"Sometimes you see your own country more sharply from a distance. That's how I felt as I dropped in on a shack in this remote area of the Mekong Delta in Vietnam. The head of the impoverished household during the week is a malnourished 14-year-old girl, Đào Ngọc Phụng. She's tiny, standing just 4 feet 11 inches and weighing 97 pounds.

Yet if Phung is achingly fragile, she's also breathtakingly strong

(...) when you learn that Phung is so obsessed with schoolwork that she sets her alarm for 3 AM each day. She rises quietly so as not to wake her younger brother and sister, who both share her bed, and she then cooks rice for breakfast while reviewing her books. The children's mother died of cancer a year ago, leaving the family with USD \$1,500 in debts. Their father, a carpenter named Đào Văn Hiệp, loves his children and is desperate for them to get an education, but he has taken city jobs so that he can pay down the debt. Therefore, during the week, Phụng is like a second mother who happens to be in the ninth grade. Phụng wakes her brother and sister, and then after breakfast they all trundle off to school. For Phụng, that means a 90-minute bicycle ride each way. She arrives at school 20 minutes early to be sure she's not late. After school, the three children go fishing to get something to eat for dinner. Phụng reserves unpleasant chores, like cleaning the toilet, for herself, but

she does not hesitate to discipline her younger brother, Tiến, 9, or sister, Hường, 12. When Tiến disobeyed her by hanging out with some bad boys, she thrashed him with a stick. Most of the time, though, she's gentle, especially when Tiến misses his mother. "I try to comfort him," she says, 'but then all three of us end up crying'"

"Phụng pleads with her father to pay for extra tutoring in math and English. He explains softly that the cost — USD \$40 a year — is unaffordable."

"Every day, she helps her little brother and sister with their homework first and then completes her own. Sometimes she doesn't collapse into bed until 11 PM, only to rouse herself four hours later. On Sundays, Phụng sleeps in. As she explained: 'I don't get up till 5 AM.'"

Excerpts from "Girls just want to go to school" article by journalist Nicholas Kristof on New York Times in 2011 about Room to Read alumna Đào Ngọc Phụng

The article has deeply touched international readers because of the strong will and perseverance of a little girl from a poor rural town in Vietnam. With a lot of efforts throughout an arduous journey, Phụng managed to gain a bachelor degree from the University of Labor and Social Affairs. From being a contriving sister in the family, Phụng is now thriving to achieve another role of her dream – becoming an expert and manager in Human Resource Management.

MAKING THROUGH IT ALL WITH A SMILE



Ngô Ngọc Đình

*Joined GEP in 2011 (Hòa Bình
secondary school)*

*Current: Student of Sài Gòn
Tourism Vocational College*



After graduating from high school, I did not continue to study but chose to work because my family could not afford the tuition fee. Although it was sad, I was determined not to be disheartened. I applied for a waitress position at a restaurant in Phú Nhuận district.

Everything was very difficult at the beginning as I was not used to the nature of this work: I have to work every day from 9 AM till late, even 1 AM to 2 AM sometimes. My health worsened and I was so discouraged. Every now and then I thought of finding another job but then I remember that this is the kind of job that would get me to my dream career: I want to be a hotel or restaurant manager, therefore I need to gain practical customer service experience. To pursue that passion, every morning I would wake up with a smile on my face, determination and positive thoughts for my work. Thanks to that practice, I have gained some success, become more independent. I can take care of my family and get myself to school again.

Looking back on the journey that I have been through since Grade 6, I think I have grown up and become more mature. In the past, I just looked out for myself, asked my parents for money, but now I am not only self-sufficient but also can help my parents.

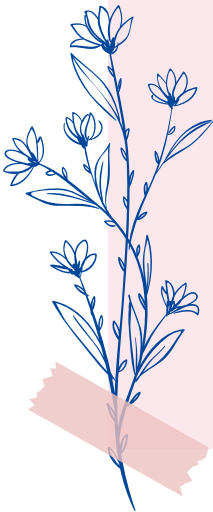
I hope the future generation of girls will know how to overcome life's challenges and strive through your chosen path. Regardless of how harsh life gets, always remember that:

"Education is the only way to progress and Willpower is a key to realize your dreams."



Phạm Thùy Quyên

*Joined GEP in 2011
(Vĩnh Xuân secondary school)
Current: Employee at Tỷ Xuân company
(Vĩnh Long footwear Co., Ltd)*



PHILOSOPHY OF THE BED BUGS

This past year has been a challenging time for me. The turning point of my career was when I was promoted from a garment factory worker to a factory office assistant. As a newcomer, it was likely that people were skeptical and distrust me. The pressure was great when I had to report to line managers and also to be directly responsible for the workers' productivity.

Since I was new to the position, I obviously had to work harder to prove my competence. Sometimes I would skip my lunch to work during break. In some cases, I would not even go to the bathroom just to save some time for work. Recently I read this book about "The Bed Bugs' Philosophy"* - Long ago in South Korea, people used to place bowls

of water under bed legs to prevent bed bugs from crawling into bed, which lead the bugs to find a new solution: They crawl into bed by tracing the ceiling - a longer route but still reaching their aim. They did not give up on their goal but found a different approach to progress.

Learning from that philosophy, I am trying hard to overcome all obstacles and work on my dream. I'm kindling the fires. I'm telling myself to be confident and persistently work on it. I'm embracing challenges and working my way through obstacles push through my limits.

() An excerpt from "Trials may not fail" book by Chung Ju Yung, a South Korean entrepreneur*

EDUCATION AND LIFE SKILLS CHANGE MY LIFE



Huỳnh Thị Nữ Nhi

Joined GEP in 2008 (Phước Lại lower secondary school – Ngô Thời Nhiệm upper secondary school)

Current: Graduate of HUTECH University

I was born in Long An Province, the land of rich alluvial soil filled with love, where the economy is still underdeveloped, and in a family with financial constraints where happiness is incomplete. Since birth, I only have my father beside me, as my mother left us. Throughout Grade 4, my family was so impecunious that we could not even afford to eat plain white rice, and my little brother had to live with my grandmother. Despite growing up in poverty without a mother figure, I never wanted to stop going to school. Back in those days, I actually had no idea about how attending school would benefit me, but what I knew for sure is that the more difficult it gets, the more I aspired to go to school. It was almost an instinctive response. By Grade 5, our family also struggled with endless debts. Every morning, I would wake up and bike around to sell lottery tickets to make ends meet, and to help pay my family's debts. With a pile of lottery tickets in my hand, I had to sell them all fast because I had class at noon. I was always scared of not being able to go to school so every day I had to find ways to balance between my work of selling lottery tickets and studying.

My childhood memories may not be sharing meals with family, getting picked up from school, words of encouragement from loved ones, or flying kites and swimming in the river with friends, but I do have my own childhood memories. Those were my first day of primary school, while other children cried upon saying goodbye to their parents, I only looked at my strict father silently through the class window.

Those were the days of living among my father's gratuitous scolding, through days without food, walking through the village alleys and small markets to sell out tickets to pedestrians, drivers, people in cafes, people in the market and make it in time for class. Those were also nights looking up at the stars when the sky was clear, or water droplets falling through the dilapidated metal roof onto the raincoat that was temporarily laid out for rainy nights.

But I did not give up on school!

I started receiving support from Room to Read when I transitioned from lower to upper secondary school, and that was the most wonderful gift of my life. Not only did Room to Read support me financially so I could continue to go to class, but also equipped us girls with a lot of life skills that I believe not everyone is lucky enough to be this prepared.

I still remember every fresh textbook I received. It was the words printed on the first page of each notebook that have shown me the purpose of my education: "World Change Starts with Educated Children®." I have yet to fully understand how the world would benefit from me being literate, but I am completely aware, not just by intuition anymore, that education has changed my life.

I will never forget every teacher and friend that I had in Phước Lại secondary School. They were the guiding light that made me believe I am not alone, but I am protected, loved, and full of love. I remember each Room to Read staff who took time to talk to me and my family, to convince and motivate us to follow

our dreams.

Every life skill lesson became valuable assets for my life. The first gender and reproductive health lessons made us aware of how to protect ourselves through puberty. Lessons on rights and responsibilities helped us realize girl rights to life, education and free speech. Lessons about decision-making skill, communication skill and problem-solving have helped me with time management and how to deal with unexpected situations and temptations in life. There were career orientation sessions with the alumnae coming to share their experience with us on how to choose a career, which subjects to focus on, and how to apply to university. Life skill summer camps were a great opportunity for me to connect with others - combining learning and playing to apply life skills and improve myself.

Graduation from the program was by the time I started university. During my college time, some Room to Read staff still looked out for me and connected me with different scholarship opportunities. Time went by quickly and now I have graduated, many problems in my childhood have passed and I feel much more confident now to face challenges ahead. A new chapter has opened: I can send my younger brother to school, care for my aging father, renovate my house so it can withstand the weather, and also help others who are more in need.

DON'T LET OBSTACLES KNOCK YOU DOWN



Thạch Thị Thu Huyền

*Joined GEP in 2009 (Hàm Giang
secondary school)
Current: Teacher at Sunflower
kindergarten*

Back in high school, I always dreamt of becoming a preschool teacher and finally got accepted into the National College of Education in Ho Chi Minh City. Happiness did not last long as during my fresh year, my mother fell sick and was diagnosed with tonsil cancer so she had to undergo chemotherapy and irradiation treatment.

Her health got worse. After each treatment she could not eat, she fainted, and was hospitalized

several times. Everyone told me: "You should quit school to go to work and take care of your mother!" I felt no more motivation to continue studying. But whenever I thought about the future, I told myself to finish school to secure a stable job, then I can offer better financial support to my family. I decided to continue my education despite the hardship, juggling attending school with taking care of my mother.

Fortunately, during the first two years of school at its District 9 campus, I was staying at my uncle's house so I did not have to pay for accommodation and I was given some money to go to school. I only spend about USD \$50 – \$100 a month, mainly to pay for books and textbooks. There were times when I felt fallen and wanted to give it all up, I tried to tell myself that it was just temporary down time. Once I had decided to go to school, no

matter how difficult or obstructing, I still have to study hard for my professional qualifications. As time went on, I managed to reach my final year of college. At this point, my mom's illness got better and only required follow-up examinations so that was a relief.

Although there were times when I was close to surrendering, I am currently living my dream job right in my hometown, financially independent, and near to take care of my parents.

*I know more than
anyone that with will
and perseverance, I can
overcome any predicament.*

Communicating effectively is the key to connect, cooperate and live in harmony with others, as well as to develop yourself. In Room to Read's Girls' Education Program, girls learn Social-awareness skills such as communication, solving conflicts, building healthy relationship, etc. These skills not only benefit them in school, but also help them seize many opportunities, becoming more proactive and successful in life.

COMMUNICATION FACILITATES GROUP WORK

I did not have a good start in life - my family and I had to make the utmost effort to send me into university. Therefore, I told myself to give everything I have to achieve deserving academic results to justify my family's sacrifices. During the first year in university, I experienced a lot of hardships and pressure in the new environment. At university, we often work in groups, and I am the group leader, which I thought would be easy as I only need to assign tasks to members, but it was not as simple as I thought. Members in my group did not get

along well, and when we were assigned tasks, some were on top while others were not. One time, everyone was supposed to send a draft to me one week before the submission date. I realize it was incomplete and requested members to redo their parts but ended up receiving just the outline. The deadline was approaching, I still remember doing all the work including a 10-page essay in few days. When it was presentation time, no one wanted that responsibility and I ended up having to present. It always happened like that: whatever assignment it is,



Thạch Thanh Tuyền

*Joined GEP in 2011 (Thiện Mỹ
lower secondary school – Trà Ôn
upper secondary school)
Current: Student at Cần Thơ
University*

I would have to do for the whole group, and they all would benefit from the good mark that I earned. I felt very frustrated and dissatisfied. In Girls' Education Program, I learned teamwork skills, effective conflict resolution, and persuasive communication. The stress of university life reminded me of those lessons. I have developed a habit of self-reflection at bedtime, asking myself what happened during the day, what to do and what not to do. I decided to hold a meeting to solve all the complications in our group, where everyone had the chance to express their thoughts and feelings throughout this collaborative process and discuss whether task

allocation was reasonable. We have come to an agreement that all of our work would be synthesized and submitted, despite the work quality, and I wouldn't redo everyone's work anymore. That is, if anyone doesn't do well then, we all get low marks. Ever since, they have all completed the task more responsibly so that the group result would improve. Thanks to the lessons from Girls' Education Program and such experiences in the real world, I have become a more mature and rational individual, an effective problem solver. I have also lived a harmonious life with others and become more independent so my parents would not have to worry so much about me.

COMMUNICATE TO SOLVE PROBLEMS

Trương Khánh Nguyễn

Joined GEP in 2011 (Thiện Mỹ lower secondary school – Trà Ôn upper secondary school)

Current: Student at Cần Thơ University



This situation that I had at the dormitory is very common. If the problem is not well solved, it will affect both our relationship with roommates and our living conditions. The root of this problem lies in the difference in lifestyles. Each room accommodates 8 girls so coming to an agreement in lifestyle is particularly difficult, and even more so when someone moves in at mid semester. Previously, we all lived together from the very beginning so the house rules were already established with general routines that have been agreed on and implemented together. Anyone that moves in afterwards, will have to add on to our rule book with their own personalities and habits, and if one is not wise, it will make the whole thing ugly and messy. These new girls had lived comfortably in a rented apartment before, so when they moved into the dorm, they found it hard to comply with the room regulations. We understand this so whenever someone made a mistake, we did not confront her but instead tried to fix it for her, hopefully she would realize and change. However, that was not the case as she was not aware nor inspired to change.

After two weeks of irritation and suffering, I decided to confess to one of our newer roommates. Despite the annoyance I had for days, I tried to approach the matter calmly, for I know aggression will not result in a peaceful resolution but may give rise to other conflicts. I demonstrated to her how to hang up the laundry, store personal belongings and do house chores in rotation basis. I told her to come home silently at night and lock the door properly. Through suggestion and discussion with other roommates, we let our new member have the time and space to adjust accordingly. We told ourselves to give gentle reminders to each other.

In that situation, I chose assertive communication but not commanding or blaming, for we are all students at the same age, and conversing politely will create a sense of respect and trust for one another. She has taken the feedback positively and changed. Although the progress has not been huge, I feel much accomplished considering her personality.

Thanks for the life skills lessons in Girls' Education Program, I can communicate with confidence and have more friends. I can also communicate to solve problems with different people in different context.

I hope you girls will be confident and bold in voicing your thoughts respectfully and constructively so others can understand and cooperate with you.

OVERCOMING YOUR FEAR TO COMMUNICATE WITH SINCERITY

Dear Thu Lan, could you please tell us about yourself?

I am Trần Thị Thu Lan. I was born in a family with three other siblings in Ho Chi Minh City. In my family, I am the only one who graduated from university and was a valedictorian of Early childhood education faculty in Sài Gòn University. I have been working for two years.



What a great achievement you have! How could you do that?

I think Determination is what most important for success. When I was admitted to the university, my family was hit by a misfortune: My father passed away. The pain itself and my family's financial constraint made me consider ending my education there. Fortunately, I got a scholarship and I started to think of what my parents always said "Education is the only way out of poverty. You can't do anything without education." Ever since, education has always been a precious gift to me, a second chance that I have to take and do all my best with gratitude. During my school years, I never skipped a class. I always attended class early to sit in the front row. I tried to memorize all lessons by the time a class ended. Every effort resulted in my good performance at school.

You seem to be very self-confident, outgoing and open to people all the time. Can you share your tips about how to communicate with confidence?

When I was small, I was also scared of talking to a lot of people. When I joined Room to Read, I learnt many life skills such as communication and teamwork. There was one thing I found out from those classes: The only thing that prevents you from expressing yourself is Fear – fear of mistakes, fear of not being perfect, fear of judgement, etc. When I was in lower secondary school, I told myself: “No more fear!” Even though the first experiences of speaking in front of people might be intimidating, I told myself to not be scared of trying. I volunteered to do presentations which made me feel more confident afterwards, though it didn’t have to be perfect. I’d like to share this one tip: when you feel nervous while speaking, try to look at just one point in the crowd and continue your speech until you feel more relaxed. And above all, I think sincerity should be foremost. Even if you’re wrong, be brave enough to admit it and learn from it rather than blaming.

Thank you, Lan, you are so willing to share with others. Last question, do you have any favorite life motto that you’d love to share?

I think all girls should work hard and try hard to make the most out of our youth. Once you do your best, be content and grateful for whatever you got. It is not the fulfillment of what we want that matters, but the appreciation of what we already have.



Trần Thị Thu Lan

*Joined GEP in 2004 (An Nghĩa secondary school)
Current: Teacher at Bong Sen Kindergarten*

THIS WORLD IS VAST, ARE YOU READY?



Đinh Thị Kim Thùy

Joined GEP in 2011

*(Lục Sĩ Thành lower secondary school –
Trà Ôn upper secondary school)*

Current: Student at Cần Thơ University

you are ready

One of my most memorable memories in life might have to be the first time attending Room to Read's Fundraising Gala in Hong Kong. Previously, I have dreamt of standing on a big stage one day to share and spread the values that I believe in. Finally, the opportunity came. However, when I faced it, I was half excited and half nervous. My English skills were still very poor. How could I communicate with others in a language that was still much unfamiliar to me?

Instead of letting the fear consume me, I told myself that if Room to Read has faith in me, I am definitely capable. I set a target that within the timeframe, I had to be able to present my speech in English fluently, with all the bravery and confidence that I have. With that objective, I aimed to improve day by day. First and foremost, practice for pronunciation, posture, movement and gesture on stage. Then, practice my listening every day by listening to songs and speeches on repeat. On the weekend, I invited friends out to Ninh Kiều wharf to talk with foreign tourists. I also had a chance to go to Ho Chi Minh City for one week so that Room to Read staff could guide me and connect me with foreign friends who were attentive and helpful to help me practice.

On the Gala Day in Hong Kong, while backstage I was still very nervous, but when I heard my name, I was bold to walk up and present in front of a hall full of people with all the nerve and pride I have ever had. In that moment, I had a feeling that I was not just speaking for myself, but also for my parents, teachers, and the girls who are in need. It seemed as though they were standing with me and holding my hand to give me an immense motivation.

That first trip abroad was unforgettable, because it made me realize that I still have a lot to learn and grow in this wide big world. Being abroad has shown me that English proficiency and the ability to integrate with people who speak different languages and from a variety of cultures are exceedingly important. Therefore, every young person needs to hone these skills while still in school because they get you access to endless opportunities and new horizons for self-development and affirmation.

you are ready

A MESSAGE FOR

The Future

"We cannot choose where we are born and how we start, but we can absolutely choose our destination."

Phạm Thị Ngọc Giỏi

Joined GEP in 2008, Tân Thành lower secondary school – Thủ Khoa Huân upper secondary school



"Don't quit when it gets hard. Try to overcome it all!"

Joined GEP in 2011, Hòa Bình secondary school

Nguyễn Thị Thu Trúc



"In order to become a useful member in society, you will need self-confidence, determination, and loyalty."

Thạch Thị Ánh

Joined GEP in 2010, Hàm Giang secondary school



"Make the most of your youth by working towards your dreams. Don't waste it."

Nguyễn Thị Hồng Sen

Joined GEP in 2011, Thiên Mỹ A lower secondary school & Lê Thanh Mững upper secondary school



"I hope you will all be grateful for what you have. Room to Read is your helping hand, your shelter and support. Hope you will fully participate in all activities of the program!"

Nguyễn Ngọc Tuyền

Joined GEP
in 2011, Vĩnh Xuân secondary school



"I feel particularly fortunate to learn these life skills, because they help me be more confident, forceful and get many helpful, applicable knowledge."

Nguyễn Thị Mỹ Linh

Joined GEP in 2011, Hòa Bình secondary school



"If you consider between two roads – one is arduous, leading to your dream, the other one is easier and more taken – don't hesitate to choose the hard one. If you think of giving up, ask yourself: "Are the outcomes worth the challenges?"

Vô Thị Hồng Đào

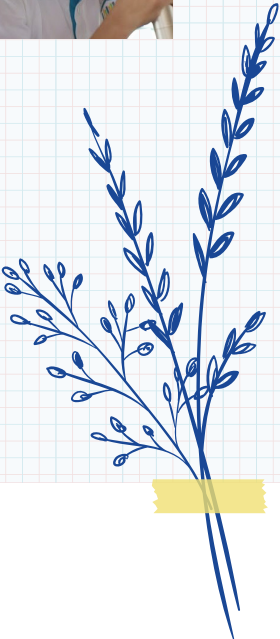
Joined GEP in 2003, Đỗ Văn Dậy lower secondary school – Lý Thường Kiệt upper secondary school



"Be confident and try to achieve your dreams!"

Nguyễn Thị Ngọc Hân

Joined GEP in 2011, Vĩnh Xuân secondary school



"Neighbors and friends gossiped about my decision to follow my family business. They say what's the point in studying if I will end up working in a market. I think every job is worthwhile because it supports your family. Be proud of your job!"

Thạch Thị Thune Na

Joined GEP in 2009, Long Hiệp secondary school



"Life is colorful. Be grateful for all great things awaiting us! Nothing is impossible when you put in efforts. Even if it's a favorable or unfavorable outcome, at least you gave your best."

Trần Thị Kim Chi

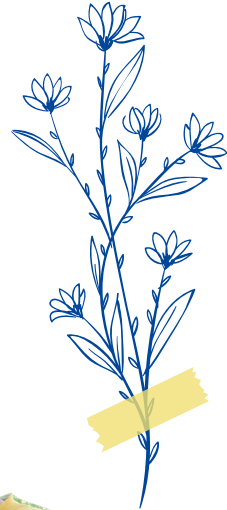
Joined GEP in 2009, Hàm Giang secondary school



"Despite countless obstacles, constant difficulties coming your way, be courageous and persistent to overcome and strive for achievements in your education and career. Don't lose faith, get better than yourself every day!"

Cao Thị Thảo Nguyễn

Joined GEP in 2009, Hàm Giang secondary school



Afterword

Dear girls,

Youth is the most beautiful stage of our life, for we still have time for many choices.

When you encounter a big challenge, what choices do you have? Wondering "Why me?" while feeling exhausted and pessimistic? Googling all information about the problem to finally see that you're not alone in this? Writing down all problems and their causes? Asking someone experienced about it? You see, every problem, every question has not one but many answers and different ways of response.

Don't just sit there passively, go find your own answer, write it down in big size, post it somewhere visible and focus on it the best you can until you reach your goals. The happiness when you overcome a challenge feels even greater than living a trouble-free life.

Everyone has their own problem. Before, I was very doubtful about my appearance, my health and intelligence. However, after joining in Room to Read life skills classes, I started to understand that I have to sincerely accept, believe and love myself because no one could do that for me. This awareness had miraculously opened chances for me to connect with many kind people, those who have cared for me as if they care for themselves. You can



Nguyễn Thị Tây Thi

Joined GEP in 2005
(Long Hậu lower secondary school,
Cần Giuộc upper secondary school)
Current: English Teacher at Long
Hậu lower secondary school

find in this book many stories like mine, or yours, and realize that the key to your goals is in your hands: Believe in yourself – Do your best – Connect with people.

Don't forget that any certification is only a passport, only life skills can push you go further. Therefore, remember to work hard at school, to learn life skills, read many books, accumulate knowledge and life experiences, understand that challenges are inevitable and essential. Stand up straight, eyes forward, nail a "power pose" and walk to the front so fiercely that troubles may be scared and avoid you.

This book is dedicated to you with strong energy from kind hearts and positive minds. Please keep it as your companion, let these real-life stories pave the way for your journey. When it's your turn, live and share your life to inspire others in the most meaningful way.

Alumnae

ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES



Alumnae granting scholarship for GEP girl

Graduated from this program, the alumnae are not only prepared with more solid experiences but also saved treasured memories with friends, teachers, and school in their heart. They will leave this second family but will always return to contribute and pass the torch on to many generations of alumnae to come.



Alumnae meet-up, Vĩnh Long



Alumnae as guest speaker in career orientation day in Vĩnh Long



Alumnae meet-up,
Trà Vinh



Alumna speaking at "The Act of Kindness" show on VTV channel in 2019



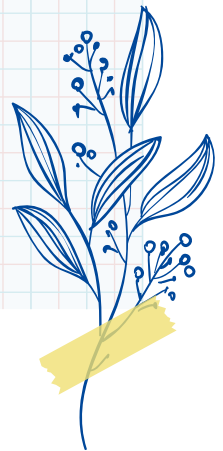
Alumnae meeting with former first lady of the United States Michelle Obama and guests during her visit to GEP at Long An in 2019



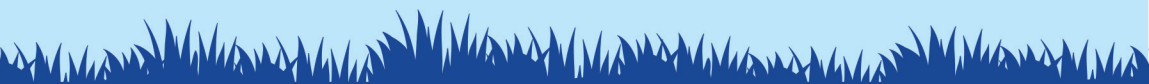
"Alumnae speaking and sharing with GEP girls" in Vĩnh Long

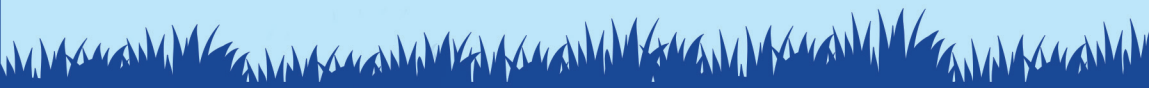


Alumnae meet-up, HCMC and Long An



GROWING UP IN DIFFERENT WAYS

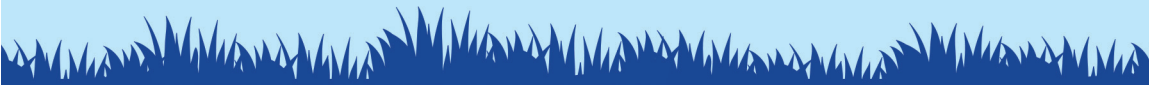






Room to Read®

World Change Starts with Educated Children.®



GIRLS' EDUCATION PROGRAM