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VIETNAM

SUCCESS STORY

Regaining Social Mobility and Respect

Professional computer programmers join Vietnamese workforce



Photo: USAID/Richard Nyberg

Le Thi Le, right, gives a few tips to Pham Thu Huong at the PWD Soft company.

“The training gave me the confidence I needed to get this job. And it has changed my view of disabilities,” said Le Thi Le.

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Le Thi Le hit the fast track early in life. As the top student in her primary school level, she was singled out for high achievement and tested her way into a gifted school in Tam Diep town in Vietnam’s Ninh Binh province. Biking four miles to class, she maintained her grades and kept academic pace with fellow pupils. But it wasn’t long before she became painfully aware of the fact that her limited mobility prevented her from walking as far or fast as most people. Searing comments from peers burned a spotlight on her physical disability, causing her to withdraw socially.

“I had friends, but I was very self-conscious of what others thought and didn’t want to communicate with them,” Le said. She persevered, however, and eventually earned a degree in English from the Vietnam National University.

Unfortunately, finding work after graduation proved difficult. “Potential employers always looked at me anxiously during my job interviews. They said they were pleased with my test scores but were afraid that I could not do well at work. It was like they had a barrier in their minds.” After some disappointing interviews, Le, 26, landed a slot at the Information Technology Training Program (ITTP) for people with disabilities in 2008. The program, which is supported by USAID, provides 12 months of software engineering training based on an international-standard curriculum and shorter-term classes in basic computer skills for persons with disabilities. USAID-supported projects have promoted inclusive education for people with disabilities in Vietnam since 1998. The ITTP expands the “Inclusion of Vietnamese with Disabilities” program to higher education. The program also facilitates job placement and increases employers’ awareness of skilled people with disabilities. More than 150 students have successfully completed ITTP courses.

After completing the second ITTP software engineering class Le was hired by PWDSoft, a computer company run by people with disabilities in Hanoi, Vietnam. As human resources manager, she moves around the room with resolve as she helps 20 fellow programmers and web content editors manage their work flow. Standing four feet, six inches tall, she has high hopes for her career in computer technology and has started a two-year training course certified by Carnegie Mellon University.

“Now I have stable employment at PWDSoft,” she said. “I like the friendly working environment here, where everyone helps each other to learn and improve. The training from the ITTP program gave me the confidence I needed to get this job. And it has changed my view of disabilities.”