

Learning Through Service

Vietnam CAS Trip 2017

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Creativity, Activity, Service (CAS) is part of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme curriculum which allows us to learn how to plan, work with others, engage issues that are of global importance, develop new skills and learn from our strengths and weaknesses.

Our class had decided to help a village kindergarten build a kitchen and a toilet on its premises and we needed to raise about \$3,000 to buy materials and hire construction workers for that. So, we baked and sold cookies, brownies and honey cornflakes to staff and our schoolmates, and washed staff's cars for a minimum of \$10 per vehicle.

In Vietnam, we carried out our activities in Sapa and Hanoi. It was in Sapa where we helped a small kindergarten build a kitchen and a toilet. Previously, staff had to walk about 20m to use a single-cubicle unlit outhouse; the children relieved themselves in an open space behind the school.

The construction of the toilet was challenging due to inclement weather. Rain water kept filling up the 2m deep hole that we dug and we had to bucket it out so that the fresh cement would not be washed away.

We found out that the children came from poor families and they hardly ate meat. The next day, we bought fresh meat from the local market and contributed them as the main ingredient which teachers used to cook their lunch. Their delight and appreciation of our small gesture was heartwarming. This episode made us recall the countless times when we would turn away food that was not cooked to our liking, and prompted us to be grateful for what we have.

Those of us who were not constructing the toilet taught the children the Alphabet and English Nursery Rhymes.

We noticed that the paint on the walls was weathered and peeling. We drew a mural on one of them. We also painted the storeroom and organised the items in there that had been thrown about haphazardly.

After our CAS project in Sapa, we went to Friendship Village in Hanoi to visit the locals who had been affected by Agent Orange.

Agent Orange was used widely by the US Military during the Vietnam War for strategic deforestation and the destruction of food source. However, this chemical weapon left a long-term impact on the Vietnamese, most of whom suffered pain in the eyes and skin, and their offspring were born with physical deformities.

The residents of Friendship Village are the third generation of those exposed to the Agent Orange chemical but the toxins are still present in their blood stream and their physical deformities are prominent.

From this trip, we learnt new skills like fundraising, layering bricks and teaching. We also learned to cherish what we have. We live in a First World country where electricity flows and clean water does not run dry. We have often taken these for granted. Now that we have experienced disruption of electricity or water heaters that are faulty, it has hit home hard on us that we enjoy daily entitlements that others consider a privilege