



# ANNUAL REPORT

**2021**

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# Bridges to Learning Annual Report 2021



## *Mission Statement:*

*Bridges to Learning provides education, health, and social development programs to empower impoverished Vietnamese children to change their world.*

2021 was a little bit better year for the Bridges to Learning organization, but a more challenging year for the schools in Vietnam as the pandemic hit them with full force in the spring.

In 2020, Vietnam was physically shut off from the rest of the world, strict lock downs were put in place to keep Covid at bay, the economy hummed along, and school kept going in person. It had some challenging stops and starts, but overall meals were served, lessons were learned, and the students and teachers were happy to be in school.

2021 started out well, in person, with kids learning and having some fun.



Early 2021 fun at school. Photos: Vu Hai Truong

Unfortunately, by spring they saw a surge of illness, all schools went online and the economy stalled. The tough economy resulted in many students returning to small villages as their parent(s) or grandparent(s) lost their

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jobs. The remote villages did not escape the problems as food was hard to come by up there as well.

Throughout the summer, people were stuck at home, and the heat and humidity were thick. The empty streets of Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) were the complete opposite of their usual vibrancy and hustle. The administrators and teachers at the school, along with some of the students who were staying at the Anh Linh dorm, kicked into high gear as they received, processed, and delivered literally tons of food throughout the area. Unloading delivery trucks full of donated food and eventually medicines, dividing, cooking, and redistributing filled their days at the Anh Linh School.

The Viet Anh School scraped together donations and delivered them to far flung students and their families in sometimes treacherous conditions. It was hard work and dangerous too.

Fortunately, the people involved in the effort were among the first in Vietnam to receive the vaccine. While some of the teachers and students contracted Covid, we are happy to report they have now recovered.



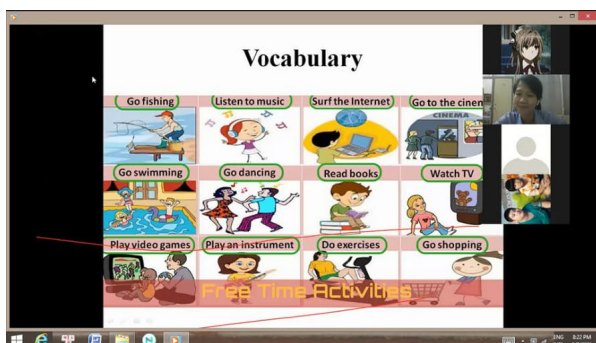
Mid-summer food and medicine distribution at the Anh Linh School.

By the fall of 2021, Anh Linh school reopened the best they could online. Ensuring the children had access to the internet and technology was a challenge that was met by school staff. It was a great challenge to equip the severely impoverished children with the technology needed for online school. They faced the same challenges that others did around the world (e.g. stability of connections, powering devices, building relationships with the students, and motivating them). The teachers rose to the challenge as they shifted to teaching online and created awards and incentives to encourage

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the students. Bridges to Learning stayed in contact throughout the year, supplying funds to support their work.

Unfortunately student enrollment at the Anh Linh School dropped significantly in 2021 with only 210 primary and secondary students enrolled throughout the year.



On-line School and prizes to encourage students

The Viet Anh School was fortunate to have the children back in the classroom at the start of the school year, but had to stop in November due to increasing Covid cases in the area. Due to the resource limits of the rural area, it was a struggle.

The Bridges to Learning Board continued to meet online, but moved closer to "normal" as the 2nd Annual Golf Tournament was held at Stonebrooke Golf Club. Since B2L did not have a tournament in 2020, perhaps it should have been called the "Skip a Year Annual Tournament". The tournament was a great success with beautiful weather and record-breaking proceeds of \$12,228 raised for the children.

In the fall of 2021, since the cases of Covid in Minnesota were rising, after much research into many options, the board decided to forego the Wine Tasting Event.

### **Here's a look at our goal achievement in 2021:**

#### **Board Members**

In order to achieve our mission, it is critical that B2L has an active and engaged board of directors. Our board goes above and beyond as an active board with each member volunteering their time above and beyond the monthly meetings.

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The entire board continued in their roles throughout 2021, so we had seven members throughout the year. Our board continues to represent a mix of backgrounds, cultures, and age groups, providing a wide range of experiences and insights that support our mission and the schools.

Current Board members and our staff are:

- Donny Chau (secretary)
- Brian Hammer
- Joe Hellman
- Robert A. Mac Murdo (treasurer and co-founder)
- John Nesheim (vice board chair)
- Linh Phan (board chair)
- Pooja Shah
- Stacy Phan, Part Time Staff

### **Fundraising Goals in 2021**

Winter into spring of 2021 offered an opportunity to begin to gather together for events that COVID has curtailed. The annual golf event was planned as was a wine tasting for the fall.

Board member Linh Phan, along with her husband Huy Phan, created and promoted the 3rd Annual Bridges to Learning Golf Tournament. With the support of Linh's troop of volunteers and Stacy Phan, the event was very successful, drawing in 70 golfers and raising \$12,228 which surpassed our goal.

Unfortunately, the Wine Tasting event was canceled during the initial planning stages since Covid rates were starting to increase. Instead, B2L focussed on end of the year email appeals in conjunction with Give to the Max and Giving Tuesday, raising \$11,910.

The fundraisers allowed Bridges to provide support to the Anh Linh and to Viet Anh Schools.

### **Community Served**

Vietnam was fairly successful in managing the pandemic, but was hit hard in the spring of 2021. The economy stalled, and then dropped dramatically in light of near total shutdowns. The parents and guardians of the children served by the Anh Linh and Viet Anh Schools live on the margins of society



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with little means. Jobs were lost and many moved back to remote villages as they had no income. Others stayed in the city, but had little means.

Since our inception in 2004 we have focused on the support for Anh Linh School in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and the children who receive their education and care from the staff at Anh Linh Free School. In 2016, a former principal at Anh Linh assumed the management of a new school, Viet Anh Primary School in the central highlands of Vietnam. Bridges responded to the director's need for support and granted the school \$3,500 annually to augment their resources which provide for the education of minority children in the province. In 2021, Bridges to Learning allocated \$3,500 to the Viet Anh Primary School.

### Major Programs

#### Education and Supports, Child Sponsorships

Bridges to Learning's primary focus is to provide education for underserved children, which includes not only the teachers, classrooms, books, and



supplies, but also nutritious meals, uniforms, haircuts, games, music, sports, dance, holiday celebrations, and special field trips when possible.

All of the things that help build strong, knowledgeable, curious students who strive to learn more and have hope for the future.

The mission is largely carried out through sponsorships funded by a large group of our constituents, our

Sponsors. General donations and proceeds from fundraisers supplement the students as well.

A sponsorship of \$500 annually provides the student with daily classes that meet the State requirements as well as the following:

- Two nutritious meals a day
- Two new uniforms a year

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- School books and supplies
- Monthly haircuts
- Health, dental, and vision screening, and treatment as needed
- Special programs and activities throughout the year
- English classes, open library and games, and activity area when not in scheduled classes.

A sustaining sponsorship is a three-year commitment to help the students and sponsors become invested in the relationship that develops with the sponsor. The relationship becomes an important part of an individual's decision to sponsor rather than simply donate. A student is carefully selected based on the principal's belief that he/she would significantly benefit from having a relationship with a sponsor. Sponsorship provides the unique opportunity to:

- Develop a relationship with their sponsored child by exchanging photos and letters, however, during the pandemic, it has been very difficult to maintain communication, especially when the city locks down and children move to remote villages; Bridges to Learning and the school are working to restore regular communication;
- Know that they are supporting the happiness of a specific child who would otherwise face a bleak and limited future;
- See the amazing difference that a small amount of caring can bring.

The sponsorship program has suffered during the pandemic as the student population has fluctuated and many students moved away. Also, the principal and teachers have focussed on shifting education online and providing the most basic support of food and medicine. We confidently look forward to resuming regular communications with the sponsored children and stability in their schooling.

Bridges to Learning commits 100% of every dollar received as sponsorship funding to Anh Linh School for the child sponsored as these are considered restricted funds. In the past we have strived to maintain a base of 70 sponsored children but through recent attrition we are only supporting 48 students in 2021-2022. That amounts to approximately \$24,000 annually for the 48 children. The total support sent to Anh Linh School for sponsorships was \$20,826 in 2021.

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Food and medicine distribution.



Truckloads of food and medicine were processed, divided and distributed.

### Breakfast Fund

The Breakfast Fund was created early in our involvement with Anh Linh when our Founder, Jerilyn Hirsch taught at the school in 2004-2005. Jerri noticed that many of the children were hungry in the morning. She discovered that many children were from circumstances that could not afford a breakfast meal. Searching about in the ex-pat community in Ho Chi Minh Jerri found someone who could provide high protein supplements for the kids and the Breakfast Fund was created. Now all elementary students receive a healthy breakfast each morning.

Bridges to Learning primarily draws from unrestricted funds to support the Breakfast Fund to the level of \$7,500 annually. In 2021, B2L provided \$7,500 to the Anh Linh School for the breakfast fund.

### Financial Statement

The 2021 financials reflect the ongoing sustainment and rebuilding in 2020. We hosted the 2nd Annual Golf Tournament fundraiser in 2021, raising over \$12,228, and ran an end of the year appeal via email and social media, which raised nearly \$11,910. Throughout the year, we received additional donations and sponsorships as well. In total, Bridges to Learning raised, or received, a total of \$70,353.

In 2021, there were a total of \$59,824 in expenses, including a total of \$35,326 which was sent to the schools as sponsorships, general funds, and



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the breakfast funds. Program services expenses totaled \$5,265, and the remainder was fundraising and operating expenses.

We began the fiscal year with just over \$51,349 in reserves, after taking a loss in 2020 due to the pandemic. However, due to successful fundraising efforts and the generosity of our supporters, reserves increased by \$10,529. We are ending 2021 with reserves of \$61,878.

Bridges to Learning holds reserves of funds for the schools as it can attract too much attention to their financial situation if they hold too much money in their bank accounts. It puts the funds at risk of being confiscated.

The average program to expense ratio for the past three years is 91% as Bridges to Learning keeps overhead low, and relies heavily on the helpfulness of talented volunteers. In addition, the pandemic affected the number. We are watching the ratio to ensure Bridges to Learning is investing in a solid foundation for the organization to continue working towards the mission.

You can find the formal financial documents at [www.bridges2learning.org](http://www.bridges2learning.org) by clicking on "Public Documents" at the bottom of the page.

### **Goals for 2022**

- Build the number of sponsored children at Anh Linh back to 65.
- Host two fundraising events: Golf Tournament and Wine Tasting.

### **Looking Ahead to 2022**

What to look forward to? At the time of this writing we are well into 2022, and things are returning back to "normal". Is everything the same, no, but we are hosting in person events, and the schools are back in session in person.

We are most delighted to know students are returning to the schools, and enrollment is increasing. Every day, every month, and every year where each child is provided with education, meals and a nurturing environment is a gift that builds to a hopeful future.

We held a record setting golf tournament in June, and just wrapped up a wine tasting which helps improve B2L's financial position as we recover from the impact of Covid. It is fun to see supporters gathering together to have

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some fun and support the mission. In addition, B2L is in the fortunate position to have some cash reserves to continue support to the schools for the near future.

We continue to strive to support the well-being and education of the children. It is our primary focus and motivates our work.