



- POLITICS AND LAWS
- Cases
- Government in Action
- Legal Briefs
- Talking Law
- BUSINESS
- Banking-Finance
- Business Beat
- Infobytes
- Stock Market
- Talking Shop
- INDUSTRIES
- AGRICULTURE
- SOCIAL ISSUES
- Education
- Health
- Humanitarian aid
- Labour
- Owner of the Future
- Population & Development
- Religion
- Talk Around Town
- CULTURE
- Antique & Relics
- Arts & Craft
- Books

## Disabled kids help those with heart disease

(21-12-2004)

THUA THIEN-HUE — While ‘Healing the wounded heart’ is simply a motto printed on heart-shaped paper, it has helped many kids suffering from congenital heart diseases to recover and regain their health. These encouraging messages made by children with disabilities in Thua Thien-Hue provide hope.

A brain-child of Marachia, vice president of The Spiral - an American philanthropic organisation, the message ‘Healing the wounded heart’ is sent to all of the charity’s client in the US and Italy and was extended to Viet Nam through Nguyen Viet Nhan, the founder and head of Hue Medical College’s Physiology Faculty. He explains that she wants to help poor young patients affected by innate heart diseases who do not have the money to pay for heart surgery.

She does not help by directly sending money, but in a more hands-on, tangible way, by teaching deaf and disabled children in Hue City’s "Hope" and "Future" centres to make handicrafts to sell, where the profits are used to support children with heart problems. The Spiral, through the Office of Genetic Counselling and Disabled Children, has channelled more than US\$45,000 to provide operations for hundreds of young heart patients over the past two years.

According to Nhan, central Viet Nam has a high number of children under 16-years-old who are affected by innate heart diseases and 0.25 per cent of children in Thua Thien-Hue in particular also suffer from these conditions.

Although medical facilities cannot cure these various heart diseases in children, they can be treated, although treatment is expensive and a big burden on families. Operation fees are even greater.

Surgery costs between VND14 million (US\$934) to VND45 million (\$3,000), and only about half of the children with heart disease at Hue Central Hospital can afford the operation, however Bui Duc Phu, deputy director of Hue Central Hospital, says the hospital, with the help of the Spiral covers half of the operation fee for very young patients.

Because Hue Central Hospital now offers a cheap price for this important operation, the numbers of people requesting surgery is growing.

At present, the hospital has nearly 500 patients on the waiting list for the operation, stretching to the end of 2005.

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VN-INDEX	
Feb.28: 235.1(-0.02%)	
RATES	
EUR	20,752.25
GBP	30,080.70
HKD	2,037.95
USD	15,801.00
CHF	13,368.01
JPY	153.44
BAT	417.73
AUD	12,298.29
CAD	12,928.33
SGD	9,724.27
CNY	1,840.66

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TRAVEL
Travellers' Notes
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Features
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the operation, stretching to the end of 2005.

Phu also said that nearly 1,000 patients approved to receive immediate surgery have not yet returned to the hospital because they do not have money.

Sixteen-year-old Nguyen Thi Lam in Quang Tri Province was diagnosed with heart disease as an infant, as her breathing was shallow and she was too skinny. Doctors say she should receive surgery or otherwise she may not lead a normal life.

Lam explains that for nearly 16 years she's suffered and wheezed because her parents could not afford the operation. Only until recently, thanks to the help of charity organisations like the Spiral has she been rescued.

Nhan, who is also head of the Genetic Counselling and Disabled Children Office, remembers before the Spiral came to help in 2003 the office had to rely on the less dependable support of individuals and organisations outside the country, such as the East meets West to fund impoverished families whose children are affected by innate heart diseases.

### **Double happiness**

Not only have children affected by heart disease been given a second chance at life, but the people with disabilities feel fulfilled and useful as part of the project.

"My joy is double one day after another, for months on end," says Le Thi Uyen Phuong, 26, a disabled person at the Hope centre.

Before she began tailoring at the centre in 1999, Phuong was pessimistic about her life as both of her legs have been paralysed since she was a small child, but now she earns about VND450,000 a month doing job that she feels is meaningful.

Phuong said she was especially delighted because she knows she can contribute her humble efforts to help deformed children like her.

"It is joyful when a disabled person like me can do useful things for others," she says.

It is also hard to describe how happy children and their relatives are when they are rescued from heart disease.

Eight-year-old Tuong Vi in Thua Thien-Hue received her heart operation three months ago and still her mother is delighted and is overcome by tears when she recalls how her daughter was saved.

"I was happy when I found out that my daughter could receive the operation, but it seemed hopeless, as it cost VND14 million and I could only save VND4 million."

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Just recently Lan learned who helped repair her daughter's heart and when she was told the benefactors' name, she cried, saying "They are too kind to us."—VNS

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