

blue dragon



CHILDREN'S FOUNDATION

2020: Overcoming challenges together

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This year the world has faced its greatest crisis in decades, and Vietnam has not been exempt from its consequences. The coronavirus pandemic and restrictions to prevent its spread caused significant unemployment and income loss around the country. This plunged disadvantaged communities deeper into poverty, and placed children and families at higher risk of homelessness, trafficking, abuse and exploitation.

Compounding the hardship, a sequence of intense storms and typhoons in central Vietnam devastated communities in October and November. Over 200 lives were lost, and many thousands of homes were damaged.

Thanks to support from around the globe, Blue Dragon has provided emergency aid to communities affected by these crises, protecting those most vulnerable from these heightened risks and rescuing children and young adults who had fallen prey to traffickers or were sleeping rough on the streets.

Thank you for standing beside Vietnamese children and families throughout these difficult times.

Here is a summary of how your support has helped Vietnamese children and families overcome the challenges of 2020:

Your impact in numbers:



Your impact beyond the numbers



Keeping children in school in the midst of a global pandemic

When classes resumed after being cancelled for nearly four months due to the pandemic, not all children returned to school.

In the remote ethnic communities of Dien Bien and Ha Giang provinces, most children attend boarding schools. In these areas, the loss of jobs and incomes combined with the school closures meant that, without the free meals provided at school, many families were struggling to feed their children. This placed young people at a high risk of quitting school in order to find work to help their families make ends meet.

Blue Dragon recognised this risk early in the pandemic and set in motion 'Back to School' campaigns in areas considered hotspots for human trafficking. Because the effects of the pandemic were so widespread, the campaigns were expanded to reach entire districts in partnership with the Department of Education.

To respond swiftly to this urgent situation, Blue Dragon supported school teachers to visit the homes of the students who hadn't returned to class. Blue Dragon social workers then assessed the circumstances of each family, **identified the reasons** why the child had quit school, and offered a **solution based on their needs**. These practical solutions ranged from scholarships for children to providing school supplies or livestock for families to raise and generate an income.

As a result of this rapid and coordinated response, **over 70% of the students** who had quit school **returned to the classroom** by the end of the campaigns. The initiative was so successful, we now intend to conduct similar campaigns twice a year: after the Lunar New Year holiday, and at the beginning of each school year (in September). We are sharing the model and advocating for its wide adoption with the Department of Education in vulnerable provinces.



Systemic changes to protect children in the legal system

In our work with child victims of sexual abuse and human trafficking, Blue Dragon has witnessed that the investigation and prosecution processes do not always protect the rights of children, and can in fact result in retraumatization. Child victims, perpetrators or witnesses of crime typically undergo long interrogations conducted by people with little or no understanding of child psychology, rights or trauma, and their identity is often not kept confidential.

This experience is harmful to children and jeopardizes successful prosecution, as it reduces the collaboration of child victims and witnesses, which in the Vietnamese legal system is essential for a successful conviction.

In light of this, during 2020 **Blue Dragon has advocated** for and contributed to the development of a Circular to guide Child Friendly Investigation processes. The Circular will introduce **compulsory guidelines** for police when it is approved at the end of December 2020, requiring interrogators to have expertise in child-friendly investigations and ensuring that all personnel involved in the investigation and prosecution processes follow child protection best practice.

During December, we are working with the government to design training materials for police to ensure effective implementation of the Circular from 2021.



Doubling efforts to keep children safe from the dangers of the streets

A devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was the sharp increase in the number of children on the streets of Hanoi. As the restrictions put in place to curb the spread of the virus caused increased hardship across the country, a higher number of children from rural areas migrated to the city hoping to find work, but instead became homeless and vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

The Blue Dragon Outreach team continued to go out on the streets looking for homeless children every night and, at the height of the pandemic, also in the daytime. This street outreach work allowed us to identify new 'hotspots' for homelessness in Hanoi. In light of this increased need, our outreach work has now expanded to these new areas, in addition to locations where children have traditionally sought shelter.

This extra effort has allowed Blue Dragon to meet and provide **support to nearly double** the number of street children in 2020.



Advances in prosecution of human trafficking

One of Blue Dragon's key goals is for our work to affect long-term change at an institutional level, in order to achieve the end of human trafficking. Collaboration, knowledge sharing, and legal advocacy are among the main methods we use to ensure that what we learn through **our front-line work informs and transforms the legal and justice systems**. This year, two landmark court cases have proven this approach is starting to bear fruit:

- **Combatting all types of trafficking**

In July, Blue Dragon represented a victim of organ trafficking in court for the first time. The trafficker tricked the victim into selling one of his kidneys by taking advantage of his desperate financial situation, and then swindled him by only paying a fraction of the amount they had agreed on. The trafficker was sentenced to 5 years in prison in this landmark case, and required to pay compensation to the victim, who hasn't been able to return to work due to the long-term damage to his health the kidney removal caused him.

The authorities' determination to prosecute these facts as a trafficking case and the acknowledgement of the victim's experience indicate there is a **growing understanding of the different forms of trafficking**, and a commitment to tackle all of them.

- **Prosecution beyond the low-hanging fruit**

The **conviction** of two traffickers and their **two accomplices** in a sex trafficking case at the beginning of December also indicates an **increased commitment to combat human trafficking** on all fronts.



In this case, Blue Dragon represented a victim who was trafficked when she was 14. The investigation found that the trafficking of this girl and two other young women was possible in part because of the complicit silence of two people who were aware of the crime and did not stop it. Not only did these two people not report the case to the police, but they extorted substantial sums of money from the traffickers in exchange for their silence.

While the trafficking of Vietnamese girls and women into forced ‘marriages’ or sex work in China is enabled by multiple parties in both countries, it is usually only those who directly deceived the victims who make it to trial. In this regard, this case marks a milestone that Blue Dragon hopes will become a trend moving forward.





Despite the many challenges the world has faced in 2020, Blue Dragon has been fortunate to receive strong support from generous and caring donors like you. Your commitment to care for Vietnamese children and families in need has meant that we could not only continue our work during these unprecedented times, but also expand it in order to reach even more people and have a greater impact.

Thank you