



## SUCCESS STORY

# Finding Encouragement, Being Included

### Vietnamese girl takes her place in school and community



Photo: USAID/Richard Nyberg

Pham Thi Bich Ngoc rides the modified wheelchair to get her out into the community.

***“We would love for her to study and find a good job. She shouldn’t feel disadvantaged in any way,” said Ngoc’s mother, Bui Thi Mai.***

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Patiently, Pham Thi Bich Ngoc angled her right elbow to type in what she would like to be when she grows up. Beaming, she threw a sideways glance at a teacher. The laptop screen read “doctor” in Vietnamese. The room burst out in a chorus of approval led by

Ngoc’s mother, Bui Thi Mai. Daughter and mother are defiant: they will not allow cerebral palsy to dampen Ngoc’s aspirations and outlook. Through a USAID-supported education program, she is finding pathways to inclusion in her community.

Born with severe mobility difficulties in 1995, Ngoc enjoyed few opportunities to interact with children her age in the village in Ninh Binh province where her family lives. Daily life had been a challenge for Ngoc, but the family mustered the support they needed to help Ngoc start attending classes at Yen Tu primary school. Eighteen of the 476 children enrolled at the school have disabilities.

Like many schools in Ninh Binh, Yen Tu school receives USAID-sponsored training for teachers on how best to cater to the educational and social needs of students like Ngoc. “Before the training, I didn’t know how to teach children with disabilities,”

said Nguyen Thi Mung, who taught Ngoc last year. “Now I know how to create appropriate activities for children like Ngoc. We also ask the other students to help her and play with her. She is very happy to be around peers and to have the opportunity to learn like other children.”

USAID also provides support to parent associations as part of the Inclusion of Vietnamese with Disabilities project in Ninh Binh province. The project helps remove obstacles faced by people with disabilities through engaging the education system, social services, and communities. It is working: So far, more than 3,000 children with all kinds of disabilities have been enrolled in regular preschools, primary, and junior secondary schools in Ninh Binh province alone.

Ngoc’s parents have invested a lot in their daughter – from a laptop to a modified wheelchair that she can power with her legs. “Ngoc is really smart,” said her father, Pham Huy Chat, a retired border guard. “She always wanted to learn.” After bringing Ngoc home on the back of a bicycle and setting up the computer for Ngoc to work on her homework, Bui Thi Mai said she was confident that her daughter would have chances in life. “We would love for her to study and find a good job. She shouldn’t feel disadvantaged in any way.”