

January 16, 2016

University of Education in Danang City, Vietnam



Danang Ceremony and Stories

After our AMA award ceremony at Danang City's University of Education today on Jan 16th, we sat down for a 3-hour conversation with our 38 recipients from the class of 2014 and 2015 today. Here are some touching stories that make us so proud of our students, our cause, and our donors at AMA:

1. One student's father abandoned the family when she was only 3 years old. Her mom then died of cancer when she was 10 years old, which forced her to move in with her aunt. Shortly after that, she had to move into a non-profit shelter because her aunt could not afford to raise her and her brother. She studied hard and has now become the first person from this shelter to enter an university. There is great calm about her, in addition to her resilience and toughness. She is also grateful for what the shelter has done for her and already wants to contribute back. AMA is proud to have her as part of our family now.
2. Another student was asked by her father to drop out of school because of poverty, since she is a girl and has a few siblings who are also at school. Her parents cannot afford to support her and want her to help out with farming work at home. Her mother has to dig through garbage to put food on the table. She has refused her father's order despite being physically beaten a few times already, because she wants to finish her college degree and not be stuck as a farmer for life. She sees AMA as her new family and feels encouraged by the support, so she is still studying hard at school. In her own words, she said that she now realizes through AMA that there are good people in this world who care about her well-being, so she no longer resents her parents and forgives them for what they did to her. She now understands that their actions were driven by their own difficult circumstances. She seems more at peace now and happy, determined to finish her college degree. She told this story to her fellow students so that they understand that the AMA scholarship means a lot to her in many ways. It was a very emotional and inspirational moment for all of us in the room.

Danang Ceremony and Stories, continued

3. Another student (from our class of 2014) was recently on the brink of quitting her university education during her first year, but our AMA members found out during a mentoring luncheon and intervened to convince her to stay in school. Due to poverty at home, she was working a few odd jobs over an excessive number of hours to help out and had no time to focus on her classes and grades. Our members personally gave her extra assistance and encouragement on the condition that she'd work less and concentrate more on her education. She was so proud and honest that she would only accept our extra assistance if she can prove it to herself and us that she can indeed improve her grades in one semester. Today at our event, she happily disclosed that her grade point average has improved dramatically from 1.9 to 2.8! She walked up to our AMA member Huong and gave her a big thank-you hug while shedding tears of joy. It was a very special moment. She knows that she has turned things around for herself, believing in her own ability to finish her education and blazing a new trail. We feel very happy and proud of her.

4. Another student grew up fatherless and motherless because they left home to work in Saigon due to poverty. She grew up poor with her grandparents in a remote area and met her parents for the first time at the age of 5 when they came back to visit her and her few younger siblings. Despite her difficulties, she was able to focus on her education and not give up because she met two great teachers in elementary school and later high school. These teachers even paid for her transportation costs for getting to schools from her remote home. She studied hard and got good grades. Due to poverty and siblings at home who need her, she took up jobs to help her grandparents financially while staying in school. She has collapsed from exhaustion and ended up in hospitals before, due to severe level of stress. She still worries about issues at home now, though she is in a better place now at a good university. She is motivated to be a teacher to help others, just like what her teachers have done for her in recent past.

5. Another student failed her college entrance exam in her first year. Most people in that position in her village would go to work and make ends meet somehow for the rest of their lives. While she thought about taking that route, her father encouraged her to try again. She spent a year studying hard and re-took the exam. Not only did she qualify this time for admissions, she scored the highest mark for her faculty (preschool education)! She was proud and emotional at the same time as she spoke for a long time about her past struggles. She is very happy to be part of the AMA family.

We heard so many amazing stories today and thanked the students for sharing them with us. While shy at first, the students warmed up quickly and shared their struggles with one another. Many tears were shed and a bond was formed by the end of the session. They found hope and inspiration just listening to one another's struggles. They no longer feel like they are alone in their struggles. The hopeless now can become hopeful, and that hope can lead to new possibilities.

Education is their bridge to new opportunities. AMA together with the university and these students are building this bridge together. We are very proud of everyone on this magical day.

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We want to thank everyone at the university for their assistance and cooperation. We appreciate it.

We thank the brave students for sharing their life stories with us. We admire you all for your perseverance.

