



USAID
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VIETNAM

FIRST PERSON Walking Towards a Brighter Future

A young woman is able to use her legs now after a life spent crawling



Photo: Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation

After three surgeries and extensive physiotherapy, Nguyen Thi Hong is able to walk for the first time.

“With every step, I feel immense gratitude for those who have helped me,” said Nguyen Thi Hong, who underwent surgery on her legs that allowed her to walk.

As a child, Nguyen Thi Hong had never graduated from crawling into walking because polio weakened her legs when she was 5 months old. Growing up in the remote mountainous province of Ha Giang, she said her family was too poor to pay for the surgeries that would have allowed her to walk. This isolated her both socially and physically.

Hong’s story is not unusual in Vietnam, where cerebral palsy, polio, stroke, spinal injuries, brain injuries and trauma frequently cause disabilities. USAID programs have targeted this complex problem by building the capacity within Vietnam’s educational system to include people with disabilities, providing vocational training, conducting prosthetic and orthotic workshops, disseminating information, implementing and enforcing policy, and training medical professionals.

When Hong was 21, she received a consultation with Dr. Ngo Van Toan, one of Vietnam’s best surgeons. He said that since her condition was left untreated for so long, she would need three surgeries to repair her leg, knee and hip joint. Although the road to recovery would be long, Hong was not deterred, and underwent her final surgery five months after this initial consultation.

At the Bac Thai Rehabilitation Center, Hong worked hard in her physiotherapy sessions. She gained strength in her leg, and with time and effort, she learned to walk, first with crutches and eventually without them. Hong has since opened an ice cream shop to earn money so that she can help her family as well.