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VIETNAM

FIRST PERSON

Disabled Girls Bring Talents to Sewing

Young women prove abilities to owner and clients of sewing shop



Photo: World Concern/Mai Huong

Duong Thi Sau (center) teaches her trainees, some of whom are disabled, how to sew.

“I now understand how important it is to include people with disabilities. I was worried that my business would suffer, but my customers are happy and I feel good helping the girls,” said Duong Thi Sau, who owns a sewing shop.

When Duong Thi Sau first hired one mobility-impaired and two hearing-impaired students to work in her sewing shop, her customers worried that the quality of her clothes would not be as good. Sau was also concerned that she wouldn't be able to communicate with the hearing-impaired girls, since she didn't know any sign language. But, through a USAID-funded program that fosters the inclusion of Vietnamese with disabilities into society, her concerns were quickly put to rest.

Sau received about \$12 a month to train the girls and about \$160 to buy a new sewing machine and fabric for training. She quickly found ways to communicate with her pupils, and showed them how to measure, cut and sew clothes to perfection. Huong, one of the hearing-impaired students, can now sew almost as well as her teacher, and is learning how to make “ao dai”, the traditional dress. Binh, the mobility-impaired student, plans to open her own shop.

Since a high percentage of Vietnam's population is considered disabled, USAID helps provide better treatment and more opportunities for people with disabilities in Vietnam. Receiving vocational training instead of just charity gives disabled people a sense of self-worth and makes them valued members of their families and communities. Peer support groups also help their members build networks of friends and promote awareness about the many abilities of disabled people.

Sau said she would continue to employ the girls after the program, or help them set up their own businesses. She has also taken an active interest in their cause, taking them to peer-group meetings on her bicycle and joining community-awareness activities. “I now understand how important it is to include people with disabilities. I was worried that my business would suffer, but my customers are happy and I feel good helping the girls,” she said.