

Vietnamese Friendship Association  
Family Empowerment Program

**PARENT ADVOCACY PROGRAM**  
2008/2009

Program Report & Evaluation



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**Summary:** The Vietnamese Friendship Association, with funding from United Way of King County Impact funds, the Gates Foundation, and the Department of Neighborhoods, successfully launched the second year of the Parent Advocacy program, one of the three components of our overarching Family Empowerment Program, which has been running since November 2007. Besides home visits and advocacy on behalf of parents, the Parent Advocacy component comprises workshops to empower parents to become more aware of and involved in their children’s education. We served a total of 66 parents, most of who are low-income and living in the 98118 area. In support of parental and community involvement, five steering committee meetings, six workshops, and two community events were held. Parents found the program extremely beneficial, especially in meeting their needs as well as connecting to other parents and the community. Despite countless challenges (i.e. staff time, activities coordination, and adjusting to parents’ schedules), we look forward to continuing to provide high-quality services and to build a stronger and sustainable parent advocacy program.

**I. Steering Committee**



Five steering committee meetings were held from February to June 2009. A group of three to six parents met monthly on Friday evenings at the VFA’s main office. They helped select workshop topics, provide feedback on activities planning and working with families. They took ownership and gained a better understanding of the program by being involved. They enhanced their leadership and confidence as well as expanded their social support network.

*“I’ve been in the parent program for two years. The staff is truly passionate and friendly. If there’s any concerns or needs, they are ready to help. My daughters attend the after-school program and they get homework assistance. I’m not fluent in English and with the knowledge that I have, I can’t get the kids to listen to me. They only listen to and believe in teachers and tutors who were born or grew up here. That’s why the programs here are helpful to me.” ~ Sata Gip, steering committee parent participant*



**II. Workshops**

Six workshops were implemented from March to June 2009. The monthly two-hour workshops were conducted on Friday evenings at VFA’s office. Presentations were led by bilingual guest speakers of chosen topics or by the program coordinator when necessary. Topics were selected by the Steering Committee and are based on parents’ needs and concerns. Ice-breakers, group activities, role-play, and discussions were incorporated to increase social skills, motivation, teamwork, and active learning among parents.



*“[From Positive Discipline workshop], I learned the importance of having family discussions as a way of paying attention to my kids, being a good role model [for them], and differences in parenting styles between American and Vietnamese culture.” ~Anonymous parent participant*

Six workshops were held, on the following topics:

1. Differences between Vietnamese and American education system and culture, and what parents need to understand to navigate the new system.
2. Learning to use The Source, which is Seattle Public Schools’ online database of students’ grades that parents may access at any time.
3. What parents need to know about high school graduation requirements and getting students into college.
4. How parents can develop effective communication styles to build a healthy relationship with their children and family.
5. Positive discipline and reducing at-risk behaviors in adolescents in the U.S.

6. What parents need to know about the importance of talking to their teens and pre-teens about waiting to have sex, and the Family Life and Sexual Health, a Seattle Public Schools' curriculum.

### III. Home visits

To foster better relationships and communication with parents, 26 parents benefited from home visits. Home visits are scheduled based on parents' schedules. During one-on-one conversations, parents disclose and share their concerns or issues that may affect their families. The family's conditions are assessed to identify their needs then a service plan is made. For example, a parent expresses interest in attending a parent-teacher conference and is unclear about this process. The Parent Advocate then leads him/her through the process until the goal is achieved. When a parent wants services like ESL or citizenship, which VFA does not currently provide, community resources are given and referrals are made to families during this time. Families who have transportation and health issues, and those who could not attend workshops benefited from home visits. Multiple home visits are conducted to families who needed further assistance. The discussion and follow-up actions are recorded for documentation and evaluation purposes.

### IV. Community Events



Two community events were organized for parents and families. We are very proud of the accomplishments we have had working as a team with the Atlantic Street Center, Chesterfield Health Services, Seattle Housing Authority, Seattle Neighborhood Group, Tammy's Bakery, Within Reach, United States Vovinam Federation, and members of the Vietnamese Service Providers Network.

To cultivate leadership, relationships, and community strengths, the second annual Multicultural Cooking night was held. Parents interacted with non-Vietnamese community members and leaders. The VFA Steering Committee and other community members rigorously took part in the event planning.

They applied funding through the New Holly Community Building Project Funds, recruited participants, and prepared traditional foods. Parents successfully executed the event with over 110 people, volunteers, and students in attendance. Parents gained more confidence and took great pride in being able to give back to the program and the community by being involved.

*"[The program] hosted activities closer to the community and Vietnamese people."* ~Anonymous parent participant



The first annual Vietnamese resource fair brought community resources to Vietnamese families in Southeast Seattle neighborhood. Over 250 people attended, including many parents and students from VFA programs. With more than 40 information booths, parents gathered numerous social services such as education, housing, employment, healthcare, ESL and citizenship classes, and etc. They found the event very valuable and resourceful. They look forward to recreating another event next year.

*"[I] hope that they will be able to continue providing this service to the community."* ~Anonymous parent participant

### V. Demographic of Parents Served

Parents in the program were mainly recruited during workshops. Our outreach included collaborations between the VFA, Secondary Bilingual Orientation Center, Meany Middle and Van Asselt Elementary Schools. The second year of the program we enrolled 20 additional parents, most of who are recent immigrants. We now served a total of 66

parents (65 Vietnamese parents and 1 Caucasian parent of a Vietnamese child).

Of these 66 parents:

- **Economic Status:** very low income: 23 (35%); low-income: 8 (12%); moderate: 3 (5%); unknown income: 32 (48%), as identified on intake forms and based on King County HUD guidelines. Almost half of parents were uncomfortable reporting their income status although other data suggested they were between very low to moderate income as well.
- **Limited English:** 63 (95%)
- **Single parent:** 12 (18%) females; 1 (2%) male; 53 (80%) unknown
- **Gender:** 48 (73%) females; 18 (27%) males
- **Age:** Ranged from 23 to 68 years old (average age: 43)
- **Household size:** Ranged from 2 to 8 (average size: 4.32)
- **Geographic region:** 98118 (44 parents; 67%), 98108 (13 parents; 20%), 98104 (2 parents; 3%), 98106 (2 parents; 3%), 98126 (1 parent; 2%), 98144 (1 parent; 2%), 98178 (1 parent; 2%), and 2 (3%) parents have not identified their zip code.



*“This [VFA] is a good organization; it’s a place where Vietnamese people can come together. The ice-breakers helped us get to know each other better. Newcomers like me need this service...The workshops provided me new ideas of teaching my daughter other than from my personal experience.”~Anonymous parent participant*



## VI. Collaborations

In the second year of our Parent Advocacy program, VFA is appreciative for new collaborations and the continuous support of our partners:

- United Way of King County, City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods, and the Gates Foundation provided funding
- Atlantic Street Center assisted with neighborhood night
- Chesterfield Health Services sponsored the Vietnamese resource fair
- Seattle Housing Authority helped coordinate neighborhood night and resource fair
- Seattle Neighborhood Group helped out with the resource fair
- Seattle-King County Public Health provided guest speaker for workshops
- The following Seattle Public Schools assisted with families outreach:
  - Cleveland High School
  - Meany Middle School
  - Secondary Bilingual Orientation Center
  - Van Asselt Elementary School
- Seattle Public School: Office of Family & Community Partnerships provided translated materials
- Tammy’s Bakery generously donated food for workshops and Vietnamese resource fair
- United States Vovinam Federation volunteered their time for resource fair
- Vietnamese Service Providers Network helped coordinate resource fair

- Within Reach sponsored Vietnamese resource fair

## VII. Accomplishments

- 1400 service hours provided to families, an increase of 1065 hours this year.
- 57 parents attended workshops, with an average of 15.
- 26 families benefited from home visits/individual meetings.
- 16 more parents attended six workshops this year.
- 14 additional families enrolled in the program.
- A Steering Committee was formed and provided feedbacks on working with families and activities planning.
- Parents, volunteers, and a work-study staff assisted with phone calling and program activities.
- Over 10 Steering Committee and community members applied fund to support cooking event, recruited participants, prepared traditional foods, and successfully executed the event with over 110 people in attendance.
- Steering Committee members developed their own social support group through participation in monthly meetings.
- Organized the first annual Vietnamese resource fair for Vietnamese families in Southeast Seattle neighborhood. Over 250 people attended, including many parents and students from VFA programs.
- Parents found the program extremely beneficial, especially in meeting their needs as well as connecting to other parents and the community.
- Parents developed closer bonds with community members through volunteering and attending two New Holly community events that VFA helped coordinate.
- Developed effective outreach strategies, workshop structure, and strategic planning for program activities.
- Developed and strengthened partnerships with 15 partner agencies/schools.
- A convenient office location encouraged parents to attend workshops as most of them don't drive and/or unfamiliar with directions.
- Better turn-out when scheduled workshops on Friday evenings or Saturday mornings.

*“The parent program helps me a lot because I’m a recent immigrant and I don’t understand how Americans discipline their children. Through this program, I learned how to teach my children and adjust to the American lifestyle. Many parents did not get adequate education [in Vietnam] and do not speak English, so they cannot catch up quickly and help their children with schoolwork. VFA assist students with their homework and my kids always wanted to attend the after school program. [The Parent Advocate] helped me interpret school letters and make phone calls to the school. I hope that you can help other parents as much as you’ve helped me.” ~Anonymous parent participant*



## VIII. Program Evaluation

Evaluation of workshops was made through surveys and a final program evaluation was administered through home visits and personal phone calls with parents. A number of them, however, weren't able to complete surveys due to challenges in getting a hold of them. Of the 66 parents enrolled, we collected final evaluation surveys from 35. The full evaluation summary chart is below. Here are some highlights:

- 94% of respondents *strongly agree* and *agree* that participation in the program was very helpful.
- 86% Agreed with “Because of this program, I develop better relationship with my children/family.”
- 85% Agreed with “This program helped increase my participation in parent-teacher meetings.”
- 83% Agreed with “This program helped increase my participation in helping my child(ren) with homework.”

- 82% Agreed with “This program helped increase my participation in school events/activities with my child(ren).”
- 79% Agreed with “This program helped me gain understanding about American school system.”

Program Survey N=35	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Agree
1. This program helped me gain understanding about:					
a) American school system	44%	35%	21%	0%	0%
b) Positive discipline	41%	41%	19%	0%	0%
c) The SOURCE	44%	31%	25%	0%	0%
d) Sex education	55%	30%	15%	0%	0%
e) Parental involvement	27%	42%	21%	9%	0
f) High school graduation requirements & college preparations	32%	27%	36%	5%	0
2. This program helped increase my participation in:					
a) Helping my child(ren) with homework	60%	23%	9%	9%	0%
b) School events/activities with my child(ren)	42%	39%	15%	3%	0%
c) Parent-teacher meetings	47%	38%	6%	9%	0%
3. I gain access to resources because of this program	47%	32%	15%	6%	0%
4. I expand my network/support system because of this program	43%	23%	31%	3%	0%
5. Because of this program, I understand the importance of being or knowing how to be involved in my child’s education	69%	23%	6%	3%	0%
6. Because of this program, I develop better relationship with my children/family	66%	20%	11%	3%	0%
7. Because of this program, I communicate better with my family/children	66%	20%	11%	3%	0%
8. Because of this program, I spend more time with my child(ren)	63%	26%	9%	3%	0%
9. The program is well-organized	63%	26%	9%	3%	0%
10. I really like the staff in this program	80%	17%	0%	3%	0%
11. I really like the guest speakers in this program	69%	19%	13%	0%	0%
12. I really like the refreshment and snacks	66%	22%	13%	0%	0%
13. I really enjoyed the:					
a) Ice-breakers	63%	22%	13%	3%	0%
b) Group activities	61%	26%	13%	0%	0%
c) Presentation	71%	19%	10%	0%	0%
14. I prefer to have Vietnamese-speaking guest speakers in this program	80%	20%	0%	0%	0%
15. Overall, this program is very helpful to me	71%	23%	3%	3%	0%
16. I would recommend this program to my friends	74%	24%	0%	3%	0%



“I gained a better understanding of different issues that I didn’t know before. I didn’t think I needed it, but after going to the workshops, I think knowing is better than not knowing it. I learned about education, laws, and health.”~Phong Dang, parent participant

As a result of evaluation outcome and through personal interactions with parents, we learned that:

- Newcomer parents tend to utilize our services and reach out for help more often compared to those who already adjusted to the American life. Yet both groups share similar issues: They lack the language, social, and leadership

skills. They also have difficulties getting the necessary resources, mainly not knowing how or where to reach out for assistance.

- Parents of elementary school students attend parent meetings and/or parent-teacher conferences more regularly than parents of middle and high schools students.
- Lack of bilingual Instructional Assistants (IAs) at schools hinder parents from attending school meetings.
- Parents are more likely to attend parent-teacher conferences if the school IAs scheduled it with them.
- Parents are more likely to read with and/or tell stories to elementary students compared to middle and high school students.
- Parents of younger students are more aware of and involved in their children's academics than parents of older students.
- Parents with special education children are more invested in their children's schoolwork and activities.
- Parents in general lack language skills and resources to become more involved in their children's schoolwork.
- Parents' lack of knowledge of the Seattle Public School system prevents them from participating school activities and therefore they assume low expectations of the benefits of parental involvement.
- Single parents are more involved in their children's academic progress than couple parents.
- Parents with fluent English skills are more likely to participate in their children's schoolwork and activities.
- Mothers are more likely to seek for outside help compared to fathers.
- Unemployed parents showed greater parental involvement than those who are working.



*"[From The Source workshop], I know how to access and navigate The Source website to check my children's grades."* ~Anonymous parent participant

*"Material is presented in Vietnamese. Vietnamese help Vietnamese [parents] learn positive ways to teach children in America."* ~Anonymous parent participant

*"Very helpful, [the program] helps connect parents to schools."* ~Anonymous parent participant

## IX. Challenges Overcome

- Meeting parents' needs with limited resources are very challenging. Only one main staff coordinated program activities such as workshops, community events, and group/individual meetings with parents.
- With the assistance from a work-study student and collaborations, we accomplished all program activities except for the number of anticipated home visits. We could not rely on partnership or work-study student to conduct home visits so we only focused on visiting families who really needed the attention instead, as not all parents do.
- Lack of parental involvement may be due to meeting family basic needs prior to increasing participation in children's schoolwork. Individual meetings consisted of helping parents interpret school-related and non-related letters such as utilities and medical bills.
- We collaborate and work with 15 agencies/schools. We found that parents are more responsive when the schools referred them to us.
- Shortage of facilities for workshops (i.e. classroom, tables and chairs, computer lab, laptop, projector, screen). Due to VFA's lack of facilities, we held most of workshops at the office. It was just enough space for parents and staff to navigate around the small office, especially with 18 to 23 people in the room.
- Although personal phone calls are the most effective approach for inviting parents to events, it was time consuming for the staff. We spent a plentiful of 10 hours calling parents in the evening on the week of workshops/events.
- Parents are more responsive to phone calls this year, yet it is still difficult to get a hold of them and have them initiate the call.
- It takes a lot of time and patience in motivating and building confidence among parents to participate in program activities such as steering committee meetings, workshops, and community events. For example, the ice-breakers

provide them opportunities to network during workshops. Since ice-breaker is a new concept to them, they were somewhat reluctant at first but eventually participated.

- Encouraging parents to ask questions and share their experiences is challenging during workshops. We engaged them by forming group discussions, providing culturally relevant real-life scenarios, and role-playing parent-child relationship.
- It was difficult working with parents of high school students. They are less engaged in their children's academics but are more concerned with their children's social life.
- Seeking effective guest speakers who speak both Vietnamese and English fluently. Parents don't respond well to workshops conducted in English followed by Vietnamese interpretation. Consequently, the program coordinator learned the materials and carried out the presentation when necessary.
- Working around guest speaker's schedule (i.e. weekdays) and parent's schedule (i.e. evenings and weekends) was less challenging this year. We confirmed guest speakers' schedule at least a month in advance so it was less of a challenge. Additionally, Friday evening workshops had similar attendance as Saturday morning.
- We had limited resources in Vietnamese language so our administrative staff helped with most of the translation, mainly handouts for parents to take home in reference of workshop presentation.
- Parents expressed great needs and concerns in services such as employment, E.S.L and computer classes. Due to limited services, we referred them to other agencies that could be of help/support.
- We intended to have 40 parents complete baseline surveys beginning of school year. Due to lack of resources and staff for outreach, we only had 15 parents filled out surveys during the school year. We will revise our systems to increase this number for next year.
- Many parents have difficulties understanding survey terms so we spent a lot of time explaining each question.
- We hoped to provide 35 parents with at least 50% of individual monthly meetings. However, we only accomplished 30 individual meetings (i.e. home visits, school visits, and other meetings at our office or New Holly campus) from October 2008 to August 2009.
- We aimed to have 35 parents participate at least 30% of program activities/hours. We had 57 parents attended at least one of program activities such as workshops, community events, steering committee and parent orientation meetings. We provided 2 to 27 hours of service to each of these families.

## **X. Plans for 2009/2010 and Beyond**

- Have at least one half-time staff or two part-time workstudy students assist with outreaching and carrying out program's activities while the main staff focuses on program development and home visits.
- Coordinate one workshop per month instead of every 2 to 3 weeks. This gives us more time for home visits and parents more flexibility in their schedules for other commitments.
- Maintain regular Steering Committee meetings as it is essential for relationship building as well as fostering self-confidence and leadership skills.
- Develop better structure for workshops and individual meetings/home visits.
- Collaborate with other parent programs and learn from their models. One of the models we're looking at is train-the-trainer model.
- Apply for grants to support the program and the train-the-trainer model so that we could empower more parents to become leaders and advocate on behalf of their children.
- A long-term goal is to develop enough experience that we will be able to create a curriculum model that other agencies can replicate when working with Vietnamese parents.

**Inspiring Stories from Parents:** *\*Participants' names have changed due to confidentiality.*

**Story 1:** Although "Kim" is a single-mother who recently immigrated to Seattle; she is very invested in her son's special education program. Despite a severe leg injury and transportation difficulties, she made countless visits to her son's school by bus, usually relying on the bus driver for directions. She is determined to learn English so she volunteers at a hair salon, hoping to pick up proficiency in English quickly. She also taught herself how to use the

internet so she could communicate with her son's teachers by e-mail. However, she found it very difficult to get her thoughts expressed clearly. She knew she needed help from an organization with people speaking her native language so she went online and searched for one. One day we received a call from her and since then Phung [the Parent Advocate] has been working closely with her family. She appreciates Phung's help in interpreting at parent-teacher meetings, keeping consistent contact with her son's teachers, and making multiple visits to her home. She really enjoyed and learned a lot from the workshops and community events that VFA hosted in addition to developing a social support network here in a new country.

**Story 2:** "Hung" and his family recently immigrated to Seattle. He really enjoyed coming to the workshops and expanding his knowledge about different topics. In fact, he attended more workshops than any other parents in the program. He said, *"Every workshop is beneficial such as this [Sex Education] workshop. It is a challenging topic to discuss between parents and children in Vietnamese culture. After attending this workshop, I have more confidence approaching my children about this topic."*

**Story 3:** "Loan" is a single-mother who is an active Steering Committee member for the Parent Advocacy program. Through many interactions with her the past year, the Parent Advocate could see her leadership and self-confidence have greatly improved. She was able to contact and make appointments with her children's teachers, which many parents we work with could not. She also participated in the multicultural cooking event with other non-Vietnamese parents to help with food preparation and recruitment of other participants in the community. She was involved in a two-day training through the Vietnamese Community Leadership Institute. *"[Through this training], I learned many things including politics and the importance of working together. Hearing other participants' experiences was beneficial and I enjoyed it very much. I would attend this training again next year, next time with new topics on leadership."*

**Story 4:** "Han" is another single-mother who lives with her two children in Southeast Seattle. Her 10 years old daughter participated in our after-school tutoring program. Her 12-year old son is in the special education program at Meany middle school, one of the schools we worked with. Despite the language and culture barriers, Han is very much involved in her children's education. She attended parent meetings and participated in most of our parent workshops although she doesn't have a car. With our Parent Advocate's assistance, she actively communicated with her son's teacher. During a phone interview she said, *"[The Parent Advocate] has helped me many times by going with me to school [for parent-teacher conferences about my son]. Whenever I need her help, she's quick to respond...she works wholeheartedly and unlike others, she doesn't count the time."*

#### **Additional Translated Comments from Anonymous Parents:**

*"[From Family Communications workshop], I learned the importance of listening to my children's opinions, having family dinner..., encouraging them to think independently and making healthy choices."*

*"The workshops have helped me gain a more in-depth understanding of parenting options so that I can discipline my children and exchange knowledge with them. They [guest speakers] provided me more information besides learning from my own experience about positive discipline."*

*"I gained more knowledge about the different topics presented at each workshop and understand more about the prevention of drug abuse and how to discuss with my children regarding safe sexual practices."*

*"This program teaches me that I need to pay attention to my children and guide them in their education. I also get to learn about school and related laws."*

*"I didn't know how to teach my kids, and you helped me figure out some ways to do so."*

*"[The program] offers new topics in the community, workshops about school. One topic I'm concerned about is drugs."*