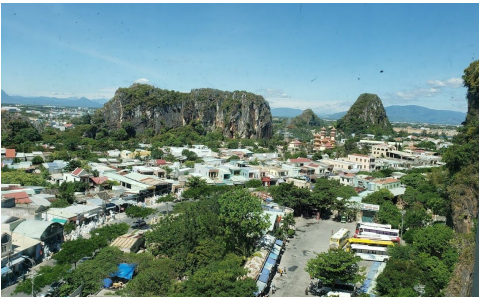


August 31st, 2019- Austin, Texas, USA



Sitting in an air-conditioned room as the scorching heat in Austin, Texas is at its peak 100°F+ in the month of August, I'm tasked with documenting about our organization's first mission. Just a few weeks ago, I was in Vietnam with Janny- my OEGB team member and Vice President of our organization. I'm still in awe at how we were able to function and survive the humidity and the tropical heat relying only on fans and the occasional summer breeze.

It all started about 10 months ago with an email to a few friends, family members and acquaintances expressing my interest to form a nonprofit organization with the idea of doing mission trips around the world, especially rural places where access to vision care is limited. Fast forward a few months later, when our organization was officially 501c3 stamped; Open Eyes Beyond Border (OEGB) became a philanthropic organization with mission includes not only vision care, but also school support program, and especially scholarship/sponsorship program for underprivileged children to help with all school related expenses until completion of highschool. All this was accomplished thanks to the collaborative input and forward thinking of the newly banded OEGB members.

Having growing up in Vietnam and experienced first hand economic hardship throughout childhood, many of our team members and I strongly feel the need to support underprivileged children to stay in school, thus giving them a chance to escape poverty through education.

For this pioneer mission trip, we needed a place where we could use all the help and find enough local support since we were on our learning curve. Besides, no where else could have meant more to us than a place that is filled with our childhood memories. Thus, Vietnam was decided as the destination for our first mission.

The preparation for Vietnam mission trip was well underway until March 2019, when we were faced with the first set of obstacles in securing a location for our vision mission. Different provinces in Vietnam have different rules and regulations. Besides, just because we have a desire for charity work, doesn't mean we can proceed without proper documentation, which may take months to be ready. Not only that, our team only have a certain window for traveling since our mission involves planning to travel with children.

Though we paid for the trip travel expense ourselves, OEGB hosted many activities to raise funds and awareness for the mission trip. Many team members and I tried to incorporate programs for kids and everyone to get involved and volunteer together. By having the children involved early in the process of planning and getting ready for the mission days, we hoped to instill in young children a positive attitude, a sense of appreciation and perspective that can stay with them for life. My personal favorite moment happened on June 1st, 2019 during our "Family Volunteer Day" in Austin, when we were sorting out hats and packing candy gift sets for the children in Vietnam; I saw the biggest and broadest smiles on my children's faces and on the faces of many boys and girls, and adults who came that day. The spirit of sharing and contributing to others sparked joy in all of us.

Planning for our first mission trip was another enjoyable experience in itself. "OEGB Vietnam mission team" was what I used to communicate with other nonprofit groups and other eye care professionals regarding our mission group. It's a bit hard to explain that our "OEGB Vietnam mission team" was in fact, comprised of 2 moms, 3 children and 1 grandma. Even though OEGB organization has a working board and a handful of volunteers, only 6 persons were available for Vietnam mission trip. This group of 6 represented the fundamentals of OEGB teamwork by bringing the donation directly to the children in Vietnam and delivering the care that was envisioned by OEGB mission. The stakes couldn't have been higher.

July 3rd, 2019- as most families were getting their BBQ pits ready for Independence Day celebration, our mission team were getting ready to board the plane out of Austin, Texas for DaNang, Vietnam. I was one of the lucky 2 adults, travelling with my two sons age 9 and 12. The other adult was Janny- a mother of 3, who was able to bring only her oldest daughter aged

g and her mother- "the grandma", aged 68. There were a few comments that our group must be "crazy", because how could a small group with children like us going to another country and accomplish all the tasks that we said we would?

"Crazy", I thought, maybe we were a little; but, we certainly were not naive of the situation, nor were we alone in our work and our journey. Here in Austin, Texas, many of OEBB team members and volunteers have already worked and prepared for what we needed for the mission trip, countless "behind the scenes" hours. Furthermore, when we arrived in Vietnam, the support from our childhood friends, local nonprofit groups and volunteers were tremendous; which overall was the reason for the success of OEBB mission work in Vietnam.

A rather emotional moment for our team happened the night before our mission started in QuangNgai province. That day, we learned that our team might not be able to carry out vision care to the school children despite many documents that we had sent in before. As our hope for OEBB vision mission work was dwindled, a local patron came to the rescue and the green light was then back on. With this news, Janny broke down. Seeing Janny's emotional tears of joy, I couldn't help but feel the weight and the pressure that we were tasked with for OEBB first mission trip. It was not only paramount that we deliver our work, but also deliver it well. The hope, the expectations of the whole team and of the many donors and contributors were upon us.



In the two areas that the team visited- Quang Ngai province and Mekong Delta area. We provided service for 1119 people- kids and adults. Nutritional eye vitamins and eye drops were distributed. 328 received prescription eyeglasses, some 900 children received school supplies, uniforms, backpacks, candy gift sets, and shampoo for eye and lid hygiene. 46 children from extreme poverty families also received new bicycles, desk lamps, solar lamps and scholarship/sponsorship all the way to highschool. With a team of 6 persons and local volunteers working together; I think we did "alright" for a pioneer mission trip. There will always be potential for improvement, but for now, it was a commendable start.

The whole time I was in Vietnam and even after I left, the one thing that was imprinted in my mind was the smile of the children and the echo in their innocent voices. When one of 3rd grade children congratulated her friend: "Hey, good for you friend, you don't need to wear glasses yet", I couldn't help but feel so touched because of the simple joy in their hearts. They felt good because their eyes were healthy. They were happy because they have new books and new backpacks ready for school. Some got to enjoy their new bikes. I felt very lucky to be able to be there, to deliver vision care, to give away OEBB gifts, and to represent what OEBB stands for- a supporter for the underprivileged children.

For the few weeks that I've been to Vietnam, I've felt as if I have lived twice. By this, I felt as if my life experience has doubled and it seems I have lived for a longer time too. I definitely feel much more blessed in all aspects of my life since the start of Open Eyes Beyond Border. From the joy of working alongside with friends, families and volunteers, to going on a mission trip across the globe. Working on this mission and fulfilling OEBB work are not simply responsibilities, but more like a personal quest for sharing life's happiness, making a difference, and a pursuit for a change in perspective.

I have traveled to Vietnam many times before, but going on a mission to Vietnam is an entirely reviving experience. The whole process of planning for mission trip and being there can change anyone's attitude. I encourage everyone- singles, couples, young and old; families, kids or without kids to choose any OEBB mission trip and be involved. Once you go, your perspective will never be the same and your life will forever be enriched.

- Kim Chi Trinh, OD- President -Open Eyes Beyond Border
From the travel log for OEBB 1st mission trip- Vietnam, July 2019