

# Building Bridges

**Michael Halloran** discovers a centre that connects donors and volunteers with people and organisation that need them in order to build a better community. Photo by **Quinn Ryan Mattingly**

**W**hen you live in such a rapidly developing city as Ho Chi Minh City, disparities of wealth might sadden you at first, but hopefully, they will shock you into action. Many people decide they want to volunteer and donate. But where to begin? It's been said that it's often easier to make money than give it away... wisely. So whom should you invest your time and money with?

This is where LIN Centre for Community Development comes in. Running since 2009, LIN is all about creating bridges between donor partners and local not-for-profit organisations (NPOs), in the context of volunteerism and helping vulnerable people. Their mission is to foster a culture of philanthropy in the city, to promote social responsibility and altruism, especially at the grassroots level. So far they are working with over 80 NPOs.

The centre also provides small grants to NPOs, expert training, information and resource exchanges, workshops and in-depth roundtable discussions to address shared concerns, as well as networking events.

"This has been a growth year for us," says Dana R.H. Doan, strategic consultant at LIN. "We've been working on a five year plan and we've also been actively fundraising and we have plans to operate a regular thrift store. We want to use *An Phu Neighbours* (a Google group) to encourage people to donate to the thrift store rather than just selling on their old things."

LIN is also working to put all of its resources online. For example, providing detailed online profiles for all partner NPOs. They also want to become a physical centre where NPOs can come to seek out advice and resources — resource exchange is something that LIN is working on quite a lot, and in the current world economic climate, this particularly suits donors who are more interested in providing time, mentorship and products, rather than monetary donations.

## The Challenge

What kind of networking activities does LIN organise? A prime example was the Corporate Challenge 2012. In this challenge, local NPOs in the city were matched with corporate

partners (in this case advertising firms) to make five teams: Brand Maker & Hoc Mon Social Centre, Clover4Leaf & Little Rose Warm Shelter, Matterhorn Communications & Thao Dan Social Centre, Clover4Leaf & Tuong Lai Centre, and Lowe Vietnam & Action for Wildlife Organization. Over eight weeks, the corporate partners mentored each NPO in order to create a product and design a mission strategy. The challenge ended with an award ceremony on Sep. 7.

The winning NPO was Hoc Mon Social Shelter and their prize was a service package worth VND40 million by Viivue, to be used for website development and brand building.

"I'm very happy our organisation won the top prize," said Hong To Hue Lan, director of Hoc Mon Social Shelter at the ceremony. "However, even if we didn't have any prize, the appreciative relationship between Brand Maker and us would still be there standing as a promise that we will be frequently in touch with each other."

You can give more than just time and money to charities. A constant requirement at LIN is space for workshops and round table meetings.

"Ideally," says Dana, "we need spaces in a central location. Also, our round table meetings can be up to 20 people and workshops up to 60 people."

They need people who are willing to donate their skills. LIN has a pool of around 100 volunteers who regularly contribute, but still need more. English-speakers can help with language teaching and website proofreading. However, knowledge of Vietnamese is a requirement for most assignments. Dana advises "if you're an English speaker who wants to volunteer, bring a Vietnamese friend."

LIN is also hoping to hold a "festival of experts" every other month where people can meet and network with experts in various fields and build lasting connections. "We need volunteers with skills in human resources, finance, communications and IT," says Nguyen Thi Thanh Truc, volunteer coordinator at LIN. People with expertise in law are the most coveted.

For more information, visit their website, [www.linvn.org](http://www.linvn.org). 





