



# VIETNAM

**MAIN TAKEAWAYS**

# VIETNAM CHILDREN'S CLUB

## WHO WE ARE ?

Planète Enfants & Développement (PE&D) has been working since 1984 to protect, educate, and integrate the most vulnerable children. It empowers families, educators, local associations, and public authorities to provide children with a protective, non-violent, stable, and stimulating environment. This is in fact an essential condition for their development and well-being, which begins in early childhood, a critical period for a child's growth and development that shapes the rest of their life.

In August of 2020, l'AFD (Agence Française de Développement) co-financed a multi-country program agreement entitled "Investing in Early Childhood" (Investir dans la Petite Enfance), which notably includes projects such as the establishment of nurseries, provision of professional training, improvement of preschool conditions, creation of play areas, and more. The first of three-three year phase concluded in July 2023, allowing for deeper understanding of the main takeaways for certain activities.

## IN VIETNAM

Present in Vietnam since 1992, PE&D has developed projects for early childhood development thanks to a partnership with local association HACRP (Ho Chi Minh City Association For Children's Rights Protection) since 2020. In two community centers, We have created a place of welcome for parents and children that we call the Children Club.

**Population: 97.5 million people\***

**Capital: Hanoi**

**Official language: Vietnamese**

**Infant mortality rate (under 5): 21 per thousand\***

**Gross pre-school enrolment rate: 92%\***

\* World Bank 2021

## WHY ?

### ● INVESTING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), "early childhood development (from pregnancy to 8 years old) is crucial for upholding every child's right to survive and thrive [...] The period from pregnancy to the age of the 3 is the most critical as the brain develops more rapidly than at any other period. 80% of a baby's brain is formed during this age. For healthy brain development during these years, children need a safe, secure, and nurturing environment, along with proper nutrition and stimulation from their parents or caregivers. It is a window of opportunity to lay the foundation for lifelong health and well being, which also has an impact on the next generation." <sup>1</sup>

**“The first 3000 days (from conception to 7 years old) are a period when learning is most intense and effective, almost effortless.”**

**Agnès Florin**  
Professor Emeritus of Child Psychology and Education at Nantes University <sup>2</sup>

Agnès Florin highlights, "the importance of stimulating [the child], meeting their needs, whatever they may be, surrounding the child with love and support during the critical period [...]". "Providing the child with regular opportunities to be active, solve problems with the help of an adult if needed, and have positive interactions with their surroundings allows them to become truly independent, responsible, and aware of their actions [...] Engaging in object manipulation, play, walks, reading, music, sharing ideas and emotions, and eliciting laughter nourishes the child's brain and contributes to healthy physical and mental growth."

### ● INVESTING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD IN VIETNAM

Vietnam has 7.5 million children under the age of 5 (despite a relatively low fertility rate in Ho Chi Minh City), and school services are still insufficient, especially for early childhood (0-3 years old).

In fact, unlike pre-schools, early childhood (EC) services do not meet demand, either qualitatively or quantitatively, and have serious limitations: they are overcrowded, too expensive, and often the scene of violence and abuse.

Since 2010 PE&D has worked on problems of urban poverty and has centered its actions on early childhood development in two particularly vulnerable districts in Ho Chi Minh City (Than Phu and Thu Duc). The families in these districts, often migrants (internally displaced), face many psycho-social problems, legal and administrative challenges, and difficulties related to health and education.

In fact, the living environment is often unsanitary, and knowledge about health, especially sexual health, is limited (nutrition, vaccinations, health insurance, addiction, etc.).

It is the same when it comes to education: children are not taken care of, and parents' skills and financial resources are seriously limited and are lacking to ensure the education and healthy development of their children. This problem is exacerbated by the predominant, even sole, responsibility of the mothers and very limited involvement of the fathers.

1. <https://www.who.int/fr/publications-detail/9789241514064>

2. <https://www.cerveauetpsycho.fr/sd/developpement-enfant/cerveau-psycho-n143-23634.php>



## WHAT & WHEN ?

In 2021, PE&D developed parenting sessions offered to mothers as well as fathers where they could meet in small groups to discuss subjects related to the education of young children, including development, nutrition, emotions, hygiene, safety, and learning through games. The families who benefited from the sessions were selected by our partner HACRP, which organizes food distribution for vulnerable families.

The parenting sessions were less successful than we had hoped. Parents found it difficult to be available without their children (there are few options for childcare). Gradually, thanks to the social workers' observations and exchanges with the families, the idea to put in place playtime for children with their parents together in the community centers was implemented. Therefore, parents would be able to come to the center with their children without worrying about childcare. For this purpose, we have established the Children Club in 2022 which allows parents to learn new parenting skills and put them into practice under the caring guidance of the social workers.

### OVERVIEW

- Moms and dads and their children up to age 6 welcome
- 10 families at each Children Club

## FOR WHO ?

On average, the community centers welcome around ten families to each Children Club. Each year, they welcome a hundred parents and a hundred children between the ages of 0 and 6.



## HOW ?

The families are invited to come once every two weeks from 9:30 to 11:00 am or 2:00 to 3:30 pm to participate in a fun time and to play with their children under the age of 6. The sessions take place in a space rented by our partner HACRP which is rented from the DOLISA (Department of Labors, Invalids and Social Affairs.). The spaces are community centers located in the neighborhoods where the parents live. In 2022-2023, PE&D and HACRP ran the Children Club in two social centers in the districts of Tan Phu and Thu Duc.

In consultation with parents, PE&D has developed a 26 session curriculum centered around 8 main topics: screens, nutrition, health and hygiene, safety, play, emotions, child development, and more specific topics like using a timer to manage time with children or developing self-confidence.

### TRAINING AND TEAM COACHING

Two Vietnamese social workers and employees of PE&D were trained over the course of 3 years in different themes. They then trained in turn a team of social workers who are employees of our partner HACRP.

To improve professional practices and provide ongoing training, PE&D set up a weekly meeting with an early childhood expert from the organization's headquarters to explore the various themes chosen more in depth, and to give the childcare centers an opportunity to provide feedback. PE&D also developed an observation evaluation chart that social workers use every time they work together in pairs. The social workers received training in observation and evaluation methods to ensure that they are able to give each other meaningful feedback.

### THE THEMES LINKED TO PRACTICE

Starting with a theme, the parents are invited to reflect on the subject through playful, participatory activities. The children are always **at the center** of the program and the activities that they participate in with their parents. For example, when the topic of hygiene comes up, the children might learn to wash their hands together with their parents using adapted materials : water basins, soap, and towels were provided to the children so that the parents could put into practice the advice given by the social workers. Subsequently, hand washing was introduced as a routine before each snack offered by the team.



**« Now, my child washes his hands multiple times every day on his own. »**

## PROXIMITY TO FAMILIES

Since 2022, HACRP has organized food distributions for the most vulnerable families in the community center in Tan Phu. The ward officers work with HACRP and were trained to identify families in need to offer them the opportunity to sign up for the food distributions.

PE&D is present at these distributions and invites parents who benefit from them to join the parenting sessions. Social workers distribute flyers and inform families about the next sessions.

In parallel, the PE&D social workers accompanied and supported these same families for 6 months by meeting with them at home to work on finding solutions for their social, economic, and educational problems, thanks to the Family Development Approach developed by PE&D.



The families saw the same social worker for the Family Development Approach sessions as for the parenting sessions at the Children Club. This strengthened the bonds of trust between the families and the social workers, who were able to better understand their problems and refine their support, listening, and accompaniment. This close relationship between the families and the social workers is one of the keys for success of the Children Clubs.

In addition to the follow-up through the various activities mentioned above, the teams also created groups on Zalo (an instant messaging platform used in Vietnam), and kept the families up to date with messages about the time and place for the next Children Club. They regularly sent advice through flyers designed by the teams. The parents can also ask questions either in the group chats or individually through direct messages to their social worker. Finally, meetings were offered to parents online (through Google Meet & livestreaming on Facebook) one evening a month where an early childhood expert (in education, health, psychology, or other areas) would discuss different themes: screen time, nutrition, health, early childhood development, parent/child interactions, and more.

### TO REMEMBER

In addition to the Children Club...

- The presence of PE&D at family food distributions
- 6-months of family support meetings in their home
- Creation of a Zalo group
- Monthly online meetings with an expert

## THE LAYOUT OF THE SPACE

The layout of the space has been designed to prevent gender stereotypes. For example, it offers toys and games that are not split by gender: dolls are placed next to cars, which are placed next to construction games, and so on. In addition, play corners were created to facilitate the children's free movement through games in line with their age and development (fine motor corner, imitation games, construction games, etc.) based on their interest and the availability of materials. Finally, to ensure that the children have a safe and reassuring space, the layout of the space is always set up the same way at each meeting.



## SMALL BENEFITS THAT MOTIVATE FAMILIES

At each meeting, the teams offered the children and their parents a shared snack. The parenting sessions and Children Clubs have focused on raising awareness on hygiene and nutrition, and the snacks are an integral part of that effort. An intentional effort was made to avoid sugar and instead offer healthy, balanced snacks. Furthermore, families leave each Children Club with cartons of milk for their children and sometimes small gifts, like a book, game, or picture.



**The children encourage their parents to come back more often to share these moments with them.**

**RESULTS 2022-2023**



Above all, the Children Clubs had a significant direct impact on the children (fulfillment of their needs, improvement of mental health). In fact, the children had few games at home or playgrounds suitable for them. Play was not incorporated in their education or parent-child interactions. The adults did not know how to play with their children. We observed through home visits that there were no places for play and that toys were quite non-existent. Parents were often too busy or not wealthy enough to buy toys.

**PARENTS' VOICES**

*"I prioritize spending more time with my child, reducing time spent in front of the TV, and engaging in conversation and actively playing with him."*

*"Now, my daughter shows me the things that she likes in books. Before, there was no interaction."*

*"The Children's Club plays a crucial role in children's education by providing knowledge about care, nutrition and learning."*

*"Being part of the Club allows me to connect with other parents, share experiences and improve my parenting skills."*

*"Today, I spend daily quality time talking and playing with my child."*

**CONNECTING PARENTS WHO LIVE CLOSE TO EACH OTHER**

The Children Club also brings together families in the community who live near one another. They find similarities in their living situations and parenting challenges. For example, they look after each other's children when they have to be away, take care of and support each other by sharing housing tips or simply meeting to chat in their spare time, telling family stories, and talking about life's difficulties...

**THE IMPACT OF THIS METHODOLOGY**

The Children Clubs also had a **significant indirect impact on parents' mental health** (most significant for the mothers)(an observation shared by DOLISA). In fact, the Children Club allowed parents to take time for themselves with their children, putting aside their problems and daily mental toll.

According to Archipel & Co's final evaluation report, the **median time** dedicated by parents to looking after their children **doubled** (11 hours a week before participating in the sessions and the Children Club, compared to 23 hours afterwards.)

The **quality time** shared by children and parents (education, games, reading, dance, singing, activities, discussions) also grew significantly, increasing **from 3 hours a week to 8 hours** after attending the Children Club.



## ● LESSONS

- 1** The parent-child activities contributed to the improvement of parents' knowledge as well as the improvement of their relationship with their children
- 2** Meetings with parents and children in a ideal space for children to play motivated parents to come and facilitated their availability
- 3** The combination of discussions in the Children Clubs and contact through digital communication reinforced the close ties between parents and social workers, increasing trust and receptiveness to messages
- 4** The initial and ongoing training for social workers is essential for the quality of the activities, both in terms of lessons on the themes and in terms of training in leadership and posture.

## ● CONCLUSION

*The Children Club has been designed to improve, encourage and support the parent-child relationship by providing them quality time for exchanges, play and interactions away from the difficulties of everyday life. The child is (re)centered in their parents' concerns and, thanks to the topics covered by the professionals, the parents receive high quality information that allows them to improve their parenting skills.*

### **NOLWENN DESCHARD**

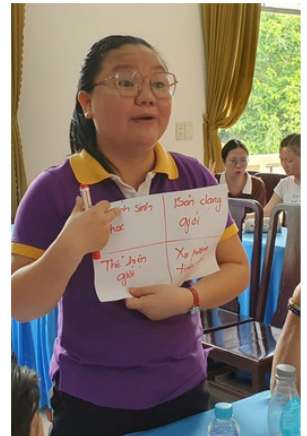
**EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPERT**

PLANÈTE ENFANTS & DÉVELOPPEMENT

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## WHO WE ARE ?

Planète Enfants & Développement (PE&D) has been working to protect, educate and integrate the most vulnerable children since 1984.

## IN VIETNAM

In Vietnam since 1992, PE&D has been developing early childhood projects. In two social centers, we have set up the Children Club, a space where parents and their children can spend time together.

### FOR WHO ?

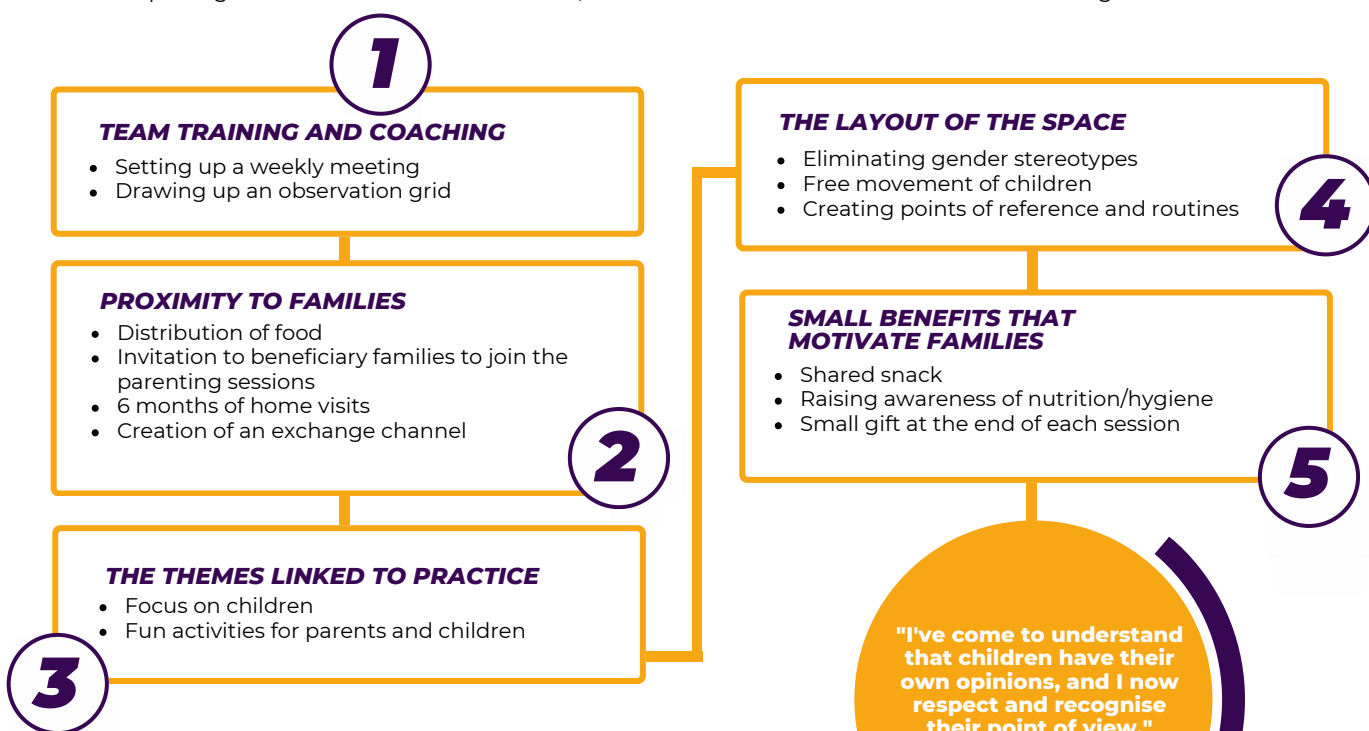
The Children's Clubs can reach around 100 parents, and currently around ten families attend each session.

### WHAT / WHEN ?

Children's Clubs enable parents to learn new parenting skills while putting them into practice under the watchful eye of social workers.

## HOW ?

Every week from 9.30am to 11am or from 2pm to 3.30pm, a time of fun and games with their children under 6. We have put together a curriculum of 26 sessions, divided into 8 main themes to be covered during each session



## IMPACTS

**65**

SESSIONS ON AVERAGE

**25%**

OF FAMILIES STAY FOR MORE THAN 3 MONTHS

**8**

PARENTS AND 8 CHILDREN PER SESSION ON AVERAGE

**128**

FAMILIES AND 128 CHILDREN IN TOTAL

**FIRST AND FOREMOST, CHILDREN'S CLUBS HAVE A MAJOR DIRECT IMPACT ON CHILDREN (PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT, MENTAL HEALTH).**

## LESSONS LEARNED & CONCLUSION

- IMPROVING KNOWLEDGE
- BETTER PARENT/CHILD RELATIONSHIPS
- AN ENVIRONMENT CONDUCIVE TO PLAY
- INITIAL AND CONTINUING TRAINING

**x2**

THE MEDIAN TIME SPENT BY PARENTS LOOKING AFTER THEIR CHILDREN