

## **U.S. STUDY TOUR FOR VIETNAM'S DISABILITY POLICY MAKERS**

### **Integration and Coordination of Disability Policies and Services December 12 – 20, 2011**

In December 2011, nine high-level officials from the Ministries of Labor Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), Education and Training (MOET) and Health (MOH) participated in a study tour of US disability policy sponsored by USAID and Vietnam Assistance for the Handicapped (VNAH).

The officials, including Mr. Nguyen Trong Dam, Vice Minister of MOLISA and Dr. Nguyen Vinh Hien, Vice Minister of MOET were chosen because each is responsible for key aspects of Vietnam's recently adopted national disability law that guarantees the right of people with disabilities to equal participation in society. Like US disability laws, Vietnam's new disability law authorizes government agencies at the national, provincial and local levels to develop regulations, policies and programs aimed at inclusion and full participation of people with disabilities in society. The law seeks to remove physical barriers to education, employment, health care, social services and financial support such as access to buildings and transportation, as well as attitudinal barriers such as low expectations and discrimination.

The study tour highlighted the importance of coordination among different public agencies and service providers across sectors (health, education, labor) and at various levels of government (federal, state and local) in the US. and an integrated approach to the development of disability policy.

The delegation met with the following people and agencies in Washington DC and the surrounding areas:

#### **Senator Tom Harkin**

Harkin, one of the architects of the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and a friend of Vietnam, discussed the challenges that the US faced in passing and implementing the law and highlighted the importance of including people with disabilities and family members in the decision-making process. He noted that implementing

such a law is a long process and requires dedication at all levels of government. He said the US is committed to helping Vietnam move forward on this issue.



Sen. Harkin (Third from Left) speaks with the Vietnamese delegation on the need of collaboration of all government agencies to effectively implement the new disability law.

The delegation also met with Tim Rieser, a key staff member working with Senator Patrick Leahy on the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee that funds foreign aid. Both Senator Leahy and Mr. Rieser have been instrumental in ensuring continued support for the Leahy War Victims Fund that provides funding for disability-related programs and activities in Vietnam.

### **US State Department**

The delegation met with **Judith Heumann**, Special Advisor for International Disability Rights and **Charlotte McClain-Nhlapo**, Coordinator for Disability and Inclusive Development at USAID to discuss the role of disability in the human rights agenda and the critical relationship between government and civil society in developing and implementing a rights-based disability agenda.

### **Federal Departments of Education (DoEd), Labor (DOL) and Health and Human Services (HHS) and National Council on Disability (NCD).**

Responsibility for implementing disability laws in the US, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education

Act (IDEA), the Rehabilitation Act, and the ADA is split among a number of different federal agencies. The delegation met with high-level administrators from the Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services responsible for developing and implementing disability programs, as well as from the National Council on Disability, which monitors and reports to Congress annually on the status of disability policy implementation. The leadership of each of these agencies presented information and discussed the US approach to educating children with disabilities including the right to a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. The delegation learned



Mr. Tim Rieser (Right) emphasizes the inclusion of people with disabilities in the implementation and enforcement of the new disability law.



Judith Heumann and Charlotte McClain-Nhlapo (on wheelchairs), meet the delegation at the State Department

about the roles of the federal government as compared to the state and local governments. The federal agencies provide guidance and a limited amount of funding to programs that are implemented at the state and local levels.

### **Community services board of Fairfax County Virginia**

After hearing about the role of the federal government in implementing disability law and policy, the delegation met with administrators of Community Services Board in Fairfax county, Virginia and the Service Source to see how services are delivered to adults with disabilities. With funding streams from different departments at the federal, state, and local levels, the

Community Service Board organizes health, social service and employment support for 20,000 people with psychiatric and intellectual disabilities. The Service Source provides a range of employment options and social support for people with disabilities. The delegation had to opportunity to observe one such employment setting at a company that hires people with disabilities.

### **School System in Montgomery County Maryland**

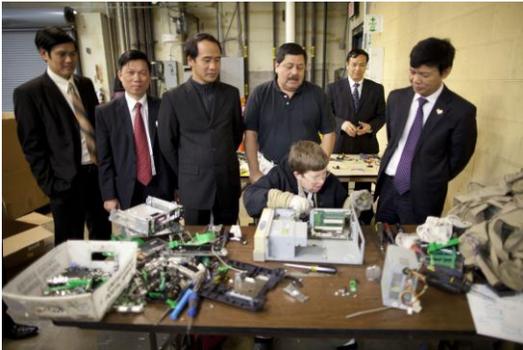
The delegation observed both inclusive and special education elementary school classes. In both types of classrooms children with disabilities were being taught the same curriculum as children without disabilities. The delegation saw the types of educational support available to the students with disabilities including speech and occupational therapies. They met with teachers to discuss the type of training they have received and where they get ongoing information to update their skills.

The delegation met the with transition specialist at an area high school and discussed transition planning and employment preparation before visiting a One-Stop career center where staff from the department of labor work side by side with staff from vocational

rehabilitation funded by the Department of Education and a number of other agencies that provide employment support for different populations.

### **Early Intervention Services in Anne Arundel County, Maryland**

US federal law requires that the public school system in each county have an early intervention program that focuses on early detection, diagnosis and intervention. The delegation met with administrators of the program in Anne Arundel County and observed a preschool classroom that integrates children with disabilities in community-based preschool programs with appropriate support which emphasizes therapeutic play.



The delegation learned how children are referred for services and the role of the education system in early diagnosis and intervention.

The delegation met with parents of children with disabilities who discussed

the role of parents in seeking appropriate services from both the education and health sectors and in advocating for their children's right to obtain these services as guaranteed under the IDEA law.

### **Johns Hopkins University Hospital Rehabilitation Center and the Kennedy Krieger Institute**

The Rehabilitation Center at Johns Hopkins Hospital is one of the premier



centers in the region. The Kennedy Krieger Institute provides specialized services to children with disabilities and is a regional center for children with autism spectrum disorders.

The delegation met with faculty doctors who have been providing training to rehabilitation doctors and physiotherapists in Danang city under another USAID/VNAH project. The visit focused on the role of the health care sector in providing rehabilitation, community outreach, and specialized services.