

## **February 2021 Sustained Grantee Spotlight: Catalyst Foundation (Vietnam)**

As Catalyst Foundation beneficiaries and staff faced down the coming pandemic early last year, the organization's crisis response was a tangible reflection of its strong community connection.

"Vietnam went into lockdown in late January (2020), which was quite early in this pandemic," Caroline Nguyen Ticarro, Founder and Executive Director of Catalyst Foundation, said.

Ticarro said the government knew the country's healthcare system could not handle the potential onslaught that could come with COVID-19, so borders were closed immediately. Though that protected the health of residents, Ticarro said those who would normally travel 20-30 kilometers for manual labor were suddenly unable to do so.

"All labor stopped," she said "Because it was a lockdown, everyone had to stay home. Our entire community lost any source of external income. And there was a lack of knowledge about what the virus was. They were afraid to go to markets. Schools were closed."

Catalyst Foundation responded quickly.

"The very first thing we did was we increased our food distribution," Ticarro said. "Since the kids had to stop school, we had two social workers go out with the food distribution to provide one-on-one tutoring with every kid. They speak an ethnic language, so keeping Vietnamese in daily life is hard. They don't speak it with their parents or with their friends."

As the pandemic spread, travel for Catalyst's volunteer groups was cancelled, shutting down a source of financial and labor support. As a stop gap measure, a local plumber worked with families to teach them what they would have learned with the volunteer groups.

"We taught families to create outhouses," Ticarro said.

During the lockdown, which ended in October, Ticarro said the organization had to cancel everything that would have brought in income.

"For 10 months, it was totally stay at home," she said.

As a result, Ticarro stopped taking a salary so staff would not be furloughed.

"I picked up a couple of side hustles," she said. "I don't know what we would have done without the Dining for Women grant. We couldn't have fed our families and couldn't have kept our staff."

Though community members are still not able to travel as much for labor yet, schools have reopened and there is hope. Because of Catalyst Foundation's tutoring program, students were able to keep up with schoolwork. Masks and bar soap were added to the organization's expanded food distribution program, and most importantly, no one in the community got sick.

"We kept everyone healthy, which is really all that you could ask for," Ticarro said. "Our plan for 2021 is to go back to what the plan was for 2020. Financially, it will still be tough, but we know how to make do."