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Agency: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

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Seeing beyond

It was during my second year of university when I had quite adapted to my life as an international student in Hong Kong. I remembered seeking for opportunities of personal development in the summer when the title of UNV internship programme caught my attention. Although majoring in science, I have always wanted to have a volunteering opportunity where I can dedicate myself for volunteerism. Moreover, as a Vietnamese myself, I was intrigued and excited by learning about the UN system and operation in my home country. Without hesitation, I applied, went through many applications and interviews to finally get my position. I was ready to begin my journey in the UN.

However, “I have no experiences” was what made me nervous the most. This assignment focused on the implementation and improvement of the national legal system. On one hand, I kept my mind open and determined to learn everything to be able to work. On the other hand, I doubted that I could actually do anything. Luckily, I was guided and helped by my supervisor who is a Legal Specialist. I was assigned with small tasks such as reading, generating database, providing comments, translating documents and letters to bigger tasks such as proofreading, consolidating documents and Annual Work Plan, and supporting in activity implementation. In the first few months I sometimes felt doubtful when realizing my limited knowledge and ability as a university volunteer to contribute to my section. Yet I was lucky to receive support and help from my colleagues and friends to keep on going. As I get used to my work, I was assigned with more important tasks, invited to attend meetings and events in and outside of the UN House, all of which had helped me learn so much more about the Child Protection (CP) System in Viet Nam, its progress and implementation, its limitation and future plans. Most significantly, under the guidance of my supervisor, I was able to co-implement one small student-initiative project with relations to one activity where UNICEF supported the Law University to open the first-ever course on Juvenile System for undergraduate students in Viet Nam. This opportunity allowed me to use what I had learned to implement a project for law students and inspire them to explore the topic of juvenile system.

As a university volunteer who have no experiences in the related field, in June, 2018, I came back to Viet Nam with doubts and uncertainty of what I could achieve from this internship. Looking back now, I was proud of how far I had come. Moreover, I learned and appreciated so much the spirit, dedication, and passion from my supervisor, my Section Chief, and all my colleagues who work really hard with the dream of protecting Vietnamese children from violence, exploitation, and abuse and providing them a fair and equal rights in the legal system. This programme has taught me about volunteerism in a much larger scope and inspired me to continue to take more actions to change the world in the future.

“Why would a Science major student take an internship of a Governance and Policy position?” has been so far the mostly asked question that I receive ever since I told my friends, my parents, or anybody about my decision to take a 6-month gap to join the UNV programme. A simple

but difficult question to answer. Until today, I would say that I have not yet found an ultimate answer for that question, but it has been an experience which helped me unlock my potential and see beyond my own field of profession.

So be brave, and be open-minded. Dream and take action. I believe you can get much more than you expect, and you will see yourself grow so much from the programme in just 6 months.