

# THU'S STORY

## VIETNAM



[Watch Thu's Story](#)



**Thu and his wife Linh live in the Quang Tri province, Vietnam. After Linh suffered a stroke, Thu became her primary carer.** Photo: Phan Tan Lam/Caritas Australia

Thu lives in the Quảng Trị province, located on the Northern Central Coast of Vietnam.

Vietnam has made significant economic and social progress since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. However, poverty and inequality remain widespread across the country. The repercussions of land mines and chemical warfare can be seen in the large numbers of people living with a disability.

Thu was just 12 years old when he stepped on an unexploded land mine and lost his leg. The province was one of the most heavily bombed areas during the Vietnam War. Overall, there are approximately 800,000 tonnes of unexploded ammunition that have been left over from the war.

According to the Vietnamese government, more than 100,000 people have died from unexploded landmines.

Living with a disability in rural Vietnam presented many challenges for Thu, who worked mainly as a rice farmer.

**"It is hard to get a job in rural areas where people earn their living mainly from farming. However, local farming here depends on the natural weather... There is often drought in summertime and flood in rainy season. Life is thus extremely difficult," says Thu.**

In addition to being the breadwinner for his family, Thu took on the role of caring for his wife, Linh, after she suffered a stroke.

**"She is my wife and we have been living together and depending on each other, I am the one to be there with her and for her," says Thu.**

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Determined to turn their lives around, Thu and Linh joined the Empowerment of People with Disabilities program, run by Caritas Australia's local partner in Vietnam, the Centre for Sustainable Rural Development (SRD). "Many people with a disability in Vietnam feel that other people would only look at their disabilities rather than at their capacities," says Toan Tran, SRD Program Manager.

The Empowerment of People with Disabilities program supports people living with disabilities to establish Village Saving and Loans Associations (VSLA) so that they can access affordable loans. Through the VSLA he was able to obtain a low-interest loan, which he used to open his own barber shop. Thu also joined an incense-making group and, with the extra income, he was able to repair his house and reconstruct his front yard to prevent flooding during the rainy season. He now plans to invest in livestock, such as pigs, ducks or chickens, to further diversify his income streams.

Before he joined the program, Thu mostly stayed at home and had limited contact with other people in his neighbourhood. The VSLA provides a welcoming and inclusive space for people with a disability like Thu and Linh to socialise, learn and support each other. The couple also participated in training in Disaster Risk Reduction, disability rights, photo-voice technology, rehabilitation, livelihood and independent living skills.

**"I think having a club is good, where people living with disabilities can join and help one another," Thu says.**

Due to the program, they have been able to build an accessible toilet for Linh and receive the support of a physiotherapist, who has assisted her to walk short distances with the aid of a walking stick. With his wife's increased independence, Thu now has more time to focus on other activities, such as walking his grandson to school and working at his barber shop. With your generosity, the Empowerment of People with Disabilities program was able to support more than 6,300 people in Vietnam in the last financial year.

**"I am grateful to Caritas Australia for the help they give to people living with disability like me and my wife," Thu says. "Thank you to Caritas Australia and the Australian people."**

*Along with your support, this program is supported by the Australian government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).*



Photo: Phan Tan Lam/Caritas Australia

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### TASK 1: Discussion

- A. What were some of the challenges faced by Thu living with a disability in Vietnam?
- B. Explain how Caritas Australia and their partners in Vietnam have supported Thu, his wife Linh and others living with a disability in his community.
- C. How has your support of Caritas Australia enabled Thu to change his life?
- D. Which Catholic Social Teachings do you see reflected in Thu's story?

### TASK 2: How accessible is your school?

Write down, or mark on a map of your school grounds, all the ways that your school is accessible for those with a disability. This could include yellow lines in front of steps and on posts, accessible toilets, wide entry ways, ramps, or even technologies that make it easier for students to learn in the classroom.

Ask a teacher if there are any others you have not thought of.

Write a letter to your principal with suggestions on how to make your school more accessible for people living with disabilities.

### TASK 3: Inclusion and the Sustainable Development Goals

How is disability Inclusion prioritised in the Sustainable Development Goals?

Read the information on the [United Nations webpage](#) about disability.

1. Select three and summarise how each goal works towards inclusive development.
2. Design a social media post or create a video promoting inclusive development.

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### A CATHOLIC WORLDVIEW (JUDGE)

*"Every human person is precious and has value that does not depend on what they have or on their abilities, but on the simple fact that he or she is a person, the image of God."*

Pope Francis

How does this quote relate to Thu's story?

*"If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it."*

1 Corinthians 12:26

When Thu's wife Linh suffered a stroke, he continued to care for her, despite his own challenges. Standing in solidarity is one way that we can act in love for our global brothers and sisters.

How does the above scripture passage relate to the Catholic Social Teaching of Solidarity?