

MEDIA RELEASE

27 May 2008

TWO YOUNG VIETNAMESE TO LEARN TRADE UNDER LEADING AUSTRALIAN DESIGNER

Mariana Hardwick, Australia's leading wedding dress and couture designer, working in collaboration with the **Lifestart Foundation** (LSF) has commenced training two young people from underprivileged backgrounds in Vietnam.

This inaugural program is part of a 12-month Melbourne based traineeship that aims to provide the young people with training and fashion design skills to be used when they return home to Hoi An, Vietnam's dress making capital.

Mariana sees the traineeship as a way of embracing social entrepreneurship by applying her business skills and resources to support humanitarian and social issues. She says, "When I visited Vietnam, I so admired the diligence and humility of the people. I could see the opportunity to match this very positive attitude with the opportunity for a skills transfer. In meeting **Karen Leonard (LSF Founder)** I have found a kindred spirit in someone who is determined to make things happen. Our vision of this initiative to create a training ground for disadvantaged youth from Hoi An is just the beginning of something much larger."

Thanh Thi Tran and **Ghi Quang Le**, both aged 23 began their traineeship on 5 May. Selected from the LSF's *Jobstart* program, which is designed to foster independence and economic self-sufficiency, they were supported by Mariana for a one-year pre-training scheme in Vietnam before arriving in Australia.

Under the guidance of Mariana and her team the two will learn specialist dress making skills to include basic design, pattern making, grading, draping, lay planning and cutting, garment construction and pressing. Thanh and Ghi will stay with Karen for the 12 months and will be paid award wages in accordance with the terms and conditions of their Australian traineeship and visa requirements.

"This project is not about bringing two underprivileged kids to Australia for the experience of a lifetime," says Karen. "Instead it is about providing Vietnamese youth from disadvantaged backgrounds with first class training and skills that will enable them to pass on the knowledge when they return home. This truly is the beginning of what will be an amazing collaboration between the Lifestart Foundation and Mariana Hardwick."

Leonard, a former music teacher, commenced the Lifestart Foundation in 2004 after a backpacking trip to Vietnam. Since then Lifestart has provided education scholarships for street children, micro-business grants to families, installed basic

services in homes, built houses for families without shelter, boats to provide a source of income, renovated a local orphanage and paid the medical expenses of children with severe illnesses. In 2006 the Foundation opened a Free School.

Thanh and Ghi will be special guests at this year's Lifestart Foundation annual **Christmas in July** fundraiser, which will be held on **Saturday, 26 July** with a dinner dance and charity auction.

Lifestart Foundation is a non-profit charity registered in Victoria.
<http://www.lifestartfoundation.org.au>

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Thanh & Ghi:

Thanh's family are poor farmers. Like many young people, she was forced to come to Hoi An in central Vietnam in search of work. Her job required her to work seven days a week for up to 18 hours per day. Because her salary was only enough for food, she had no accommodation and was forced to sleep on the floor of her employment. Since meeting Karen three years ago, Thanh now speaks fluent English and has regularly acted as a translator for the Lifestart Foundation.

Ghi comes from a large family living in a small village near Hoi An. He overcame the hardship and struggle of poverty to complete year twelve as a result of a life juggling school and selling on the street to tourists. He had just finished his two-year compulsory stint in the Vietnamese Army when Leonard was first introduced to him as a possible candidate for this project. He has had intensive English classes for the past ten months and has also acted as a translator for the Lifestart Foundation.

