



June E-Newsletter

Advancing Our Circular Learning Model Through Purposeful Research and Community Impact



As we move into summer, the true strength of our circular learning ecosystem becomes increasingly evident. This month showcases how our model transforms curious minds into confident researchers and community advocates, with each project reinforcing the interconnected nature of learning and service that defines AASuccess.

Through our 20-year proven methodology, we witness students like Aashee Balani conducting sophisticated environmental health research and Hillary Nguyen implementing educational initiatives. Each represents different stages in our development pipeline yet all contribute to our shared mission of creating positive social impact.

This circular model ensures sustainability: every resource invested multiplies through peer mentorship, community projects, and the kind of deep learning that only occurs when students know their work has genuine purpose. With our modest annual budget under \$100,000, we're developing future leaders who understand that true success requires both personal growth and service to others.



Dave Nguyen, Founder & Board Member



Student Research Spotlight: The Critical Health Threat of Microplastics

Meet Aashee Balani, 11th Grade, Oakton High School!



As part of her commitment to the AASuccess Go Green initiative, Aashee conducted in-depth research uncovering the alarming health risks of microplastics—tiny plastic particles found in everyday items like food packaging, cosmetics, and utensils.

Her findings reveal that these particles can enter the bloodstream and even breach the blood-brain barrier, potentially contributing to neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. Through detailed analysis of recent scientific studies, Aashee connects the environmental impact of plastics with their biological consequences, demonstrating how oxidative stress triggered by microplastics can damage DNA and vital organs. Her work showcases not only scientific rigor but also a deep personal passion to raise awareness and drive long-term environmental and public health solutions through student-led action.

Read her full research paper at: <https://shorturl.at/G6X2F>

From School Project to Community Impact: Hillary's Educational Initiative

How Level 1 Students Develop Leadership Skills Through Real-World Applications



When Hillary Nguyen, a first-year high school freshman at AASuccess, undertook an educational kids' camp as her real-world project, she exemplified how our circular learning model transforms students into confident community leaders. Working alongside Mason Le, Hillary identified a shared passion: addressing educational disparities within their community, fueled by her personal experiences with inadequate schooling.

Their project aimed to assist children in areas with less robust educational resources. For multiple weekend sessions lasting two hours each, Hillary and Mason visited the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Washington in Annandale, providing worksheets and teaching new concepts while reinforcing existing knowledge.

The project wasn't without challenges. "Sometimes we wouldn't agree, and it would take us a little bit of time to agree, and that would push back a lot of our planning," Hillary reflected. They learned to compromise, eventually scrapping their initial separate ideas to create a combined curriculum incorporating both math and other topics.

Hillary also grappled with personal obstacles: "During planning, one of my biggest weaknesses was procrastination. I kept pushing things to different days." She overcame her nervousness about teaching by "learning to visualize instead of just telling them" and implementing breaks to maintain student engagement.

Key Learning Outcomes: The project's success led to the Boys and Girls Club expressing interest in more frequent events. Hillary's biggest takeaway was the importance of decisiveness and quick action—lessons she plans to apply in future endeavors. "If I have second thoughts about a decision, I've learned I should think about it quickly instead of pushing it away," she noted.

This experience demonstrates how our AASuccess model develops essential skills: collaboration, problem-solving, and resilience through practical application rather than theoretical study alone.

Hillary Nguyen with the support work of Aashee Balani



Supporting Families Affected by Agent Orange: A Call for Community Action

Research by Derica Dang, 11th Grade, Annandale High School

When I joined AASuccess as a Level 1 student, I was quiet and hesitant about my abilities. However, through mentorship and real-world project experience, I have developed comprehensive research examining the historical context of Agent Orange, its ongoing health effects, and the specific challenges facing families in Quang Tri Province, Vietnam.

Agent Orange was a toxic herbicide used by the U.S. military during the Vietnam War between 1961 and 1971, intended to destroy dense jungle cover and damage crops that could be used by enemy forces. The chemical contained dioxin, a highly poisonous substance that has caused long-term health issues for many people. Over 19 million gallons were sprayed across Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

The Continuing Impact

The devastating legacy of Agent Orange continues to severely affect families in Quang Tri Province decades after the conflict. Children and their families still grapple with horrific health consequences and disabilities stemming from exposure, including cancer, birth defects, and neurological problems. In Quang Tri, where poverty is exacerbated by Agent Orange's effects, families desperately need basic necessities, including safe shelter.

How \$1,000 Can Make a Difference

Approximately \$1,000 can construct a basic, yet vital, housing unit for an affected family through:

- Site Preparation: Clearing suitable land with proper drainage
- Simple Foundation: Laying a basic concrete slab for a stable, dry floor
- Frame Construction: Using locally sourced materials like treated bamboo or light timber
- Wall Enclosure: Employing durable, low-cost materials such as corrugated metal sheets
- Roofing: Installing sloped roofing for protection from rain and sun
- Basic Openings: Creating functional door and window openings

While modest, this basic unit offers a vital step towards stability, providing shelter and hope for these vulnerable families.

A Call to Action

My research aims to inspire community action to support AASuccess's Agent Orange Housing Project. We invite you to join this meaningful effort by visiting our website's donation tab. Please indicate that your donation is for the "Agent Orange Housing Project" to ensure 100% of your contribution goes directly toward building housing units in Quang Tri Province in 2026.

Students Come Together for a Meaningful Yard Sale Effort

Raising Funds for Life Skills Programs while Learning Teamwork, Event Organizing, and Community Connection



This month, AASuccess hosted a community yard sale, an event completely thought of and led by our students. Their goal was to raise funds for next year's Life Skills Training Programs.



The yard sale featured a wide variety of donated items, from kitchen appliances and clothing to toys, office supplies, decorations, and electronics. These generous contributions came from students' families, friends, and volunteers across our community.

The yard sale was a success, drawing in lots of visitors from the surrounding area throughout the day. We officially opened at 9 AM and wrapped up by 2 PM, raising over \$700 to support our 2026 student Life Skills Training Programs. Any items we didn't sell ended up being donated to the local Goodwill.

But this event wasn't just about fundraising- it gave our students a chance to plan and run a real-world event from start to finish. Along the way, they picked up important skills like communication, teamwork, organization, and adaptability. My favorite part was getting to meet people from all over the community and seeing some of our shyer students step up and help customers as they browsed. We even got a mini workout moving all the items up and down! I especially loved watching Nathan and Marvin (see picture below) advertising with signs and coming up with creative chants and dances to get people coming.



To me, this event really reflected what AASuccess is all about: when our students see a need, they work together to take action and plan something impactful. This was just a taste of what they can do and a reminder of just how capable they are.

Supporting Our Mission: A Community of Committed Partners

Special Recognition of Our Generous Supporters

We are deeply grateful to acknowledge significant recent contributions that enable our continued impact: **The Douglas Ebenstein & Norman Ebenstein Family Foundation** has provided **\$10,000 in scholarship support**, continuing their steadfast commitment to our mission through the Ebenstein Scholarships directed to qualified Vietnamese American high school students. **The Rotary Club of Bailey's Crossroads in Falls Church, Virginia**, has contributed \$750 to support our operational needs and student programming. These investments, along with continued support from **Eden Center, The Plein Family Charitable Trust, Mr. James Pan, Dr. Linh Tran, Dr. Kieu Le, and Ms. Nguyen Nguyen**, enable us to maintain our distinctive model where character development takes precedence over credentials.

How You Can Support our Work

We've spent two decades refining a character development program that truly transforms lives, all without the overhead of full-time staff or rigid barriers. Now, we invite you to be a part of this proven success. Your **financial support** is crucial: an annual investment of just \$100,000 unlocks immediate access to our year-round life skills program for primarily high school students and senior students who are actively involved in our circular work-learn model. We're aiming to raise **\$80,000 by September 30, 2025**, to sustain and expand this vital work. Beyond financial contributions, consider becoming a mentor, dedicating just 2-4 hours monthly to share your professional expertise and lived experience, which is a small commitment that yields profound impacts on each of our AAS students. Finally, we welcome you to **attend our upcoming AAS Gala on August 9, 2025**, to witness firsthand our students' growth that your involvement helps to create. Join us in shaping a brighter future for our community.





Mark Your Calendar: AASuccess Gala 2025

Save the Date: August 9, 2025



Join us for our annual celebration of student achievements and community impact. This elegant evening brings together our AASuccess family, supporters, and community leaders to honor the remarkable growth of our students and the dedicated mentors who guide them.

Ticket Price:

- Early Bird Pricing (Deadline: July 27, 2025): Individual tickets: \$150 and 10-seat Table: \$1,500
- Regular Pricing (after July 27, 2025): Individual tickets: \$175

The Gala features inspiring student presentations, recognition of outstanding mentors, and the opportunity to witness firsthand how our circular learning model transforms young lives while creating lasting community impact. All proceeds support our scholarship programs and operational excellence. For tickets and more information, visit AASuccess.org.



Student-Led 2025 AAS BioHealth Conference: A Platform for Innovation and Learning

We're excited to share that our students are leading the organization of the **2025 AAS BioHealth Conference** scheduled for **July 19, 2025**, in **Hanoi, Vietnam**. This remarkable event showcases how our circular learning model develops capable leaders who can coordinate complex, international initiatives.

The conference features student speakers like **Lara Tran, Vivian Cao-Dao, Liem Nguyen, Kathleen Pham, Xandra Phan,** and **Leo Tran**, who will present on topics ranging from leadership development to community projects and life skills for meaningful work. These emerging leaders are supported by experienced professionals including Dave Nguyen, Len Tran, Thuc Hoang, Thanh Nguyen, and Dr. David Montanari, creating an intergenerational learning environment that embodies our core philosophy.

The program integrates traditional Vietnamese medicine with American healthcare approaches, examining evidence-based practices alongside innovations in cancer care and community health leadership. This student-led initiative demonstrates the practical application of our training methodology on an international scale.

Sponsorship Opportunities

We welcome partnerships with organizations that share our commitment to developing future healthcare leaders and fostering US-Vietnam collaboration. Sponsorship opportunities in the range of \$5,000 to \$10,000 would significantly enhance this meaningful educational event while providing visibility for your organization's commitment to innovative leadership development. For sponsorship information, please contact us at information@aasuccess.org

Looking Ahead

As we move through summer, our students continue applying their learning through real-world projects that create meaningful community impact. From environmental health research to educational initiatives and international conference coordination, each endeavor reinforces our belief that true education occurs when learning serves a purpose beyond the classroom.

Together, we're not just building careers but we're cultivating a mindset of service, innovation, and responsible citizenship that will shape our community for many years to come.

AASuccess: Perfecting the Act of Giving Back

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