ANNUAL PROJECT REPORT
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Vietnam: KOTO Holistic Hospitality Training Program for Disadvantaged Vietnamese Youths

The hospitality industry in Vietnam continues to be a major contributor to economic growth and job creation. However, youth from disadvantaged backgrounds often lack access to quality education, vocational training, and safe environments for personal growth. KOTO's 24-month Holistic Hospitality Training Program bridges this gap by offering a structured, comprehensive, and empowering learning experience. This report outlines the progress and achievements of Cohort 44 over the reporting period.

Impact & Achievements

36 trainees completed intensive hospitality training, including sustainability practices.

90% reported improved well-being through weekly counseling and group workshops.

All trainees gained English and digital skills, becoming proficient in Word, Excel, email, and Zoom.

Trainees helped raise €20,000 through Dream Ride 2024 and led events like Tet Jam.

Each trainee worked 6 months in real hospitality settings and joined major events like Taste of Australia 2024.

All trainees joined a Dream Trip, many leaving their hometown for the first time, gaining cultural and industry exposure.

Program Overview

Cohort 44 trainees were engaged in a curriculum that integrates professional hospitality training, English language instruction, life skills development, health and well-being support, and personal growth activities. The program fosters confidence, competence, and community engagement, hence enabling trainees to transform their lives and contribute meaningfully to society.

Core Training Components

Vocational Training

Trainees received intensive training in both Front of House (FOH) and Back of House (BOH) operations. FOH instruction covers customer service, communication skills, serving etiquette, and beverage knowledge. BOH training includes food preparation, knife handling, kitchen safety, cooking techniques, plating, baking, nd mixology. Trainees were exposed to sustainable practices such as reducing plastic waste, managing inventory using the First In First Out (FIFO) approach, and waste segregation. Food safety and hygiene practices are strictly followed, contributing to the overall learning environment.

Vocational training

English Language Training

Trainees took general English and Hospitality English classes. Lessons focused on developing vocabulary related to food and beverage, conversational phrases, and customer interaction scenarios. These were reinforced through role- play, group activities, and real-life service experience at the KOTO training restaurant. Continuous improvement is evident in their ability to communicate effectively with guests.

Life Skills

Trainees participated in workshops designed to strengthen communication, active listening, teamwork, leadership, financial literacy, and goal setting. These sessions promote self-awareness and equip trainees to navigate personal and professional relationships effectively. New activities such as newspaper analysis and reflective journaling were introduced to support critical thinking and self-expression.

Digital Literacy

All trainees received training in Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, emailing, and Zoom. Additional training covered research, online learning tools, and preparing digital CVs. This component ensures trainees are well-prepared for modern workplace requirements.

In class

Work-Based Learning and Industry Exposure

Cohort 44 trainees engaged in a range of hands-on learning experiences designed to strengthen their technical and interpersonal skills in real-world hospitality environments. At the KOTO Van Mieu training restaurant, trainees worked for an average of six months, serving both local and international guests. This live setting enabled them to apply classroom learning, develop professional confidence, and practice service excellence.

Beyond the restaurant, trainees supported major events such as the Vietnam Tourism Association's exhibition, Taste of Australia 2024 (organized by the Australian Embassy), and the Hanoi Culinary Challenge. These high- profile experiences enhanced their adaptability, communication, teamwork, and time management skills under pressure. Further exposure came through site visits and internships. A field trip to the luxury resort Legacy Yen Tu MGallery provided valuable insights into high-end hospitality standards, while placements at partner hotels and restaurants helped trainees refine their craft and build professional networks in the industry.

Competitions

Trainees showcased their culinary creativity at the 2025 Hanoi Salon Culinaire and Monin Cup Vietnam. These platforms boosted their confidence and professionalism while strengthening KOTO's reputation in the industry.

Hands-on learning experience

Health and Well-being

KOTO takes a holistic approach to trainee wellness, addressing physical, mental, and emotional health. In collaboration with MSI Vietnam and Dr. Marie, trainees received general and reproductive health screenings, with sessions focusing on menstrual hygiene, contraception, and overall health awareness. These efforts led to noticeable improvements in confidence and classroom engagement. To support mental well-being, trainees participated in weekly one-on-one counseling sessions with KOTO's Social Worker, as well as group workshops on stress management, peer support, and positive reinforcement helping to build emotional resilience and healthy coping strategies. Additionally, trainees were provided with nutritious meals and engaged in workshops on healthy eating and kitchen safety. These measures ensured their physical health was supported, contributing to better learning outcomes and overall program success.

Workshop on peer support

Personal Development and Community Engagement

Dream Trip

The trainees took part in a transformative journey to Hue, Da Nang, and Hoi An. The Dream Trip offered cultural exposure, team bonding, and first-hand observation of hospitality operations in different regions. In addition to gaining valuable cultural and professional exposure in the hospitality sector, these trips marked a significant personal milestone for many trainees, some of whom had never traveled outside their hometowns before. The experience not only broadened their worldview but also fostered independence, confidence, and a deeper appreciation for the industry they are entering.

Dream trip

Fundraising and Leadership

Cohort 44 trainees actively participated in fundraising initiatives that strengthened their leadership, planning, and teamwork skills. They successfully organized and delivered the "Tet Jam" (authentic Vietnamese Jam making) event, demonstrating initiative, event management, and collaboration. Proceeds from the event was used to support trainees in need and extracurricular activities highlighting their sense of responsibility and peer support. Additionally, trainees contributed to KOTO's annual cycling fundraiser, Dream Ride 2024, which raised 550 million VND (approximately €20,000). Their roles included volunteering, performing, and engaging in community outreach activities that fostered pride, unity, and a strong sense of contribution. These experiences helped trainees build confidence while giving back to their community.

Challenges and Solutions

The main challenge faced by KOTO during this reporting period was fostering unity and effective teamwork among Cohort 44 trainees. Due to staggered admission dates and diverse personal backgrounds, the class initially struggled with division, communication barriers, and interpersonal conflicts. Differences in personality, ranging from strong-willed to reserved further complicated collaboration, particularly in group assignments. To address this, KOTO organized off-site class retreats and team-building activities, intentionally incorporating life skills such as communication, empathy, and responsibility. These activities created a safe and enjoyable environment for trainees to express themselves, build trust, and strengthen group cohesion. This approach proved effective and has now become a model for future cohort retreats, underscoring the importance of collective growth and teamwork in the hospitality industry.

Group pic!

Conclusion

Cohort 44 continues to demonstrate significant progress in skills development, self-confidence, and community involvement. The comprehensive approach of the KOTO Holistic Training Program has equipped trainees with tools to lead independent and dignified lives. Donor support remains vital in making this journey possible for disadvantaged youth in Vietnam. We thank you for your ongoing partnership and belief in the potential of every trainee.