

Distance Learning approaches for young children: Vietnam

ONESKY FOR ALL CHILDREN



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Established in 1998 under the previous name Half the Sky, OneSky is a not-for-profit non-governmental organisation working in China, Vietnam, Mongolia, and Hong Kong. OneSky supports communities and caregivers to provide nurturing, responsive care and early education within marginalised communities including welfare institutions, rural villages, industrial zones, and urban slums. Through innovative and evidence-based training programs that have been evaluated by leading academic institutions, OneSky addresses the lack of quality, inclusive early nurture and learning within these vulnerable communities. OneSky works in partnership with governments across Asia as well as other leading global institutions, foundations, and networks. The organisation is funded through donations from individuals, private foundations, and corporate donors.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE HOME-BASED CARE (HBC) TRAINING PROGRAM

The Home-Based Care (HBC) training program was a program designed to train and support Home-Based Care (HBC) providers in providing high-quality early childhood education (ECE) to vulnerable children in Vietnam. HBC providers are often untrained and work in overcrowded childcare settings with limited support. The program's blended learning model consisted of in-person classroom training, home visits, and a mobile-friendly digital platform called iBigFamily. This case report focuses on the online delivery and modification of OneSky's HBC training program within Vietnam in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The curriculum and content focus on responsive caregiving, creating safe and nurturing early learning environments that support children's holistic development. During the ongoing pandemic, when all in-person components of the program were suspended, the in-person classroom training and home visit sessions were modified for delivery via Zoom and the iBigFamily digital learning platform was modified to include delivery of all program content and support.

OneSky for all Children

Leader and contact: Daphne Feng, Director of Distance Learning, China/Vietnam,
daphne@halfthesky.org

Tim Huang, Chief Impact Officer, tim@onesky.org

Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC)

1 Commonwealth Lane

#03-27

Singapore 149544

www.arnec.net

secretariat@arnec.net

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KEY PROGRAM FEATURES

OneSky's Home-Based Care (HBC) Training Program was established in partnership with the Vietnamese government in 2018. OneSky's curriculum, content, and delivery have been developed from over two decades of experience in China and low-resource settings across Asia. A blended learning approach was employed for the program, consisting of a combination of:

1. In-person classroom training
2. In-person HBC visits
3. OneSky's digital learning platform (i.e., iBigFamily)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the in-person delivery components were suspended (pre-COVID, in-person delivery was every 2 weeks) due to distancing restrictions. As a result, the entire program was modified for online delivery through a combination of Zoom sessions and OneSky's own mobile-friendly platform, iBigFamily. As the original blended learning approach incorporated a digital learning platform, some program content and features were already established (e.g., discussion forums and teaching videos). These resources and the platform itself were further developed to better support HBC providers during the pandemic.

PROGRAM RATIONALE

The OneSky HBC training program was established to improve the quality of early childhood education (ECE) offered by HBC providers, who were often untrained and working in overcrowded home settings with limited additional support while working with the most vulnerable children. The COVID-19 pandemic caused mass closures of schools and home-based care centres (early childhood education and care often provided from HBC providers' homes or small rented spaces) in Vietnam. Many HBC providers were required to adjust to online digital learning with little to no preparation or support.

GOALS OF THE PROGRAM

OneSky's HBC training program aimed to create safer, nurturing, and stimulating environments for young children's early education and development. The program focused on improving the quality of home-based childcare and supporting the holistic development of vulnerable children in the care of HBC providers. The program also promoted gender equity by supporting women as skilled and empowered frontline childcare workers. This focus was consistent with pre-COVID program goals.

Due to the increased stress placed on HBC providers during the pandemic, the OneSky program was adapted to support online delivery through Zoom training and a digital community of practice in which HBC providers could remain connected and support one another during lockdowns.

During the pandemic, the OneSky program fostered a virtual Community of Practice where HBC providers could learn, share, support and recognise one another's work, foster connections, and increase their sense of belonging to the profession, as well as developing skills to deliver quality ECE.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND STRUCTURE

The OneSky HBC training program focused on the holistic development of vulnerable children through the training and ongoing support of HBC providers. HBC providers were invited by their provincial Department of Education and Training to undertake the 11-month program led by OneSky qualified trainers. The original blended learning program involved the delivery of three components that were focused on responsive and nurturing caregiving, and promoting learning environments that were supportive of developmental needs:

1. In-person classroom training: 20 facilitated sessions for HBC providers focused on delivering high-quality ECE
2. Bi-monthly home visits and coaching on best practices: trainers visited HBC centres to give feedback on the delivery and content of the program and apply learning from the training sessions
3. iBigFamily online learning platform: a mobile-friendly digital platform for continuous support and learning for HBC providers through discussion forums, access to ECE professionals who could answer HBC providers' questions, home-made toy activity guides, teaching videos, professional development articles, and other ECE resources

The OneSky curriculum was inspired by the Reggio Emilia principles of child-centred learning, informed by the global evidence base on early childhood development, and adapted to serve the specific needs of children and caregivers in Vietnam. It focused on establishing response relationships between caregivers and children, promoting age-appropriate communication, and stimulating healthy cognitive, physical, language and social-emotional development of children birth to six years of age.

The first two components (in-person) focused on developing relationships between HBC providers and trainers while the third online component was used as a learning supplement to these training and coaching sessions. As a result of pandemic lockdowns and restrictions, the first two in-person components were moved to online delivery via Zoom with support from iBigFamily.

During COVID-19, trainers created new digital content and resources for the iBigFamily platform including vetted COVID-19 reference materials,

tutorials, and training videos. Content was designed to increase Home-Based Care provider engagement and minimise screen fatigue (e.g., creating quizzes, implementing brainstorming breaks, uploading pre-recorded role-plays, guided discussion questions, online competitions for HBC providers to share their own innovations). Locally-responsive content became more important during the COVID-19 pandemic and trainers therefore developed content that was reflective of the communities in which the HBC providers were situated. Consultations with HBC providers prior to, and during the digital learning model, informed responsive amendments to the content and the iBigFamily platform features.

CONTENT

In response to COVID-19, the program was modified to provide continuous support to HBC providers through the iBigFamily platform which encompassed discussion forums, access to ECE professionals, home-made toy activity sheets, play activities, local songs and stories, teaching videos, professional development articles, and other ECE resources.

iBigFamily content consisted of:

- Pre-written courses for online training, developed by OneSky's experts
- Videos on teaching parents/caregivers how to engage children in storytelling in an effective manner. These videos were created by a mix of educators, OneSky staff, and HBC providers, which led to two types of videos
 - a. Five high-quality training videos developed by OneSky on delivering responsive care, including animated videos for HBC providers
 - b. Over 200 unique resources developed by trainers to help caregivers learn about child care and development. Trainers created video resources based on their knowledge regarding available in-home play activities for families
- Forums for HBC providers to share their own ideas and resources, photos, and share in discussions around key learnings of the program and how these can be/have been implemented in practice
- The 'Be Creative' online competition area was a new feature designed specifically for HBC provider engagement and co-creation during the COVID-19 pandemic. This included instructions on building toys, play activities, and online competitions on a variety of topics such as local storytelling for HBC providers to contribute their own innovations. This kept them engaged and motivated during online learning.

- Additional play activities designed by OneSky's experts with activities for caregivers to do with children at home
- A COVID-19 safety element with vetted, community-specific content on COVID-19 health, hygiene, prevention and response.

Program content continued to evolve with input from OneSky staff, educators, and HBC providers.

Trainer responsibilities:

- Each OneSky trainer led a training group of 40 HBC providers, facilitating training sessions and home visits via Zoom and providing additional support via iBigFamily
- The trainer provided feedback and promoted discussion amongst providers
- The trainer shared articles for further reading (typically in response to requests from HBC providers)
- Trainers were interactive by responding on forums and submitted work by HBC providers
- Trainers taught HBC providers how to make low-cost, local learning materials and home-made toys that are especially necessary in under-resourced childcare environments

TRAINING & SUPPORT

Key Personnel:

- **OneSky trainers:** ECE professionals from OneSky who were responsible for training and supporting HBC providers. They had core competencies and qualifications in ECE
- **HBC providers:** HBC caregivers, educators and owners who run HBC centres out of their homes or from small rented spaces for vulnerable young children. The majority of these providers do not have higher education credentials
- **Digital learning team:** Three OneSky professionals responsible for overseeing online program development and implementation, as well as providing technical assistance

Between 15-20 trainers were involved in the delivery of the program. These trainers were part of the pre-COVID program delivery. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the trainers' main role was to provide in-person teaching to Home-Based Care providers and share the digital learning content on iBigFamily that was provided for them. This experience meant trainers had some although limited digital literacy skills.

The mentoring provided through OneSky was essential in building trainer skills and resulted in

increased trainer confidence and capacity to use digital equipment, and to develop innovative online content.

DURATION & INTENSITY

From 2018 to 2020, OneSky's Home-Based Care training program reached 720 Home-Based Care providers serving over 20,000 marginalised children in Vietnam.

In pre-COVID times, the HBC training program was an 11-month long program with 20 topical training sessions and follow-up sessions. During COVID-19, the duration and intensity of the program remained similar but the in-person elements were brought online. A measure of online engagement was not undertaken.

FUNDING

The HBC training program was funded through grants from philanthropic foundations that have supported the direct implementation of the program, the adaptation to an online learning model, and the ongoing development and upgrading of the iBigFamily platform.

PARTNERSHIPS

OneSky had strong partnerships with the Ministry of Education and Training, as well as the Department of Education and Training at a provincial level. The Department of Education and Training assisted with the recruitment of ECE specialist, trainers, and Home-Based Care providers. Home-Based Care providers receive a certificate from the Department of Education and Training and OneSky on completion of the program.

OneSky had been invited by the Ministry of Education and Training to expand the HBC training program in 19 provinces. The Ministry also approved the HBC training program curriculum for nationwide use.

IMPACTS & OUTCOMES

Between 2019 and 2020, an impact evaluation was undertaken. In April 2020, OneSky - in partnership with Harvard and the Research and Training Centre for Community Development - released an impact evaluation report for the HBC training program. Key findings indicated that the program had a positive sustained impact on Home-Based Care quality (based on results from the Measure of Early Learning Environments [MELE] Module of Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes [MELQO] tool). It was also found that the program contributed to positive improvements in children's overall early learning score on the Mullen Scales of Early Learning (MSEL), particularly within the domains of fine motor skills and visual perception.

Anecdotally, parents and children of Home-Based Care centres, where providers were participating in the program, reported that they enjoyed and appreciated

the activities. Similarly, Home-Based Care providers reported high levels of satisfaction with the program, positive engagement, and motivation to share information with other providers and families using the iBigFamily platform during COVID-19.

During the pandemic, as trainers began creating a media library on iBigFamily of over 55 videos and growing, HBC providers were reportedly inspired to create their own content, share photographs of activities and COVID-19 protocols in their HBC centres, and organically initiated their own chat groups on social communication platforms, strengthening the community of providers established during the training. Anecdotally, trainers and OneSky personnel reported that the online community grew widely as trainers utilised discussion forums and chat features to stay connected with HBC providers, and posted videos and photos, which providers shared with parents to support the home learning environment.

EVALUATION

In 2020, Professor Aisha Yousafzai and her research team at the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health (HSPH) along with a local team of researchers at the Research and Training Center for Community Development (RTCCD) based in Hanoi completed a pioneering impact evaluation of OneSky's HBC training program. The impact evaluation was the first to formally evaluate a childcare training program in Asia and the largest outside of high-income countries. The research study took place from 2019 to 2020, including during COVID disruptions, in 3 provinces with 418 HBC providers and 1,689 children.

The findings of the evaluation study indicated that the OneSky training program had a positive sustained impact on the quality of home-based childcare, based on results from the Measure of Early Learning Environments [MELE] Module of Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes [MELQO] tool, and on early childhood development outcomes, particularly on overall early learning scores, fine motor skills, and visual perception, measured using the Mullen Scales of Early Learning (MSEL). There is promising evidence for training spill-over effects to other caregivers who were not trained directly by OneSky but still benefitted with knowledge gain and improved quality of caregiver-child interactions. HBC providers also reported high levels of satisfaction with the program as well as through qualitative interviews, demonstrated positive engagement and motivation to share information with other providers and families using the iBigFamily platform during COVID-19. Other interviewed stakeholders highlighted high-quality implementation features, such as hiring local trainers familiar with the community context and creating a professional learning community that fosters a sense of belonging.

OneSky is currently developing new surveys to monitor and measure the quantitative and qualitative impact of the online delivery model on HBC provider knowledge gain, application, and community building compared to cohorts that had original blended learning model.

FACILITATORS & BARRIERS

Facilitators:

- rBigFamily online learning platform with multiple skill-building and communications features that enable HBC providers to form a community of practice and continuing learning through COVID-19 disruptions
- COVID-19 provided an opportunity to fully utilize and further develop this already established rBigFamily online platform
- Professional development and support to help OneSky trainers became even more proficient in online teaching via Zoom, online coaching and support, digital content and materials development
- Funding commitments from philanthropic foundations
- Continued adaptation and digitization during COVID-19 variant outbreaks
- Program designed around the needs and voices of the home-based childcare provider community in Vietnam, opportunities for regular feedback on the rBigFamily platform
- Digital content developed by global early childhood experts from OneSky, used both during the pandemic and beyond
- User-friendly, culturally-responsive, and engaging content that they can fit into HBC providers' busy schedule
- Engagement, co-creation and sharing of best practices and innovations via both online competitions and forum discussions in which HBC providers build capacity through conversations, uploads and building on one another's ideas

- Individualized and differentiated support for HBC providers' interests, knowledge and skills levels
- Strong online community supported by a digital learning team that constantly posts content, encourages engagement, and supports troubleshooting

Barriers:

- Screen fatigue
- Structural challenges, such as limited free time for online study among HBC providers during the pandemic due to other social or economic reasons

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Ongoing support for the development of the digital content library including curriculum materials (i.e., animated responsive care videos, play activities, home-made toy guides, etc.)
- Reintroduction of some in-person and blended elements to provide more wrap-around support for HBC providers
- Exploration of ways to make digital learning components even more accessible, such as through adapting video resolution to providers' data capacities
- Continue to improve the user- and mobile-friendliness of rBigFamily, introducing trainer HBC visit checklists, and improving post-training professional development and support for HBC providers.
- Expanded delivery through national and provincial government partners - piloting a government technical assistance model in which government trainers implement the HBC training program with OneSky's support (training of trainers, implementation guidance, monitoring, on-going support, and quality assurance to the government)
- OneSky continues to explore institutional partnerships with philanthropic foundations to improve digital delivery and scale the HBC training program

Mapping to Nurturing Care Framework (NCF)

NURTURING CARE – OUTPUTS (STRATEGIC ACTIONS)

The NCF suggests five strategic actions for a program to align with best practice:



1. LEAD AND INVEST

- The adaptation of the existing program was guided by the overarching goals of OneSky to provide HBC providers with high-quality learning experiences that translate into high-quality ECE practices for vulnerable children. All elements of the iBigFamily platform have clear objectives, outputs, and outcomes outlined in relation to what the trainers and Home-Based Care providers should achieve after completion of the training program, as well as providing ongoing support.
- The HBC training program was developed in an enabling and authorising policy environment focused on supporting the high-quality ECE workforce. The HBC training program received national recognition from Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training.
- The program adopted a multi-level structure with clear role descriptions for OneSky's digital learning personnel, local trainers, and HBC providers to collectively support the provision of high-quality ECE.



2. FOCUS ON FAMILIES

- The program focussed on the support of families and children through the training and support of HBC providers. Quality, affordable ECE enables parents to go to work with increased peace of mind.
- Content, lessons and knowledge shared with the OneSky-trained HBC providers results in spill-over to parents of children attending the HBC centre.



3. STRENGTHEN SERVICES

- Consultations with HBC providers incorporating their voices, agency and needs during the pandemic were conducted prior and during the development of the digital learning model, which afforded trainers the opportunities for responsive amendments to the program.
- The adapted digital learning model of the OneSky HBC training program could in the future create a stronger focus on the online and remote learning components for HBC providers.

- Some digital content had existed prior to the pandemic but was supplemented by a rich plethora of newly-developed materials that supported the learning, health and wellbeing of HBC providers and low-income families, especially for supporting early childhood care and development during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Standard operating protocols and professional mentoring opportunities were in place to ensure supportive supervision of all trainers and HBC providers to ensure the delivery of high-quality ECE.
- The program trainers were hired from the local community and had existing expertise in the ECE field. They were then trained, monitored and supported to build the capacity of HBC providers to create a safe, nurturing early learning environment for vulnerable children.

4. MONITOR PROGRESS

- Program progress was monitored through a variety of assessment tools on HBC provider knowledge, skills, and community. By digitising data collection, analysis, and program fidelity, monitoring using the offline-friendly KoBoToolbox app and Tableau software equipped on trainer tablets, a faster feedback loop was created for program improvement.



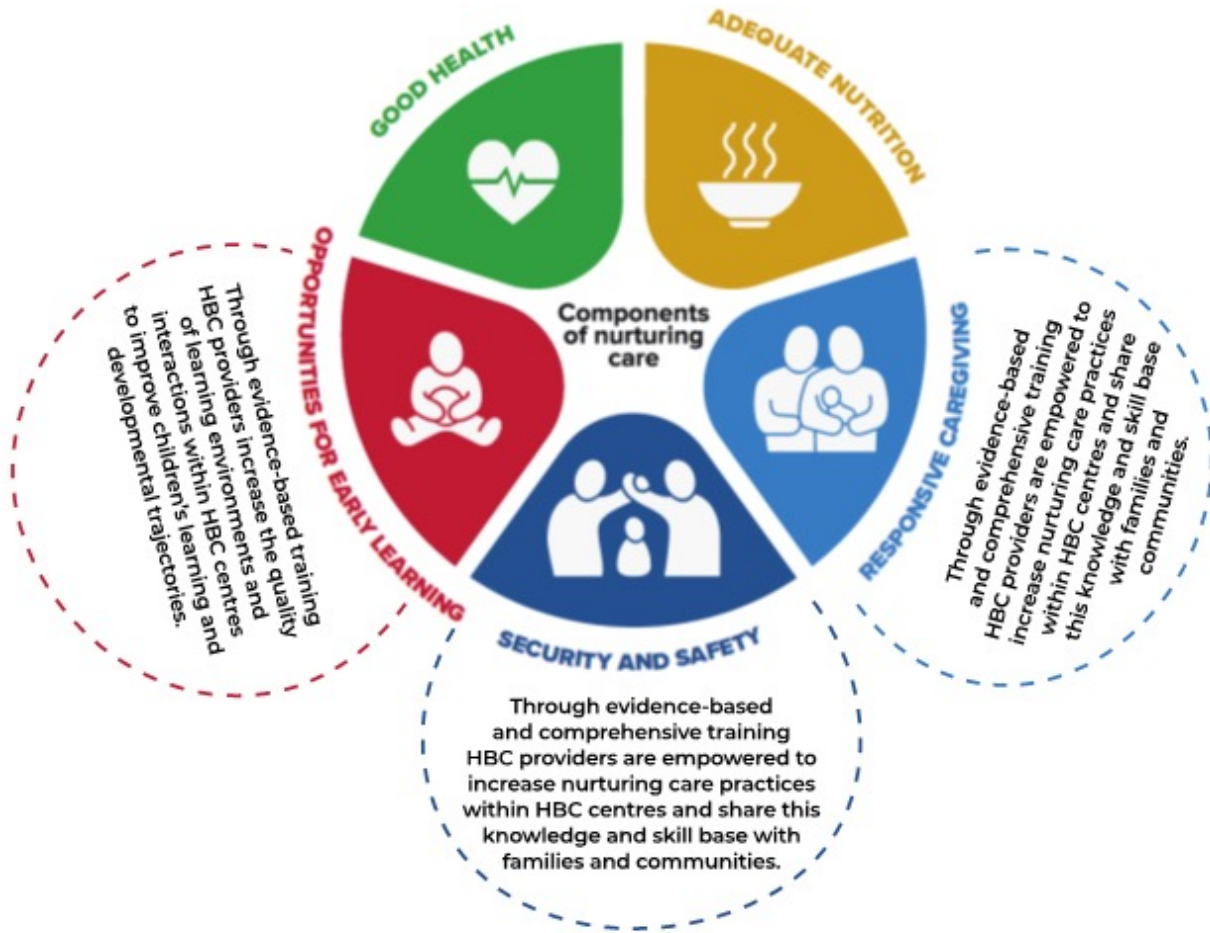
5. USE DATA AND INNOVATE

- Evidence on the program had been shared widely with and through global partnerships and platforms including ARNEC, ECDAN, the World Bank, IFC, UN, and more to support ECD field building and research regarding effective practices in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- OneSky had been invited by the Ministry of Education and Training to scale its program nationally and in the next phase, OneSky will be collaborating with partners to design and pilot an innovative new government technical assistance model.






NURTURING CARE – OUTCOMES

To reach children’s full potential of adequate early development, the NCF identifies five components of nurturing care, including good health, adequate nutrition, responsive caregiving, opportunities for early learning, and security and safety.



LINKS TO OTHER RESOURCES

- OneSky: blended learning for home-based childcare providers in Vietnam (November 2020): <https://earlychildhoodmatters.online/2020/onesky-blended-learning-for-home-based-childcare-providers-in-vietnam/>
- Spring Impact and Echnida Giving’s report “Support Programs for Home-Based Child Care: A Global Study” (October 2020): <https://www.springimpact.org/2020/10/support-programs-for-hbcc/>
- Childhood Education Innovations. “Staying Connected during a Pandemic” (October 2020): <https://ceinternational1892.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/OneSky.pdf>

LINKS TO THE WHO NURTURING CARE FRAMEWORK OUTCOMES	
	Increase nurturing care practices within home-based childcare and transferring knowledge to families and communities.
	Enriched quality of learning environments and interactions within home-based childcare to improve ECD.
	HBC providers learned skills to overcome the impacts of overcrowding, such as lack of stimulation, in home-based childcare..

Stakeholder experiences and considerations for future implementation

Stakeholders from Education and Health sectors recognised that this program:

- Ensured Home-Based Care providers had access to quality health and wellbeing information for children and families during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Included strategies and information to facilitate positive interaction with vulnerable families and children
- Collaborated with local communities to ensure a continuum of nurturing care
- Reinforced the importance of education from an early age
- Ensured good health practices
- Placed family and home-based engagement at the forefront of early childhood programs

OneSky's blended and digital learning approach has shown significant promise in Vietnam (and in China where OneSky has been working for over two decades). Building on this success OneSky is working towards the future implementation of these approaches including iBigFamily regionally, including in Mongolia. OneSky recognises the potential of digital content for exponential impact and to compliment in-person approaches to learning and support. Digital learning is particularly important during times of crisis, but also beyond the pandemic, particularly in instances where a HBC provider may not be able to travel for training, or may miss training sessions.

Links to research base and previous evidence

- A large body of international evidence supports that high quality early learning environments, including early childhood education settings, are fundamental to increasing children's developmental trajectories and are highly predictive of enhanced academic outcomes (Black et al., 2017; Shonkoff et al., 2012; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2008; Sylva et al., 2004). Research shows that when educators are highly skilled and participate in professional development that is based on an extensive evidence base, the benefits of early childhood education for children are increased (Siraj et al., 2018).
- A 2021 Vietnamese study, looking at university student intentions to undertake online study during the COVID-19 pandemic, found that institutional support and perceived enjoyment were the key factors that impacted student's intentions online, with access to digital technology infrastructure and the internet identified as an additional extrinsic factor to student intentions (Maheshwari, 2021). This suggests that online teaching delivery that focuses on innovative approaches to engaging learners and close support from trainers, such as that of OneSky's Home-based Care Training Program, may increase program uptake.

Policy considerations

OneSky's response to COVID-19 included modification of an existing HBC training program for digital delivery, facilitated via the iBigFamily online learning platform and Zoom. The evidence-based HBC training program improved the quality of ECE and ECD outcomes for vulnerable children in Vietnam. The successful design, development, implementation and evaluation of the program offers many lessons for policy and practice.

These include, but are not limited to,

1. Use of technology

The iBigFamily online platform was the cornerstone of OneSky's approach, serving as a multi-functional, skill-building 'one-stop shop' for HBC providers, with video functionality, forum discussions, and more. The iBigFamily online platform transformed the way HBC providers are trained and supported in Vietnam, through: enabling remote and ongoing learning during the COVID-19 pandemic; enhancing the impact of in-person training on student engagement; knowledge retention, and skills proficiency through digital learning and teaching aids; providing on-demand content accessible on mobile phones, including interactive, visual resources that enable caregivers of all educational levels to understand and apply concepts immediately, cultivating collaboration through peer support, online community, and the exchange of best practices and resources; driving greater scale by reducing the cost of training and continuing education that requires personnel, travel, and meeting expenses; and improving monitoring and evaluation by empowering trainers, equipped with tablets and online engagement data, to better assess skills gaps and improve program quality. Equitable and sustainable learning and education programs, for early childhood education providers, with potential for both remote and in-person implementation, ensure a bigger cohort of children benefit from rich ECCD support. Stable, ongoing funding is required to bridge the digital divide to meet the needs of home-based educators, and subsequently provide support for children and families in need.

2. Remote community engagement

OneSky surveyed Home-Based Care providers to ascertain their evolving needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. This community engagement and consultation was critical, as it exposed the high levels of stress and reduced enrolments within HBC centres. HBC providers shared contextualised knowledge of familial needs and provided critical, innovative solutions to support children and families, including uploading their own videos and resource

material. These insights enabled trainers to better support HBC providers and more effective responses to support vulnerable children and families during COVID-19. Advocating for government investment in community support that meets the needs of early childhood education and care providers is essential.

3. Emphasis on importance of home-learning environment

HBC serves as a critical service and care infrastructure for low-income families in Vietnam, providing affordable early childhood education and care for a significant number of vulnerable young children. The OneSky HBC training program focused on improving high-quality ECE and supporting working families who use these services. The digital community of practice supported on-going training and ensured HBC providers could remain connected and support one another during lockdowns. Policy decisions should be based on an evaluation of how best to target and support young children and their families in the home environment - inclusive of established Home-Based Care centres - with significant investment in children's services required by governments to ensure maximum reach and impact, particularly during times of crisis such as the pandemic. Related to this is the importance of empowering women as front-line workers through programs such as this.

4. Pre-existing programs and workforce

In addition to the value of this HBC training program for ECCD is the importance of this program for gender equity and workforce development: empowering local female home-based childcare providers as respected, compensated, supported and skilled early childhood care and education professionals. Effective coordination of cross-sectoral services, increased financing, and an enabling authorising environment through government policy are together critical to ensure the on-going training, compensation, and support of the HBC workforce, and more broadly, the ECE workforce. Providers, caregivers and early educators must be equipped with nurturing care strategies and supports to meet the evolving needs of young children and families.

5. Flexibility and program responsiveness

The success of OneSky's COVID-19 response is largely attributed to the responsiveness and flexibility of OneSky trainers and trained HBC providers to meet the emerging needs in communities. The adaptation of the HBC training program to an online delivery model allowed for more impactful, responsive strategies that improve the

ECE practice of HBC providers as stewards of local families and vulnerable children. In addition, the use of monitoring data to create faster program improvement feedback loops among the training team supported not only high fidelity during COVID-19 but also innovation and adaptation for greater access and quality through digital-first

approaches. Stable, ongoing funding and effective coordination of services is critical to ensure continued support during the changing landscape of the pandemic and into the future. In OneSky's program, training was essential to ensure program fidelity and therefore should be built into funding models.

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This is one of the ten case studies from ARNEC's documentation of good ECD practices and innovations in the context of COVID-19.

The case study was prepared for ARNEC by the team from the University of Wollongong led by Professor Marc de Rosnay in collaboration with partners from the Asia-Pacific region.

ARNEC would like to thank OneSky for all children for allowing us to document its good practice.

