



## VIA Continues to Innovate Despite a Year of Unprecedented Challenges

The year 2020 has been an unexpectedly challenging year for all of us and the VIA staff sincerely hope that everyone is staying safe and healthy. COVID-19 has certainly impacted our work and reminded us of how our lives can change dramatically in an instant. With safety of our participants being a high priority for us, VIA made the decision in March to evacuate our Global Community Fellows posted in Asia and also cancel our in-person programs we had planned to run in Silicon Valley and in Asia.

While this decision made us sorely miss the excitement that we love to see when we bring people together on our programs, it did not stop us from being creative in offering opportunities for people to interact cross-culturally and inspire each other to bring positive social change to the world. For example, throughout this year, we have been running our online Social Impact Leadership Accelerator program that we launched in January (details of the Accelerator are introduced on the next page). We have also re-designed our Exploring Social Innovation (ESI) and



Exploring Health Care (EHC) programs to online versions for next spring. Taking advantage of the virtual structure, we are excited that these programs can bring people from more diverse regions together and also allow those who may not be able to join our usual in-person programs due to cost or visa challenges to take part in our programs.

This year has also given us an opportunity to take a step back and reflect on our values and how they are integrated in the work we do. Especially

considering the recent climate in which racial and gender discrimination has been highlighted, social justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion have been a central part of our discussions. As we continue our work and design programs, we are committed to creating opportunities for people to join the VIA community regardless of their backgrounds and aspire to continue to play a role in fostering cross-cultural empathy and openness in our wider community of participants, alumni, partners, and collaborators.

## How Lives Have Been Changed By this Pandemic!

*A reflection by Dwight Clark, VIA's Founder*



COVID-19 has not only affected VIA's work but also others who have been dedicated to international education. This includes VIA's founder Dwight Clark who has been offering experiential programs in Thailand and Myanmar through his nonprofit organization Learning Across Borders. We recently had a chance to catch up with Dwight who is currently sheltering-in-place at his home in California. Here is his reflection on the current situation.

“ I've been amazed that the VIA staff, having had to cancel all the regularly-scheduled programs for this year, has nonetheless quickly imagined and made real a number of virtual programs to carry out many of the same objectives.

*And at a time when international travel is impossible, people have nonetheless managed to maintain ties — and, incredibly, sometimes even increase them — by abundant and wise use of Skype, Zoom, and emails.*

*For those of us in the so-called developed world, some of the changes have been wrenching — but nothing like what one might find elsewhere. This was brought home to me by a recent Reuters report from an impoverished township in Yangon, Burma, where food-short people have taken to the sewers to hunt for rats and snakes.*

*Hopefully, we can use our VIA experiences to look beyond the disruptions to our daily existence and better understand the trials of those who have been so much more deeply affected. Their difficulties put our own into proper perspective.*

# Social Impact Leadership Accelerator Program

What are our program alumni motivated to do after they participate in a VIA program? This was a central question in recent alumni surveys and alumni summits, and it turns out that many of our alumni are hungry to launch their own social impact projects in their home communities, but need support to get their ideas off the ground.

So in January 2020, we launched our 6-month virtual Social Impact Leadership Accelerator program to serve as a launchpad for local, community-driven change. The Accelerator brings together cohorts of teams from diverse backgrounds and social sectors to achieve collective impact on a broad scale.



Through virtual sessions and an online learning platform, teams learn how to:

- **Build effective teams with a clear and compelling vision for social impact**
- **Critically analyze and apply sustainability frameworks**
- **Define their mission and their unique approach to social challenges**
- **Design and implement social impact projects**

Our first two cohorts were made up of teams representing Indonesia, Japan, Myanmar, Thailand, Philippines, and the US. The infographic above illustrates the project themes that the teams focused on.



*(from left to right) Global Community Fellows & Accelerator Coordinators Carrie Soo Hoo, Hannah Sorenson, and Laura Galang*

Through virtual sessions and modules delivered through an online learning platform, we guide the teams to formulate problem statements, conduct needfinding, and develop a theory of change, a program design model, and an assessment plan that would shape their project. At the end of the program, each team has an

opportunity to pitch their ideas to an audience from the VIA community and receive feedback.

A major key to the success of the Accelerator program are the program coordinators who mentor the project teams. This year, we were fortunate to have Carrie Soo Hoo, Hannah Sorenson, and Laura Galang, who were part of

the most recent Global Community Fellowship, to take on the coordinator role. They work closely with the various project teams and play a critical role in guiding them through the program modules.

Read on for an interview with Hannah Sorenson on her experience working on the Accelerator program.

### What have you enjoyed most about being a coordinator for the Accelerator program?

*Building relationships with teams has easily been the most fulfilling part of the Accelerator program. When the program started, we were hoping to be able to complete on-site visits and hold a summer conference with our participants; unfortunately, due to COVID, we were unable to do so. The mental shift from working in community in Bangkok or Fukuoka to Zoom is undoubtedly jarring. Still, we are able to build community, learn from each other, and even form friendships. In the last nine months, we've meditated, sang, and traded*

*recipes in our newfound community — a group of people I'll cherish forever.*

### Please share about one of the teams you have supported.

*One team I'm currently supporting is based in Bangkok. During their interview, I knew I wanted to work with them. A lot of the teams we support are working on large-scale, long-term, multi-faceted projects. Contrastingly, this team is approaching a very specific issue with a short-term tech-based solution: addressing education inequality in Thailand by increasing accessibility and quality of teachers' materials. Their project struck home with my experience attending a charter school in rural Minnesota, long viewed as "less than" by others. The team's experiences and passions permeate their action-oriented approach, giving it a notable "living" quality. They're also funny, which doesn't hurt.*

### While your Global Community Fellow (GCF) opportunity was canceled halfway through the year due to COVID, how has the Accelerator experience impacted you?

*I really struggled with GCF ending early. In my case, it was due to a visa issue that aligned with COVID. I was heartbroken at the prospect of leaving the family I found in Indonesia and my five co-fellows. I was willing to do anything to stay a part of the VIA community. In many ways, the Accelerator spared me from some of the shock and trauma of being ripped out of Indonesia so quickly and isolated in the US by building a bridge to my cohort, stronger connections with VIA staff, and keeping me engaged in VIA's work.*

If you would like to learn more about the Social Impact Leadership Accelerator or know people who may be interested in joining, please visit the program website at [viaprograms.org/accelerator](http://viaprograms.org/accelerator).



## 1960s

Net Payne (Hong Kong '63)

I remember with fondness spending the summer of

1963 sleeping on the deck of the floating medical clinic anchored in the Yau Ma Tei Typhoon Shelter in Kowloon, Hong Kong with Dwight and Marsden Blois.

Don Gray (Hong Kong '64)

Dwight Clark visited my wife and me last year and demonstrated how much a positive attitude can accomplish. We all retain our good health and help others.

Howard Weiss (Hong Kong '67)

Presently hunkering down at home during the pandemic. Enjoying being a grandfather to Andreas,

now 2 years old, my daily booster shot of joy. Much more time than ever engaged in body maintenance.

## 1970s

Jim Stein (Philippines '77)

Moved from Washington DC to Sacramento in October, getting settled into new home. Enjoyed meeting other VIA alumni and leadership at the reunion in October.

## 1980s

William "Sandy" Craig (Indonesia '82)

Hospitalist physician at Rural Critical Access Hospital in Vermont.

Greg James (China '83)

I'm tutoring Chinese a bit again - fun! My husband and I are grateful

to have full-time jobs in these perilous times and feel for those who don't.

Scott Templeton (Philippines '83)

I continue to teach and conduct research in economics at Clemson University. I still have friends, in addition to family, in the Philippines.

## 2010s

Feliciano Alexio (YSEALI Media Literacy Workshop '19)

I did some great activities during pandemic of COVID-19 in Timor-Leste. I got several funding from the US embassy and German government. We provided basic materials to 150 households and provided local nutrition food to 400 vulnerable households in Dili.

# Bringing the Community Together

Each year we have the chance to bring together alumni and supporters at regional reunions across the US and in Asia when our staff travel for recruitment trips. Of course, that was not possible this year due to the pandemic.

However, this did not stop us from bringing people in our community together. Thanks to Global Community Fellows Carrie Soo Hoo, Hannah Sorenson, and Laura Galang who were part of our Alumni Reunion Planning Committee, we offered the following opportunities this fall which enabled our alumni to come together remotely.

## VIA Happy Hour: Meeting New Faces!

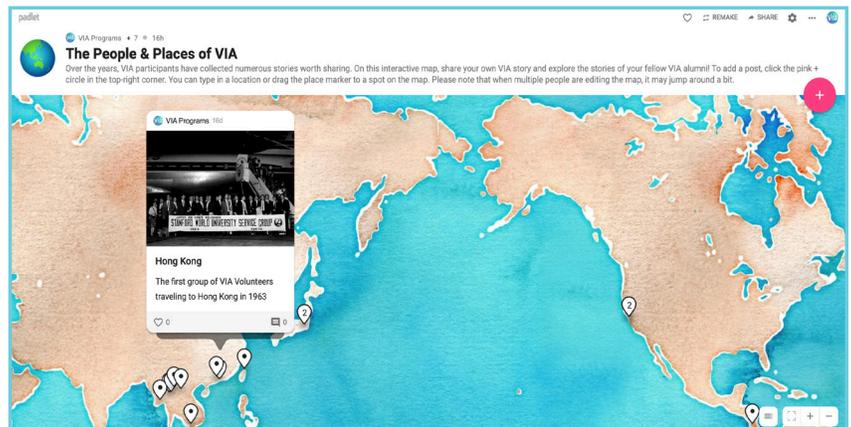
On October 30 (US time), over 20 alumni joined a virtual happy hour event. Participants included former VIA volunteers who were posted in Asia in the 60s and 70s, alumni who joined our programs in Silicon Valley from Hong Kong, Japan, and Myanmar, and former executive directors who led VIA in the 90s and early 2000s.

## VIA: Past, Present, and Future

On November 7 (US time), 40 alumni gathered online to reconnect with fellow past participants. VIA Founder Dwight Clark and Executive Director Kazutoh Ishida also joined and shared updates from VIA. We are also thankful to Sarah Whitmore (Indonesia '84 & '88) and Aaron Wertheimer (China '14) who shared stories from their time as VIA volunteers/fellows and reflected on their VIA experience.

## The People and Places of VIA

We are collecting VIA memories on an interactive map. We encourage you to access <https://padlet.com/viaprograms/viacommunity> to explore the stories of your fellow VIA alumni and also add your own!



## Ways to Support VIA

Our work is made possible through generous contributions from our alumni and friends in our community. Below are some ways that you can support VIA. If you have any questions about making a gift to VIA, please contact [info@viaprograms.org](mailto:info@viaprograms.org).

- **Shop online** at [smile.amazon.com/ch/94-1622372](https://smile.amazon.com/ch/94-1622372). (Amazon will donate 0.5% of the price of eligible purchases to VIA at no extra charge to you!)
- **Mail a check** to P.O. Box 1314, Palo Alto, CA 94302.
- Make a **one-time or a recurring monthly donation** online from [www.viaprograms.org/donate](https://www.viaprograms.org/donate).
- Make a **stock donation** or a gift through a **donor-advised fund**.
- Have your company **match your charitable contribution**.
- Include VIA in your will and **leave a legacy gift** so that VIA can continue to provide rich cross-cultural experiential experiences in Asia and the US for future generations!