



## *The Legacy of* **Dwight Clark**

### ***The Builder***

#### *Creating What Didn't Yet Exist*

**In 1963**, when most Americans had little direct engagement with Asia, Dwight Clark led a group of Stanford freshmen to Hong Kong to work with refugees. What began as a single summer project became VIA Programs, a global community grounded in the belief that cross-cultural understanding can only be understood by living it.

From the beginning, Dwight approached this work as a builder. At a time when many parts of Asia were not open to foreign engagement, VIA developed a model that made collaboration possible. The organization was intentionally non-governmental, non-religious, and small, allowing it to enter communities not as an institution with an agenda, but as a partner grounded in humility and learning. That approach built trust, and it defined VIA's identity.



Dwight's entrepreneurship extended beyond geography. In the late 1970s, VIA began designing programs that brought Asian students to the United States, an uncommon idea at the time, and one that helped reshape the notion of exchange as mutual rather than one-directional. In the mid-1990s, VIA again moved ahead of its time by launching experiential health care programs for medical students from Asia: programs that examined not only systems, but culture, ethics, and human relationships in care. Decades later, they remain distinctive in both design and purpose.

Even after stepping away from VIA, Dwight continued building through Learning Across Borders (LAB), a nonprofit he founded, extending his lifelong commitment to connecting people across cultures.

What defined his work was not scale, but intention: creating opportunities for people to engage deeply with the world and with themselves. He often encouraged students to ask a simple but enduring question: *What kind of a person do I want to become?* That question continues to shape VIA's programs and the individuals who move through them today.



## The Person

### Quiet Leadership, Lasting Influence



Those who knew Dwight often return to the same idea: he changed people not by telling them what to think, but by creating the conditions for them to discover it themselves. He led with listening. He asked thoughtful questions. And he gave others the space to grow into their own sense of purpose.

He believed that leadership begins with curiosity and that real understanding requires humility. That philosophy shaped VIA in lasting ways. Volunteers were not positioned as "helpers," but as learners. They were encouraged to listen before acting, to reflect before concluding, and to engage across difference with openness and respect.

What stands out most is not only what Dwight built, but how he engaged with people. His influence is best understood less as something he asserted, and more as something he enabled in others: a way of seeing, listening, and being present.

Reflections shared by members of the VIA community point to a consistent impact that spans decades and geographies:

*“He had a quiet way of guiding you—never imposing, always inviting.”*

*“Being with Dwight changed how I understood the world, and my place in it.”*

Others remembered not only his leadership, but his humanity:

*“He welcomed people into his home and into his life.”*

*“He was as kind and generous personally as he was visionary professionally.”*

What is striking is the consistency of these reflections across time and context. Whether someone met Dwight briefly or worked closely with him over years, the impact remained.



His legacy lives not only in VIA as an organization, but in the thousands of individuals who carry forward the way he encouraged them to see, think, and engage with the world.

## **The Continuation** *A Legacy in Motion*

More than sixty years after its founding, VIA continues to evolve in ways that reflect Dwight's original intention. While today's programs look different from our earlier years, they reflect the same spirit that defined his work: a willingness to experiment, respond to changing contexts, and center learning in real-world experience. From global fellowships to health care and social innovation programs, VIA remains committed to developing social impact leaders who can navigate complexity with empathy and insight.

What Dwight created was never meant to be static. It lives on in each new cohort, each cross-cultural exchange, and each individual who chooses to engage deeply with the world. His influence is reflected in the questions participants ask, the risks they take, and the paths they pursue afterward.

This fall, VIA will host memorial gatherings honoring Dwight's life and legacy, bringing together alumni, partners, and friends across generations. These events offer an opportunity not only to remember, but to reconnect with the values that continue to shape this community.

Dwight believed in the transformative power of cross-cultural understanding and experiential learning. Supporting VIA helps ensure that future generations can continue to engage with the world in the spirit he championed. What he built was never meant to end with him, it was meant to be carried forward. As he often said, “Carry on!”



# Meet the 2025–26 Global Community Fellows

VIA's Global Community Fellowship provides a unique opportunity for recent graduates and professionals at all stages of their careers to work with NGOs, schools, universities, and social enterprises across Asia. Fellows engage in community development, capacity-building, and education through hands-on collaboration with local partners, gaining practical experience while applying creative approaches to real-world challenges. This year's cohort supports a diverse group of partners, including Parami University and BEAM Education Foundation in Chiang Mai, Thailand; the Education for Friendship Foundation (EFF) in Mae Sot, Thailand; and the Suwandi Foundation in Bali, Indonesia.

## Maywadee Viriyapah *Chiang Mai, Thailand | BEAM Education Foundation*

A recent graduate of The George Washington University (Political Science and Fine Arts), Maywadee supports the Community Youth Leadership Development (CYLD) program at BEAM Education Foundation in Chiang Mai. She contributes to curriculum design, volunteer coordination, and student mentorship, while also teaching GED (General Educational Development) English and supporting university and scholarship applications. She also helps expand experiential learning opportunities such as field trips, community projects, and partnerships.

*My time at BEAM has flown by these past few months. It's been filled with learning, laughter, and new friends. I've loved getting to know my students and working alongside my coworkers. As I continue this journey, I hope to grow into a better teacher and contribute to making education more accessible for marginalized communities. Beyond my formal responsibilities, my goal is to be a positive presence at BEAM that my colleagues can depend on.*



## Alexandra Dingle *Chiang Mai, Thailand | Parami University*

In her second year at Parami, Alex supports advising, career development workshops, and co-curricular initiatives such as the Public Speaking and Debate team. She also contributes to institutional efforts like launching Parami's first publication.

*Embarking on my second year at Parami continues to be full of growth and purpose. Supporting students as they advance toward graduation and helping launch new initiatives has been deeply meaningful. This role has reaffirmed the importance of using my voice and skills as tools for advocacy, and strengthened my commitment to this work.*

## Navya Mohan *Chiang Mai, Thailand | Parami University*

Now in her second year with Parami University, Navya works closely with students through advising while contributing to broader initiatives such as the Inclusion Committee. Her role bridges direct student support with institutional projects in a rapidly evolving higher education environment.

*In the past year at Parami University, I have felt deeply privileged to work alongside such an innovative, passionate, and resilient community. I am so excited to spend another year as a VIA fellow, continuing to support my amazing advisees and work on projects like the Inclusion Committee. This experience has taught me so much about higher education spaces, and I am excited and grateful going into my second year.*





## Cleo Pollinger *Chiang Mai, Thailand | Parami University*

Cleo supports students across Myanmar and Thailand, helping expand access to higher education and strengthen learning opportunities. Her work focuses on student support and collaboration with staff to build pathways for students' futures.

*The Global Community Fellowship has been such an exciting journey so far. This work aligns with my personal values of making higher education more accessible to all students. It has been so inspiring working with students and staff to provide a quality education and create more opportunities for their futures. I have learned so much already and will continue learning throughout the year.*

## Lia Sokol *Chiang Mai, Thailand | Parami University*

Lia works at the intersection of education and advocacy, supporting students affected by conflict in Myanmar. Her experience has strengthened her commitment to public policy and human rights.

*Each day, I learn more about the realities of being a young person in or fleeing from a country at war. My students' resilience and desire to better themselves and their country is astounding, and it motivates me to be a stronger advocate on their behalf. This experience is giving me invaluable insight into what it means to make change from the ground up.*



## Jason Own *Mae Sot, Thailand | Education for Friendship Foundation (EFF)*

Based in Mae Sot, Jason works with migrant and refugee students navigating complex and uncertain circumstances. His experience reflects both the challenges of the region and the resilience of the community he serves.

*Mae Sot is a special place to say the least. At times, there has been laughter, and at other times, sadness. But through it all, the only word to characterize my experience thus far is hope. Despite the hardships and uncertainty, the students and staff continue to push forward with incredible conviction. Their resilience isn't just a story to admire—it's a standard I'm learning to meet.*



## Carmen Gray *Bali, Indonesia | Suwandi Foundation*

Carmen contributes across programs at the Suwandi Foundation, from teaching and volunteer coordination to communications and fundraising. Her role reflects the dynamic, hands-on nature of grassroots nonprofit work.

*I have spent the beginning of my fellowship practicing my language skills, absorbing Balinese culture, and showing up in the classroom to connect with students. I love that this position allows me to do a little bit of everything—from teaching to supporting outreach and fundraising—and I'm excited to take on more responsibilities.*



### How to Support

The VIA Global Community Fellowship (GCF) engages directly with communities in Asia. VIA Fellows gain hands-on experience addressing critical social challenges while supporting local partners. As the program expands beyond Thailand and Indonesia to new regions, VIA is seeking partners to support its continued growth. For collaboration opportunities, **please contact our Strategic Relationships Director Wallace Wong ([wallace@viaprograms.org](mailto:wallace@viaprograms.org))**

# VIA's Social Impact Programs 2025–2026

## TOMODACHI MUFG Sustainable Entrepreneurship Program

As part of the U.S.-Japan Council TOMODACHI Initiative, the TOMODACHI MUFG Sustainable Entrepreneurship Program brings high school students from across Japan to the San Francisco Bay Area to explore sustainability, leadership, and US-Japan relations. The program took place in August 2025, following a series of online preparation sessions in the months prior. These sessions introduced key concepts such as inquiry-based learning and leadership development, helping students build a strong foundation before arriving in the US.



Over the course of an intensive week, participants engaged in a wide range of activities from university visits and innovation workshops at Stanford, to conversations with entrepreneurs, corporate leaders, and community organizations. Through immersive experiences such as the SDGs Simulation Game, guest lectures, and company visits including Google, MUFG, and ChargePoint, students gained practical insights into how sustainability and entrepreneurship intersect in real-world contexts.

Beyond site visits, the program emphasized reflection, cross-cultural exchange, and personal growth. Daily group discussions and mentorship sessions helped students connect their experiences to broader global challenges and their own leadership journeys. Cultural experiences, such



as visits to Japantown and the Japanese American Museum of San Jose, deepened their understanding of identity and community. The program culminated in final presentations in Tokyo where participants shared their visions for addressing the Sustainable Development Goals and strengthening US-Japan ties, leaving with a renewed sense of purpose, a global network, and the tools to drive positive change in their communities.

## NPO Leadership Exchange Program

The VIA Nichibei Nonprofit Leaders Exchange Program, supported by the Japan Foundation, brought together ten nonprofit organizations—five from the Bay Area and five from Japan—for a cross-cultural exchange spanning both regions. Participating Bay Area organizations included AAPI Women Lead, Asians Are Strong, KOHO, RAMS, and Silicon Valley Tech for Good Basecamp. From Japan, participating organizations included Chance For Children, Code for Everyone, comachi plus, Katariba, and ParaCan.

The program kicked off in the Bay Area in September 2025 with an immersive week of collaboration focused on fundraising, community development, cross-sector partnerships, and staff wellbeing. Through site visits and sessions with organizations such as CCS Fundraising, as well as academic institutions including Stanford and



UC Berkeley, participants explored innovative nonprofit models and shared strategies for navigating increasingly complex funding and operating environments.

The exchange continued in Japan in March 2026, where participants deepened their learning through site visits, workshops, and community engagement with local organizations addressing education, youth empowerment, disability inclusion, and

refugee support. Across both countries, interactive sessions like the World Café and group reflections created space for candid dialogue around shared challenges and opportunities in the nonprofit sector. One participant has commented: "I learned that many of the challenges nonprofits face are shared across contexts, and that collaboration, when it's intentional and supported, can create real, lasting impact."

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(continued from p.6) The program culminated in a Nonprofit Leaders Summit at Keio University, convening nearly 50 nonprofit and community leaders across sectors to exchange ideas and explore future collaborations. Several participants have already begun exploring cross-border collaborations, including joint programming and

new partnerships with organizations they connected with during the exchange. Through this bilateral experience, the program fosters lasting partnerships, strengthens cross-cultural understanding, and equips nonprofit leaders with the insights and tools needed to drive meaningful social impact across borders.

## Exploring Social Innovation

VIA's Exploring Social Innovation Program (ESI) is an immersive learning experience in the Bay Area that equips participants with the mindset and tools to address complex social challenges through design thinking, storytelling, and cross-sector exploration. The most recent program took place in March 2026, bringing together 11 university students from Japan, China, and Myanmar for an intensive, hands-on learning experience.

Through workshops, site visits, and conversations with leaders across nonprofit, tech, and education sectors, participants engaged with topics such as sustainability, community innovation, and ethical technology. Experiences ranging from urban farming at Alemany Farm to student activism at Stanford University and entrepreneurship at UC Berkeley encouraged participants to connect ideas with real-world impact.

Throughout the program, participants strengthened skills in collaboration, problem-solving, and leadership while reflecting on social inequality and community wellbeing. Hands-on activities, including the SDGs Simulation Game, volunteering in San Francisco's Tenderloin district, and sessions with organizations like Google and Autodesk, challenged them to think critically about innovation and equity. The program culminated in a storytelling showcase,



where participants shared personal narratives shaped by their experiences. They left with a deeper understanding of the role they can play in addressing global challenges, along with a renewed sense of purpose and a network of peers committed to driving social change.

## Discovering Healthcare Programs

VIA's healthcare programs engage students visiting the San Francisco Bay Area through a combination of cultural exploration and hands-on learning. The most recent programs took place in March 2026 and included two cohorts: Discovering Culture & Healthcare (DCH), which brought together medical students from across Japan, and Discovering Diversity in Healthcare (DDH), offered exclusively for students from Tokyo Medical University.

Participants engaged directly with healthcare professionals and researchers, including Stanford's Clinical Anatomy Team, and explored innovations such as AI in medicine. The program also included site visits and service experiences like supporting Project Open Hand and learning from community-based care models at San Francisco Community Health Center. Students also



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(continued from p.7) participated in discussions on LGBTQ+ history and patient-centered care with advocates and practitioners, while gaining exposure to different approaches to medical education, research, and career pathways across the US and Japan.

Workshops, service learning, and collaborative activities helped participants build skills in design thinking,

communication, and problem-solving while examining how culture, diversity, equity, and inclusion shape healthcare access, delivery, and outcomes. The programs concluded with group presentations in which students proposed human-centered solutions to issues such as mental health, leaving with practical experience, cross-cultural perspectives, and a strong foundation for future careers serving diverse communities in healthcare.

## Study Tour in Japan

VIA's Study Tour this spring took our VIA alumni community across some of Japan's most historically rich and meaningful regions. The program explored the Kansai region, including vibrant Osaka and the sacred mountain town of Koyasan, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and former VIA volunteer training location.

Participants also traveled to Hiroshima, where visits to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and Itsukushima Shrine offered powerful opportunities to reflect on history, resilience, and peace. TOMODACHI program alumna **Konatsu Haga**, who has been actively engaged in peace education initiatives, guided the group through the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, introducing the significance of its various monuments and memorials.

The group then moved to Tokyo, where they enjoyed a boat cruise down the Sumida River alongside the cherry blossoms. They also visited a community hospital where VIA's AUSL program alumnus, **Masanori Tanaka**, shared how his VIA experience inspired his path toward a career in medicine.

The journey continued in Kamakura, where participants explored historic landmarks such as Tsurugaoka Hachimangu and the Great Buddha of Kamakura. They also visited VIA community partner comachi plus at Coyorido Café, where founder **Yumiko Mori** spoke about her grassroots efforts supporting families and strengthening local communities.

Throughout the journey, participants engaged in traditional cultural experiences, meaningful conversations on contemporary social issues, and connections with VIA alumni and community partners across Japan. Blending history, cultural immersion, and social engagement, the study tour fostered deeper cross-cultural understanding and meaningful connections throughout the country.



We are planning future Study Tours to Thailand, Hong Kong, Macau, and Indonesia. If you are interested in joining our tours, please visit [viaprograms.org/thailand-tour](https://viaprograms.org/thailand-tour) or contact VIA Strategic Relationships Director Wallace Wong ([wallace@viaprograms.org](mailto:wallace@viaprograms.org)).

## How to Support

We are deeply grateful for our alumni and friends who have supported VIA in so many ways, including assisting our programs as fellows/ mentors, providing insight and expertise, collaborating on programs, building community connections, and donating to support VIA's mission. If you would like to make a gift and add your support, please visit [viaprograms.org/donate](https://viaprograms.org/donate) or contact our Strategic Relationships Director Wallace Wong at [wallace@viaprograms.org](mailto:wallace@viaprograms.org).