

# First master of Dreamers pays it forward

## Vancouver program to get kids to college welcomes graduate's contributions

### Update

#### ■ **Previously:**

Vancouver's "I Have a Dream" program started in 1995 with about 60 fourth-graders at Washington Elementary.

#### ■ **What's new:**

Han Tran is the first Dreamer to earn a master's degree.

#### ■ **What's next:**

Ninety students in Project 4, the program's final group, will be high school juniors next year.

By **TOM VOGT**

*Columbian staff writer*

Fourteen years after a group of fourth-graders learned they were Vancouver's initial "I Have a Dream" class, the program has its first master's degree.

Han Tran received her master's in social work last month at the University of Washington. Her degree work included six months in Vietnam with an agency that helps street kids.

"Han is an extraordinary young woman — independent and extremely focused on her goals," said Mary Granger, who organized the Vancouver program.

More than 330 students from four Vancouver elementary schools in low-income neighborhoods have participated in the college-preparation program.

Two years after the first class was



ZACHARY KAUFMAN/The Columbian

**Han Tran, a member of Vancouver's initial "I Have a Dream" class at Washington Elementary, received her master's degree in social work from the University of Washington last month.**

# Degree:

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tapped at Washington, the program selected 75 Hough fourth-graders in 1997; 83 Harney fourth-graders in 1999; and 100 King second-graders in 2001.

Project leaders and mentors help the students get into college or get into career-training programs. Sponsors provide tuition assistance when Dreamers exhaust their scholarship opportunities and grants.

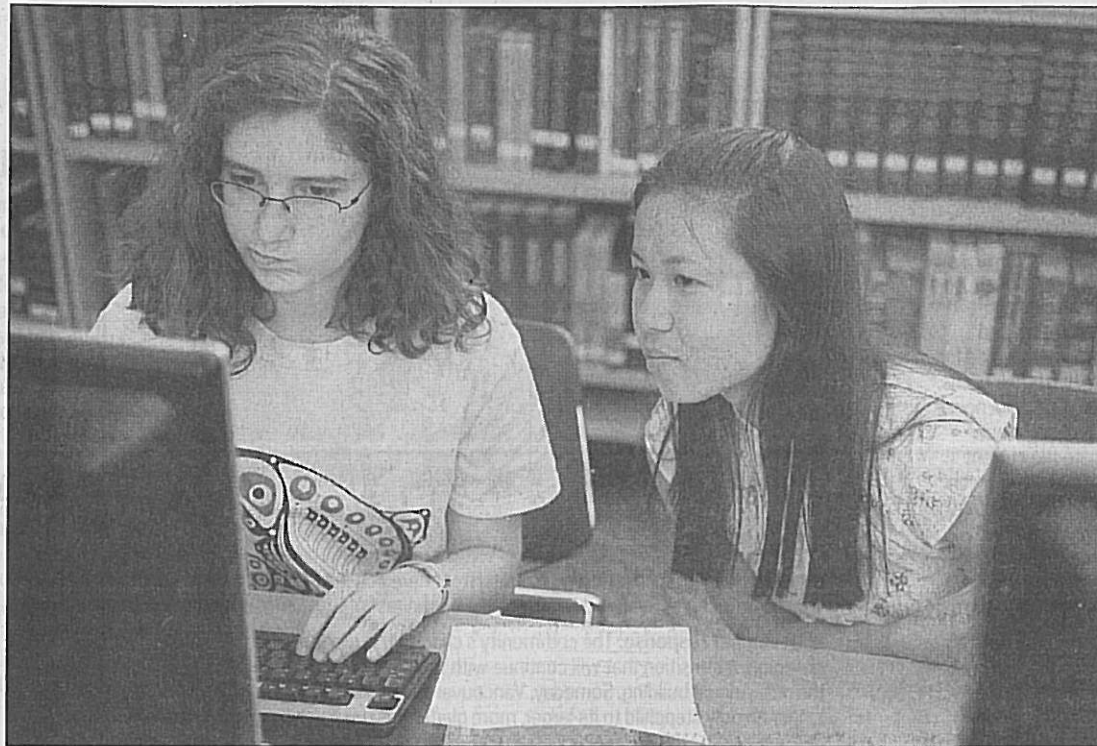
It's not just that Tran is the first to earn a master's degree. Tran had some catching up to do as a grade-schooler, since her family came to Vancouver from Vietnam when she was in the third grade.

The independence cited by Granger reflects Tran's route to college.

"She did not want to accept any tuition assistance," Granger said.

"I wanted to do it on my own," Tran said.

Financially, anyway. The Dreamer program provides other support for its students, and Tran credits project director Deanna Green for some of the focus Granger mentioned.



ZACHARY KAUFMAN/The Columbian

**Han Tran, right, helps 16-year-old Sariah Hayford research Washington colleges in preparation for a summer tour of college campuses. Hayford will be a junior at Vancouver School of Arts and Academics.**

"She never gives up on us," Tran said. "I work with youth now, and now I know how difficult it is to work with them."

"I was really shy when I was in the seventh grade" at Discovery Middle School, Tran said.

When she saw Green approaching, "I would run away. She hunted me down in the gym."

"It was critical for her to know I was interested," Green said. "When she saw I was taking an interest, she would seek me out

in my office."

That was the sort of support Tran appreciates as she looks back on her education.

Tran said she probably would have gone to college anyway: It was something her family

expected.

However, the Dreamer program provided something other than money, Tran said: "Being there for me. I could go to Deanna and the sponsors with personal problems, and they were willing to listen."

Tran is among 15 Dreamers who have completed their coursework at four-year schools, community colleges or career institutes.

The group includes seven who have earned bachelor's degrees; two more are scheduled to receive bachelor's degrees in August.

Tran, 24, is on the other side of the Dreamer relationship now, assisting younger students who have college ambitions.

"They're intimidating," Tran said. "Really incredibly smart. I learn from them, as much as they learn from me."

Tran helped out recently at a "Pursuing the Dream" workshop at Fort Vancouver High School. Students from Project 4, who will be heading into their junior year of high school, went online to research several colleges around the state. It was groundwork for the Dreamers' summer tour, with 24 students visiting those campuses this month.

Tran sat at a computer with

16-year-old Sariah Hayford, who will get a jump on her college credits in the fall.

In addition to attending Vancouver School of Arts and Academics next year, Hayford will take classes at Clark College through the Running Start program.

Tran graduated from Fort Vancouver High School in 2003, attended Clark College for a year, and then transferred to the University of Washington. She graduated in 2007 with a bachelor's degree in law, society and justice.

In Seattle, Tran was an intern at a nonprofit center that assisted victims of human trafficking.

"A Vietnamese woman had been trafficked, and I did translations when a lawyer and the staff at the center helped her."

That was a factor in guiding her career path toward what Tran describes as the area of anti-oppression and empowerment.

In 2008, Tran went to Vietnam to work as a research assistant with the Save the Children organization.

"It was heartbreaking," Tran said, reflecting on the young people she'd worked with. "One is in prison now, and one just got out. You want to change their lives, but it is so hard."