

Writer gives hope to ethnic minority children



► **BOOK WORMS:** Students read books sponsored by LOAN Stiftung. Photos courtesy of the LOAN Stiftung Foundation



► **MENTOR:** Isabelle awards scholarships to students in difficult circumstances.

BY BẢO NGỌC

Overcoming the trauma of being sexually abused and having a poor childhood, a Vietnamese-French writer hopes to bring a better future to ethnic minority children in Việt Nam.

Isabelle Müller was the fifth child of a Vietnamese mother and a French father. Growing up in a poor village in France, experiencing deprivation, racism, and even being sexually abused by her own father during her teenage years, Müller managed to overcome adversity through education.

Like her mother, she is aware that only by improving her knowledge and being resilient could she change her life.

She studied German, English and Russian languages at Francois Rabelais University and at the Centre d'Etudes Pratiques de Langues Vivantes, Tours, France.

She became known to many when she published the book *Loan -- Từ cuộc đời của một con phượng hoàng* (*Loan -- From the Life of a Phoenix*), which was voted in the top five at the 2015 Kindle Storyteller Awards.

Müller also participated in many TV programmes to talk about sexual abuse and encouraged victims to speak up to protect themselves.

Recently, she returned to Việt Nam for the launch of her second book *Phoenix Daughter – Hope Was My Way*.

Released in Germany in 2009, it tells the autobiographical story of an outstanding woman with Vietnamese blood running through her veins who defied fate to become a successful businesswoman.

The Vietnamese version published by the Hồ Chí Minh City General Publishing House was translated as *Con Gái của Chim Phượng Hoàng*:



► **BUILDING HOPE:** A school built by LOAN Stiftung Foundation in Hà Giang Province.

Hy Vọng Là Con Đường Của Tôi by Trương Hồng Quang.

The memoir not only gives hope to victims of sexual abuse but also to students of LOAN Stiftung, a foundation she founded in her mother's name.

Müller told *Việt Nam News* that she had vivid memories of when her family had no beds and were treated coldly by others because they were poor. She recalled how difficult it was for them to preserve their dignity and fight the loneliness that had settled in their hearts.

"That's why I want to go back to Việt Nam where my mother was born, to help children in disadvantaged areas have a better life," she

said.

Established in May 2016, the foundation has offered help to hundreds of ethnic minority children in remote areas in the provinces Hà Giang, Tuyên Quang, Cao Bằng and Lào Cai.

"At first, I planned to choose Hà Tĩnh Province, where my mother came from. But after talking with experts, we realised that there are many provinces with much more difficult living conditions. The places we choose to support are very difficult to access. For this reason, many aid organisations do not go there. But this does not stop us from bringing better things to the children here," she said.

During its six years of operation,

LOAN Stiftung has built about 20 kindergartens, schools and boarding houses, as well as provided educational supplies and direct support on-site for educational access.

"We started with small schools and classrooms. Then we developed them into two-floor buildings with canteens, libraries and sleeping quarters," she said.

"Earlier this year, we also provided scholarships to 66 orphans and poor students to help them continue their dream of accessing education and leading an independent life. Of course, we have scholarship requirements because we are not a big organisation yet. But I'm glad we were able to provide help directly to needy

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Isabelle Müller

children instead of just building buildings with big signs."

The support of LOAN Stiftung and sponsors has brought hope, better living conditions and education to the children of poor areas. They feel grateful and strive to achieve better academic results to be worthy of the help they receive.

"A lot of changes have happened to the children after receiving the scholarships. They understand that this is a huge opportunity for them because with this money they can buy something they really need or cover expenses," she said.

"Some students even wrote nice letters to me and to the project sponsors. They say it means a lot to them because they know that there are people who are silently helping them and believing in them."

Talking about future projects, Müller said she planned to continue to launch a book in Việt Nam this summer.

"It's a children's book with stories and drawings made by myself. With a theme of life and death, I think the book will be very suitable for children who are going through the loss of a loved one, especially in this post-pandemic time," she said. VNS