**Bold & Highlighted** text indicates a header slide.

**1.** Hello everyone. I’m Kevin Kirby, Technical Writing Associate for Neogard in Dallas, Texas. I was fortunate to be selected to participate in the 2016 Hempel Foundation’s volunteer trip to Vietnam, and that’s what this presentation is all about.

**2.** I thought I’d start by discussing the Hempel Foundation and just what it does.

3. J.C. Hempel started the Foundation in 1948, and we’re wholly owned by it. It stabilizes the company, and also provides funding environmental and charitable projects.

4. Education of Children in Need is our major charitable endeavor. We have 22 projects worldwide, and they cover four major categories: helping child workers get back into school, building schools, upgrading schools, and funding learning centers for skills training.

5. The Foundation send a delegation of volunteer employees to one of these projects about once a year. There have been five trips so far: Cambodia, <*advance picture*> Mozambique, <*advance picture*> Bolivia, <*advance picture*> Indonesia, and this past April, <*advance picture*> Vietnam.

6. Here is our volunteer delegation for the Vietnam trip. <*read names and countries*>. Unfortunately, Thanh was recalled to the office after we drove to our destination, and he had to go back.

**7.** Vietnam in 2016 is different from the image most Americans have of the country.

8. In the late 1980s Vietnam switched from a planned economy to a “market socialist” economy—much like China. Their economy grew steadily in the 1990s, and exploded in the 2000s. <*advance picture*> Public health is much improved, with a focus on vaccination and sanitation. <*advance picture*> And school enrollment is much higher than it was for previous generations.

9. However, the country’s ethnic minorities have been left behind. The Kinh—or Viet—are the vast majority of the population. But there are 53 other ethnic groups in Vietnam. They make up the majority of people living in poverty, they live outside the cities, and have limited access to education. They also speak their own languages, making the education problem more acute.

**10.** The ethnic minorities are the focus on the Hempel Foundation’s project in Lao Cai, in particular the Hmong.

11. Lao Cai is in the northwest of Vietnam. It is the red area with the stars in the upper left of this map. I’ve shown Vietnam next to Texas for a sense of scale. <*advance picture*> Lao Cai is very poor, and its economy is almost entirely agricultural. <*advance picture*> Here’s the province overlaid in red against a map of the DFW metro area.

12. The Foundation partnered with UNICEF for our project in Lao Cai. We provide funding and materials for upgrades to the schools, and UNICEF’s education specialists work with the schools and government to improve the school programs.

**13.** Traveling to Vietnam, and especially a remote province like Lao Cai, is a bit of a challenge.

14. We flew in to Nội Bài International Airport. It’s very modern, efficient, and has plenty of amenities. <*advance picture*> This is the baggage claim area; I had a short wait for my bags. <*advance picture*> We stayed at the Metropole, which was originally built in 1901. It is a fantastic hotel. <*advance picture*> This is the interior courtyard and pool area. It’s located in the Hoàn Kiếm Lake area, <*advance picture*> a major cultural district. This is a picture of the lake from a restaurant where we had dinner Sunday night. <*advance picture*> Sunday afternoon, the group toured Hanoi, and visited the Museum of Ethnology; this picture shows a house exhibit at the museum. Bente recommended I stay at the hotel and rest after my 24-hour trip and 12-hour time differential, and she was right. I skipped the tour.

15. Monday morning, we met with the local UNICEF representatives at the UN Green One House, their new building. Here we are walking in to the building. <*advance picture*> We were briefed on the situation in Lao Cai by Jesper Moller, UNICEF’s Deputy Representative, and Thao Phuong, Education Specialist, who would accompany us on the trip. <*advance picture*> And here we are after the briefing.

16. After lunch, we drove to Lao Cai in two comfortable minivans. The drive takes about six hours. The Nội Bài–Lào Cai Expressway opened in 2014; before it opened, the drive took 12 hours. <*advance picture*> It’s a modern road, with well-stocked and equipped rest stops like the one pictured here. <*advance picture*> The roads off the highway are narrow, rough, and the last bit of the drive on this map took a good two hours. <*advance picture*> Our hotel, the Sao Mai, is easily the best in the area. It’s simple, but clean, modern, and the kitchen makes very good food.

17. Tuesday we started our school visits. First up was the Sín Chéng Semi-Boarding Primary School No. 1. We would visit it for at least part of the next three days.

18. This was our drive to and from the school. It takes about an hour over some winding, twisting roads. Our driver, a local resident, handled them expertly.

19. We arrived a little after 9 a.m. The children lined up to welcome us into the school.

20. We were given flowers, and seated at a VIP table. That’s bente in the front, followed by me and Maria.

21. This is the courtyard; the parasol keeps the sun, which is very intense in the afternoon, under control.

22. The children performed a traditional dance, and we participated. Leon and I are in the very back of this picture.

23. Here are Bente, Veronica, and Jane. I’m on the far right in the back.

24. Here’s Leon with his qeej, a Hmong flute. My boot can be seen on the right.

25. The school put out a display of local produce and goods.

26. These are some local dishes, with Hmong musical instruments and clothes in the back.

27. Some of the children have a long walk to and from the school, and as you’ll see later, that walk can be hazardous. So they stay here five nights a week. The dormitory is quite simple.

28. One room has a television; it gets crowded when something is being shown.

29. This is the dining hall, a large corrugated metal shed.

30. The kitchen uses open fires for cooking, and the room gets very hot. I could only stay inside for a minute at a time. This is Veronica, wearing a Hmong dress, helping prepare lunch.

31. Here I am in an apron, running bowls of soup out to the tables.

32. It looks and sounds like a cafeteria in an American school. Hempel provided the tables, chairs, and other equipment and furnishings seen here.

33. The kids wash their own dishes. Maria helped with the day’s cleanup.

34. These drying and storage units were also provided by Hempel. They keep the dishes organized and clean.

35. We had lunch at the local government building; it’s a couple hundred yards up a hill from the school.

36. They laid out a nice spread. The duck eggs, seen here being cracked, were excellent. They like their meats chewy, which was a struggle for me; they require some ripping and tearing with the teeth. We also had many small toasts featuring the local corn liquor; that stuff is quite strong.

37. Back at the school, there were more dances and ceremonies. Bente gave a speech translated by Thao.

38. This is a combination dance and game. The bamboo poles are moved together and apart, and the dancers must jump through them in pairs.

39. Our volunteers do the bamboo dance. Here are Bente, Thao, Jane, Leon, and Rohan.

40. That afternoon we had activities and lessons with the kids.

41. Veronica did a class on balloon animals.

42. Maria brought some painting kits. She also did a great project where Russian kids wrote letters to the Vietnamese kids, and the Vietnamese wrote back.

43. Here I am with Thao from UNICEF showing a poster about where I live and what I do. I also taught English—mostly pronunciation—and talked about astronomy. My first translator for the class disappeared, but Thao stepped in and was indispensable.

**44.** Wednesday was a very busy day. We had three visits, to a local market and two schools.

45. We had passed the Sín Chéng Market the day before. It’s just a few minutes short of the primary school.

46. This is a local market, and is not focused on tourists; it is for the local people. We were given a sort of approval to be here by the local authorities. You won’t see a tourist bus pull in here like other markets in the area.

47. The main road gets very busy. Driving a vehicle through here takes some time.

48. Everyone comes to the market. Most school-age kids don’t, because they’re in school, but we saw some.

49. All kinds of animals are sold here. There are lots of dogs in Vietnam; here are some pups for sale.

50. Water buffalo are common. We had to keep telling Jane not to try and touch the water buffalo.

51. Ducks are also popular. Here’s a basket of ducklings.

52. These are chickens in bamboo cages.

53. The produce here is excellent; the watermelon and pineapple are some of the best I’ve had. I could smell those dried fish a fair distance away.

54. This is the meat market. It looks pretty rough, but remember, the meat was butchered just hours before being sold.

55. Lots of clothes being sold. Much of this is made in Vietnam or China (Lao Cai provinces borders China).

56. More clothing, some locally made, in the Hmong style.

57. Other local goods, including stuffed animals (in the lower right).

58. This is a local market, and there are decidedly non-tourist items, like these tools.

59. Fired dough! The donut and its relatives are truly universal.

60. Lots of grill stands were serving food. Look at those chicken feet.

61. Here’s Bente trying a bit of the local corn liquor. This is the same kind of thing we were toasted with Tuesday. It’s appropriate that it’s stored in gas cans; this stuff could power your car.

62. Services are also available. Need a haircut? These guys had a lot of business.

63. A cockfight broke out right in front of me while I was walking around. I managed to snap off a quick picture.

64. These guys provided some musical accompaniment for the day’s shopping.

65. After a couple of hours at the market, we drove to our next destination, the Chu Lìn Chồ Learning Center. It’s what we would call a kindergarten. The drive was longer than the 12 minutes estimated by Google. The road is difficult, and we made a wrong turn and had to double back.

66. Here’s the view of the school from the road.

67. We walked down the path to the school.

68. We were given a VIP table to from which to watch the grand opening ceremonies.

69. Two mothers and their daughters performed a sweet, lovely dance.

70. After speeches by school and government administrators—and by Bente--we had an actual red ribbon cutting! A confetti cannon was involved; notice the Mylar foil floating around.

71. This is how the school looked before the Hempel/UNICEF Project. This is a picture of a picture, but I think you can see the poor condition it was in.

72. And here is how it appears now. Hempel supplied the materials, and the local people—many parents of the children here—did the work.

73. One of UNICEF’s initiatives is improved hygiene and sanitation. They stress the importance of hand washing to prevent disease. The kids were eager to show off their skills at their new sink.

74. The kitchen here also uses open fires. Ventilation is better, and it isn’t as raging hot inside as at the primary school.

75. The mothers of the kids often accompany their children here for the day. While the kids are in class, they make items for their use and for sale.

76. We joined in and made some bracelets and necklaces out of seeds. Rohan, Leon, and I are working in this picture.

77. Lots of group pictures were taken. This is the full version of the shot on the title slide.

78. We went back to the market for lunch with our official hosts. This stall is a café, and prepares food bought at the market.

79. It’s definitely rugged, but the food was very good, and it had a nice crowd.

80. We weren’t the only Westerners there; a couple trekking through the area stopped for lunch. You can see them in the background. We were a curiosity; one very friendly patron insisted I have a toast of that ubiquitous corn liquor with him.

81. Back at the primary school, we had more activities. Rohan taught a craft class.

82. We couldn’t find a class with older kids for my astronomy lessons, so I helped Jane teach the kids rounders, the English prototype of baseball. The courtyard was crowded with other class groups, so it devolved into me batting the ball to the kids in a wild game of catch. I have video of this on YouTube if you’re interested.

83. More games: Thao brought a petanque set, although some of the kids just wanted to play soccer.

**84.** Thursday’s experience was quite incredible. We walked to the homes of two of the students and visited their families.

85. The walk wasn’t long, about three miles round trip. But getting to the house was challenging, as you will see.

86. Here’s our group starting out. Our student is under the umbrella on the far right.

87. The road skirts the edges of the terraced fields.

88. Those small mountains overlook the primary school. Mountains and hills like these are all over the area.

89. We passed a few small villages on the way.

90. Some of the views here are gorgeous.

91. My favorite picture I took during the trip: A Hmong woman, with a child on her back, checking the fields.

92. This road can be hazardous. In the rain it turns to sludge, it’s rocky and occasionally rutted, and livestock like this water buffalo roam freely.

93. Vehicles also use the road, mostly motorcycles. It’s due to these hazards—and the distance some of the kids must walk—that the children spend five nights a week at the school.

94. The house is off the road and up a steep hill. This picture shows the easy part of the trail; I have some pictures of the rest of the trail during the descent, which you’ll see in a moment.

95. Grandmother and granddaughter posed for pictures in their doorway. We brought gifts to them, including containers and filters for water.

96. The house is simple: mud walls, packed dirt floor. There is electricity, but it isn’t always reliable. They have a rice cooker and a TV. There is no plumbing, but a hose with a valve is behind the house; I have no idea where the water is sourced.

97. Here, a sweaty fat man is given a cup of water by a Vietnamese child.

98. This is the trail I mentioned earlier. It is very rocky and obviously has no fall protection.

99. That’s me carefully descending the trail to the road.

100. Like the road, the trail to the house is rocky, uneven, and turns to a slurry in the rain. Not something you want the kids walking in poor conditions.

101. Our other volunteer group visited this home. Any house with a TV has a dish; terrestrial broadcasting does not work in these mountains.

102. The group with the student and his father. You’ll see more of him near then end of this presentation.

103. During the walk back to the school, we had lunch at this village community center.

104. Again, the food was great. I didn’t eat much due to the heat; I needed water more than anything.

105. For our last afternoon at the school, Leon and I split a classroom. He was making origami frogs, and I was making paper airplanes—a paper folding extravaganza. The kids enjoyed it.

106. We dropped off our materials—I brought maps of the world and U.S., and books on the subjects and activities I taught—and took a lot of group pictures.

107. The kids lined up and said goodbye. We enjoyed our visit with these great kids and their teachers.

**108.** Friday we had some traveling to do. We drove to the mountains in the west side of Lao Cai to visit a preschool.

109. The drive wasn’t long, but it was slow. It really did take about two and a half hours to travel the 53 miles.

110. We walked to our destination, the Mong Sen Learning Center, a preschool. The second half of this walk was very challenging.

111. The start wasn’t bad—a bit hilly, but easy.

112. Views of the river valley below were quite spectacular.

113. Here’s Thao in front of the bridge over the river. See the red circle in the upper left? That’s our destination.

114. The bridge is solid, but it does bounce a bit. Notice the path going up to the right.

115. And we’re going up. Here, Jane is converting to shorts in the increasing heat.

116. There’s Maria overlooking the valley. The pavement ends about two-thirds of the way up the hill.

117. Cars and trucks probably cannot make it up this road. It is too narrow in spots, and the ruts are very deep.

118. Our objective at last. Note the motorcycles ridden by the staff. I had to ride one part of the way up; I got a bit winded and lightheaded and needed a break.

119. The group rests after the walk up. The red circle in the lower right shows where we took the earlier picture showing our destination.

120. Once again, there were dances and speeches and a VIP table for us.

121. These kids are very young, so we played games, sang songs, and just visited. No lessons today.

122. After lunch, we visited some nearby homes which were just a few hundred meters away. This boy, shown with his mother, attends the preschool.

123. Their house is very rudimentary. It gets cold here in the winter; the house does not provide much protection. This was a sobering visit.

124. The open fire provides heat and is used for cooking. There is electrical wiring, but no appliances. A hose running up from the school runs at a trickle. They must haul water up from the river. We gave them a gift of a water carrier and filter.

**125.** We finished at the preschool and walked back to our van. Our next destination allowed us some rest before the long trip home.

126. We spent the night at the Topas Ecolodge. It’s near the town of Sa Pa, a major tourist destination in the region.

127. This is an overhead shot of the Ecolodge taken from their website. Guests stay in the bungalows; the mail building with a bar, restaurant, and the office is at the left. Everything here is made from local materials.

128. The views here are spectacular. This is sundown Friday night.

129. Looking west Saturday morning. The bungalows have electricity and air conditioning. There are no TVs anywhere in the lodge.

130. Staying here gave us a chance to recharge and debrief. We had formal and informal discussions of the trip, and how we planned to promote it when we returned home. The rest of the trip back is just minivans, airports, and airliners, so we’ll skip that…

**131.** A few reflections about, and the lessons learned during this exceptional, meaningful trip…

132. This boy was very concerned we were leaving Wednesday, and really wanted us to come back Thursday. We assured him we were coming back for another day. He obviously enjoyed our visit, and that alone showed the value of our trip. He was in my English lesson Tuesday afternoon, and recited numbers 1-10 and said “thank you” with perfect pronunciation. The world is indeed very small today; reaching out in projects like this and showing these children that we care about their future is a powerful message to send.

133. During my paper airplane activity, I showed the kids how to make a basic airplane which flew well. Within minutes—maybe seconds—of finishing, they were modifying the design. Kids everywhere are creative and energetic; regardless of their differences, they’re largely the same no matter where you go.

134. They may look different and have different traditions, but really, they want what we want: a decent life for their families, a future for their children. A job, a business, a place to call home. Helping achieve that is really at the core of the Hempel Foundation’s projects in education. Giving people a chance at a better life.

135. Finally, here’s the boy our second group visited Thursday. He was also in my English lesson, and recorded this short video: <*play video*> That was really great.

136. I’m more than happy to answer any questions you may have regarding the Vietnam trip, or about volunteering for future volunteer trips by the Hempel Foundation. It is definitely a worthwhile experience. It may not be easy, and you’ll have to donate some of your vacation time to do it, but it is something you’ll cherish for a lifetime. I strongly encourage you to apply. Great thanks for taking the time to watch this presentation, and goodbye.