

STORIES OF CHANGE

A second chance



The Vanguard Series

The Vanguard Series: Paving innovative ways to combat trafficking and unsafe migration

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Authors and contributors: Karen Rivera.

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World Vision International
East Asia Regional Office

Address: Bangkok Business Center Building 13th Floor
29 Sukhumvit 63 (Ekamai Road) Klongton Nua,
Wattana Bangkok 10110 THAILAND
Office: +66-2-3916155; +66-2-3818861
Fax: +66-2-3811976
<http://www.wvi.org/asiapacific>

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Pou Ying waited for her mother to leave their house to go to the market. As soon as she was out the door, Pou Ying grabbed her bag from its hiding place and set off to her friend's house.

She and her friend were leaving their village in Savannakhet, Laos, that night for Mukdahan, the Thai town across the Mekong River.

She didn't leave a note to tell her parents where she was going.

'I know they will understand why I'm leaving. I'm doing this for the family,' she thought to herself.





A few days earlier, she and her friend had been offered jobs as housemaids in Thailand by a man who came to her friend's house. The man said they could earn 6,000 Baht per month and he would arrange for them to work together. The offer was too good to be true but the young Lao girls believed it.

'That's more than my father earns from the furniture company or what my mother gets from selling vegetables,' Pou Ying thought. She saw this as her chance to make things better for her six younger brothers and sisters.



That evening the 16-year-old girls crossed the border in a boat with 10 people.

‘Be quiet. Don’t make a sound,’ the boatman warned them. The trip was only 30 minutes, but it transported Pou Ying from the warmth of her home to the abusive hands of her employer.



When they reached the other side, the men and women were separated and taken in different cars. The driver brought Pou Ying to a large gated house.

‘What about my friend? We are supposed to work together,’ she asked the driver.

‘No, you stay here. Your friend will work somewhere else,’ she was told. She would never see her friend again. For the first time, Pou Ying felt scared. She wasn’t prepared to work alone, but it was too late to back out.



For three months Pou Ying did all the housework and everything else that her employer asked her to do. But her employer would always find something wrong with her work and this usually led to Pou Ying being beaten with a broom. There were three Thai servants in the house, but they were not allowed to talk to each other. There was no break from her daily routine, and she was never given a single day off.

She also never received the 6,000 Baht that was promised to her. Each time she asked for her salary, her employer said she would give it to her the following month.

Pou Ying desperately wanted to go home but she didn't know how to contact her family. She was not even allowed to go out. Soon she started to make plans to escape.



At home her mother had been worried sick. Her husband hadn't stopped blaming her for her daughter's disappearance. 'This is all your fault!' he ranted. 'You encouraged her to leave – now you must go and find her!'

Pou Ying's mother knew that she was in Thailand but she didn't know where to start looking. She remembered her daughter had once mentioned going there to work but she had discouraged her. She still hadn't told anyone about her daughter's disappearance – not even the police – because she was scared they would also blame her.



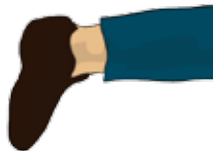
Fortunately, events began to turn in Pou Ying's favour when her employer and his business partner had a disagreement. The business partner reported to the police that he was keeping an illegal worker at home. The police came and found Pou Ying and took her to the police station for questioning. They then worked with the Laos authorities and began the process of sending her home.




When the police brought her home, Pou Ying's mother leapt up and rushed to her. They embraced and cried for a long time. Her mother couldn't believe how much weight her daughter had lost.

Pou Ying's father was also very happy to see his daughter back home and he told her how much he had missed her.

'Never go away again,' he implored. 'Just stay here and continue your studies. Your mother and I will work hard to support you.'







Immediately after her return, Sutchai, a staff-member from World Vision, came to visit her. When Pou Ying's case was referred to her by the police, Sutchai was surprised to discover that the girl was her neighbour. She brought her to the hospital for a medical check-up and, thankfully, the doctor didn't find anything wrong with her physically.

Sutchai, together with a government counterpart, then worked closely with Pou Ying and asked her what she wanted to do now that she was back home.

'I still want to help my family,' she said. 'I want to earn some money to help them.'



They talked about her plans with her family and looked at possible business ideas they could start at home. Since the family was already selling vegetables, they decided to expand their business by growing mushrooms in their yard.

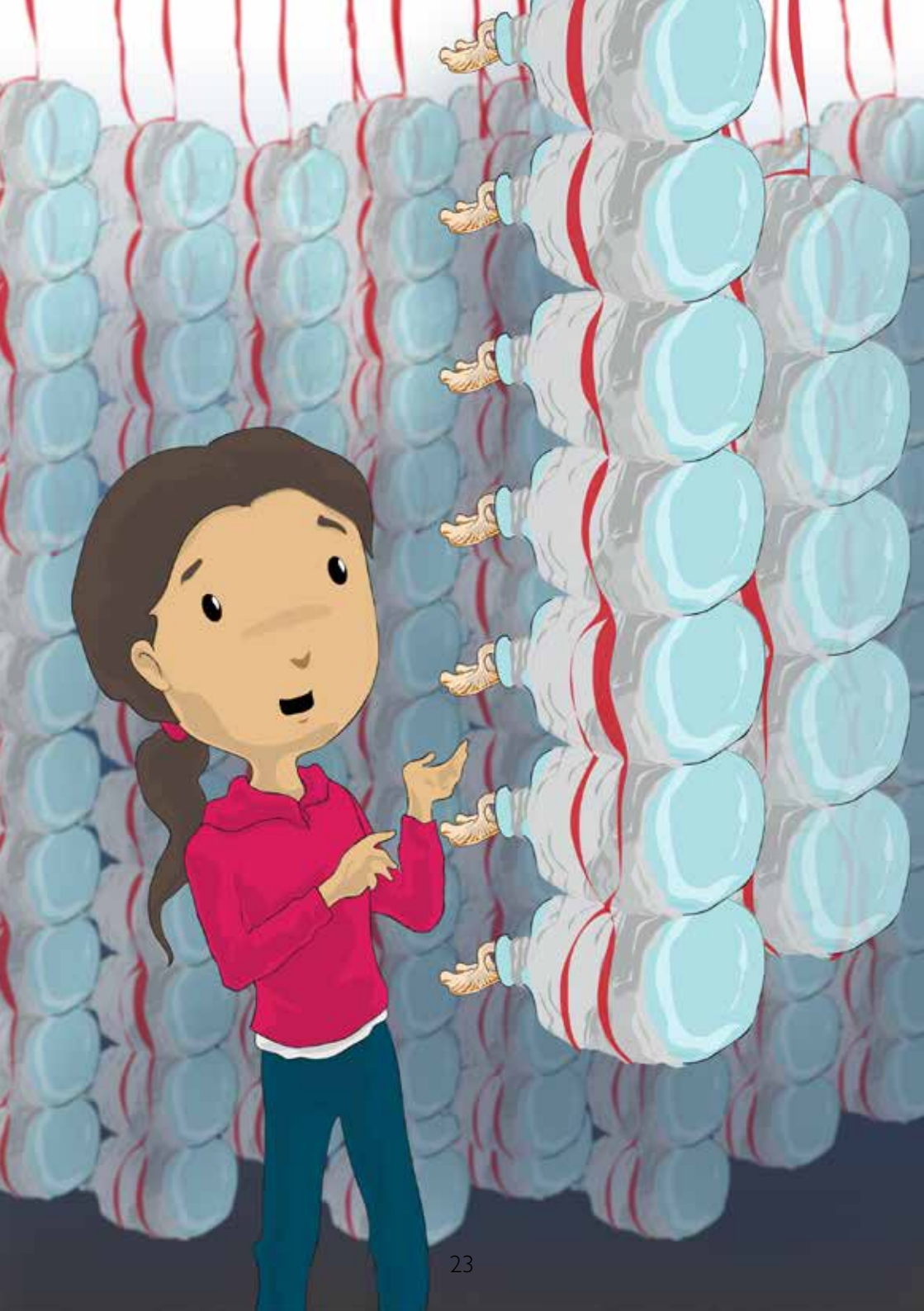
Sutchai helped Pou Ying enrol in a training course offered by the district agriculture office. After the training course, World Vision provided her with various start-up materials while her family built a shed. During the course, Pou Ying learned how to manage the business, including keeping track of earnings and expenses.



Since they started the business, the family has earned 800,000 kip. They harvest twice a week and sell their produce at the local market. It has become a major source of income for the family.

Pou Ying has also returned to school. She's still ashamed to talk about her experience with other people but she has joined a youth club to learn about life skills.





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