

Realizing Child Domestic Workers' Dreams through Sewing Class

The atmosphere in “Sanggar Belajar Masa Depan Pekerja Rumah Tangga Anak (PRTA) or Learning Studio for the Future of Child Domestic Workers (CDWs) in Kranji” at Jalan Banteng no. 18, RT/RW 01/11 Kranji, West Bekasi was full of laughter. Several mothers and girls were sitting and chatting. There were round and rectangle trays on a desk in front of them; they were apparently CDWs who learned how to make brooches.

“In this studio, they learn to sew, make beads, brooches, etc... We started this program in 2009 and now we are collaborating with the ILO. At first, (we held this activity) in Harapan Mulia, but since we could reach the target number of CDWs, we moved to Kranji,” Inke Maris Purba, an activist from the Mitra ImaDei NGO, told Media Pembaruan.

Inke said the reason Mitra ImaDei chose a sewing course is because the program provides better prospects for CDWs. “Most CDWs choose sewing because they can open their own sewing business in the future. It does not require much capital and it is easier for them. We can't force them to go back to school because they are no longer interested.”

After moving to Kranji in 2011, Mitra ImaDei had to finance the sewing course. Fortunately, they managed to borrow Mrs. Napsiah's space to conduct the program.

“Come on girls. Take out your books. Write your own body measurement in the book so you can wear what you make when you're done,” said Mrs. Napsiah to the CDWs. While teaching, Napsiah explained the course to Media Pembaruan. “At first, they learn to sew. Making brooches is a variation so that they don't get bored. Sometimes they make beads and bows,” said Mrs. Napsiah while monitoring the work of the students. Mrs. Napsiah believes her sewing studio could fulfill the future needs of CDW's. “Sewing is something that you can do even when you are old. Money will always come to you.”

Mrs. Napsiah allocates time on Sundays to teach sewing skills to CDWs. On weekdays, she and her five staff members run the sewing business as usual.

Mrs. Napsiah told us that she received an invitation to collaborate with Mitra ImaDei and the ILO. “At that time, an official from the sub-district secretariat visited me and we developed a contract with the ILO, funded by Mitra ImaDei. I tried very hard to reach a target of 50 CDWs. I went to villages to spread the word about it,” she said. So far, 17 CDWs have participated in the program. Based on Media Pembaruan's observation, the learning process was rather slow because some of them were taking the course for the first time.

It seems that all CDWs are eager to learn. They understand that the sewing course could be a way out of poverty. Khusnul Khotimah (17) of Purworejo, Central Java expressed this to Media Pembaruan. She hopes that she won't be a domestic worker forever. “My dream is to become a teacher but I need money to continue my studies. Besides, my employer said it is better to open a business than to be a teacher. That's why I joined the sewing course,” said the girl who goes by Ima.

Similar efforts were also made by Jala PRT, an advocacy network at the national level established in July of 2004. Jala PRT consists of 26 NGOs and several individuals who care about DW's protection. It established the Rumpun Alternative School for DWs in Yogyakarta. “The program's development took place from July 2003 to February 2006. So far, we have 8 programs. The total number of participants in the programs is 267 people, with an average number of 15 to 30 people per program. Most of them are junior high school graduates, so some are still children,” explained Lita Anggraini, Coordinator of Jala PRT, to Media Pembaruan.

DWs and CDWs can learn many things at the Rumpun Alternative School. Lessons given include general skills like driving, English, computers, basic health care, and domestic management. In addition, they also have minor subjects such as theater, music and sports. There are also vocational subjects like domesticity, home-based nursing and babysitting.

What sets it apart is that in addition to teaching practical skills, Rumpun Alternative School also raises awareness for domestic workers; that like other human beings, they also have the right to protection and recognition. Subjects include gender equality: domestic workers as women, citizen workers, and citizens of the world. In addition, there are also subjects on children's rights and healthy reproduction, and subjects on litigation and non-litigation advocacy, policy advocacy and organizing campaigns.

Lita said that she is satisfied with achievements of the Rumpun Alternative School. “The Local Manpower Office in Yogyakarta and the provincial government of Yogyakarta consider our work contracts and standard

protection requirements as models in establishing good working relations between employers and domestic workers in order to create better working conditions for women domestic workers, particularly in Yogyakarta,” she said.

Looking at what Sanggar Jahit PRTA and Rumpun School have already achieved in the area of CDWs, we should be hopeful because there are parties out there who care about the future of CDWs. Poverty should not continue to impede CDWs efforts to have a better life. Perhaps the time has come for the government to pay attention and help small enterprises like Mrs. Napsiah’s business or alternative schools in order to develop CDWs potential.

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