

STORIES FROM CHILDREN

ILO-IPEC project to combat the worst forms of child labour in shrimp and seafood processing areas in Thailand

Mae Lah's story

My name is Mae Lah. I am 15 years old. My parents are migrant workers from Myanmar. I have a sister who is now 21 years old. She started working at the age of 15. I sometimes help my parents sorting fish at a pier in Samut Sakhon province.

When I was studying the fifth grade at Wat Sirimongkol School, my parents wanted me to leave school and start working. They thought going to school would not help with anything and that I had better leave school for work.

Even though I was about three years behind in my studies I did not want to leave school.

One day I saw a library and a computer room being set up in my area. I went to try the computer. That was when I got to know the Foundation for Child Development (FCD). Since then I always attend their recreational and educational activities and have become fluent in Thai.

I sought help from the FCD about my studies. The FCD staff came to speak to my parents to let me study and work as a volunteer interpreter for the FCD during the weekends.

With the extra income earned during my weekends, my parent agreed to let me continue my studies.

Even though I am earning less than a factory wage, I am happy that I can still go to school.

Through working with FCD I have also gained recognition from people in my community. I often assist the FCD staff when they visit households in my area. The FCD staff have complimented me on my hard work and responsibility.

My hope is to finish school and find a job I want in the future.

Mae Lah had been supported by the Foundation for Child Development (FCD) as part of the ILO-IPEC action programme "Promoting education, social protection and safe work for migrant children and teen workers in seafood areas", implemented in the Samut Sakhon and Samut Prakan provinces of Thailand from 2012-2014.

'Dara's' story

My name is 'Dara'. I am 16 years old. My parents are ethnic Mon from Myanmar. I have a 5-year-old sister.

My parents left Myanmar for Ranong province in Thailand where I was born. They then moved to Samut Sakhon province where my sister was born.

I was 11 years old when my sister was born. As a result mother asked me to leave school. My father was the only wage earner at that time. Mother had to stay at home caring for my baby sister.

I have helped my mother peel shrimps since I was 12 years old. I started with a few hours a day. At peak times I worked 12 hours a day. I am currently working eight hours a day. I earn 400 to 500 Baht a day (12-15 USD).

In addition to peeling shrimps, I started a direct sales business. I sell cosmetics and nutritional products.

Even though I left school, I attend Sunday classes organized by the Labour Rights Promotion Network Foundation (LPN). I have studied English and Burmese languages. I love to learn new things. I have also learned about my rights and other issues, such as child labour and human trafficking. Attending the LPN's classes also helps me improve my Thai language and my communication skills. With the LPN's support, I am able to translate Thai instructions into the Mon dialect for other workers at my work place.

I think education is very important since it contributes to us finding a better job. When I complete my secondary education I will try to go on to university level. One day I will go and study abroad.

'Dara' was supported by the Labour Rights Promotion Network Foundation (LPN) as part of the ILO-IPEC action programme "Promoting the rights to education and legal protection for working children and migrants in Samut Sakhon", which was implemented from 2012-2014.

'Chanah's' story

My name is 'Chanah'. I am 14 years old. I live with my parents and my younger brother, Charti, in Ranode district, Songkhla Province, in the south of Thailand.

My father is a wage earner who does shoreline fishing, but sometimes he finds no job. My mother does shrimp sorting at the pier and earns about 200 Baht a day, but there are not always shrimps to sort.

I started helping my father at work when I was 11. We would go and catch fish in a public pond near home. Each time we caught some fish we sold it at the market for about 200 Baht. I worked a few hours a day before and after school.

When I finished my sixth grade, I moved to a new school far from home. My mother gave me money for the bus fare and lunch at school. She also gave my brother some cash for lunch. When included the house rent, our family had a lot of expenses while our income was small. Then my mother became ill, and my father could not earn much from work, I decided to leave school regardless of their disapproval. I was 13 and studying in the eighth grade at that time.

I went out on a fishing boat with my neighbours and was paid 200 baht a day. I often came home with money and some fish for the family to eat.

I worked at night in a squid-catching boat. My work sometimes went on until morning. My tasks were to disentangle the fishing nets and dive into the sea to loosen the stuck nets.

Two months after I left school a village volunteer and a worker from the Planned Parenthood Association in Thailand (PPAT) came to see my parents. They talked to them about the importance of education, the negative effects of hard work and illiteracy on my future. PPAT invited my parents to take part in an income generating group and other activities in the village. Most importantly, the project invited me to join other children of my age for some education games. We talked about children's rights and education. I really enjoyed these activities.

Finally, I decided to go back to school but I felt embarrassed to go back to the same school that I had left because all of my buddies have now moved up to higher classes. The project helped me to enroll in a non-formal education course. I look forward to starting my studies in the first semester of 2015.

'Chanah' was supported by the Planned Parenthood Association of Thailand (PPAT) under the ILO-IPEC action programme "Protection of children from child labour in the shrimp and seafood-related industries in Songkhla and Nakhon Si Thammarat provinces", which was implemented from 2012-2014.

The ILO-IPEC project in Thailand (2010-2015) aims to address child labour and forced labour in shrimp and seafood processing areas and help to create an industry that is free of child labour and forced labour and offers decent working conditions and opportunities to Thai and migrant workers. Special attention is given to the situation of Thai and migrant children at risk of entering or/and involved in hazardous child labour.

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