

STORIES OF CHANGE

A future in the **village**



The Vanguard Series

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

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ISBN 978-0-918261-47-2

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Published by the End Trafficking in Persons (ETIP) Programme on behalf of World Vision International

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Managed on behalf of the ETIP Programme by Amy Collins. Senior Editor: Heather Elliott.

Production Management: Katie Klopman Fike. Copyediting: Ian Pugh.

Cover Design and Interior Layout: Inis Communication. Illustrations: James Dimanarig.

Designed and printed by Inis Communication – www.iniscommunication.com

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For days Srey Pech had been crying and begging her parents to let her go to Malaysia. She had told them that a recruiter from Phnom Penh had come to her village and offered her a job as a domestic worker in that country. She really wanted to go.

'Please let me go,' she pleaded. 'I could earn a lot of money there. We couldn't earn that kind of money from making charcoal or from our harvest.'

'You are only 16 and Malaysia is too far,' her mother replied.

Srey Pech told them that the recruiter promised to work on her papers and give her training before she left. But still her parents refused to listen.



One day she came up with an idea that finally won her parents' approval.

'I'll just go and check out the training centre in Phnom Penh. If I don't like it, I'll come back in two days,' she promised her parents.

The recruiter also agreed with this plan and quickly arranged Srey Pech's five-hour trip to the city.



At the training centre, Srey Pech met with a lot of other girls her age. The place was crammed. There was no place to sleep but on the floor and they were not allowed to go out. There were cameras everywhere and a high fence surrounded the centre.

After two days she told the agency she wanted to go home. But Srey Pech was not allowed to leave.

She was told that she couldn't go unless her family paid the US\$125, which they said was now owed to the agency for her travel and expenses at the centre for two days. She was then forced to sign a two-year contract that promised to pay her \$3,000 after two years.



During her training, Srey Pech and the other girls were beaten and slapped for the slightest offence. Some tried to escape but failed. On the day that she left for Malaysia, the agency sent \$50 to her parents as an advance of her salary. The agency dressed her and the other girls in nice office clothes and gave them strict instructions.

‘Don’t talk or sit together at the airport. Pretend that you don’t know each other,’ they were told.



In Malaysia, Srey Pech worked with cruel employers who treated her like a slave for eight months.

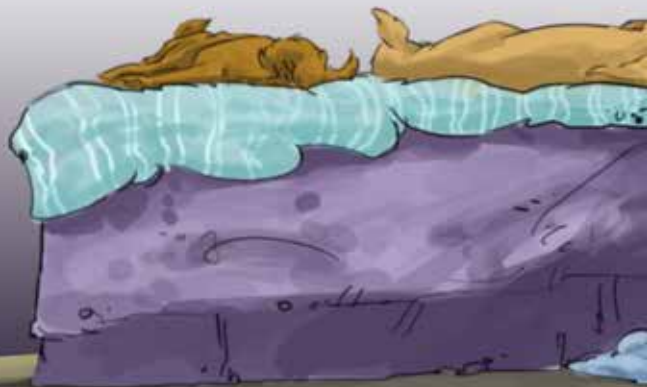
She worked long hours, doing all the housework and cleaning her employers' office. She also had to look after three children and nine dogs. She had to share a room with the dogs. They slept on a mattress while she had to sleep on the floor!

When Srey Pech got very weak and refused to work, the wife of her employer started giving her some pills that made her feel stronger.



And, when the husband started showing an interest in Srey Pech, the wife would beat her even more.

One day she forced her to swallow a new pill and locked her in the dogs' room. The pill made Srey Pech feel sick all night and the next day she was too weak to work. She begged her employer to send her home but now the wife accused her of being lazy and beat her until she passed out.





Srey Pech woke up in the hospital. The doctor told her employers that they had better send her home because she might die. Her employers quickly bought her a ticket to go home.

Srey Pech travelled home in a daze. At the airport in Phnom Penh, immigration officers held her for questioning when they noticed that she wasn't well. After she told them what had happened to her, they sent her back to her village.



When Srey Pech arrived home she was severely traumatised. She often cried but refused to talk to her family about her experiences. Since they didn't know how to help her, they blamed her instead.

When Samnang, a World Vision staff member, first came to see her, she ran away and hid in the bush.

'I was afraid it was someone from the agency coming to take me back to the centre to finish my contract,' she said to Samnang.



Samnang and the social affairs officer in her village helped Srey Pech to get counselling together with her mother. World Vision took care of their expenses during their trips to the counsellor. It took several months of counselling sessions before Srey Pech started to heal from her trauma.

The counselling also helped her parents understand their daughter and they eventually stopped blaming her.

Samnang regularly monitored Srey Pech's progress. When she was ready, they talked about how she could earn money without leaving her village. Srey decided to sell vegetables so World Vision provided her with some funding and materials to start her business.



Soon Srey Pech was earning between \$1.25 and \$2 a day and had plans to expand her business. Selling also helped bring back her confidence. When her neighbours came to buy her vegetables she was no longer afraid to talk to them.

When Samnang visited her again at home, she was happy to see the changes in Srey Pech. She asked if she still wanted to work abroad.

'I don't want to go back to Malaysia anymore. I was treated lower than a dog. I would rather stay home now,' she replied with a shy smile.



A stylized illustration of a tree with a thick brown trunk and dense green foliage, set against a light green background with soft, abstract shapes. The tree is positioned on the right side of the page, with its base resting on a green hill. The overall style is simple and artistic, using watercolor-like textures and soft lines.

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