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Women Peace Makers

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# Story of Change

2018 Beneficiaries

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Story by: Soklin Uy and Lyhour Heang

## Story of Change: [Chhour Rattanakneary]

Written date: January 2019

Peace Program: [Empathy Project]



*[In whatever context, there are good and bad people. However, regardless of our different identity, colour, or religion, we still can hold hand and move forward together. ]* Photo by: Heang Lyhour

As a daughter born and raised in a very conservative Khmer-Chinese family, exposing myself to the public or having the chance to join this kind of activity has been very rare, since my family just wants me to go to school and then come back home, which limits my decision making. Because of this, I am the kind of person who is not really sociable, and I find it hard to open up with new friends or really talk much. On the first day of the Orientation and Conflict transformation training of the project, I shared that I hate places that have a lot of people, and I just want to be alone all of the time.



For the first time, while being here, I just wanted to get to know more people, and only improve myself. However, this program impressed me and played a significant role for me to become who I am today. I have learnt a lot from WPM, as the project gave me a lot of knowledge which I couldn't learn at school, because beyond that I got the chance to practice and test it on my own with the others during the program. Most importantly, all the knowledge and skills I got can further help me, because I utilize it in my daily activities and in my major too, since some of what we learned is really related to my subject. I gained more than what I expected. Personally, I become more confident.

As a daughter born in a conservative family, I have never been able to get out of the city or stay far away from home without being with my parents. This is the first time, being with other people during the camping, and especially the homestay in Kandal province without having my family near me. I gradually became fearless in doing all that I had never done before.

I can see myself changing a lot and that has impacted my life immensely. Before, I always thought that if there was conflict, violence is just the fast way of dealing with it. Now, when there is a problem, I try to think of a peaceful solution. In term of my relationships with the other, in the beginning, I always viewed Vietnamese as negative and bad due to the violent history and negative news feeds that I have encountered about Vietnamese people. On the first day of training, I felt very bad and didn't really like them (Vietnamese participants). They are loud and I felt like they were very bad. I never ever wanted to be near them. However, through communication and interaction and having a chance to build community and to stay in their homes, I was able to understand their way of life more deeply. I found out that there is no difference in the way they live, no difference even with my way of living at home. When we asked why they speak mostly Vietnamese in their family, I found it was very connected to my family too, because we always speak Chinese. In the end, nothing is different between us all. I try to see someone in a very positive way as much as I can and look beyond that negative preconceptions.

## Story of Change: [Tuch Sreynich]

Written date: 15th Dec 2018

**Peace Program:** [Empathy Project]



*[We are the same and there is nothing wrong with having different ethnicities, culture and belief.]* Photo by: Lyhour Heang

Growing as an ethnic Vietnamese girl, there are so many challenging to me. Many discriminations taking place at school against ethnic Vietnamese and I was scared and lived in fear every single time of not able to express to people about who I am or my real identity. Though, with this program, it help me growth so much individually and to certain amount of people around me. At school, I never even able to face with my friend, I never dare to express my opinion. But now, when they say something bad about one ethnicity, I can dare to critically question and letting them know my own opinions. I now can see myself very active in promoting peace, especially with my classmates and friends. I tried to tell them to think further and see



someone for who they are and not judging them too quick without knowing anything or based on its own perceptions.

Before I am too quick to judge. At the very beginning, I met those participants in the program, I don't like some specific people and one of which is Muslim. I used to be very anti-Islam, thinking that they are very bad people and not helpful at all. I believed in the rummors saying that Cham Muslim are very good at doing black magic, fishy smell and stuff like that. With such preceptions, I was so fearful of her when she tried to chat to me during the first day of the training. I didn't even dare to touch her as I was so scare of her and just talk to her a little bit since I don't want her to feel bad. Though, when we went through the second activities and camping together, I push myself to learn more about her by talking and playing with her. Since then, we became very close and connected to one another. When I got a chance to hear from her about everything that related to her religion, it made me understand more and realized that what I perceived previously was wrong. I am so close with her like a best friend. I believe communiation and interaction is key in breaking the negative perceptions against one another. We still use social media to keep in touch. To me they are like my second family.

Thanks to WPM, I start to understand more about the issue and change my negative view toward the other. I love how this program allow me to interact with different ethnic groups and change the way I perceived about the other. Lastly, I hope that not only in Cambodia but around the world, we no longer discriminate one another based on race or ethnicity. Everyone want peace. so we need to spread love and respect each other more.

## Story of Change: Fatilah Ismael

Written date: October 2018

Peace Program: [From Center to Periphery Project]



*Fatilah Ismael, 20, is a Khmer-Islam living in Kampot Province and shares her personal experience and deep reflection about her fieldwork using Facilitative Listening Design (FLD).*

*Photo by: Lyhour Heang*

Fatilah, 20, is from Daun Toak commune, Sangkat Treay Koh district in Kampot province. She self-identifies herself as Khmer-Islam who studies at a university in her provincial town.

As much as rumors destroy one's reputation, preconceptions can also play a crucial part in affecting one's belief about something or someone. It critically shapes the judgement of a person before he or she even gets to know what lies within. As a Khmer-Islam, Fatilah grew up hearing people's negative opinions on Vietnamese, particularly being around her family and community. Those opinions, the daily environment, re-telling of history and ongoing media seemed to continue stirring up anti-Vietnamese sentiment within her. She held onto strong stereotypes about Vietnamese.

A listening project of WPM, called *From Center to Periphery*, led Fatilah into a journey of transformation. She was selected to be one of the "Listeners" and trained to carry out WPM's homegrown Facilitative Listening Design (FLD) approach as well as gaining skills in conflict transformation and communication in order to set out upon a mission to engage with different communities and talk to diverse people about their views on Cambodian-Vietnamese relations. It was interesting for her to have a chance to talk to "the Other", or those outside of her community who she sees as completely different. Her experience in the fieldwork and in group discussions with other Listeners allowed her to reflect on her own perception. Surprisingly, what brought her

to a closer and deeper understanding on this issue is when she found out that one of her friends, a fellow Listener who she thought was Khmer, was in fact also ethnic Vietnamese. “I have known her for quite a long time. We get along very well and I had no idea that she is half-Vietnamese. That’s why I have this feeling of shock and confusion” said Fatilah “I didn’t talk to her for a few days when I found out about her identity. How could I have a Vietnamese friend? But she is my best friend. After deeply thinking about it, I realized that I should not allow our ethnic differences to divide our friendship. Because I am also different from the Khmer majority.” Fatilah said. This personal experience helped her to open her heart to others and embrace differences, potentially break the prejudice cycle in her community.

Fatilah shows that personal experience deeply influences the way one sees and treats the Other. As in her case, once Fatilah realized that she has been friends with a half-Vietnamese girl, she no longer allowed structural negative perceptions to resurface again. Yet, she emphasizes that she still believes that no one is perfect, and that people can be good and bad in any group.

## Story of Change: Sreyneang Loek

Written date: October 2018

Peace Program: [From Center to Periphery Project]



Loek Sreyneang, 26, coming from the Bunong Indigenous community in Mondulokiri province, is featured here in the Coaching and Training Lab, part of the FLD process.

Photo by: Lyhour Heang



I am a Bunong Indigenous woman from Mondulkiri. Actually, I am half, because my dad is from Vietnam. He has been living in Cambodia since 1980. He was not able to speak but not to read and write in Khmer. He escaped from war in Vietnam and met my mom, an Indigenous Bunong living in Mondulkiri province.

As an Indigenous girl, I faced discrimination from friends and people around me, saying things like Indigenous people eat their own babies, and even calling us “barbarians”. As a mixed Vietnamese girl, I was also harrassed when I was in school. Some people called me “Youn”, a term that is deemed discriminatory to refer to Vietnamese. When I got good grades in school, usually the top of the class, some people would say something like: “how could such Bunong indigenous girl get high marks? Indigenous people are stupid.”

Because of the prejudice and discrimination against ethnic Vietnamese, I do not feel comfortable to reveal my mix identity. When I started listening to people from my communities, I thought it is time to stop. And then I asked myself why I am half? I am not half. I have two faces. When I am with my Bunong family, I am Bunong. When I am with my Vietnamese family, I am Vietnamese. It is about having two identities, not halves. In fact, I am a global citizen, not weighed down by any nationality.

Coming back from the intensive FLD listening in the fieldwork, I had a chance for reflection on my personal experience and my own perception during group discussions. I went through a deep meditation and reflection when my face was covered by the plaster during the Peace Master demonstration event. At that moment when I took off the mask, I realized that I am just who I am and should not hiding anymore. Everyone of us cannot choose where to be born or what ethnic identity to hold. For that reason, we are the same as a human and should respect each other. I am now happy to be who I am.