

A BRIGHT FUTURE AGAINST THE ODDS: YULIANA'S STORY

Yuliana has experienced more in her 27 years than many people have experienced in their lifetime, and her story is testament to her strength, courage and resilience.

Yuliana was born the oldest child of a poor family in Makassar, South Sulawesi. Yuliana's parents spent many years of her childhood working on farms in Malaysia and Yuliana and her sisters, in the absence of their parents, were raised by their grandmother.

"IF I LOOK BACK ON MY LIFE AND REMEMBER WHAT I'VE BEEN THROUGH, I CAN'T STOP CRYING"

Upon finishing elementary school, Yuliana went to live with her father in Malaysia, to work in the fields. However, Yuliana and her father found it difficult to find sufficient work for her, and after a short time she returned to Makassar.

Upon her return, Yuliana's family decided that it would be best for Yuliana to marry. A relative was found as a suitable choice and it was hoped that, with her limited education, Yuliana would be able to help her husband in the fields whilst raising a family.

ILLEGAL MIGRATION TO MALAYSIA.

After three years together, during which time she gave birth to her first child, a son, Yuliana and her husband remained trapped in grinding poverty in Makassar. The couple were then told about an opportunity to make more money in Malaysia, working on a plantation. Encouraged by stories of new wealth and opportunities, Yuliana and her husband moved to Malaysia, to start work on the plantation as illegal migrants.

During the three years Yuliana and her husband worked on the plantation, they experienced great cruelty and suffering. While they had been promised a steady income and comfortable living quarters, they found conditions far worse than they had experienced in Indonesia. They were denied a salary for their work, and instead received 10kg of rice and two bags of dried fish each month. To supplement this meagre diet, the couple grew a small amount of vegetables around the hostel where they stayed. Yuliana and her husband found themselves fighting frequently, and during this period, her husband began to physically abuse her.

When Yuliana and her husband understood that the situation on the plantation was akin to slavery, they asked to leave. However, they learned that this was not permitted, and that they were trapped on the farm.

"Since being with CARE, our lives are getting better. The work is paying off, and I'm now able to employ fellow ex-migrants in my stalls. I now believe that my children will be able to live a better life"

ESCAPE FROM THE PLANTATION.

At nine months' pregnant with their second child, Yuliana and her husband decided to flee the plantation, along with a group of other workers. To orchestrate the escape, the group asked for permission from the plantation managers to go to the local market to buy clothing and other essentials for their children. After much negotiation, they were granted this permission, although on the provision they were escorted by two guards.

When they arrived at the market, Yuliana pretended that she had gone into labour, and sent the guards to find a midwife and a clinic. As soon as they left, the group begged a driver to take them out of the market and as far as they could go. The driver, fearing punishment, took them to the edge of the forest and left them there, apologizing for not being able to take them further.

When night fell, the group crept through the forest, walking in the direction of the edge of the plantation. Their movements were caught by the guards, who threw stones in the direction of the group while they hid in a ditch. Yuliana recalls that in this moment she prayed to God "Please protect us and keep them from us", and hoped that her son would not make a sound. After a time the guards left them alone and, when morning came, the group finally made their way out of the plantation.

ON THE RUN.

After they successfully fled the plantation, Yuliana and her husband found themselves in a foreign country with no possessions and no work. In the first few days on the run, they found shelter with a group of Filipino people, who gave them a meal, a shower, and new sets of clothes. However, Yuliana and her husband were told that they could not stay with the group, as the Filipino people feared repercussions if they were found to be harboring a runaway family.

Back on the road, Yuliana and her husband found an abandoned barn, where she gave birth to their second son. Yuliana recalls that she and the baby were soaked in blood, and they only had just enough fabric in their clothes to clean themselves. For two days following the birth, Yuliana and her husband had no water, and she was

unable to breastfeed her baby. During these dark days, she feared her baby would not survive, and prayed to God for help.

At the end of their strength, Yuliana and her family were discovered by a warehouse keeper, who gave them food and clothing. He informed the owner of the barn, who also allowed them to stay for no payment. Soon they could communicate with Yuliana's parents, who came to find them and try to find a more permanent place to live. With no money to travel, the family decided to remain in the area, while trying to save and eventually return to Makassar.

Over the next few years, Yuliana's husband grew more and more violent. He developed a drinking problem, making alcohol from the plants on the farm. When he was drunk, he beat Yuliana. She recalls how much she hated the violence, but felt powerless to leave.

RETURN TO MAKASSAR.

After several years living in this remote community, Yuliana and her family were able to save enough to return to Makassar. However, with no income and no remaining savings, they were forced to move in with her husband's family, where they were made to feel like a burden. Finally, Yuliana developed the courage to separate from her husband, although on the condition that she leave her first son with him and his family. She found out a few years later that her husband eventually returned to Malaysia, taking her son with him.

STARTING FROM SCRATCH.

Upon leaving her husband, Yuliana was determined to focus on giving her remaining son a better future. In Makassar, she learned about a group called "Women's Solidarity" that supports women who have experienced hardship. Through joining the group, she met other women who had been through similar trauma, and was able to share her experience and receive comfort and support. She recalls being very grateful to have found the group, and to have been able to make new friends who understood her situation.

JOINING BINTANG MUDA.

Some friends from Women's Solidarity introduced Yuliana to CARE's Bintang Muda program, which supports women entrepreneurs to run their own microenterprises.

Through the program, Yuliana participated in training activities and workshops, and started to think that she might have what it takes to become an entrepreneur. Yuliana decided to start a business, which has since grown to attract a wide market of customers. Indeed, her business is now so successful that she has been able to

open multiple stalls, in which she employs other former migrant workers.

In her own words: "By joining the Bintang Muda program, my life is better. I feel pride and happiness beyond measure Now that I have my own income, I am sure I will be able to educate my son. I have great hope and confidence that I will also be able to help those who have had the same fate as me. I can get better for myself and my family as well as those who have the same fate as me."

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