

INSIGHT OUT!

Life after the
tsunami through
children's
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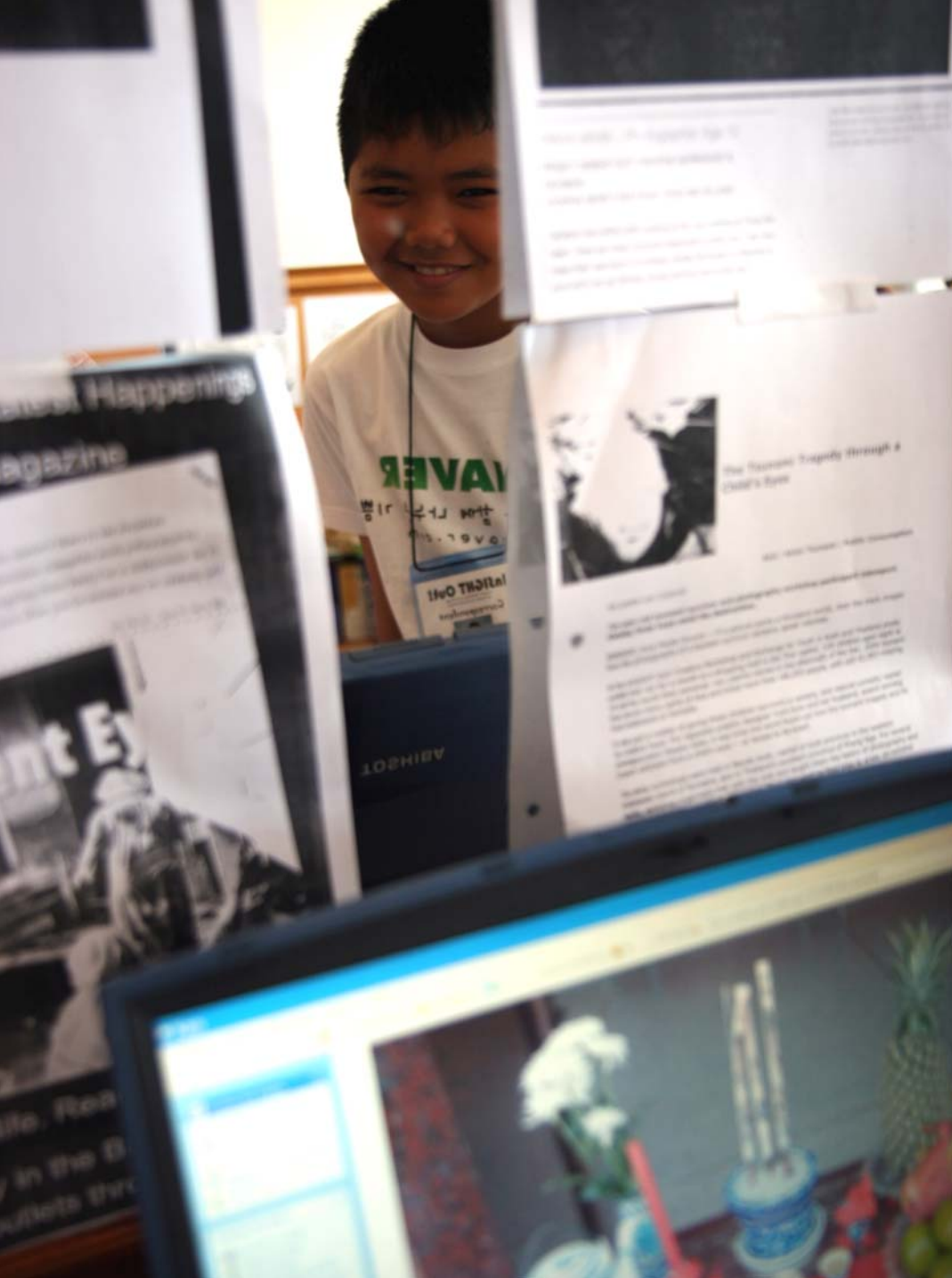
Over the last year, UNICEF has supported the Insight Out project in teaching children in tsunami-affected areas how to photograph and write. The project has given new skills to some of the most marginalized children in Thailand. But more than that, it has given them a voice to speak out about their lives. It has built their confidence, helped them overcome the tragedy of December 2004 and allowed them to develop new friendships across ethnic and religious divides.



The children, aged from 10 to 15 years old, come from all backgrounds. They include the children of Buddhist and Muslim Thai nationals, Burmese migrant workers and the Mokken and other sea gypsy communities. For many, this project is the first time they have spent real time with children from other cultures and ethnic groups. They are building friendships that help them recover from trauma and bring their communities closer together.



Over the course of the project, the children have learned to shoot pictures...



... to edit them on computer...



... to interview people and research stories ...



... and to write journals to accompany their pictures. They describe the things that are most important to them: family, friends and daily life in their very different communities. The project has been an immense success – so much so that some children’s work has been featured in professional photographic magazines and contests, including National Geographic. Soon their pictures and journals are to go on tour in Europe, Japan and the USA.



Among the children on the project are these Mokken boys, playing in the sea after a final graduation ceremony. Their village, like many other sea gypsy communities, was completely destroyed by the tsunami. But even before disaster struck, the Mokken and other minority groups were excluded from school and other basic services in tsunami-affected areas. For many of them, Insight Out is the first formal teaching of any kind that they have ever had.



These Muslim girls are from a seaside village called Baan Nai Rai, which was swept away in the tsunami but has now been rebuilt with help from UNICEF. As tensions rise between Thai Muslim and Buddhist groups further south, activities that bring children of different backgrounds to study and play together help build a foundation for more peaceful relations in the future.



The Insight Out project tries to reach out to all vulnerable children in the area – not just those directly affected by the tsunami. One of them is Mod. Behind her are photographs she took of her grandparents. She lives with them, in a decrepit roadside shack, because her mother died years ago and her father was recently killed in a motorcycle accident. All orphaned children in the tsunami area are more at risk of neglect and abuse, including exploitation and trafficking, because they do not have their primary caregivers to protect them.



This is Mod's grandfather. Mod and her younger brother, who is also part of the Insight Out project, have to take care of their grandparents as well as finding the time for study and homework. The tsunami did not only wipe out people, homes and livelihoods, it also washed away childhoods.



On a photo shoot, Htun Htun Naing instructs one of the Burmese children, Mg Naing Lin, whose migrant parents brought him to Thailand when they came to work on a rubber plantation. A migrant from Myanmar himself, Htun Htun Naing says, “These children are able to say things about our communities that we cannot say. They are speaking out for us and teaching us about ourselves and how to go forward with our lives.”



Meanwhile, on another field trip, Suthep Kritsanavarin, a professional photographer who has volunteered weeks of his time and is one of the driving forces behind the project, helps Mg Aung Soe Win, the child of Burmese migrant workers, to photograph a typical construction site and the migrant labourers who live there. He is passionate about the need to give these children a voice. “You can’t understand how important it is to be able to speak out, unless you have spent your whole life being ignored at the bottom of society,” he says.



For all of the Burmese children in the project, this is a field trip into their own realities. Their parents are also migrant construction workers who live on site in single rooms cobbled together from scavenged wood and corrugated metal. Or they live in similar conditions in rubber plantations and near fisheries. They have no running water and no electricity. Many also have no citizenship and therefore little access to schooling, healthcare or legal protection from abuse.



Improving their lives will take years. But projects like Insight Out, which aid literacy, build confidence and give children a genuine voice in their communities, are one way to make children less vulnerable and to help them create a better adulthood for themselves and a better childhood for their own children of the next generation.



The first year of Insight Out is over. But UNICEF will continue to support the project so that these children can continue to develop their skills, can keep speaking up and speaking out for their communities, and can keep their cameras focused on a brighter future over the horizon.