



## SUCCESS STORY

# Once Jobless, Thai Woman Achieves Economic Empowerment

### Creating strong networks to reduce prejudice and poverty associated with HIV/AIDS



Hei Lipper, USAID/RDMA

*Pa, who is HIV-positive, gives a foot massage in her Bangkok parlor, funded through the Positive Partnerships Program, which gives loans to business partners, one of whom is HIV-positive and the other HIV-negative.*

***“My giving massages helps reduce the fears about being infected,” says Pa, who also volunteers at an HIV/AIDS telephone counseling center.***

Pa expected to face prejudice from strangers when she learned in 1996 that she had contracted HIV from her former husband. Instead, she found it at home. Her brother demanded that Pa move out of the house, which she did despite her sisters' pleas to remain. He relented after social workers explained that HIV cannot be spread by living with an infected person, and Pa returned home. Even then, he refused to let her sit on the same chairs as the rest of the family. With no job, Pa was despondent.

Hearing about a program supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and funded by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (Emergency Plan/PEPFAR) helped change Pa's life. The Positive Partnerships Program increases women's access to income and productive resources by giving microcredit loans to HIV-positive and HIV-negative individuals who pair up to form a business. Pa partnered with her sister, who has learned more about HIV/AIDS from a local nongovernmental organization. The women used the 12,000 baht (\$300) they received to set up a shop adjacent to Cabbages and Condoms, a Bangkok restaurant that promotes safe sex. They offer 15-minute foot massages to diners before and after dinner. Pa's 4,000 baht monthly earnings have allowed her to pay off the loan and support herself and her two teenaged girls, who also live in the family compound. She also makes 7,000 baht a month as a housekeeper for an HIV-positive couple, with time off to speak at HIV/AIDS seminars run by PDA.

Now on antiretroviral (ARV) medication, Pa says the jobs have given her a new outlook on life and that there is more acceptance of people living with HIV/AIDS today than there was 10 years ago, when ARVs were not yet available.

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Times and attitudes change. Today, Pa says she chooses where to sit, and her brother doesn't mind.