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From Marriage Certificate to High School Diploma

In Bone, a former child bride returns to school to fulfil her dreams

Dinda Veska



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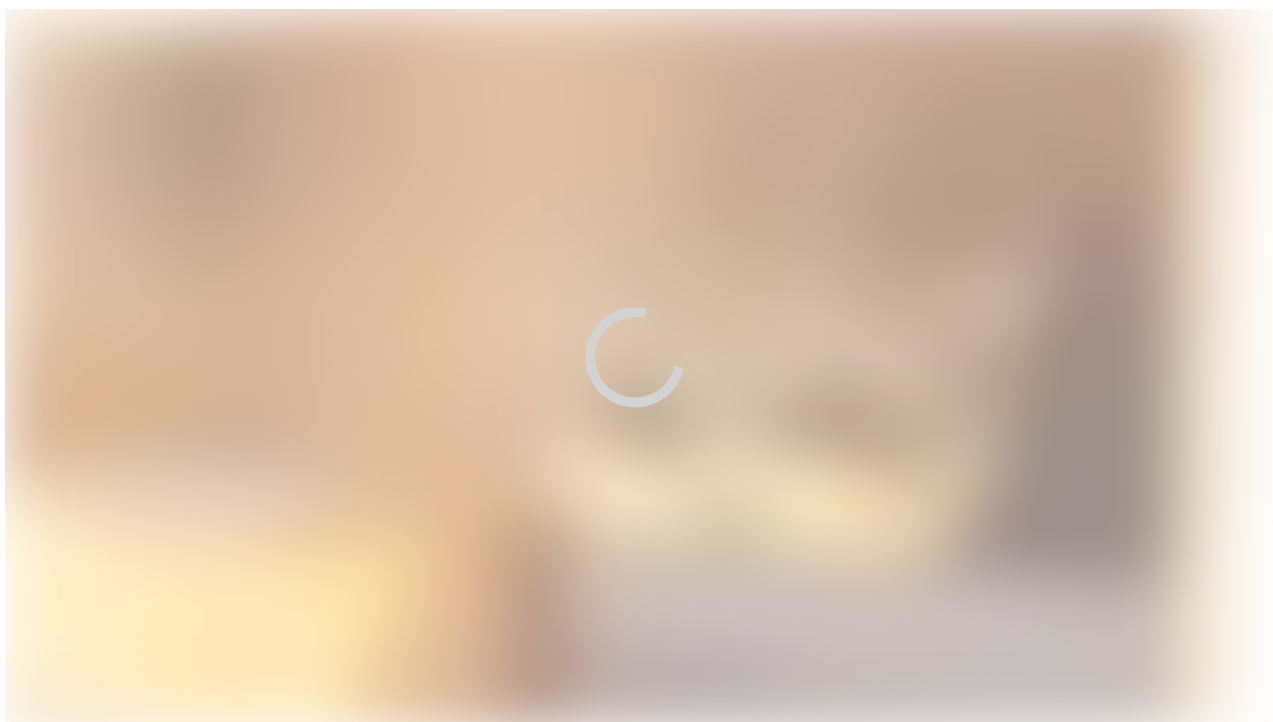
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BONE, Indonesia - In Panyili Village, Fitri*, 17, and her parents returned from North Kalimantan where they had been living until recently. The three of them walked



a vacant old house that once belonged to Fitri's grandmother. The house looked dilapidated, with the roof and its frame exposed. In the living room, four stuffed bears inside plastic bags sat in a row, covered in dust. There were also framed pictures of Fitri as a young girl neatly displayed on her study desk.

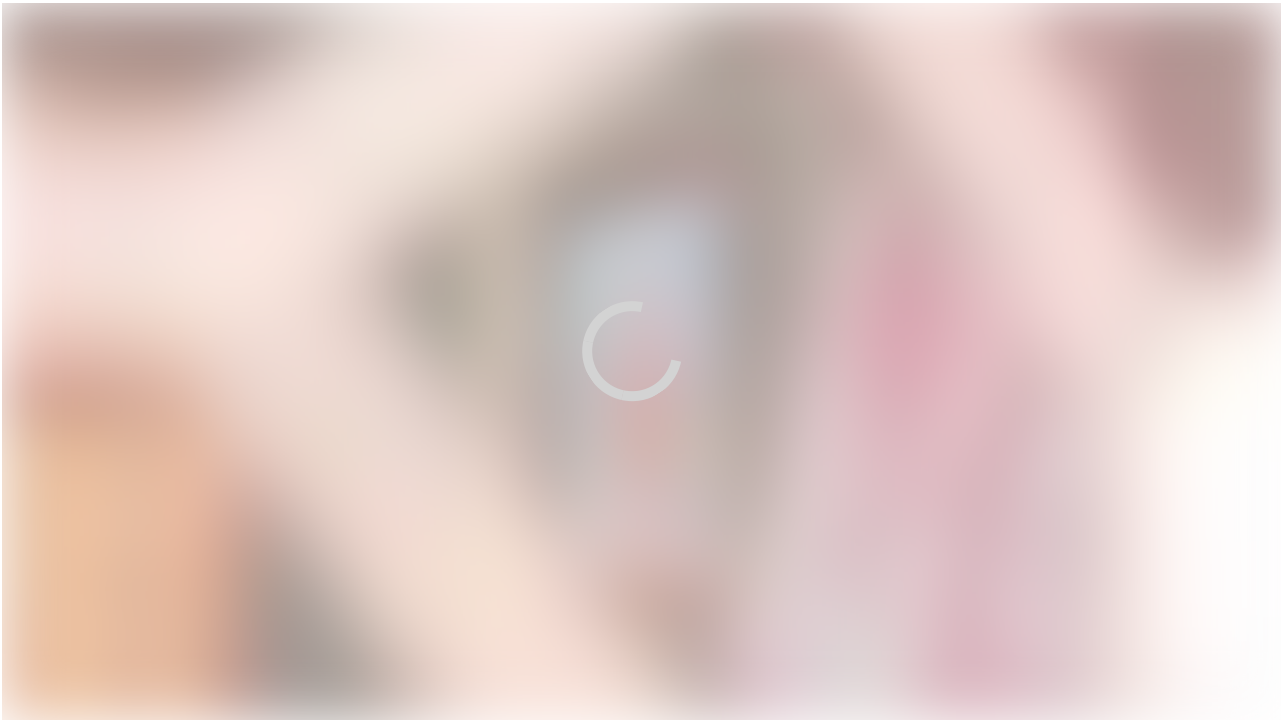
With her parents by her side, Fitri went back to her village to start a new chapter in her life. She was recently divorced and lost custody of her child. She was married as a high school sophomore at just 15 years old. Afterwards, she was forced to drop out of school.



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By going back to Bone, she hoped to get a job and save enough money to get custody rights. However, with only two years of high school education and just a junior high school diploma, the only kind of job she could find was as an attendant in a small shop.





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Weeks turned into months, and Fitri remained without a job. Every day, she helped her mother with chores around the house.

In the middle of her confusion, a member of the Sipakatau Community Learning Center teaching staff visited Fitri's house to collect data on out-of-school children. That person saw Fitri and offered to help her go back to school through the Package C equivalency programme, the non-formal education equivalent of high school.

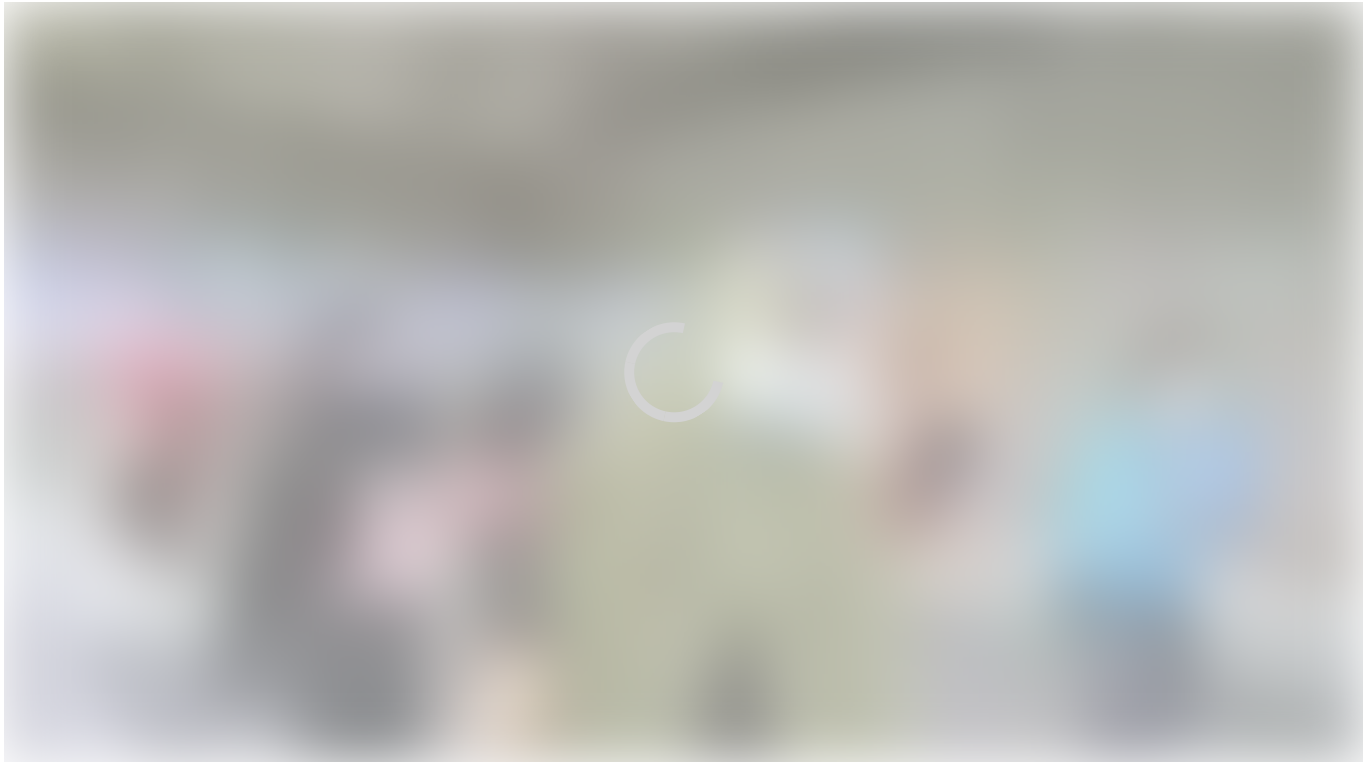
"I had lost hope at one point, because all I wanted was to start over and have a better life, but I ended up being out of work for months. When I got the offer to get my high school diploma through the Package C programme, I immediately agreed and my parents supported my decision."

Fitri

There are at least 4.3 million school-age children (7– 18 years old) like Fitri in Indonesia who are currently out of school. For many of them, it has been two to



years since they last saw a classroom, and even longer for others. Their reasons vary, from the demand to work and contribute to their family, early marriage, loss of parents, to migration, which prevent children like Fitri from going back to school.

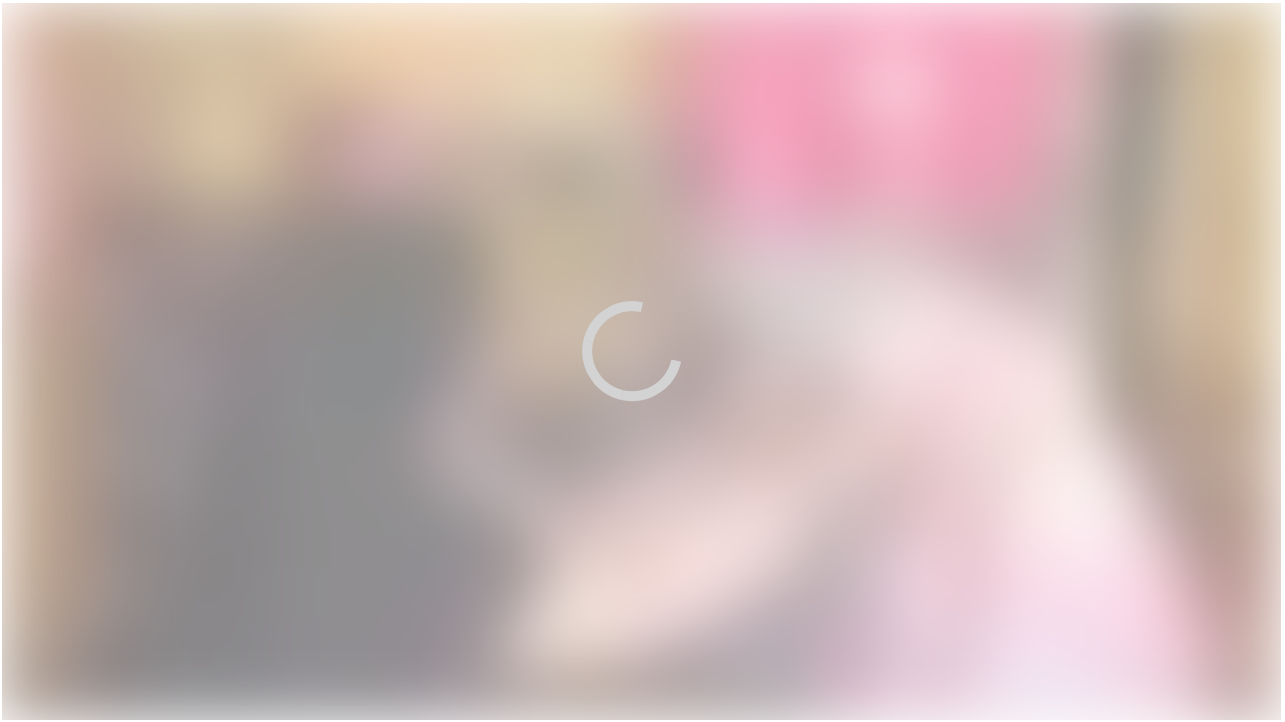


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“When encouraged to continue their schooling, many children – including adolescents – prefer non-formal education at Community Learning Centres that are more suited to their needs. UNICEF supports efforts to strengthen non-formal education so that children and teens who do choose this track can benefit from an inclusive, quality education that fits their interests and talents.”

Suhaeni Kudus - UNICEF Indonesia Education Specialist





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Fitri now plans to get her diploma through the Package C programme by enrolling at the Sipakatau Learning Centre. Soon, she will be able to replace her marriage certificate with a high school diploma. Fitri will then be on her way to realizing her mother's dream for her to create a better life and be reunited with her child.

**Fitri's real name has been changed to respect and protect her privacy.*

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