

Kevin, Mauritius

Kevin, 16, is from Port Louis, the capital of Mauritius, a tropical, island country in the Indian Ocean, north of South Africa and east of Madagascar. He lives with his 5-year-old brother, 13-year-old sister, and mother. Kevin's mother completed five years of primary school. She used to be a homemaker. Now, she also works in a factory. Kevin's father lives in Tombeau Bay, about 3 kilometers away. He is a mechanic. However, the family has no contact with him.



Kevin (left), 15, Children's World Congress on Child Labor, Florence, Italy, May 10-13, 2004

Five years ago, Kevin's family faced an economic problem; there was no source of income. At age 11, Kevin started working nearly 9 hours a day as an assistant mechanic. Kevin found out about the job from a friend. He cleaned the garage and equipment, and did other unskilled jobs. He worked with several other boys. He did not like getting up at 5:30 a.m. to take a long bus ride just to work all day. Kevin worked from 7:30 a.m.- 5 p.m. with three fifteen-minute breaks. During one of the breaks he ate his lunch, which he brought from home. Kevin did not like his boss, who he said was angry all day.

Kevin earned 2,000 Mauritius rupees (\$69.20) a month. He gave three-quarters of it (1,500 Mauritius rupees or \$51.90) to his mother, and kept one-quarter of it (500 Mauritius Rupees or \$17.30). Kevin does not want to think about what would have happened to his family if he had not worked as there was no other source of income. His mother bought family necessities, including food and clothes, with the money Kevin earned.

It would be very helpful to countries trying to address the problem of child labor and implement Education for All strategies, like Mauritius, to learn what approaches to mainstreaming child labor into policies and programs on education have worked elsewhere and how. For example, integrating social support services into education systems (Conditional Cash Transfer Programs). Education often brings various direct and indirect costs, including text books, uniforms, transport and food. Many of these costs are beyond the reach of poor families, which may also have to cope with the loss of income when children go to school. Some countries, like Brazil, have introduced programs to offset these costs and ensure that poor families send their children to school. For example, the PETI program in Brazil aims to reduce child labor while increasing school attendance and reducing poverty by providing a monthly allowance to poor families provided that children are enrolled in and stay in school. Families receive from PETI a monthly allowance of \$40 Brazil Reais (BRL) (\$17 USD) for each child registered in urban areas and \$25 BRL (\$11 USD) per child in rural areas. After-school activities also

ensure that children do not work after school. A similar conditional income transfer program in Mauritius might have helped Kevin go to school.

In 2002, Kevin's maternal uncle came to visit from France and encouraged Kevin to stop working. He discontinued working at age 13. He had worked for two years. His Uncle helped the family and paid Kevin's school fees of 500 Mauritius rupees (\$17.30) a month for school supplies, computer usage, etc.

In May 2004, Kevin was one of two Mauritius youth-delegates to the Children's World Congress on Child Labor in Florence, Italy. Kevin felt the experience transformed him into a more mature and confident person. Moreover, he now contributes significantly to the program of the Mouvement pour le Progrès de Roche Bois / Movement for the Progress of Rock Wood (MPRB) in his locality. Kevin is one of the volunteer leaders of the "Reading and Writing Initiation Program" for children aged 8-12 every week at the MPRB community center. This program targets primary school children who are considered slow learners by their teachers from the Emmanuel Anquetil Government School of Roche Bois.

Kevin is also a member of the Youth Wing of the Movement for the Progress of Rock Wood, which brings together some 40 youth who act as *role models* to other youth of Roche Bois. Additionally, Kevin was elected to the Executive Committee of the National Youth Council operating under the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

Kevin is still in school and not working. He is in the 5th grade of secondary school. He sees himself, eventually, studying commerce at a university, maybe in France or England. He hopes to become a journalist.