



NOVEMBER 2020

NEWSLETTER



A second chance
for youth at risk

EDITORIAL

By ACAY Executive Director

Our world is changing and subjecting us to the challenging apprenticeship of learning how to navigate in chaos. This pandemic has plunged us into it. Battered by dissonant statements, submerged in waves of new anxiety, immersed in constant stress, we are indeed in the midst of chaos.

I would never for a moment have imagined that this 22-year missionary journey on the high seas of the distress of our societies would have prepared us to know how to deal with this pandemic and to lead our boat in this face to face with more ease.

As I wrote in my book "Defying Chaos", I overcame fear the day a seaman taught me this unforgettable lesson: "Sophie, in the face of a raging sea, never base yourself on what you feel at sea (it should be noted that I cowered at every single wave!!) but stand at the bow of the boat and watch, assess and evaluate the degree of danger". That day, I got up and stood beside him facing the impressive waves of this Caledonian sea in stormy weather. By his side, and in this face to face with the breaking waves, I lost the fear of insecurity... on the sea and in the air. And on land, I learned to "face" every difficult situation before me.



This experience of "facing it" has subsequently shaped generations of our young people in ACAY. They have been immersed in the truth of the proverb: "Where the dragon lurks, there is the treasure". Their dragons, traumatic experiences or complex external situations have become, with the help of accompaniment and over time, a source of transformation and even a mission.

This "face to face" attitude has taught us not to look backward but forwards, at what is "to come". This journey has been the occasion for a metamorphosis, for all the young people or others who have walked with ACAY and who, it must be noted, have been open to this experience, initially interior. Underneath all the disorders a "new creation" is emerging.

For those who have faith, when the human dimension becomes limited, let us switch to the spiritual dimension. Rooted in the Alpha and Omega, in the infinite and eternal, this faith offers us the immensity of the power of hope.

May these limitations, far from restricting us, open for us new horizons.

The Philippines being blocked for an uncertain time yet, I am constantly making sure that we are not blinded by the enormity and the weight of sadness, frustration or anger of this current "dragon": desperately missing our Sr Rachel presently welcomed in the ACAY Marseille team, our girls who have been confined for more than 7 months, the catastrophic economic situation of the country (46% of Filipinos have lost their jobs in 6 months!). Everything leads us to cower...

However, in spite of all this, I want to believe that a new reality is being born, both human and spiritual. Optimism or illusion, I try to believe it and thus keep up the morale of my troops.

While being masked, let our strength of speech be in refusing to give in to those who preach only fear and panic!

While social distance is imposed, our creativity has strengthened our bonds, support, and affection. Since my year in France, one thing has become obvious to me and I have given it more importance in these times: the victims of our societies are often the elderly. This pandemic adds its share of anguish and possible separation. Here, poverty is even more salient and dramatic. During our comings and goings in certain markets, grandma's and grandpa's abound sitting on the ground, begging no longer able to sell, as in the past, the plastic bags, the few vegetables or other trinkets in their possession to the multitude of people in the now depopulated streets. With our teams, we have tried to find solutions to help them, even punctually.

Our young Filipinos were not able to go to Marseille for the first time in so many years, to join Laurent and the team to give their testimony to the young people of the EPM. Now it is the young people of Marseille helped these past years who have taken over! The impact is just as splendid.

I keep you all in my prayer and affection.

Sophie de Jong

Discover the ACAY Marseille team !

"To help the youth at risk and give hope to professionals in the field!" In this very particular year, ACAY France in Marseille has the great joy to welcome new members to strengthen the team. With the development of the training programs in schools, jails and the aftercare, the support of partners and donors has enabled us to hire new employees alongside Laurent Thorigné, the Program Manager. Two former volunteers from ACAY Philippines have also joined the team, bringing their legal and psychological expertise to the mission. Other volunteers give time and skills each week in a variety of areas.

They all come from very different backgrounds and share the vision and values of ACAY : discover their profile and their involvement in giving hope to the youth in Marseille.



Ines Sedrati,
Fundraising and
Communication In-charge



Hubert de la Touche,
Training In-charge

" I graduated from the University Aix Marseille with a master's degree in Management of Cultural and Humanitarian Projects. Throughout my university studies, I have had professional experiences related to youth. For several years, I accompanied minors in difficulty. I was involved in school tutoring and in cultural and sports activities in Nantes (my hometown), Aix-en-Provence and Rosario (Argentina), where I did my final year internship. My personal and professional experiences have strengthened my desire to help others in some way.

" I am a graduate of the Merchant Navy Officers School. Working as a merchant navy sailor meant I had a long vacation every year. For 3 years, I was glad to volunteer within the Bernadette association which works in the difficult areas of Marseille. This experience allowed me to discover through tutoring, family visits, outings, discussions with residents, the world of poor areas. I was deeply touched by the joy that inhabited those who had chosen to work in this association. As time went by, this made me grow in me the desire to leave my work to commit myself to the service of the youth.

«I wanted to put my communication and project management skills at the service of a cause that particularly touches my heart.»

After spending 6 months in Argentina where I did an internship, I was very impressed by the work of ACAY whose values and vision I share. Working with ACAY is my way of helping to build up this necessary and exciting mission.



ACAY Marseille team, in the presence of Sister Rachel, who arrived in France since July.

When I choose to leave my job, I decided to look at other associations in Marseille. Providence led me to ACAY. I experienced this new mission initially as a volunteer. A quote by Christiane Singer, which I discovered in Sister Sophie's book, has been with me ever since: "Where the dragons lie the treasures are hidden". These youth hold incredible treasure and to help them makes me happy.

« In November 2019, I entered the EPM for the first time to meet the youth. There it was clear for me that I wanted to continue the adventure with ACAY. »

My role is divided into two complementary missions: fundraising and communication. Good communication is the way to raise funds. Like any association, ACAY needs funds to finance its programs whether private or public funds. One of my tasks is therefore to prospect and make requests for funding from private foundations and organizations likely to finance our actions in Marseille and if possible, in the Philippines. Regarding communication, my role is to transmit news about our activities, through the newsletter and to manage the ACAY Facebook page in collaboration with Loti, in charge of communication in ACAY Philippines. I am also involved in the training with the girls in jail, with Laurent and Hubert, in charge of training. "

I oversee coaching and training. I spend my time working with the youth in the Penitentiary Establishment for Minors (EPM) of Marseille, with the youth recently released accompanied by ACAY, in a secondary school, and the office. At the EPM, I lead training sessions with Laurent during the school vacations and I accompany the youth through individual sessions. Regarding the aftercare program, I continue the work started at the EPM by helping the youth to review their achievements and their difficulties. I enjoy listening to and accompanying them in their change of life. At school, we support a class, the goal being to remobilize the group of youth in difficulty with training in self-awareness, enabling them to identify their strengths and thus be confident about the professional direction they chose for their lives. "



Sonia Hadj Chérif,
Psychologist

"After a classic school career, I graduated with a master's degree in Psychology. I worked for a few months in a hospital. My job consisted of accompanying patients and their families. My tasks were divided into two departments: the oncology department and long-term hospitalization. After this first experience, I went on a mission to Manila.

My desire to go on a mission was driven by the desire to give as much as I could receive. As a matter of fact, I have always had the feeling of having a privileged childhood. I lived in a loving family environment and in my opinion, volunteering was a good way to give back all that I had received over all those years. I started the adventure with the NGO Enfants du Mékong. During the hiring period, I was told about the ACAY mission. It quickly aroused great interest. I was very impressed by the activities carried out by the association and very touched by the way ACAY positively impacts the lives of many young Filipinos.

« I had an experience both on a human and professional level. »

My volunteering in the Philippines was beyond all my expectations. I had an experience both on a human and professional level. I feel I have grown and have become more open. What touched me the most during this year was the resilience of the Filipino people. They have an incredible ability to move forward, which has been a real source of inspiration for me. I was also very moved by the relationship I developed with the ACAY team of staff and sisters and the girls of the School of Life. These relationships became very important to me during my mission.

When I come back to France, it was obvious and natural for me to continue my mission with ACAY Marseille. The experience in the Philippines strongly impacted me and I wanted to continue to serve this mission which is very close to my heart. Being involved in ACAY Marseille is a continuation of my first experience."



Louise Dumont Saint Priest, criminal lawyer in juvenile law

"I completed my university studies in law and management. After several internships and years of study abroad, I graduated in criminal law. My experiences, especially my volunteering within ACAY, made me want to work for juvenile law. Now I live in Paris where I have opened my own criminal law practice.

Within my law studies, I had to complete a 6-month internship in an organization different from a law firm. I wanted to discover another legal culture, to learn about justice in another country as well as criminal law in the field. I also wanted to know how an association functioned. I had heard about ACAY through a friend.

I volunteered in 2013-2014. I was still a student lawyer at that time. I had several missions: I helped to advance the cases of boys and I also gave theatre and oral expression classes to girls in the School of Life and in detention. I was struck by this year, both personally and professionally. This volunteering was like a spiritual retreat, a look within myself and on what I wanted in life. My mission within ACAY confirmed my desire to do criminal law and to work on juvenile cases: I was able to see what the conditions of detention were like in another country and to experience another judicial system.

« My attachment to ACAY does not end there. »

Even though I volunteered a few years ago, the bonds with ACAY are still as strong as ever. My attachment has never been broken. I wish to help ACAY France on a legal level: to accompany the youth in judicial and legal issues. This is part of the continuity of my professional practice."



Anais Cayol,
volunteer with
ACAY France

"Volunteering is part of my life after having worked in different fields : housework, school tutoring, childcare, waitress, nurse's aide, masseuse... Volunteer work is also a way for me to be socially involved, to keep in touch with others, to work in a team, to meet new people, to grow as a person.

« As I wanted to do humanitarian work since I was younger, this is one way for me to do it and be part of a good cause. »

I got involved in ACAY France because I find the mission with the incarcerated youth important and interesting, that it is adapted to the needs of the society in which we live. Moreover, the humanitarian aspect is equally important since there are several programs offered for the youth at risk in Marseille. Since I wanted to do humanitarian work at a younger age, this is a way for me to do it and to participate for a good cause. It is a good opportunity to put the Holy into practice ("I was in prison and you visited me..."), to put myself at the service of others".

STUDYING IN THE TIME OF "NEW NORMAL"

- school of life program -



SOL beneficiaries having their study time.

It is true that Pandemic has greatly affected the whole world. Not only has it caused employees to adjust their 8am to 5pm work bringing it at home, it has also affected the young ones who looked forward to waking up in the morning, traveling to school, bonding with friends, and learning from their teachers face to face.

Moreover, the situation is worse in the rural areas of the country. Other than lack of technological resources, connecting online is also a challenge. Stories of parents working double time to provide educational needs for their children or stories of children walking a few kilometers to find Internet signal is already common especially in remote areas.

This October, online classes started!



The School of Life (SOL) team adapted to the new normal and organized the beneficiaries' daily schedule. Thanks to our partners and donors, our young girls were provided with computer sets to engage them to keep learning. Volunteer tutors were tapped to help our girls with their lessons virtually. Mr. Rheal, one of the volunteer online tutor shared what it is for him to be a volunteer with ACAY, *"It is in true giving that we find more. My stint in ACAY as a volunteer online tutor provided me with a deeper sense of purpose, productivity and community"*

As weeks passed and quarantine measures have eased, the SOL team invited a licensed teacher to come in the residential house twice a week to teach our youth Mathematics and History. To see the effectiveness of this, the girls have a monthly exam to assess their understanding and learning. All this was organized in order to help the girls to gradually adjust and prepare for the online class set-up.

And we need to be prepared, this might last until the end of the year or even the whole school year. One of our beneficiaries said that *"the new normal is really a big change for me, it's hard because I am not used to seeing and listening to my teachers' discussion from a computer screen."*

This is one of the many new paradigms our youth have to deal with. Amidst all these, our youth are still able to study with minimal challenges, and it was possible because of your support.

To express our gratitude, we let the last word to Alexa, one of our beneficiaries.



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These times are hard for most of the youth everywhere, but I am happy to have the privilege and opportunity to continue studying. This opportunity will never be wasted but rather would be a strong foundation for me to continue reaching for my dreams in life. Your precious support specially at this time means so much for us.

Maraming Salamat po!

YOUTH COPING WITH LIFE IN CONTINUOUS QUARANTINE IN THE PHILIPPINES

- second chance program -

The Philippines won the championship of the longest length of confinement. Until now after 7 months, people age 15 to 65 years old are still not permitted to leave their places.

Second Chance Program (SCP) was not able to operate fully due to the pandemic situation. Partner Youth Homes and Family Courts do not allow our team to have any visit or personal interaction with the youth. The 'new' world is online! Everything is put on hold. For a short time, this is a vacation. But in the long run, it becomes boredom. SCP team addressed these concerns by initiating online training and individual sessions. In the Youth Homes, difficulties arose very fast, how to ask a youth "how are you?" when he is occupying the computer of staff and is surrounded by ten others around him? Even the privacy of words somewhere is stolen by such a setup.



online training



Rod, sharing his testimony to the new beneficiaries



Raymart, teaching carpentry

This is the fact that most of our youth who are newly released from Youth Home or in Court Diversion, after 6 months found themselves backsliding and not being productive. This long quarantine in Metro Manila has deeply affected any positive and productive reentry in the society of the youth. *"I cannot plan clearly what to do next since I am just at home doing routine activities, it feels hopeless..."* As they are not allowed to go outside, they spent most of their time on online games, social media and some household chores.

Bored in their lives, bothered by their unresolved inner issues, hindered to open up about this, the SCP team had to deal with these factors. How to eat an elephant? "piece by piece" said the Chinese proverbs.

So after assessing all the difficulties, and in parallel implementing the precautionary measures, we decided to relaunch the Aftercare Subprogram (ACP). Among the youth released by their judges, the SCP team selected those who expressed their willingness to journey with Aftercare Subprogram (ACP). Contact with the parents was established and home visits were conducted. Always taking into consideration the health protocols and precautionary measures for the SCP team. After much preparation, the intensive training for ACP started last September.

Such a joy to have the visit of some Alumni or former beneficiaries who come to support the team during the weekend training. They shared testimonies of their transformation and how their journey with ACAY helped them on their successful reentry into society.

One started through a comedic statement *"do not bother with the color of my hair (blond), I am the 'victim' of my wife who had to learn hairdressing and I offered myself for this. Now I am blond!"* Then he embarked on the story of his recovery. He is now an educator in a government Youth Home.

Another one, Raymart specialized in carpentry and masonry, grasped the occasion that SCP needed to build a small bathroom in order to lead the group in building it. The impact was immediate. Passionately, the boys learned to design, to practice welding, assemble pieces, work as a team and the result was more than satisfying.

"It is my first time to build something like this (shower room) I learned the basic skill needed but more than that. I felt productive again."

The youth also had a series of training on employability skills. Other than the normal training on job preparedness, they experienced an online job interview simulation. Very timely for the new normal. *"I am ready now because I gain more confidence in applying for a job. I learned the proper way of speaking and dressing. I also learned that focus and being prepared can help me become comfortable and lessen nervousness during the interview. I saw also my gaps in English and I want to learn more"*

However, one beneficiary decided to discontinue the training. Success is not always here. Difficulties to cope with learnings, newness create an inner constant choice "Do I learn more? Do I accept to see that I don't know? Do I remain in my feeling of being upset or do I go beyond my emotions?" These are inner challenges conjugated with the training that our youth have to undergo.

Eighteen years of developing the Second Chance Program showed us new opportunities to grow and to evolve. But above any kind of pandemic, what needs to be protected is the relationship. Let us not allow any pandemic to touch these nurturing and fundamental relationships which are the source of growth.

A TESTIMONY OF HOPE FOR THE YOUTH

of the Penitentiary Establishment for Minors (EPM) of Marseille.

Since 2015, alumni of the ACAY Philippines programs come to France annually to share their life stories with the youth of Marseille accompanied by ACAY. Their testimonies of hope create an impact and awaken the French youth to begin their own journey of transformation. This year, due to the COVID pandemic, the alumni could not come. The Marseille team found a solution from within: Why not involve a youth from Marseille who has been accompanied by ACAY for some time and is now reintegrated into society?

« When a young person talks to another young person: the impact is immediate. »



Idrisse in front of the entrance to EPM Marseille

After five years of ACAY in Marseille, some of the youth are now ready to share their life experiences. Idrisse is one of them. Reintegrated into society, he wants now to share his life journey and transmit his achievements to the youth incarcerated in Marseille. He knows that his message of hope can raise awareness and motivate other youth to change their lives. Last August, for the first time, the Board of EPM authorized Idrisse to give his testimony to the youth in detention. During the three sessions he spoke about his "unusual journey" as he defines it, as well as the elements that led him out of delinquency.

These sessions encouraged thought and debate among other young people. According to the EPM educators, the testimony of Idrisse had a very strong impact. One of the youth shared: "What you said gave me hope, because once you were like us". This experience does not stop there. Idrisse keeps in touch with these youth by way of letters or getting together with them after their release, in order to encourage them to make the right choices.

Following his intervention, Idrisse gave us feedback about his experience: "I was nervous about my return to EPM. My time spent in detention there was a painful part of my life: I experienced many things there, especially with the guards with whom I was in conflict. I was very proud to talk and to testify to the youth. A voice in my head told me; 'You were there in their place, you have changed and evolved'. I think I touched them with my sincerity. I have the firm conviction that they will also make it through. In my opinion, accepting our past makes us better for the future'. Idrisse works in the building field and wants to be involved in the education of youth.

MAKE A DONATION

Your generous gifts made it possible to continue our mission. With your continuous support, we can help transform the life of more youth who have been exposed to traumatic experiences recover and become self-sustainable.

$$1 \text{ expenses} \times 1 \text{ day} = \text{€ } 6.66 \text{ or P } 333$$



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