



a second chance
for youth at risk

NEWSLETTER



2021 APRIL

EDITORIAL

"Each one has been entrusted with a share in the restoration of the world" (Christiane Singer)

For us in ACAY, this could be summed up in this phrase that symbolizes the vocation of the Missionaries of Mary: "You, your desert will be the desert of human hearts." If our first vocation is to reach out to young people in their experiences of desert and loneliness, in their abuse, in their violence and delinquency, in their anger, guilt, shame, and sadness, very quickly we were promptly led to embrace the hearts of their parents too: the work of the roots.

Jeany (name changed) had been stuck with this anger in her heart since she was a child. A father who dies, followed by abandonment by her mother at the age of five, and this image engraved, knotted, indelible in her child's memory of that car driving away from the orphanage taking in it her two older sisters, adopted by an American couple. Feeling abandoned, anger enveloped all her behaviors up to her facial expressions when she arrived at the School of Life. Was she going to be able to adapt to us being so full of anger? A good dose of patience and tenderness and a lot of work helped to overcome this apparent hardness. After so much researches, we finally found this missing mother. This young heart, hardened by years of loneliness, melted when she saw her mother's face for the first time after so many years. Of course, it will take a long time to rebuild this bond so distended, but in the heart of a child, the graft of a root has been restored. The inner desert of the loneliness of a child has found a source.

But it is the same for this mother. Rejected by her husband's family after his death, she had been asked not to return. The reunion with her daughter is a great consolation to her. Two inner deserts have just blossomed again.

Years of listening have helped us realize how often parents experienced situations similar to those of their children and have been left without consolation.

This desert that blossoms again when they find, or are reconciled with, their parents opens new horizons in the lives of young people. There is no more solitary wandering in this world, but the bonds are woven again. So how can we not go further? How can we not see our life through the prism of all the connections that are ours and that lead us to breathe an infinitely vaster air? We carry within us this mysterious intermingling of generations of lives that literally escape us but that have made us.

"Your caring multitude is here, warm, rustling, multiple in the unbroken chain of generations. I say thank you for having allowed me for a moment in the crossing of eternity to be your figurehead. One brief moment. For during this moment, in your name I have loved to live. Beyond the disasters and glories of life, beyond the shipwrecks and heartbreaks, I perceive and hear you, men and women of whom I am, for a time, the bearer of memory. I pass on to those whom life has entrusted to me the heritage that you have left me, that you have left us." Chistine Singer

To restore Life to the infinite that inhabits us. To live in fullness. This is when family bonds take on their full magnitude. This part of repairing the world that is entrusted to us in the ACAY mission, the deserts of hearts, now give way to prairies of joy and hope.

Sr. Sophie de Jesus - ACAY Founder

FROM ALUMNI TO STAFF OF ACAY PHILIPPINES



Diakira, Kennie Jane and Lyne

ACAY's commitment over the past 20 years to give a second chance to youth at risk through innovative programs and an uplifting presence shines through in the many success stories of our beneficiaries and the transformation of their lives.

Listening to the beneficiaries is the best way to discover ACAY. This is where you see the most rewarding aspect of the mission: once broken and today they are empowered leaders.

With great joy, we have the honor to introduce three new devoted members of our organization. They are former beneficiaries of the School of Life (SOL) program and now part of the ACAY professional teams. Their motivation and vibrant energy are now bringing to a new generation of youth a living testimony of **"from Impossible to I'm possible"**.



HOW DID YOU MEET ACAY?

"I am Kennie Jane, survivor of the strongest typhoon recorded, Haiyan, in 2013. At the age of 14, I lost one of my closest family members. Devastation surrounded me but more than the physical destruction, that event left me with deep emotional distress. In the midst of that chaos, I found a spark of joy when I met the team from ACAY. They came to offer psychosocial interventions to those affected by the calamity. Invited a few months later to join one of the training sessions of the School of Life program, I decided with the agreement of my parent to enter SOL and finally stayed for three and a half years."



COULD YOU SHARE A FEW WORDS ABOUT YOUR STORY OF TRANSFORMATION?

"During those years, I had time to heal and recover from my trauma through a series of psychosocial interventions. One of the most significant time was the Family Seminar where my parents came. For the first time, I was able to share with them some feelings that I had kept hidden from them for so long. My relationship with them has been totally transformed. I also received life skills training that empowered me and prepared me for independent life."

WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO WORK IN ACAY?

"I obtained my Bachelor Degree in Hotel and Restaurant Services then went further to get a certificate in Baking and Pastry from one of the most renowned schools in Manila.

I gained expertise working in some of the best hotels in Manila. I then did further studies but once graduated, life took an unexpected turn. **My gratitude for the people who brought me this far and my deep desire to help other youths reach their dreams prevailed more than anything else.** That sense of purpose led me to work in ACAY as a volunteer for 6 months. Along the way, I realized the joy of working for others, and I was immersed in a culture of constantly learning new professional skills. When the pandemic arrived, my volunteerism had come to an end. Fulfilled in my life, I decided to dedicate the next two years to work with the School of Life team. A cause that is close to my heart.

My role is to teach the youth new healthy lifestyles, some practical skills like creative cooking and transforming the simple into the extraordinary, encouraging them to nurture this culture of continuous learning."



WHAT WAS THE TURNING POINT WHERE IN YOU DECIDED TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE?

"What touched me the most was having a guide, someone who was with me, listening to me, journeying with me. The turning point of my life began at that moment.

I fully embraced the opportunity given to me. I started to open up and trust people willing to help me. I realized what was 'normal' in my family was not normal. Counseling and guiding sessions helped me to understand myself and gave me back the right direction in my life."

HOW DID YOU MEET ACAY?

"Growing up surrounded by violence and illegal business deals was the norm for me. At an early age, I took refuge in the material luxury of illegal activities. Being without guidance and educational support, one-day authorities caught me in the midst of these illegal activities. Because I was a minor at the time, I was taken to a Youth Home where I felt great solitude, I had lost all sense of direction in my life. I had tried to support everyone whilst growing up but now no one was there for me. After two years, I was transferred to ACAY."

WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO WORK IN ACAY?

I finished the School of Life Program and had a degree in Business Office Administration and Services.

The experiences I have had in life echo as an inner voice that drives me to help, guide, and inspire young people who have lost all direction in their life. It's one of the reasons why I decided to work for ACAY. I share the same mission with ACAY: Helping youth find new orientation for their lives.

I am now supporting the mission in Admin & Human Resources and also coaching some of the girls of SOL in their preparation for independent living and professional life.



HOW DID YOU MEET ACAY?

"I am also a calamity survivor from Tacloban. Typhoon Haiyan or Yolanda, was for me, a traumatic experience of powerlessness and fright. I arrived in the School of Life as a shy girl, oftentimes hiding myself behind others. The tireless understanding and uplifting words from the sisters and the staff in ACAY who believed in me gave me strength.

I believe that my journey in the School of Life of rebuilding my dignity and self-esteem empowered and strengthened me, molding me into a confident, independent young woman.

I graduated from the SOL Program earlier this year, and have earned my Academic Degree in Business Office Administration and Services. From the shy girl I used to be, I am now out in front and helping others. I am so thankful and blessed to have this opportunity to share with the youth the hope, love, and family atmosphere that I received before as a beneficiary. I have always at the forefront of my mind one of the most significant quotes I heard in my stay in SOL: "What is not shared is lost."

WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO WORK IN ACAY?

I chose ACAY as my first employment. **My desire is to help the youth of ACAY feel that they are not alone, there are people who are willing to help, to listen and to journey with them.** And I can be that person for them. This is the right time for me to share all that I have received.

DEVELOPMENT IN THE SECOND CHANCE PROGRAM



Online training with youth from a Youth Center

In this period of uncertainty and ever-pervasive challenge, the operation of the Second Chance Program (SCP) has evolved in a spirit of creativity and innovation.

On one hand, the Pandemic brought the opportunity to review, evaluate, and update the fundamental documents of SCP: the Program Concept, the Program Manual, and the formation training designs. On the other, it also gave an opportunity for the program staff to enter a phase of in-depth analysis to determine the actual needs of Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) and how to respond to those needs. With Center activities limited due to lockdown, the Program developed innovative ways of reaching out to our youth who need support to reintegrate society successfully.

Since March 2020, with the declaration of the pandemic and lockdown, children and youth apprehended were no longer taken to Youth Homes to prevent the spread of Covid 19. Instead, they were kept locally under the supervision of the local Council for the Protection for Children or in the Police Station under the care of the Women's and Children Desk.

As the SCP team was no longer allowed into the Youth Detention Centers, we had to adjust. As the youth at risk were now in the District Offices, we needed to reach out to them there. Thus, we have developed the SCP GOAL program to provide training at the local district level commonly known as "Barangay". Dealing with CICL or Children at Risk (CAR) is truly a challenge. The government staff gave us a very warm welcome. They expressed such relief to have the support of an NGO to collaborate with them. Together we aim to fight to lessen recidivism.

During our first visit to the District Office whilst formalizing the official documents for this new partnership, families and children arrived in the hall where we were received. Seven youth aged 15 to 20 listened to our presentation and shared their first impressions. Home visits followed to see the reality of their lives. These young guys, usually "working" in their gang, expressed their joy that, for the first time, they felt that people wanted to help them change their lives.



SCP staff giving online training with the youth

Most of them are out-of-school youth and some don't know how to read and write. ACAY committed to conducting a four-month training program destined to equip them for new choices in life.

In the two Youth Homes, where we have also signed an agreement, we will train forty youth for three months using the GOAL training program. One of our previous partners, a Branch of the Family Court, has entrusted us with five youth under their diversion program for weekly online training.



Orientation with youth and parents

The Aftercare subprogram is also blooming again. Many young people released before lockdown experienced the hardship of reintegrating society without any clear plan. A number of these youth have become part of the Aftercare: the first batch graduated in December 2020 and the second is ongoing. These youth have appreciated a conducive support system that strengthened their resolve not to go back to their past lives.

What is our aim for all of them? To lead them along a new path by way of different trainings enhancing basic academic competencies, life skills, anger management, peer pressure, emotional management, and more. Their parents and guardians will also have monthly training and formation about parenting roles and responsibilities.

From all the innovations of SCP on reaching the youth, in the end, what matters is how people work together and human acts of kindness, resiliency, and optimism still exist. On this occasion, SCP is moving forward to think and do something for the better in lessening recidivism and for the youth to be an ambassador of change.

A testimony of JM (Aftercare Beneficiary)

"I was released from the Youth Home last 2019. Time passing, I saw myself slowly going back to the negative influence of my friends and getting into trouble.

What came to my mind was the time spent with ACAY in the Youth Home. I remembered their impact on me. ACAY gave me different trainings which helped me control my negative behavior.

Realizing this, I contacted ACAY again and asked them if I could be part of their Aftercare program. I told myself, I'm not getting younger and if I stay like this, what will my future be? I do not want to go back to my old life. I want to learn and be guided on the right path in life.

I am so thankful to ACAY for its work and for its passion to help the youth. They know very well what the youth are going through.

All that they taught me about resolving unresolved issues, anger management, and peer pressure is so relevant for my life. Thanks for helping so many youths find direction in life."



Aftercare subprogram beneficiaries with SCP staff

METAMORPHOSIS PROJECT

Unlike many Associations, ACAY has always favored quality over quantity: it is not so much a question of superficially reaching thousands of young people as of ensuring an inner transformation leading to successful reintegration. The figures speak for themselves: after 20 years of the Second Chance program, the non-recidivism rate for all youth is 90%!

This focus on quality has enabled ACAY to create not only undeniable know-how but also a treasure of expertise. But this has come at the price of quantity: a hundred young people a year see their lives transformed. That's a lot, but it's also a little.

Faced with the urgency of the multiplying situations of distress that we see before our eyes, how can we reach more young people's lives? How can this expertise be used in the context of full reintegration?



<https://www.pinterest.ph/pin/844565736351959679/>

After several years of reflecting on the future of ACAY, the Board of Trustees in the Philippines has approved a new strategic approach:

1. ACAY must maintain its qualitative approach and continue to be at the forefront of innovation in its field. Losing focus would be synonymous with regression in the medium term.
2. To reach a wider audience, ACAY - with the unfailing support of the International Association AMADE - is launching a new project aimed at preparing the Seeding Stage, i.e. to connect with similar organizations all over the world and to share this ACAY know-how (Indicators of Growth, Indicators of Success, Processes, Objectives to reach, etc...): **The Metamorphosis Project.**
3. The Metamorphosis Project is a project to document and transform the existing concept and educational strategies of the School of Life Program into training and best practice packages ready to help a multitude!

Launched in the summer of 2020, the project is progressing well and is expected to be completed by June 2021.

- **Thibault de Saint Victor**
ACAY Board Member
L'Oreal General Manager E-Commerce



A POEM WRITTEN BY A SCHOOL OF LIFE BENEFICIARY

dedicated to sister Sophie...

It's not in blood or with written documents

*that being a mother is measured
but by those words and ways, you made us feel it*

*You are such a blessing to us,
You never get tired of listening to our distress
You do not let that feeling control us
Instead, you taught us to look at the picture from a
wider perspective*

*That's only one of the many things you taught us
I engrave it not only in my mind but in my heart
Are you a teacher? So close and yet so far...*

Pain and bitterness that I painfully kept within me

*You took it and replaced it with healing
Scars did not fade
but the pain has ended
Are you a doctor? So close and yet so far...*

*Now, I'll put the right words for it
The word I'm referring to is none other than a MOTHER*

My endless gratitude for your love and trust

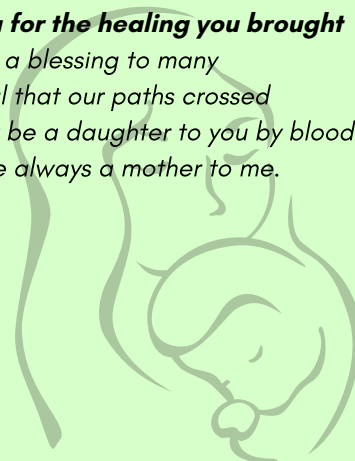
*Future that has been drawn
I'll make sure to have it painted
Nothing is by accident
Because getting to know you is destined
In the book hold by God*

*I may not come from your own womb,
But I would like to give you
My endless and untiring gratitude
In the midst of my pain and suffering
You taught me to find refuge in God*

*Your words are still fresh and clear in my head
when you said
"When the storm hits, don't ever let go,
but hold tighter."*

Thank you for the healing you brought

*Your life is a blessing to many
I'm grateful that our paths crossed
I might not be a daughter to you by blood
But you are always a mother to me.*



MAKE A DONATION

Your generous gifts have made it possible to continue our mission.
With your support, we can transform the lives of more youth
who have been exposed to traumatic experiences, through recovery and self-sustainability.

$$1 \text{ expense} \times 1 \text{ day} = 7\text{€} \text{ or } 333\text{Php}$$



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