

# NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2022

#### **Editorial**

Recently, our new Communication Officer, Sandi, organized a workshop on ACAY's branding. Her goal was, as a new employee, to listen to ACAY's experience in terms of communication.

#### One of her activities was to ask us: "If ACAY were an animal, what would it be?

This was a big question that led the teams, and later the young people, into discussions teeming with good ideas. "For me ACAY is an eagle", said Lovely, "because ACAY has a vision and sees problems clearly from a distance, ACAY knows how to target the specific aspects to be worked on". "To me, ACAY is a Kalabao" (Filipino ox) replied Kim! "ACAY has the ability to go into the mud, to reach out to people in their chaos, in their problems and to plough the land so that we can plant again." "For our group ACAY is a butterfly because it is the experience of a metamorphosis." "For us, it is the dove because in the story of Noah, it was the dove that brought hope." And then it was our turn, the last group on the track: "ACAY is a hummingbird". "A... what?" " a Hummingbird!". Surprise and amazement. I played a clip of the hummingbird's song... The smallest bird in the world, renowned for its unique song, it stands out from the rest. Warm, agile, spontaneous but keen on systemic organization, intuitive, creative, it is also capable of record speed despite its littleness.

And above all, there is this legend that enlightened my intelligence about this character that I perceive in ACAY. The legend says that a forest was on fire. The flames multiplied and spread.

Terrified, the animals escaped and watched the destruction of their forest. The hummingbird, on the other hand, began taking water from the river with its tiny beak and flying to pour it over the flames. And he spent his time flying back and forth as fast as he could. Some of the animals laughed at him and said, "Hummingbird, are you crazy? You think you can put out the fire with a few drops of water?" and the hummingbird replied, "I know I can't do it alone, but I'm doing my part."

This is ACAY.

For 25 years, we have been doing our part and the fruit is here:

a methodology called Metamorphosis! Our joy is that we have remained despite the years in smallness but agile enough to adapt to all situations, including the most

chaotic. We have been entrusted with a part in repairing the world, that of youth in great distress.

Although the task is immense, the challenges disproportionate, we have done, are doing and will do, because of and with you, our part. Faithfully... and above all joyfully.

Happy anniversary to ALL!

Sr. Sophie de Jésus - ACAY founder

## **OUR 25TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION**



Last October 1st, we celebrated the 25 years of ACAY with a beautiful gathering of our partners, alumni, staff, and youth – all considered part of the ACAY Family. It was a fun-filled event, mainly including the launch of the Skills Hub, the prestige film showing, and more activities.

What have we achieved? For 25 years, ACAY has brought a holistic approach to specific challenges faced by the youth (aged 16 to 23), addressing problems from multiple angles. We go beyond psycho social support, as we develop innovative solutions that make lasting change possible. As we now have the Metamorphosis Methodology, our goal is to continue to restore and equip our youth to have a brighter future.

This year, we captured the spirit of ACAY's mission in 4C's: Chaos, Challenge, Community and Creating Change. First, ACAY addresses the **chaos** (internally and externally) and we go where not many are willing. Thus, having a niche expertise in many fields. Second, ACAY is an expert at developing educative methodology for our youth to face and address the **challenges** at hand. We have a culture of responsibility such that we transform both the person and the system. Third, our community is open to everyone. We value each person's journey. We go together, we accompany, and we collaborate.

And finally the 4th C: Metamorphosis is at the core of all we do. We transform youth, adapt training designs, and create **ripples of change**. We're incredibly proud of how far we've come, with so much to celebrate!

To start the festivities, we were blessed by the presence of Most Rev. Bishop Gaa, Bishop of the Diocese of Novaliches for a Holy Eucharist. His words were incredibly moving as he encouraged us saying "you might be like St Therese, a small reality, but God gave you a missionary impact which reaches so many far away shores. God blesses the smallness."

We also had the honor to welcome the ambassadors of the MoM's Sisters: Her Excellency Michele Boccoz, Ambassador of France to the Philippines, His Excellency Peter Kell Ambassador of New Zealand to the Philippines, Her Excellency Hungarian Ambassador-Designate Titanilla Tóth, His Excellency Consul of the Republic of Poland in Manila Aleksander Parzych and a team from the AMADE Mondiale headed by Mr Jerome Froissart, its General Secretary.

The newly built Skills Hub was finally officially launched with a ribbon-cutting ceremony, plaque unveiling, and blessing of the building. Youth will continue there to develop their skills and potential!

# Launching of the Skills Hub



**Ribbon Cutting Ceremony** 





### **Special Messages**

"Dear Sisters,

Many of those around you, present today have helped you grow and advance ACAY in ever-greater professionalism and the development of your expertise. They are to be congratulated and thanked for this, as it also reflects on ACAY France. Go and continue this beautiful journey."

-Mr. Renoux, ACAY France President





Her Excellency Michele Boccoz, Ambassador of France to the Philippines

We are truly grateful for the presence of the special individuals who have accompanied and supported us in the past decades and were able to join the festivities:

Board of Trustees members: Dr. Ervin Nucum and Dr. Mia Oliveros; Ms. Stefani Sandoval of the Assisi Development Foundation; Jerome Moneger of DRAKE International; Honorable Mary Angeline Sale, Associate Justice of the Court of Appeals; Ms. Valerio and Ms. Barkin from SMEC Philippines; and Ms. Tablang and Ms. Barrientes from Bouygues Philippines.

# **Climbing Life's Mountains**

The theme of our anniversary celebration is "Climbing Life's Mountains: We Did It!" as it encompasses our journey with hundreds of individuals be it youth, staff, volunteers, partners, and more.

This was perfectly captured in the opening remarks by ACAY Philippines' Executive Assistant Yvonnie Gutierrez:

"Let me share some of the beautiful insights we learned from climbing this mountain. First: Journeying with others requires a presence – and for ACAY we give importance to this presence – presence to the youth, to the staff, and to our partners. This journeying which entails a "presence" has given birth to ACAY's unique culture of Listening and the strong "family spirit".

Second, the climb will always bring a moment of crisis – and in ACAY we have learned to look at crisis as an opportunity: opportunity for growth, opportunity for change. A crisis is painful and stressful but we have learned that yes it could be that way but each crisis has been a breakthrough. This view of crisis has taught us to go beyond our comfort zones and be ready to face the unknown.

And Third, the climb on the mountain entails innovation – we have learned not to be comfortable with the same path. We have learned that we must evolve – with the youth and with the changing trends of society."

# The ACAY Prestige Film

Thanks to the generous support of The AMADE - Association Mondiale des Amis de l'Enfance, ACAY commemorated its 25 years of metamorphosing youth's lives, capturing pedagogies, inspiring stories, and advocacies in a Prestige Film.

Mr. Jerome Froissart, General Secretary of the AMADE Mondiale, delivered a warm message before the film's premiere. He warmly thanked the entire ACAY community for its work and dedication. "We have learned a lot, dear sisters, we know now what compassion means. We know that love, determination, and reason can change lives," said Mr. Froissart.





Doxology by ACAY Beneficiaries and Alumni

# Thank you to the Sisters

The celebration would not be complete without warmly expressing gratitude to the four Missionaries of Mary sisters- Sister Sophie de Jesus, Sr. Edit, Sr. Laetitia and Sr. Rachel. The ACAY staff surprised them with personalized special gifts and flower bouquets.

In addition, the youth and alumni also had a surprise performance singing a beautiful song entitled "Unstoppable."

The song's lyrics were a thank you to the Sisters for metamorphosing and guiding each youth's lives. Thank you might be an understatement of this gratitude, the uniqueness of these four sisters has indeed formed ACAY Missions Philippines into who it is now!

#### **Loyalty Award to Long Service Staff**

Throughout ACAY's journey and climbing life's mountains, we are especially grateful for all the loyal staff who have helped us for many years, some even decades. During the anniversary celebration, we surprised them with a short awarding ceremony with certificate and special gift. The room was filled with applause and love!







#### **Closing Speeches**

To conclude the festivities, Sr. Edith, Sr. Sophie de Jesus, and Laurent delivered a shared speech about their inspiring journey in leading ACAY Mission in France and in the Philippines.

"Climbing and ascending Life's mountains: We did it! As a greek writer said: "Every man, every living is a workplace where God in a hidden way, works the clay and transforms it. It has been given to us the grace to enter the workplace of God", and to work with Him in the middle of Manila, our desert was the desert of the human hearts and there we found God, we touched God. The more we transformed with Him, the trauma into learning, the frailty into strength and courage, the chains of the past into freedom, and the more, we became ourselves, sons and daughters of God."



Touching God was touching the vital surge and life force, touching the "going beyond", the creativity, the metamorphosis. Once, a monk had told an almond tree "show me God, talk to me about God" and the almond tree blossomed...

We have climbed with the Filipino youth the mountains of poverty, vengeance, anger, hatred, absence, abandonment... The almond tree, we saw it blossoming.

Reconciliation happened, Lifestyles changed, and Forgiveness was born in the hearts. Dialogue found back its place, and Hope in despair blossomed. Today we climb with the French youth the same life's mountains, on other shores... Let's continue metamorphosing youth's lives worldwide!

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# SECOND CHANCE PROGRAM: ALUMNI TRAINING OF TRAINERS

The Second Chance Program (SCP) celebrates its 20th anniversary! And we are reaping the fruits of our labor. Five SCP Alumni: Robin, JM, Dexter, Kim Marvin, and Nino have successfully completed their training to become Alumni Trainers for the new generations of the Aftercare program. Each will be in charge of different training such as: How to handle Peer Pressure, the Culture of CICL, Job preparedness, How to make Curriculum Vitae, Basic Financial Management, and Dealing with authority.

"I recently volunteered as trainer for Batch Dynamic Dreamers. I wanted to come back and share my learnings to the youth. It is truly fulfilling to feel the youth receiving the content of the training with so much enthusiasm."

- Alumni Trainer Kim Marvin Ciocson





SCP Manager Marlou observed that the alumni trainers' presence helped enrich the current beneficiaries' learning experience. "We could see a change in the youth and program. The alumni are living testimonies of the program's impact and at the same time, the youth are able to learn from them and believe that they too can make a change in their lives," said Marlou.

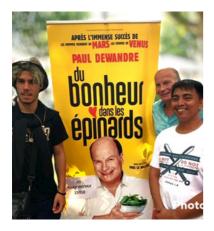
# **News Updates**

### SR. SOPHIE DE JESUS- THE ONE FINALIST

We are incredibly proud to share that our ACAY Founder, Sr. Sophie de Jesus, made it to the top 5 finalists for THE ONE PHILIPPINES. It is an initiative of the International Rotary Club to find and award the "Unsung hero of the Philippines". Congratulations to Sr Sophie and all the finalists!



#### FINDING SECOND CHANCES: THEATER & REALITY



John Paul, an ACAY alumni from the Philippines, and Rayane, a youth accompanied by ACAY in Marseille, met Paul Dewandre, a successful author and actor, during the Avignon Festival, a big theatre festival, last July. They had an inspiring exchange on the topic of happiness! Rayane said, "I think that there are a lot of similarities between Paul's life and ours. His play shows the lives of inner city and incarcerated youth, with its ups and downs... He uses this image of the pyramid of priorities and the need to find happiness. It made me think about my life, because I also want to build my pyramid. Right now it's still messy but it's under construction and I'm trying to move forward little by little." For youth beneficiaries like John Paul and Rayane who go through life's twists and turns, ACAY is here to guide them!

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#### MY JOURNEY TO FRANCE

by John Paul, Second Chance Program Alumni

The strength of ACAY is in the inspiring testimonies of all its youth who have stood back up. John Paul, accompanied by ACAY in the Philippines, after a life full of setbacks, was invited to share his journey with French youth in difficult circumstances last July. He tells of his month of encounters, discoveries, sharing and surprise, his month of testifying.

"At first, I was stressed when Laurent asked me if I wanted to go to France. This trip involved so many new things! Everything was a first time: processing my passport and visa, getting on the plane...At the airport, when I passed the immigration officer, he was suspicious about the purpose of my travel to France. Finally, when I told him that I was a former CICL and that now I was going to help incarcerated minors, he was impressed. Being an ex-convict is a stigma that carries many judgments in daily life.

Once I arrived in Marseille, I had to adapt to the people, the climate... Everything was different to the Philippines. I met the team and the volunteers of ACAY France who welcomed me warmly. When I told them about my life journey, I had a hard time controlling my emotions because I could still feel the hardship of what I've been through and the pain of my struggles.

As I began my first testimonies in front of the incarcerated youth, up to four a day, I found the French jail very nice. The young people were spoiled, it was like a hotel. In Manila Youth Reception Center (MYRC) where I was, the conditions were much harder. his filled me with compassion for the Filipino youth





who don't have what I saw in France. The problem is that the French youth don't realize this advantage they have; TI found many of them rather strong headed. Even so, I enjoyed being there to inspire and encourage them.

During a quick trip to Paris, I met up with Argie, another young Filipino accompanied by ACAY at the same time as me now living in France. It was encouraging to see him. Back in Marseille, I gave my testimony at the Wake-Up Café, an organization dedicated to the reintegration of former prisoners above 18. There, I saw young men all wearing the same ankle bracelet. At first, I thought that it was just a kind of millennial gadget for youth in France... but then I was shocked! The purpose of this bracelet was in fact to keep an eye on them and make sure they kept their curfew. I think that the youth in jail in France need more people telling them that the real struggle is not only in prison but mainly afterwards. Life outside is a challenge because you need to put into practice all that you have learnt: in the long run

you will be more courageous, wiser. Personally, I was able to adapt to people's judgments. I had to be smart with who I hung out with, to avoid situations that would lead to problems. To do this, you need patience and an unwavering commitment to one's goals, knowing what to rely on: faith for some, reading for others, or the support of an association like ACAY. Not everything is given, you must also get involved: it's an active choice to stand firm. Going through doubts and discouragements, highlighting to your weaknesses... The challenge is to face them without denial, to bring out the good fruits.

12 years after jail, I have a wife and children who can count on me. When I testify about this achievement in front of youth, it enables them to draw a parallel between my initial situation and theirs. What I experienced once and what they may be experiencing now. And by my success, I show them that there is a way out for them. Where a similar person has been able to succeed, they too will be able to succeed."

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