



ACAY NEWSLETTER - APRIL 2025

25 YEARS OF SCHOOL OF LIFE

SISTER SOPHIE OF JESUS
PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

25 Years of School of Life a Quarter of a Century of Transformation

"Mom left us when I was 6 years old, dad died two years later."

"I lived on the streets all my childhood, finding food for my little brothers and I was my only goal."

"When Typhoon Yolanda completely devastated my village with its terrifying waves, we were desperate..."

"I was sold by my mother at birth."

"Dad abused me since I was seven years old.... My brother followed him."

"Mom went abroad to work and never came back throughout our childhood. Then one day she came back, but she was ill. Cancer took her within a couple of months."

Nothing had prepared us for hearing what we have been listening to for 25 years. Stories of unimaginable hardship and suffering. But no sooner had we settled in the Philippines than teenagers came knocking on our door. They were the ones with whom it all started, who took the first steps in the School of Life.

Over the years, listening gave way to education, then to preparation for independence, life in society and the world of work. Then we built a path with them to get back on their feet, to rebuild themselves and gave them the tools to overcome the wounds of the past and face the challenges of the future.

The School of Life was not only a practical work; it was also a process of reflection, educational strategy, concept development and, most recently, the creation of our pedagogical method: the Metamorpho.sYs Journey.

And yet, paradoxically, since that January 6, 2000, a truth has forced itself upon us: despite the inner turmoil, it is the brilliance of life that is at work in the hearts of all these young girls.

The crossroads, the true turning point, was for them all to rethink life, to dare to believe in life again and to realize that hurt and trauma can lose their poison and be transformed into extraordinary resilience.

I wish you a year filled with hope!

*Some
figures on
the School
of Life*

1 unique method:
Metamorpho.sYs
Journey

2 & a half years of
preparation for
independent
living

57 formations
in 2024 to equip
beneficiaries

235 young girls
were admitted





The anniversary year of the School of Life: Former beneficiaries share their transformation journey

RAQUEL - GRADUATION 2011

"I was slowly able to let myself fall into the open arms of the ACAY staff and sisters."

At the age of 5, I roamed the chaotic streets of Manila with my family.

By the age of 7, I had learned everything: stealing, selling illegally, gambling and many other vices. Every time the police caught me, I changed my name. Then a children's foundation finally took me in. It was forbidden to leave the home. I almost suffocated and called it "prison".

With ACAY, I was to discover something I had never felt before: the spirit of a family. Before I got there, I was closed off and angry because my father had just died - another pain that only intensified my grief. I couldn't say goodbye. But ACAY listened to me.

This anger, this resentment against God, against the world, against myself - this was the famous dragon from the well-known ACAY proverb:

"Where the dragons lurk, the treasure lies hidden."

Over the years, I opened up. I was slowly able to let myself fall into the open arms of the ACAY staff and sisters. The training courses helped me to become independent, and after initially being a volunteer and later an employee at ACAY, I am now self-employed. And I return to the School of Life once or twice a week to help. For me, beyond all the help I received, the real gem of ACAY is the spirit of the family!



ERIKA - GRADUATION 2022

"I had finally found a home."

I'm about to finish my four-year accounting degree, and yet there's a whole other kind of accounting hiding inside me: the kind where I count the pieces of my life - a life that has become whole again thanks to the School of Life. All these fragments were put together piece by piece by the love I experienced at ACAY.

I am the eldest of four children. My father worked abroad. My mother was with us, but she was in constant conflict with my paternal grandfather, who had taken us in. When I was six years old, my mother decided to leave us and went away.

This renewed conflict with my grandfather made me responsible for my siblings at a young age. My aunts supported us, but as they had their own families, they lacked the strength to protect us from violence.

My aunts finally decided to place my siblings in a home. I spent years constantly moving from one home to another. I was everywhere and yet nowhere at home. The feeling of abandonment overwhelmed me. I became withdrawn and quiet.

The nightmare reached its climax when our father died. This time I was truly alone...

Until the day our neighbor's daughter entered the School of Life. One of my aunts suggested that I go there too - and I immediately agreed.

I felt at home. Immediately.

I had finally found a home.

This safe place became the space of my transformation. Sister Laetitia's guidance gave me the comfort of a motherly presence. The support of my social worker and psychologist helped me to rebuild myself, face my past and talk to my mother again.

I even found my little sister again - and took her with me to the School of Life.





Employees share their experiences at the School of Life

YVONNIE D. GUTIERREZ
DEPUTY DIRECTOR & SOCIAL WORKER

"Constant and innovative development is the key to lasting success."

The 25th anniversary of the School of Life, is an important milestone to celebrate. My journey with ACAY began with this program, and over the course of my 20 years of service, I have been deeply involved in this work for a decade. I have had the privilege of witnessing the transformative power of this program, exemplified by countless success stories that highlight its ability to change lives.

As a social worker, I have experienced firsthand that the concepts outlined in the program manual are not merely theoretical: They are brought to life in practice.

What makes the program truly remarkable is its ability to adapt and evolve. The program I implemented when I first joined the organization is very different from the program we have today. Over the years, it has grown and changed, continually adapting to the changes of its time and drawing valuable lessons from its work with young people. This constant and innovative development is the key to its lasting success.

The momentum of the School of Life program ensures that it remains relevant and influential, helping young people move from lives marked by trauma into roles where they can create change - not only for themselves, but also for those around them. As we celebrate this milestone, we honor the legacy of the program and look forward with excitement to its continued growth and lasting impact in the years to come.

SISTER RACHEL MYRIAM
SCHOOL OF LIFE PROGRAM MANAGER - MISSIONNARIES OF MARY

"It was urgent that I stay, this mission was my life, and so I gave my life."

I am Sr Rachel Myriam, Rachel received at baptism and Rachel Myriam at final profession. Even before I knew about the mission in the Philippines, I held the mission in name: Myriam. Mary at the foot of the three crosses, the mother of life, embracing all suffering – that of being a victim, of being a criminal, of being indifferent. Mary, there carries all this through the darkness to the light of the resurrection.

21 years ago, when I arrived in Manila, I had no idea what it was to be the missionary I had since childhood desired to be. I did know however, as soon as I arrived, that I had found my place. The 2 years I had originally come for were over too soon. It was urgent that I stay, this mission was my life, and so I gave my life.

As a missionary sister at the head of the School of Life, the mission is to accompany the program and each person, each youth on their journey through the chaos of what has been their past, allowing them to begin a journey of trust and openness that will transform the devastated wasteland of their hearts into fertile soil where new seeds can take root and grow strong allowing them to face the future in freedom and not fear. The system and the structure developed over time provide a framework for this journey of transformation.

The biblical symbol of 25 is: 'Grace upon grace'! Yes! We have lived the first 25 years in the goodness of God, His providence has never failed us. Thank you for the untold ways that you have been the channel of Providence for us! May we all continue to experience Grace in ways we could not even imagine! Happy Anniversary!



SCHOOL OF LIFE EXPLORES

During the Christmas period, School of Life beneficiaries were able to enjoy outward-looking experiences.

The World of Culture

Thanks to the generosity of another partner foundation, the young girls from the School of Life were able to attend a classical ballet for the first time: Peter Pan at the Sun Theater. It was a magical and unforgettable moment for each of them.

Rain: "It was the first time I had ever seen a ballet. I tried to enjoy it to the full. I felt and experienced the dance deep inside me."

Adèle: "I loved watching the flowers and mermaids dance. It gave me a great sense of peace."



The World of Entrepreneurship

In late November, several young women from the Entrepreneurship Hub (EHub) participated in the Thanksgiving Night Bazaar in the affluent Ayala Heights neighborhood. This market gave them the opportunity to sell the Creativity Hub's handmade products, as well as homemade Hungarian sausages (a recipe brought by Sister Edith) and their brand new product: Hungarian paprika.



Participation in these bazaars, contact with other social milieus and interaction with customers offer them a valuable opportunity to open up to the outside world. This gradual opening up helps them to gradually gain more independence...

For most of them, it was the first time they had come into contact with the world of trading. This kind of experience shows them that they are capable of great things and helps them to gain new self-confidence.

AGATHA
VOLUNTEER AND TRAINER IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

"These young girls have inspired me to become a better person."

What I really appreciate about ACAY is their quality-oriented approach instead of a pure focus on quantity for their beneficiaries. It's not just about numbers, but about real change.

When I met the young girls from ACAY, I was immediately impressed by their maturity. It clearly shows the love and support that surrounds them. They have now become like little sisters to me.



The World of Solidarity

The girls took to the streets of Dona Carmen on Christmas Day to share Christmas cookies and treats. It was an act of solidarity, reaching out to those most in need, for an authentic Christmas.

Gina: "I was really touched by this experience, especially by the children on the street. I really want to help them more in the future."

Getting to know the world around us better is also a valuable opportunity to get to know ourselves better.

SECOND CHANCE: YOUTH IN SERVICE OF OTHERS

ANTOINE HERBAUT

VOLUNTEER FOR SECOND CHANCE PROGRAM



To conclude the reintegration activities on December 21, 2024, the participants of the Second Chance Program – Class 'IBHAR' ('The Chosen One') – organized an initiative of sharing, solidarity, and restorative justice. On this occasion, they carried out outreach activities in Quezon City.

Through this task, the young people demonstrated not only that they had improved their skills, but also their ability to serve others.

The program participants raised money by sharing part of their monthly allowance and selling scrap metal and plastic bottles to recycling businesses.

With the money they collected, they prepared breakfasts and distributed them to over 30 people living on the streets. For most of them, it was the first time they had actively helped people in need.

“GUIDING YOUTH ON THEIR JOURNEY TO REINTEGRATION”

Here's what the participants said during the event:

Sheed: "I've realized that it's better to give than to receive – even if you get nothing in return. It feels good to also hear their stories."

Ronald: "I'm so happy that I was able to help other people. I will always remember this experience, because I never thought I would be in a position to help others."

James: "This was a completely different experience from what I usually do. Normally, I don't help or give food to people on the street. This made me happy."

Nino: "This morning, I learned how to help people on the street – even through small gestures and without expecting anything in return. That made me happy."

These feelings reflect the values that the Second Chance Program team strives to instill: growing beyond oneself, developing empathy for others, strengthening a sense of responsibility, and ultimately embracing a new way of life.

ACAY continues to accompany them on this journey and is proud to support them in their personal growth and positive contribution to society.



MARSEILLE

At the beginning of the year, the work of the ACAY team was marked by the completion of a comprehensive film that was created in a Detention Center, the Centre Educatif Fermé (CEF)* des Cèdres, in collaboration with the video artist Sylvain Péroumal. After a year of work, the film was presented in a cinema in Vitrolles on the 23rd January. The event brought together the young people and the CEF teams, justice professionals and other partners for an enriching screening and opened up new perspectives.

The 30-minute documentary film entitled 'Dans leurs regards' (*Through their eyes*) gives a voice to the young people accommodated at the CEF and the professionals involved in their development. In their testimonies, the young people share their thoughts, difficulties and perceptions about their detention, while the educators and staff present the tools and methods that accompany the young people on their path to independence. The aim of the film is to raise awareness among families and involve them in educational support by giving them an insight into the facility while emphasizing the importance of their supportive role.

The project follows on from an earlier film from 2018, 'Ma vie à l'EPM', which followed the integration of a young person into the Etablissement Pénitentiaire pour Mineurs (Juvenile Detention Center) in Marseille. The film was intended to allay the fears of the families of youth in prison. Following the impact of this first film, the director of the CEF of Cèdres wanted to develop a similar project tailored to the reality of the CEF.

As a result, the video artist Sylvain Péroumal was commissioned to shoot and edit the film. He had made the film for ACAY's 25th anniversary and demonstrated an amazing ability to connect with the young people, encouraging them to share their feelings, which could resonate with others.



Shooting

**A big 'Thank You' to Sylvain Peroumal and the financial partners
who made the production of this film possible.**

*What does CEF mean?

'The CEF differs from the traditional residential care center in that detention is imposed as part of judicial supervision, a suspended sentence or a conditional release. The CEF is labelled 'closed' because the young person is obliged to live there under constant adult supervision and to comply with the conditions of admission. This facility is part of an approach to re-establish daily life and life in the community in order to promote the young person's educational and professional integration. All the activities of daily and community life are educational in nature: observing the times for getting up and going to bed, taking meals together, tidying up the rooms, taking care of the premises and outdoor areas, doing the laundry, participating in the preparation of meals...'. (Ministry of Justice)

HOW TO DONATE TO ACAY ?

Donate in Peso (₱)

Bank transfer details:

Bank of the Philippines Islands (BPI)

Account Name: **ACAY Missions Philippines Inc.**

Account Number: **1991-0113-38**

Bank Address: **114 Kalayaan Avenue, Quezon**

City, Philippines

Swift Code: **BOPIPHMM**

Donate thru Paypal



Donate in Euro (€)

Donate thru HelloAsso

