



A Face-to-Face that Became Side-to-Side

Without prior planning or a fixed strategy, one of the deepest foundations of the ACAY mission emerged organically: to [transform a "face to-face" encounter into a genuine "side-by-side" partnership!](#) Since our founding, there has been this mysterious touch of "divine madness" that permeates our mission and illuminates our uniqueness. It is this subtle touch of "firefly in the night" that has moved me and fueled my passion for so many years.

The [spirit of restorative justice has driven ACAY since its inception.](#) How can we bring together young girls marked by various traumas, violence, abuse, and abandonment with young boys, some of whom have perpetrated these very offenses? How can we encourage dialogue between those who should be harboring extreme feelings toward one another — anger, shame, and revenge? [This is the ACAY challenge!](#)

Idealism? Simplistic thinking? Or even, some might say, with the presence of nuns, naive idealism? And yet, despite these numerous "-isms," I accept the challenge. [The ACAY mission is fully realized.](#) It listens to both sides, it has two ears. While I was developing the School of Life, Sister Edith Myriam was out working with at-risk youth, implementing the Second Chance program. And after 28 years, we can say it with one voice: it works! What seemed impossible is becoming a path to maturity and inner freedom. Those who were once "face to face" are now "side by side" in reflection, training, and times of fellowship and cohesion. [So, what are the keys that unlock the way to renewed dialogue?](#)

At that time, we were considering bringing this dimension to Marseille, which until now had focused on supporting minors under the jurisdiction of the courts. Emphasis was also placed on the preventative aspect: ["prevention is better than cure!"](#) Interventions in detention were quickly complemented by training programs on self-awareness and other topics in a pilot school for at-risk youth. How, here too, can we prevent young people from sliding into delinquency, becoming demotivated at school, or drifting into homelessness?

It is in this quest for meaning and impact that we take you once again in this newsletter. [Dive with us into this ACAY adventure, which transcends us but which, against all odds, responds so aptly to current challenges.](#)



Enjoy your reading!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sr Edith de Jésus".

Restorative Justice

The concept of restorative justice (sometimes called reparative justice) aims to bring together, in addition to the judicial response, a perpetrator of a criminal offence and a victim, in various ways, to consider together the consequences of the act and, where appropriate, to find solutions to overcome it, with the objective of restoring social peace. (French Ministry of Justice)



[I Will Always See Your Faces, Jeanne Herry \(On Restorative Justice\)](#)





When the “Face-to-Face”

Towards an experience of the spirit of restorative justice embodied within ACAY Philippines

At the heart of ACAY lies a unique vision: to support both sides of at-risk youth, those who have suffered and those who have committed acts of delinquency. Since its inception, ACAY has chosen to walk alongside both aspects of a wounded life.

This approach, rooted in the spirit of restorative justice, is central to our charisma, to our identity: to create a shared path for these young people toward inner freedom and emotional maturity.

After 28 years of mission in the Philippines, we have seen a profound and proven transformation emerge from the encounter between these two worlds. It is not about denying the past but a bout building the future by allowing everyone to see themselves differently so that certain cycles of the past do not repeat themselves.

“I was scared, but I have to prepare myself for life in society. I have to overcome my fears, relearn to trust, and to communicate. The young people in the Second Chance program helped me with that.”

“It was uncomfortable for me at first; I thought they were just pretending to be nice... but they showed a lot of respect and became like brothers. Today, I see them as young people who have been ‘helped’ just as much as I have.”

It is a delicate exercise to share this experience, to find the right words combining vision and concrete aspects. The young girls from the School of Life do not hide their initial fear when they learn that ACAY also works with young people from the world of delinquency.

On the side of young men*, it is also a surge of courage that they need to face young girls whom they know have been victims of violence or other things.

When one's own legal situation and actions are close to this suffering, it is all the more difficult.

Even though no one knows their stories, the fear of being judged and feelings of shame emerge.

So, is it acceptable or decent to expose these young people to such frightening situations and emotions?

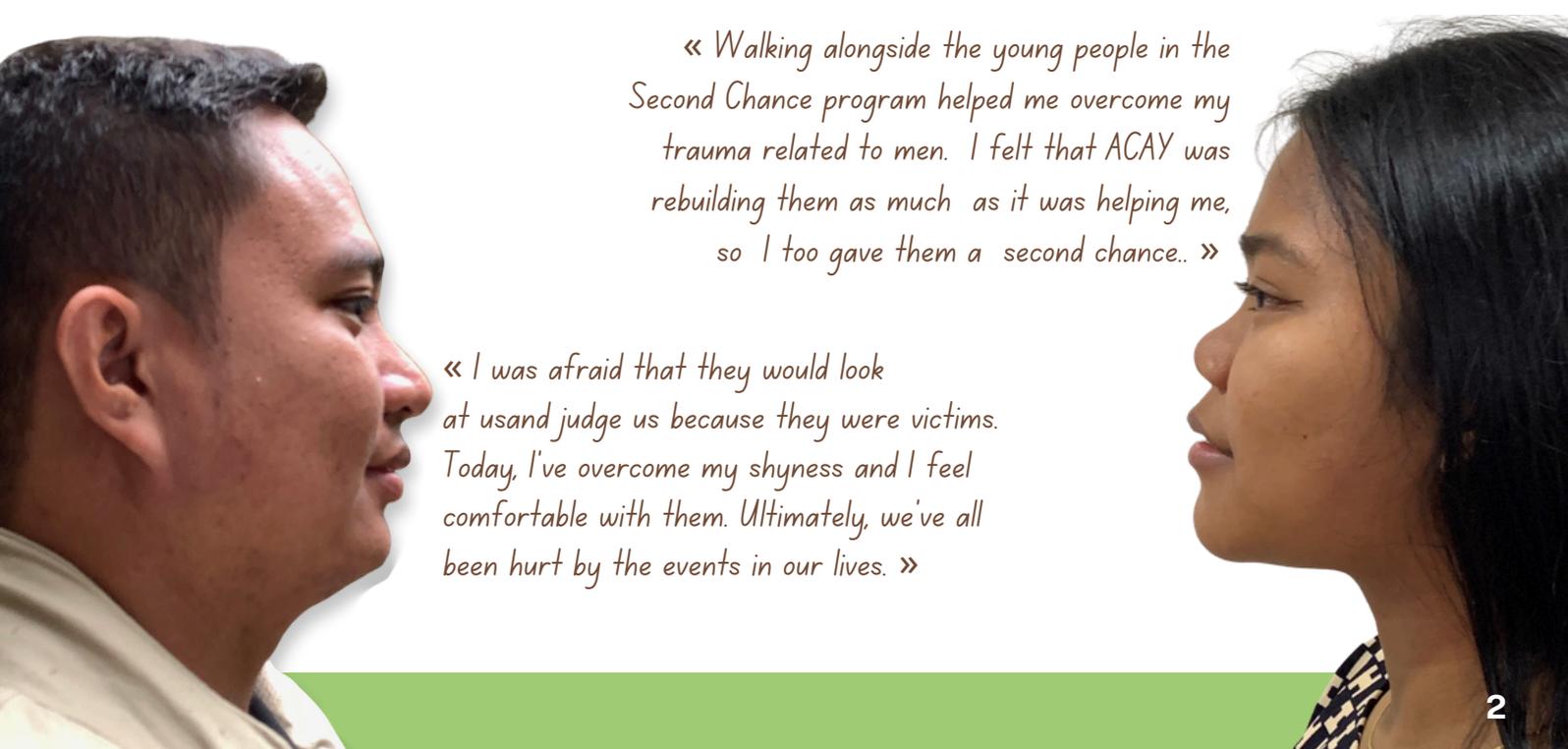
The young people themselves tell us that they have all matured from this experience...

And above all, they ask us to continue to live this. It is clear that the role of professional teams is to create a structured, safe, and respectful environment. But by enabling this, they build "bridges over the impossible" and pave the way for renewed hope. Two perspectives, a reconstruction of life. Recently, I led a workshop bringing together young people from the School of Life and the Second Chance Program.

*In addition, some young women are rarely also supported through the Second Chance program

« Walking alongside the young people in the Second Chance program helped me overcome my trauma related to men. I felt that ACAY was rebuilding them as much as it was helping me, so I too gave them a second chance.. »

« I was afraid that they would look at us and judge us because they were victims. Today, I've overcome my shyness and I feel comfortable with them. Ultimately, we've all been hurt by the events in our lives. »





Becomes "Side by Side"

by Sister Sophie De Jesus

"With the young women at the School of Life, I teach them how to communicate properly. I share advice with them on how to recognize the dangers of life and how to protect themselves from them."

The objective :

Taking a break to assess how young people themselves experience this dimension within ACAY, whether they measure its impact and importance, the challenges and issues that lie behind this choice.

After two hours of workshops on this theme, I sensed a shift between the two groups present: speaking had broken down the unspoken barriers. A connection had been re-established through honesty.

Embarrassment had given way to the joy of a shared drive towards transformation and taking control of their lives as young adults.

The young people's requests were fantastic: to develop more **time spent on missions** together serving others (outreach, food distributions) but also to provide **training together** on specific topics:

Finances: knowing how to develop and manage a budget for a single person, a couple, a family, and the birth of a child

Communication between men and women

Knowing how to **set fair boundaries** in mutual relationships



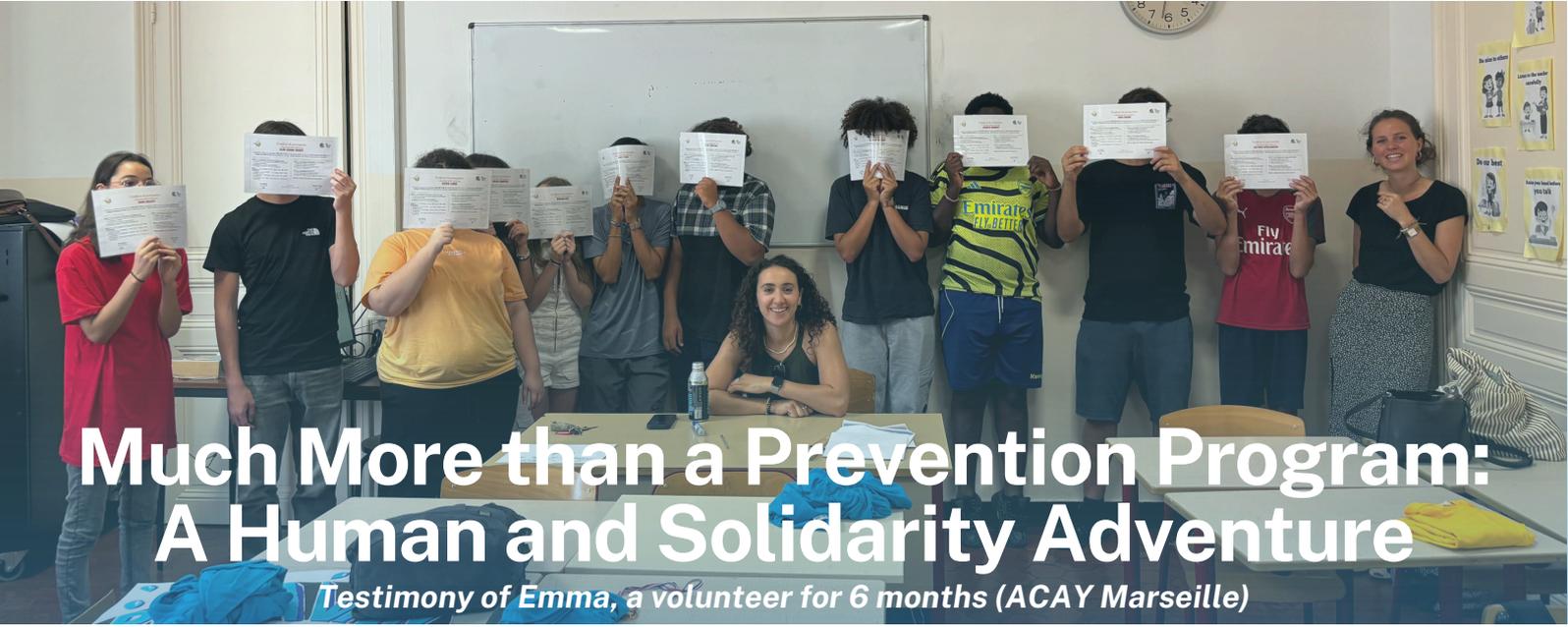
One of the team members then shared:

"Certainly, your past does not define your future... but what you decide today shapes your 'tomorrow'."

These topics thus open young people up to **constructive dialogues** in preparation for their lives as young adults and touch on sensitive subjects.

ACAY is therefore rooted in this spirit of restorative justice, **creating within itself spaces where dialogues, debates, and training among young people on societal issues or topics related to preparing for life in society pave the way for their growth.** And they become a voice that enlightens other young people and society!





Much More than a Prevention Program: A Human and Solidarity Adventure

Testimony of Emma, a volunteer for 6 months (ACAY Marseille)

According to INSEE (2023), 76,000 young people leave the school system in France each year. In 2022, the Youth Judicial Protection Service reported that 88% of incarcerated minors were declared out of school. School dropout is recognized as a vulnerability factor, increasing the risk of involvement in delinquent behavior. As such, the "Take Charge of Your Life" program aims to foster a positive dynamic among students experiencing academic difficulties, particularly those in the 9th grade of the Adapted General and Vocational Education Section (SEGPA). It seeks to re-engage them with their socio-educational path and helps young people make better choices after 9th grade.

This year, I had the pleasure of discovering the Prevention program by participating in several interventions.

It was intense, full of surprises and emotions, punctuated by genuine moments and mutual learning. What I witnessed went far beyond prevention: it was a true human experience, a sincere exchange with the students, and a supportive collaboration with the teaching staff. As a student, the end of the school year is often a hectic time.

This is especially true in 3rd grade: between the deadline for the Brevet exam and career guidance, the stakes are high. ACAY's support takes on its full meaning: through workshops, through group sessions and individual interviews, students learn to know themselves better, manage their stress, and make informed choices for their future.

At the end of the year, the students take on a solidarity challenge in service of the mission. in the Philippines!



Let me tell you

First, there was the sale of jewelry made by the girls from the School of Life in the Philippines. They prepared the stalls, approached their classmates in the courtyard, and even their teachers. The funds raised are donated to ACAY Philippines for the education of girls.

It wasn't an easy task, due to the SEGPA class which can sometimes be difficult to bear. The cause motivated them to push themselves for others. At first, when the project was presented, some were resistant, saying they wouldn't get involved.

And yet...

When the time for the challenge arrived, everyone was there. Many went above and beyond, an atmosphere of solidarity took hold, and the teams united around a common goal: to surpass themselves, to win, to help young girls in the Philippines!

They played along. All of them! They were proud, and so were we. The icing on the cake? The end-of-year presentation! A truly special moment. Some students spoke in front of everyone. There was emotion, glances that said thank you without words, speeches full of sincerity. And tears were never far away.

And the good news? In 2025, 90% of the students obtained their Brevet diploma, and 100% chose a course of study to continue their education.

"The ACAY association works with the 9th grade class every week. Through numerous activities, ACAY helps students learn to better understand themselves, manage their emotions, and participate in actions that benefit others. To focus on prevention, our students were made aware of the dangers of drug trafficking in Marseille. A huge thank you to the facilitators who, throughout the year, carry out these activities with professionalism and immense kindness." -Nadia Catalan, Third Grade Head Teacher

ACAY News

ACAY Philippines



The School of Life celebrated its 25th Anniversary!

A grand celebration organized with the presence of alumni, enriched by their inspiring testimonies



ACAY Philippines has become a member of the **France-Philippines Chamber of Commerce and Industry**, a strong and promising recognition in the pursuit of our actions!



ACAY France

A Rich Back-to-School Season New Features for ACAY France

We are happy to welcome back Laurent Thorigné, our director, who returned in July after a sabbatical year.

The ACAY France welcomed their new staff:

- **Ombeline Salomez**, new fundraising manager
- **Emma Delanoë**, the new head of communications and prevention officer

The team is full of energy and ready to take on the challenges of this new year!

A big thank you to Victoire who has contributed so much to ACAY for three years. All the best for your future!



This summer, 2 sporting challenges were carried out with 39 minors in a detention center

The young people pushed themselves to the limit in sporting events to raise funds to distribute food baskets to families in the Philippines, who were very motivated by the cause! An action that was made possible thanks to our financial partners!

Testimony of Theresa*

from the School of Life

My name is Theresa, I'm 21 years old, and I'm from the Philippines. I'm the eighth of ten children. I'm also the mother of a seven-year-old boy.

Ever since I was a child, I've always loved asking questions, especially of my mother. But the only answer I ever received was silence.

Silence can be the most devastating sound when it comes from the person you love. My father was shot and killed on his birthday when I was six. He was known for being violent at home and in our neighborhood. His death surprised no one.

My mother met my stepfather and moved in with him. My stepfather started abusing me when I was 11, but I remained silent.

«I felt pain, weakness, and despair »

I didn't tell anyone out of fear. One day, thanks to my brothers and sisters, I left that small town for Manila. After a month, I felt pain, weakness, and despair. I discovered the reason for my illness. At the age of 13, I was six months pregnant. In June 2016, I gave birth to a beautiful, healthy baby boy. I was touched by what my sister did for me. She held him close and kissed him like a mother.

For my part, I was disoriented, lost, and numb. I let my sister take charge. I went back to school and started reconnecting with my friends and family.

In 2018, one of my brothers suggested I join ACAY. There, I found a family I felt safe with. I was made safe and loved. Instead of living day to day, I learned at ACAY to develop an action plan and to make my own decisions in life.

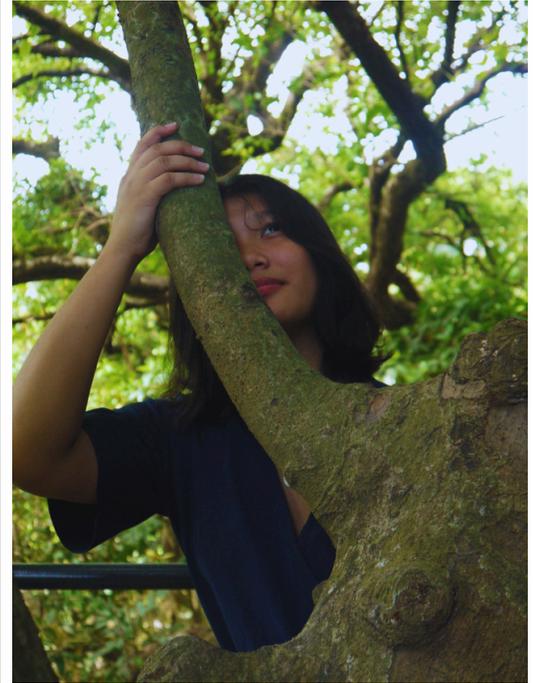
After four years at the School of Life, I graduated with confidence and was able to reintegrate into society with assurance.

« It's over, I'm free! »

Today, I won my case against my abuser. My heart felt lighter, my tears stopped flowing, and I realized this: it's over, I'm free!

Today I have reconnected with my mother, I accept my son as my own and I kiss him as much as he wants. I decided to break the cycle of silence I suffered during my childhood and answer him honestly every time he asks a question. Today, I'm working towards a social work degree so I can help more young people who have experienced what I've been through

**The first name has been changed*



Let's continue together to transform the lives of our youth!