



April 2019

NEWSLETTER



A second
chance for
youth at risk

EDITORIAL

The Philippines have been in turmoil for the past few weeks. In 2006 the RA9344 law established the age of penal responsibility at 15 instead of 9 years old. Considered by the Non-Government Associations and those working for the Rights of the Child as a victory, this law excluded the detention of children under the age of 15. Now the RA9344 is being severely questioned by the Filipino government. Last month the government decided to return to the of 9 years old!

The terminology has been changed: the government speaks of rehabilitation rather than detention but concretely it is the same thing: promiscuity, inadequate rooms in space and number, limited budget, a lack of professional workers to accompany the children towards reinsertion.

However, under immediate pressure from the Media, different Associations and the Church, they quickly revised and the age was rapidly changed to 12 years old. The project of this law is still under revision at the time of the printing of this Newsletter.

In reality, RA9344 was never fully applied. The budgets and the investment in terms of building of establishments and centers for receiving the youth were not implemented. The only professionals involved in the care of these youth are Social Workers already in short supply and overburdened in their jobs.

ACAY has been contacted many times in order to influence the government with the testimonies of our past youth. A number of the old boys have been interviewed by different media, attended conferences about the subject to answer questions, to share their life experiences and about the pedagogical dynamic that has helped them change their lives. ACAY took a stand to ask that the RA9344 law be implemented to the fullest before launching into a dramatic change that would completely upset the daily life of the few existing centers already difficult to manage.

If for a youth aged 15 – 18 detention could be a time of self-awareness leading to a radical change of life, it would never be so for a child of 9 nor for a child of 12.

de l'après de jour



CONTENTS

In this newsletter you will find the testimonies of youth we accompany in Marseille, information about the lowering of the penal age of responsibility of minors in the Philippines, news about Sr Laetitia and Julie-An's trip to France and Switzerland as well as details about the "Halo Box" - a project of a former volunteer. Read also about how ACAY is working closer than ever before with different associations.

Youth in Marseille, are



From left to right: Yanis, Niño, Sister Sophie de Jésus, Dominique Boul'ch (Coordinator of ACAY events in Brittany) and Fabienne Duhamel (from St Jean à Guidel High School)

ACAY in Marseille has celebrated their 4th anniversary! Four years during which we had to take time to get to know the French youth in their specific context - whether they be at risk of dropping out of school or in prison. Whatever their circumstance we needed to progressively understand their chaotic pasts and the dynamics which led them to a situation of failure! We are only at the beginning and still have a long way to go. However we are beginning to see the first fruits of the work of accompaniment we have made with the first youth we met in detention three or four years ago. Formed and accompanied by our group up to now, they are reintegrating into society. We are happy to present to you these two testimonies full of hope.

And as Alfred of Vigny said: "Hope is the greatest of our follies." And in Marseille as in the Philippines, it is really folly.



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My name is Yanis. I live in the suburbs of Marseille. As you know, life is not easy in the suburbs. The conditions are such that it is easy to go off the rails: I started doing some stupid things. I ended up in prison where I met the Association ACAY. They are fantastic people. They helped me to see that my life was not over and that I could take a better path once I was released. As time went by I met youth from the Philippines who, like me, had also been in prison and who are now successful.

We exchanged letters and little by little got to know each other, to discover each other and to learn from each other. But I thought that it was over for me, that I would get out and return to my life in the streets. When I was released, I kept in touch with Laurent from ACAY. We went on trips to the cliffs and creeks with the youth of the Philippines to show them the beauty of Marseille. The story that touched me the most was that of Niño who took hold of his life and thanks to the Association ACAY was able to find a job. Last November, Niño, Laurent and Sr Sophie de Jésus came to pick me up to take me with them to the High Schools in Brittany. We went to share with the students what we have been through and leave them with this message: even if there seems no way out of the mess you are in, keep hoping and listen to the right people!

At first when I spoke to the kids at the High Schools, it was weird, I felt ashamed. It was my first time speaking in front of so many people but I soon relaxed. It actually was great to be able share what I have been through and leave them with a message. I was proud of myself. Now I live with my aunt far from Marseille and I am rebuilding my life.

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getting back up !

“What a strange journey !

My name is Idrisse. I am a youth who grew up in the suburbs and who has a typical past of a delinquent. I was in the prison for minors before being transferred to the adults prison. When we are young, we need to feel the love of others and to be constantly surrounded to feel alive. I grew up in a big family and my parents didn't always have time to show their love for all the children. I think that is why I fell into evil because I needed a lot of compassion. I realize with experience that one of the first things to teach the younger ones is patience; it is one of the key words to prevent a journey like the one I have been through. I have just had four years in prison and after the first year I realized that if I wanted to get out a better person that I shouldn't waste my time. I began a therapy for cannabis addiction with a psychologist. Both prison and cannabis cut you off from the world. This was what helped to start working on myself to become better. I realized that prison could be a useful time of preparation for reintegration into the world, to prevent me making the same mistakes because regret weighs heavily in the heart. In 2016, I met Laurent, the Director of the ACAY program. For one year whilst in detention, I worked with the Association ACAY on handling my frustration, my anger and controlling my emotions.

Life is beautiful but the suburbs veil our eyes preventing us from seeing further afield. I could have been the person that all the young dealers dream of being because with all my bad friends I had many suppliers of “weed” meaning easy money whenever I wanted it. Like all youth in detention I love adrenaline, I think now that to succeed in life along a good path is a much bigger challenge than to be a drug lord. There is no price to living peacefully rather than continually asking yourself when will they kill me or when will the police arrest me? Freedom is delightful. Because of all I've been through, I am trying to share my knowledge with the other delinquent youth accompanied by ACAY. I have so much to share with them to help them to understand the reality of life and that the road they want to take is a dead end road.



Idrisse (French) and Faisal (Filipino, former beneficiary) in Marseille

Presently, I haven't taken cannabis for three years. I'm really proud of this! This has freed me. During the past three years in prison, I have realized that there are so many things that I have messed up and that I never took the hand that so many people have stretched out to me. I'm working as a gardener in city parks. Little by little I'm trying to plot out a path for myself and to go where the wind is taking me but always for good. I'm also trying to get my driver's license and to rebuild my relationship with my parents.

If I had a message to give to parents it would be take time to be with your kids, for example ask them how their day went at school. I remember that sometimes I would get home in the evening and things had not gone well and I'd shut myself away in my room. Often the problems start there and you must take time with them.

Life is a challenge and every passing day is a test! When you go to sleep at night knowing that you passed the test; that you didn't smoke a joint, or a cigarette, that you didn't drink a drop of alcohol, you can say to yourself: you made it!

The youth - Ambassadors of ACAY !

If ACAY gives a second chance for at risk youth, we also open horizons for other groups who can join in this dynamic of self-awareness and understanding of one's capacities and potential. At the beginning of this year, ACAY Marseille began a partnership with the Notre Dame of France High School in Marseille. The senior classes motivated admirable solidarity from the 1000 students of the establishment. They started up initiatives to introduce the younger students and their parents to the pedagogical approach of ACAY and the possibility of a second chance in life.

These were the activities the older students

organized for the benefit of ACAY: a Cross-Country run for the younger students, a pizza stand and a bowl of rice in place of a full meal as well as a conference for parents by Dr Claire Tesson on the theme of addiction. The students were all very motivated and as Marie-Alix, one of the senior students said: “I was very happy to be able to give my time for the Association with such a noble purpose. I took my role very much to heart: I presented ACAY to the younger students and I was able to give them the message that I had also received. Helping others helps us to build our own lives and gives meaning to our faith.” Many thanks to Mrs. Guiomar and the teachers of Notre Dame of France who were involved in these activities.

CONFERENCE

par le docteur Claire Tesson
médecin en addictologie

Jeudi 14 mars
de 20h à 22h

Ecrans, jeux vidéo, cigarette, cannabis, alcool...

**Les addictions : une réalité,
comment aider ?**



suivi de
Témoignages

par l'association ACAY aux Philippines



ACAY stands for: No to Lowering the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility

ACAY deals mostly with adolescent Children In Conflict with the Law (CICL). We have realized over the years that the offense is not only the issue, but that crime involves the community and the family as well. If we still lack the whole package of a complete rehabilitation program for CICL, then it is the CICL that should be addressed and not lowering the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility.



Sister Laetitia, Julie An and the ACAY team during a conference



Sister Laetitia, Julie An and the ACAY team at the offices of AMADE Mondiale in Monaco

Sr. Laetitia and Julie An in France and in Switzerland

Sr Laetitia and Julie An, a young Filipino graduate from the School of Life were in Marseille, France and in Jonshwil Switzerland, from the 5th to the 19th of March. They inspired more than 400 youth from Marseille in schools and in the prisons.

Julie An is a living witness that the splendor of life cannot be stifled even by numerous layers of suffering. Her testimony was full of courage and resilience shining out hope to all she met. Hope has henceforth taken root also in the hearts of all those she was able to speak with. She shines because she is well rooted.

Book your 'Halo Box'

Dear readers,

It's a great joy for me to be part of this ACAY Newsletter! In fact I was fortunate enough to have worked with the Association for a whole year between 2014 - 2015. I received so much during that year and that is why, Maxence and I, the founders of 'Halo Box', had it on our hearts to introduce Sr Sophie de Jésus and to make all our subscribers aware of the wonderful work of ACAY!

But, what is 'Halo Box'?

It is a small micro-finance business started 9 months ago by two people passionate about reading and adventure who want to support all that is written and share beautiful and inspiring life experiences particularly those of Christians.

Concretely: monthly our subscribers will receive a box full of surprises that will nourish their body, soul and spirit. The box will always include an inspiring book, a product from a Monastery which is sometimes edible (mmm) as well as bonus gifts.



The box for April will honor: ACAY as well as the book of Sr Sophie de Jésus: "Defying Chaos". If you haven't yet read the book, it is a perfect time to get it. (Our box is only slightly more expensive than the book alone). If you are touched by ACAY and the work they do, you may want to order the box and send it to a friend thus you would be doing a doubly good thing!

You can order the box directly from our site:
<https://www.aureolebox.fr/la-box-du-mois/>

You could also contact Maxence and make an order through him:
maxence@aureolebox.fr



With Halo,
Ephrem and the Halo Team

School of Life Anniversary

Last January 13, 2019, we celebrated the 19th Anniversary of the School of Life. Our chosen theme was "Roots to Grow, Wings to Fly".

During this festive day, we saw so many different faces of former beneficiaries among us with the present young women of SOL. Some families, friends and guests also came to celebrate with us.

What struck me the most was the mirroring of how the girls journeyed in the program and then how they are able to live their lives today as young professionals or mothers despite the difficulties they had to conquer. They managed to face the challenges with the help of the staff and the sisters who have never failed to support them.

As part of my testimony I shared that the learning I get from the classroom is knowledge



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THE LEARNING I GOT FROM CLASSROOM IS KNOWLEDGE BUT THE LEARNING I GET FROM SCHOOL OF LIFE IS ABILITY. IT IS NOT ABOUT THE THEORY BUT IT IS ABOUT PRACTICAL LIVING.

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but the learning I get from School of Life is ability. It is not about the theory but it is about practical living. The School of Life is a training ground enveloped with a family spirit, where you are surrounded by people who will not criticize you, instead they support you, and understand your ups and downs and train you.

Another girl shared about her life outside the School of Life as a professional: how she learned to face the realities of life in society and in the professional world; how she applied all the insights of the training she received while being in SOL. She expressed how it has been such a huge help for her present daily life.

What was special this year was the decision to create the 'Alumni Group' in view of the upcoming 20th Anniversary of SOL. This will be a time where altogether we will celebrate the victory of life in our lives!



Julie An | School of Life Beneficiary



A RACE IN THE CORDILLERA

by Luigi | Children of Mekong Volunteer in ACAY

It was a unique experience for 5 ACAY youth to participate in a 10K race in the mountain range of Cordillera, Philippines. They were prepared and trained by our volunteer, Luigi whose idea it was to have the youth participate in this type of event.

All the hard work of preparation paid off when all 5 youth together with Luigi and Lia (both Children of Mekong volunteers with ACAY) successfully finished the 10K race. The courage, determination and fulfillment could be seen on the faces of our youth as they approached the finish line one by one. We achieved our goal of finishing the race and even exceeded it when all of the youth ranked in the first 30 out of 74 runners, and 1 of them ranked 3rd place in the women's division.

Perseverance, discovering oneself and surpassing one's expectations are values that are practiced and achieved by our youth in ACAY through such sporting events.



THE ACCREDITATION OF SECOND CHANCE PROGRAM

The Second Chance Program was proud to achieve the second level of accreditation by the Department of Social Welfare and Development. Level II indicates excellence in the services offered to the youth.



A GALA FOR ACAY I

The Union of France Abroad (L'UFE) of Manila organized its 16th Gala for the benefit of ACAY on March 16th. Honored by the presence of Mr. Nicolas Galey, the Ambassador of France to the Philippines and his spouse Camélia the guests discovered the work of ACAY by way of films and the speech of Sr Sophie de Jésus and their mission for the youth to become ambassadors of the folly of hope in this world. A huge thank you to Marine and the other organizers who worked so hard for the success of this event.



SHARING OF EXPERTISE

The Supreme Court of the Philippines invited Sr Sophie de Jésus to share her mission experience with the staff of the Family Courts who work with minors. This round table discussion was an opportunity for her to share the pedagogical approaches of ACAY and the pertinence of the methods of intervention developed over the past 21 years. One of the Judges also asked ACAY to participate in the formation of Social Workers who work with youth in conflict with the law.

MAKE A DONATION

You can make a single donation or commit to a monthly bank transfer, both to the amount of your choice.

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☐ I want to give a one-time donation of :

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For more details regarding donations, or if you wish to contact our mission, visit our website www.acaymission.com and go to "TAKE ACTION"

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