



November 2019

NEWSLETTER



A second
chance for
youth at risk

EDITORIAL

In various contexts over recent years, more and more have shared with me the apparent meaninglessness or even nonsense in which they feel plunged... And it affects all social classes. I listen and hear muted appeals to "give us the meaning of what we are going through, the meaning of my life".

The weariness of hope of which Pope Francis speaks seems to have thrown its cloak over a multitude: "We can't see anymore. We don't understand anymore. We don't want to fight or get up anymore."

Does your faith sing of life upon seeing the sadness of this world?

Only faith can sing the song of life when it sees the sadness of this world.

And this is at the heart of our mission in ACAY: to identify all those who, for a time, no longer seem to see the meaning of what is happening to them. "Traverse my daughter, traverse..." said Christiane Singer. That's what these years of mission have taught me: to traverse... Traverse appearances, traverse with courage, traverse staying on track and without letting go... This traversing is what we have made with the multitude of young people who have recovered after many falls and painful experiences.

It was a great joy for all our Filipino teams to welcome Laurent and Idrisse, our first young man from Marseille who came to testify about his journey. France has been helping the Philippines for so many years. The young Filipinos have recovered. Each year, several young Filipinos come to France to give their testimonies, awakening the desire of young French people to begin their own journey of change. Idrisse is one of them. He came to the Philippines for two weeks to testify to this. The cycle has gone full circle.

As I contemplated this long work of 22 years of mission and its influence, I came to understand something. The Virgin Mary has been a mother to Christ twice: in Bethlehem and in Cana. If she gave her life to Christ in the manger, she gave birth to his "mission" during the first miracle in Cana. This is our life, it is complete only when we are "born" to our own mission on this earth. This is like a second birth. Mary "hastened" the time when Christ entered into the fulfillment of his mission.

May the Virgin gives us the grace to help all those who need it in this second "birth", in this "being born" to the mission that is theirs... and that is unique. So even if sadness will be part of this journey, faith will sing of Life in its fullness.

St. Joseph de Jony



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you will find:

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- A brief overview of the highlights experienced by the youth in the Philippines in recent months

A graduate from ACAY Marseille



Idrisse meeting children during the family visits

Since the beginning of ACAY in Marseille, young Filipinos who graduated from our programs have come to testify and share with minors in detention in order to create an impact in their lives. Five years later, it is now young people from Marseille in the process of their reconstruction who wish to meet the young people in the Philippines and give their testimonies. Here is the experience of the first of them.

Idrisse chose to spend his two-week vacation in ACAY Philippines. After several stints in juvenile prison from the age of 13, he had the "trigger" to change his life during his last detention with adults in Les Baumettes where we met him. Idrisse is now 24 years old. He works for the Marseille City Council. This summer, he wanted to be immersed in the heart of ACAY's missions to share his "strange journey" as he likes to call it with the young Filipinos. Here is his account of his journey...

As soon as I landed in Manila, the ACAY team welcomed me. It was a pleasure to get to know the members of the Association and to share with them about different things. From the first days, we went to visit some young people accompanied by ACAY who live in the slums. It was a shock and a surprise for me to see where these young people live. At the time, I thought to myself, "This is not normal. What could be more logical than for these young people to end up in prison or have the status of delinquents when you see how difficult their lives are. In France, despite the opportunity we have in relation to their living conditions, it only takes a moment when we lack something for us to start committing crimes. So they who live in constant need of everything... From that first day, I began to question myself about us young people in France, yet it was only the beginning of my stay.

The next day, I visited an adult prison. I came out of there with a lot of anger and pain to see the place where the prisoners live, the overcrowding, the poor hygiene conditions and the smell of the odours. There were more than 3400 inmates for a capacity of 600 places. Despite this anger, I was able to talk to the inmates and I felt that it was beneficial for everyone. Despite the kilometres that separate us, we understood each other and sometimes we had the same experiences. I was also able to visit the juvenile prisons where ACAY is working.



Idrisse facing the shantytowns of Manila

The two detention centres are overcrowded but the contrast between the two is striking. I do not understand why prison officials do not do more to help young people. I really enjoyed the meeting with the minors in detention where I gave my testimony. I saw the young people interested and attentive to my story. I saw myself in them some years earlier, as a prisoner trying to take as much advice as possible from a person who made a success of his life after having been through the same thing. That same day, we had lunch with the New Zealand ambassador who also shared with us his life story.

visits ACAY Philippines

Over the weekend, for four days, ACAY staff took out fifteen young people I had met at the juvenile prison on a temporary release. I had brought a football with me to try to do some football with the young people and to introduce them to this sport that excites me so much. It must be said that in the Philippines, the national sport is basketball and they know very little about football. It was successful because they loved it. I was pleased to have had them spend their energy on jogging and football. Today, I am trying to rebuild myself and I lack confidence in my career. On that day, coaching the young people and seeing that they were listening gave me self-confidence and made me want to give more to the young people. I would really like to be a coach, be an educator, to help young people. There were also girls from the School of Life who were celebrating their 18th birthday in a very beautiful way. It was a very nice time even though I was ashamed when I danced because one of the girls asked me to be her partner in this celebration which included a waltz. The most overwhelming time for me was when the team organized an exchange between the former beneficiaries of ACAY's Second Chance program who are now being reintegrated (including me) and the young people still in detention. It is thanks to times like these that any troubled youth has a chance to regain control of their lives because I saw in their eyes and their focus that they were looking for a "cure" to get out of their situation. Finally, the greatest sadness I felt was when we went to visit young people who were in a rehabilitation centre in the Tanay province. One of them has been there for almost 10 years and is still awaiting a verdict. They were in their twenties and I couldn't put myself in their shoes and understand how they felt when faced with such a slow pace of justice. But we shared a lot and gave each other courage.

ON THAT DAY, TEACHING YOUNG PEOPLE AND SEEING THAT THEY WERE LISTENING GAVE ME BACK MY SELF-CONFIDENCE AND MADE ME WANT TO GIVE MYSELF MORE

Before spending a few days on the island of Bohol to finish my stay, I spent a night in the business district at Thibaut's the director of L'Oréal in the Philippines. Once again, it made me realize that whatever one's social background, the success of our life is in humanity and being turned towards others. Before returning to France, the time in Bohol was a time to relax. Arman, a Filipino graduate of the Second Chance program who lives on this island with his family, was our guide for 3 days. I had already met him in Marseille when he came last April. We had done a hike in the rocky creeks and this time it was his turn to show us the beauty of the Philippines.

I realized during this stay that you always have to fight and I received a lesson in courage. The Filipinos have an extraordinary mental strength to stay strong even in difficult times. They are living in poverty, they manage to live, to open up, whereas in France, we are very withdrawn and even I who am like that, seeing them, I felt this thing of detaching myself, of revealing myself, of becoming more alive! Basically, I discovered here in the Philippines that I am a joyful person, but life in Marseille makes us tense and stressed.

But there I let go, I was freed of a burden. The Filipinos also taught me modesty. When I feel the urge to be capricious, because everyone has whims, only to think about what I've seen, where some people live, it helps me to step back and be modest. I cannot really describe everything about my stay and my feelings in a few sentences. But I would like to say that the association ACAY, which trains young people from precarious families, made me discover how, through a very human approach, we can help any young person to get back on their feet and believe in change.

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK ALL THE FILIPINOS THAT I MET FOR THEIR KINDNESS AND THEIR HOSPITALITY IN THIS COUNTRY: "YOU ARE GREAT AND STAY THE SAME!"



Idrisse sharing with inmates in an adult prison



The ACAY team with Idrisse and the New Zealand Ambassador in the presence of the Deputy Mayor of Quezon City

New Directors for our Programs !

Everyone who has been in ACAY will tell you: change is a part of the way ACAY works. Always requiring flexibility and always full of vitality! We are therefore pleased to introduce our new Program Directors!

Second Chance Program Director

Marlou Simangon, RSW



My adventure with ACAY began on July 22, 2011. I was a social worker for the beneficiaries of the reintegration program called After Care of the Second Chance Program. ACAY always encourages the development and fruitfulness of everyone's skills, and I was then entrusted with the management of the Life School programme for five years.

Witnessing the development of all these young people who, despite the ups and downs of their lives, are getting up and fighting to restore them, has brought me pride. It also gave me the self-confidence to accomplish the task assigned to me.

Today, I have been given a new opportunity to grow and share my knowledge with others: here I am back in the program that welcomed me, the Second Chance, this time to take over as its Director.

The experiences I have had in ACAY represent a major contribution to my personal development. The effort made is greatly rewarded and I am deeply grateful. I do not hide from you my eagerness to see how I will evolve this time in order to feed the flame of the mission.

I joined the mission in 2014. It was first of all within the School of Life that I devoted my time and expertise to the sub-programme called "Toward Self Sustainability". This step prepares the girls for their reintegration into society. After 4 years, I was offered the challenge of launching and managing the brand new ACAY Innovation Hub. This Innovation Hub capitalizes on all ACAY's innovations and brings together three important areas, namely Partnerships, Communication, and Resource & Development.

Our role is to constantly update the quality of ACAY's interventions and tools and make them accessible within our structures and to other partners who may wish to benefit from them.

Working for ACAY has not only helped me to grow professionally; on the contrary it is on a personal level that I have gained the most. Five years of working in ACAY have made me realize many things. One of the most sensational is the importance of knowing yourself first before you can help others. Being a daily witness of the transformations in the lives of young people has also pushed me to enter into this same inner process. It is the most valuable experience and the one I will keep with me wherever I go. I now realize that the ACAY experience as a whole has transformed the maps of my life; I learned about the beauty and freedom that comes with stepping outside my comfort zone. ACAY taught me how to create a harmonious balance between professionalism and compassion. Finally, I discovered the importance of leadership when working with young people.

As my adventure at ACAY continues, I dream of seeing more and more lives transformed. I also dream of the flourishing of the Innovation Hub, which would make it an avant-garde actor in the evolution of the Philippine social landscape.

Innovation Hub Director

Ma. Lourraine Alerta



School of Life Program Director

Alma Sandra Mijares-Gabuni



After years in the NGO community, I can say that ACAY is one of the most competent NGOs to restore and strengthen the rights of women and youth in the Philippines. As the new Director of the School of Life, my daily work consists in supervising the effective conduct of the various sub-programmes and ensuring that their objectives are achieved. However, our daily life in the School of Life does not stop at management and administration. Far from it!

Our inventiveness is constantly being tested by these girls to meet their needs. Our scope of action is individualized. My goal is to allow them to find a space in the School of Life where they can develop all their abilities and talents; I deeply believe that life is a long and constant transformation. Rebuilding the lives of girls inevitably leads me to rethink my own strengths but also weaknesses and potentialities.

While I am still new to ACAY and my adventure with the organization has yet to be written, I have already learned a lot. The mission has already taken me largely out of my comfort zone and changed my way of thinking. Having to constantly evolve can be uncomfortable, but it has opened my eyes to this dynamic that encourages initiative and the creation of new solutions to problems that arise.

Executive Director Assistant

Yvonne Dantogan-Gutierrez

I am Yvonne Dantogan-Gutierrez. I have been working for ACAY since 2004. These fifteen years have been a journey of self-discovery, personal development and professional enrichment. I have always said that what I am now is the result of the process I followed as a social worker and then as a Program Director. Having met my husband in ACAY, we married and have a little girl.

In 2016, I decided to leave ACAY to work in the Government. I lasted nine months. Certainly I was promoted to a position of responsibility but I no longer saw the dimension of growth of my being, as much in my analytical skills as in my decision-making. So I came back in 2017 and launched the Second Chance program in the phase of its new concept more oriented towards coaching.

Today I am entering a new phase of my career by becoming Assistant Director. I work alongside Sr Sophie de Jésus, developing innovation and supervision of 5S operating software. I take a look at the concrete aspects of the mission by giving several training courses to young people, such as "Seeking Safety", "ART (Aggression Replacement Trainings) or other courses.



Family Program Director

Jonathan Rabal

I started my adventure in ACAY in 2015. Newly mandated to lead the Family Program, in addition to accompanying young people in the reintegration program, I am delighted to implement this program for the parents of our young people, embarking them with us in interventions that will change the course of their lives.

A young person who transforms himself will impact his whole family. ACAY has understood this and has set up this program to help them as well to rebuild themselves.

My experience with ACAY has helped me to grow. All aspects of my life have been impacted: human, professional and spiritual... Seeing so many young people and their families transformed, growing, blossoming over the past four years fills me with hope and enthusiasm for the years to come.





THE NEW ZEALAND AMBASSADOR IS COMMITTING HIMSELF FOR OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

Sr. Rachel Myriam Luxford

Having met for the first time in the French Ambassador's residence, we had the pleasure of welcoming New Zealand's Ambassador to the Philippines, Mr. David Strachen, on August 22nd. It was a very enriching meeting in our home at the School of Life where the Ambassador discovered our programs and met our beneficiaries. He passed on part of his own story to us and emphasized that despite a broken past, it is possible to have a very promising future.

In the afternoon of the same day, Mr. David Strachen joined ACAY for a meeting with the young boys in detention. He also met Idrisse, the first ACAY youth from Marseille to come to the Philippines to share his testimony with the young people of the centre. This time of sharing has opened up new horizons of collaboration and partnership... At the Ambassador's request, one of the girls from the School of Life was selected for an entrepreneurship training with SPARK Philippines Foundation with a capital to start her own business afterwards... ACAY is delighted with this new partnership with the New Zealand Embassy!

“HIKING AND BONDING TIME

I very much enjoyed the adventure with ACAY family while we were walking up the mountain. I felt tired in the beginning but seeing the beauty of nature and the happiness of being surrounded with this family where I felt belong, it was all worth it. The feeling on top of the mountain was so peaceful and relaxing, I am just so happy and thankful to have had this experience.

- Cathleen SOL beneficiary ”



LEGAL COURT EXPOSURE

The School of Life beneficiaries were recently welcomed by Judge Joselito Vibandor to give them an experience to be in an actual court. They were given a chance to ask questions about family laws and their own rights for them to be empowered and well-informed about the process of legal proceedings. The aim was to make them comfortable in attending court hearings and dealing with court people.

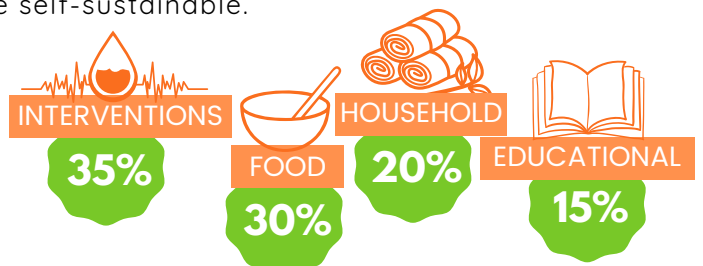
18th BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

In the Philippines, turning 18 is a great and festive occasion. It's about celebrating the beginning of adult life. Offering this unique event to young girls is like offering them an unforgettable experience. The former girls of the School of Life joined forces to cover part of the expenses of this event. Family and friends came to be with them. All the ACAY teams have turned this stage of their young lives into a stage that has led them to see their lives in a new way.

MAKE A DONATION

Your generous gifts make it possible to continue our mission. With your continuous support, we can help transform the lives of more youth who have been exposed to traumatic experiences by helping them to recover and become self-sustainable.

$$1 \text{ expenses} \times 1 \text{ month} = \text{€200 or P10,000}$$



YOU CAN MAKE A SINGLE DONATION OR COMMIT TO A MONTHLY BANK TRANSFER.

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

