Share An Opportunity
PHILIPPINES

Annual Report 2021-2022

WITH .US

About the theme: WITH US

The phrase 'with us' comes from the statement God is with us.

It is an affirmation of our experience of God's presence in our lives, in our communities, in our nation, and in the world. He was certainly present in the turmoil and the thresholds we all went through. Against the backdrop of global economic and health crises, wars and conflicts, of natural calamities, He made his presence known and felt in various ways and means.

In this Annual Report, Share An Opportunity Philippines wishes to highlight how God's abiding presence is woven in this year's journey. The milestones and stories of staff, child partners, families, and communities gathered in this report are a testament to this. Despite difficulties and limitations, SAO was able to carry on with the work of nurturing children, strengthening families, and transforming communities because God is present; working in and through various people and groups as well as circumstances and situations to bring about positive change in the places where SAO serves.

'With us' is also an expression of hope and confidence.
The challenge and perils that await us remain great. As they say, we are not totally out of the pandemic yet. At the international and national levels, a lot of things are volatile, temporary, and uncertain. SAO as an organization is in a precarious position. In all these, SAO expresses its profound faith and hope in God who promised to be constantly present in the years ahead.

Lastly, this expression, 'with us' echoes a sincere invitation, an ardent appeal for you and others to journey with SAO in the new things God is birthing. Come. Join us. Be with us.

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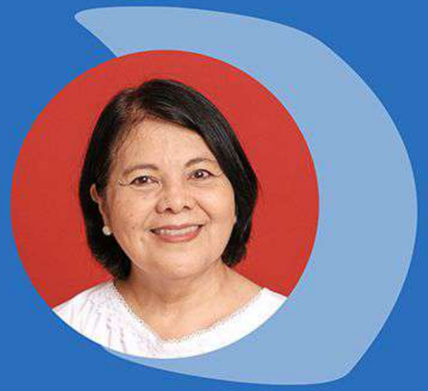
MESSAGE
from the CEO



"We will then press on, one faithful step at a time.

Dear Friends,

Another year completed. Another year of experiencing God's faithfulness.

The theme for FY 2022 was "With Us" - short for God is with us. We decided to intentionally declare and claim God's presence in our journey as He promised in Scriptures to remind ourselves especially when the going gets really tough. It was also an invitation for you and other people to journey with us in the new thing that God was birthing in our midst.

We tried to capture the objective for the next five years starting FY 2021 in three phrases: Prepare SAO. Present SAO. And Position SAO.

Prepare SAO. To make SAO ready for accreditations and partnerships, we crafted needed policy manuals and reviewed existing ones. The final version the *Diversity, Gender and Social Inclusion Statement; Fund Raising Policy Manual; Sexual Exploitation, Abuse & Harassment Allegation Management Procedure and the Corporate Governance Manual* are still being reviewed by the Board. The *Program Operations Manual* and the *Child Safeguarding Manual* which went through significant revisions still have to be completed. We still have some grounds to cover but we hope to complete everything in time for the upcoming DSWD accreditation and hopefully, we could also apply for the renewal of our PCNC certification.

Present SAO. To present SAO to the public and engage it by establishing a functional fundraising unit.
Apart from reviving our social media presence through regular Facebook and Instagram posts, we also started the monthly e-newsletter. Though we have increased the number of followers and 'likes' to our posts, we were not able to reach the target number of e-newsletter subscribers. Nonetheless, we have new partners such as the Center for Social Concern and Action of De La Salle University and VolNet.

Position SAO. To position SAO as a credible, trustworthy partner by achieving expected current project targets and finishing well. We implemented three (3) projects in FY 2021-22 - the **Makabata Program** which we implemented in all 5 ministry areas; **CAPIN** or Child Abuse Prevention Intervention Network and **Project Champ** or Championing Community Resilience through Children/Youth and Civil Society Engagement and Participation with Government in Typhoon Haiyan Affected Communities of Banate, Iloilo. Most of the pages of this report will provide you glimpses and highlights of our work on child safeguarding and inclusion and its initial impact to the community partners in Concepcion, Lemery and San Dionisio and Banate in Iloilo. And since we have wrapped up the 10-year Makabata Program, this issue will include a gist of its post project evaluation.

This annual report is the over "12 basketfuls of leftovers" from the 5 loaves and 2 fishes (Luke 9:10-17) we received from the God of Amazing Grace. God was in all these. God was with us.

We will then press on, one faithful step at a time.

LUKE 9:10-17

10 When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done.
Then he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town
called Bethsaida, 11 but the crowds learned about it and followed him. He
welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and
healed those who needed healing.

12 Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to him and said, "Send the crowd
away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find
food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here."

13 He replied, "You give them something to eat."

They answered, "We have only five loaves of bread and two fish—unless
we go and buy food for all this crowd." 14 (About five thousand men were
there.)

But he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty
each." 15 The disciples did so, and everyone sat down. 16 Taking the five
loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and
broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to distribute to the
people. 17 They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up
twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.

MESSAGE FROM *the BOT Chairperson*

> *"God is able to do immeasurably more than all we could ask or imagine..."*

"Nurturing Children, Strengthening Families, Transforming Communities" – encapsulates the aspiration of the SAO PH Board of Trustees and Corporation Members for the coming five years. In spite of the tsunami-like challenges brought about by the completion of the MAKABATA Program, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the national and global economic crisis, SAO PH BOT chose to trust God to sustain His ministry in Share An Opportunity. We remember God's goodness and faithfulness to SAO PH over the past twenty-five years so we choose to press on and continue the ministry of SAO PH in the years to come albeit on a smaller scale than before. We trust that the same God who was present for the past 25 years, is still today, and will be present in the years ahead.

To those who share SAO's aspirations and hope, I challenge you to journey with us. To surmount the financial crisis SAO PH is facing now, the Board of Trustees thru the Transition Management Team, decided to establish a Fundraising & Resource Mobilization Team tasked to implement a three-year Fundraising Plan. We enjoin all members of the Board of Trustees and the SAO General Assembly to be involved in sharing at least ten (10) names and email addresses of your friends and family members who are potential donors to the ministry of SAO PH. The Fundraising Team is also aggressively doing grant-seeking activities with local and international donor agencies and foundations. All these we do in faith that it is God who ultimately provides, sustains, and prospers.

We choose to continue to run the race and ministry that God has given to SAO PH always declaring that "God is able to do immeasurably more than all we could ask or imagine . . ."

AREAS OF OPERATION

AS OF JUNE 2022 HAS REACHED

11,446	Total number of direct beneficiaries
4,324	Total number households
322	Organized groups
144	Volunteers trained

SOURCE: 2020 CENSUS, PHILIPPINE STATISTICS AUTHORITY

2022 IMPACT NUMBERS

Share An Opportunity Philippines has been on the threshold of many transitions this fiscal year. Almost two years into the pandemic characterized by lockdowns and standstill, SAO witnessed the easing of pandemic-related restrictions, the slow and careful opening of domestic and international borders, and the reinvigoration of economic activities. While internally, SAO went through various organizational changes and the closing of a flagship program. All these require re-calibration, re-orientation, as well as letting go.

Thankfully, SAO continues to endure and carry on by the grace of God. SAO, together with its partner communities and organizations. affirms that its impact is a testament to the strength of shared vision and responsibility, of mutually-enabling partnerships, and of course, God's presence manifested in and through people who are instruments of his care, particularly for the vulnerable children, families, and communities across areas of its operation.

MAKABATA PROGRAM

The MAKABATA Program started in 2011 and successfully completed last June 2021, leaving the community children to the care of trained and nurtured volunteers, community based organizations and youth (AKTIB) organization.

Total Beneficiaries	7838
Children, Youth Beneficiaries	6004
Households	1815
Indirect Beneficiaries	13,587
Organized Groups	296
CBO	16
Community Volunteers	130

To create a safe and enabling environment for children to enjoy total well-being and to participate meaningfully.

The MAKABATA Program's contribution of the project towards the achievement of the goal:

158%

of families practiced habits that promote good health such as children practicing personal hygiene (proper hand washing before eating and after using the toilet, taking a bath, tooth brushing, nail trimming, ear cleaning); sustaining vegetable gardens; preparing nutritious meals enjoyed by children and regularly cleaning-up their house and surroundings

69%

of the families made it priority for children's potentials to be actualized evidenced by children completing grade or year level; not asking children to be absent or stopped going to school to help in the farm or help augment the family's income; allowing their children to join interest groups to enhance talents or acquired skills as well as engaged in savings

83%

of the families are resilient and prepared for emergencies evidenced by their GO bags, Family Emergency Plan and stronger family relationship which resulted in increased hope and confidence amidst life's challenges and crisis

86%

of the Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children (BCPC) in the project areas are functioning and responsive. They are more intentional in their mandate to protect the well-being of the children in their Barangay (village) by being knowledgeable of laws and important information in relation to the protection of children; having & implementing an annual plan of activities and projects to prevent abuse and promote child protection; popularizing the CP reporting processes and pushing the passage of policies for children's safety such as curfews; safe public transport and not selling cigarettes & liquors to minors thus parents can't ask their children to buy these items for them

100%

of the AKTIB groups are functional. They participated and led projects and activities benefiting children; represented the children in Barangay-based institutions such as the BCPC and the Samahan ng Kabataan (Youth Council); involved in social accountability monitoring and recognized by the Barangay Council as a monitoring agent of plans and projects affecting the well-being of children in the community

100%

of the 15 CBOs organized have established group enterprises such as micro lending, natural farming, poultry raising, vegetable production, soya milk production, goat raising, rice retailing and neighborhood sundry store. As a result, 60% of the families have increased income to provide for children's needs. All CBO's are champions of children's rights and responsive to children's issues & concerns in coordination with the BCPC. During this pandemic, the CBOs were seen to be active volunteer front liners, initiated activities for children in collaboration with the Barangay Councils and helped in popularizing the MAKABATA Helpline in their respective communities

CAPIN PROJECT

Child Abuse Prevention Intervention Network is a community-based child protection advocacy that promotes child-sensitive systems and structures in the management of child abuse cases.

Direct Beneficiaries	1190
Municipalities	3
Barangays	9
Multidisciplinary Teams	3
CAPIN members	55
Children & Youth	773
Adults	417

PROJECT CHAMP

Championing community resilience through children, youth & civil society engagement and partnership with the local government.

Direct Beneficiaries	1926
Municipality	1
Barangays	5
Households	1600
Children & Youth	303
Community Volunteers	16
Youth Groups	15
Adult Groups	11

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Typhoon Odette Response: To Be Present Where Needed

The massive destruction wrought by Super Typhoon Odette (Rai) when it swept across several areas in Mindanao and Visayas region last December 16, 2021, was appalling and heartbreaking. Odette left extensive damage to infrastructure, agriculture, and livelihoods; affecting 10.8 million people in eleven regions.

Even with the considerable and rapid actions by the government and local civil society, the needs are tremendous. The demand for providing safe, temporary shelter and repair kits so that those affected can rebuild their homes remains topmost and urgent. The road to recovery is long and hard, especially for the most vulnerable communities in the midst of the still ongoing health and economic crises. Every contribution counts!

Although none of the communities SAO has direct engagement with was gravely affected by the devastating typhoon, SAO's posture is that of readiness to put on its weight where it is needed. Agile and passionate about ensuring the well-being and protection of children and their families, especially during calamities, SAO thought of the best way to respond given its limited but potent resources and reach. 'To be present where needed' served as the impetus to plan and engage in a disaster response initiative.

The response initiative, The Shelter Kit Project, was intended to kick-start the rebuilding of homes by providing initial construction materials to affected families in Purok Caradio-an, Barangay Calasa. Himamaylan, Negros Occidental. Himamaylan City was one of the worst-hit places where around 23,400 houses were totally or partially damaged, leaving many families still in evacuation centers and makeshift houses, even two months after Odette.

SAO did the necessary groundwork and closely coordinated with the stakeholders ensuring the protection and appropriate participation of children all throughout the process. Bob Nemenzo (SAO Project Staff) led the team with six volunteers from Word International Ministries, a local church in the community, in project implementation. Sixty-five families received a Php 10,000.00 (Ten Thousand pesos) worth of Shelter Kit sourced from a local supplier in the community. More than 300 (three hundred individuals) were assisted to start rebuilding a safe shelter, a needed push that can spur them on as they continue to recover and rise above the impact of Odette. In addition to the shelter kits, SAO also distributed 2 booklets entitled "Kaya kong Bumangon" and "Batang Listo", a resiliency booklet and disaster preparedness guide for children.

The project which was funded by Transform Aid International (TAI) along with a donation from SAO's local supporter- the Community Church of the Risen Lord, was started in February and was completed by end of April 2022.

The opportunity to help bridge a crucial gap for sixty-five families is a privilege. SAO is grateful that even with its limitations and challenges, it is able to stand with some families in the midst of great need. This was made possible through a grant from Transform Aid International, a long-time and valued partner of SAO PH. SAO affirms God's enabling grace and present help in completing this project.

"I can not do everything, but I can do something. I must not fail to do the something that I can do.
— Helen Keller

COVID-19 RESPONSE:
Coming alongside CBO in their Livelihood Startups

Finding links to resources to fund livelihood initiatives is part of SAO's continuing efforts to build community groups' capacity to thrive amid the pandemic.

This fiscal year, SAO came alongside two community-based organizations (CBO) as they venture into small business startups.

SAMAKA Transport Service

Mobility has been greatly affected due to imposed restrictions and a shortage in transport supply. The toll on the commuters and the businesses has been apparent. Economies both great and small whether in the metropolis or the mountainside are hurting big time!

The members of SAMAKA, a community-based organization (CBO) in San Vicente, Roxas, Mindoro, know this well. They have experienced firsthand how difficult it is not to have proper and timely transport service. Some members lived in hard-to-reach areas accessible only through a kariton and karosa. And the task of bringing their produce to the market is difficult and costly. At times, they were forced to miss work or just discard rotten produce they failed to bring to the market in time. The group is struggling and the need is real.

Through its team in Mindoro, SAO engaged the group and guided them in the process of coming up with concrete actions to respond to this real need. As a result, SAMAKA had a business idea- to provide needed transport not just for their members but for others in their community. But first, they have to have the needed transport equipment!

Through a grant from the Consuelo Foundation, SAMAKA was helped to put their business idea into a livelihood initiative. They went through the process of business planning and development. Mr. Oscar Alcachupas (SAO Area Manager) shared, *"The group was directly involved in the process of implementing the project through attendance in the crafting of policy for their transport service, active participation in the business development sessions, and in the procurement of equipment and utilities needed to accomplish the project. Involving them in the decision-making and implementation builds their passion and commitment which accomplish many things. "*

The group completed the acquisition of the needed transport equipment– a motorcycle with sidecar, 2 karosa, and 2 carabaos in October 2021. SAMAKA members are thankful, relieved, and inspired. Not only that they now have available transport for bringing their crops and produce to the market but they also can offer transport services to other people in their community. They will be able to fill a gap and at the same time have the potential to earn revenues.

Silway 8 MAKABATA Community Association
Cloth Face Mask Production

One of the good things that we see emerged in trying times is the ingenuity of people. The willingness to learn new things and the persistence to do something worthwhile are some of the ways this ingenuity is expressed.

This is what the community-based organization in Brgy. Silway 8, Polomolok, South Cotabato showed when they ventured into a small-scale livelihood initiative of producing cloth face masks through the livelihood assistance funded by the Consuelo Foundation. The group which involved seven families (27 adults and 11 children) slowly but willingly hurdled the perplexities of a new venture. For instance, it was the first time for the sewers to sew 3D design face masks. Good thing, they were willing to learn the technology and they have the patience to watch DIY youtube videos. As expected, they had to practice repeatedly before they were able to master the skill and produce quality designs. The members of the group testified that their skills were enhanced and that they gained confidence in venturing into something new and unfamiliar to most of them.

This endeavor may be small and not without difficulty. The group has to deal with the challenges of marketing and sales. But SAO affirms the power of small beginnings. What has started is not merely a livelihood activity to fill their time. It is hoped that courage to try new things and the capacity to dream were instilled in the hearts and minds of the CBO members which can propel them to take on a bigger, bolder venture given the right support and opportunity.

The pandemic has lingered long. But God has always been present. And most of the time, we at SAO experience and witness the reality that He is with us through concrete and simple acts of help offered, of a gap filled, of opportunities shared. God is present amid lack and need. He is indeed a present help!

PROJECT CHAMP:

SAO Ph collaborates with Iloilo LGUs for Disaster Preparedness

The Philippines, on top of being prone to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, is known to be a perennial path of tropical cyclones. An average of 20 typhoons can hit the country every year which can result in devastating damage to lives and properties.

To live with these constant threats necessitates building ready and resilient communities. SAO through its Project CHAMP answers this call to build the capacities of vulnerable communities to prevent, prepare for, and manage risks and impact brought about by any form of calamities.

Project CHAMP, in particular, is focused on the province of Iloilo which was battered by several strong typhoons in the past years, resulting in severe flooding in lowland areas including the city center and other neighboring towns.

Last October, Share An Opportunity (SAO) Philippines partnered with the Local Government Unit (LGU) of Barangay Libertad, in the municipality of Banate in Iloilo province and the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction Management (DRRM) office to conduct an evacuation simulation exercise to equip and prepare the whole community in the event of a disaster such as landslides and flood.

The training and simulation were held on October 21 and 22. Eleven (11) elected officials and forty-one (41) functionaries attended the training workshop and formed the Evacuation Management Team (EMT); twenty-four (24) sub-committees point person was identified to facilitate a specific task, and around 100 parents and children participated in the said activity.

SAO encourages 'all hands on deck', involving as many stakeholder groups as possible. It is delighted to note that representatives from the Philippine National Police, Bureau of Fire Protection, Municipal DRRMO, RHU, and MSWDO were present to augment in providing services such as public safety, emergency response, maintaining health protocol, and basic social services. The local government of Banate even provided 2 sacks of rice as their counterpart to be included in food packs to be distributed to evacuees.

"Naga pasalamat kami kay naka tu-on kami kon ano ang himuon kon may kalamidad," one of the participants said. [We thank you that we have learned what to do during calamities.]

In times of disaster, it is crucial that people know what to do and how to do things to reduce risks and prevent loss. Preparedness could make a lot of difference and could save precious lives. This is why SAO through Project CHAMP continues to seek purposive partnerships and collaboration with groups and institutions that share its passion to grow resilient communities.

CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION & INTERVENTION NETWORK (CAPIN) PROGRAM

SAO Philippines in partnership with the Consuelo Foundation actively works to promote and strengthen child-friendly, child-sensitive structures for the prevention of abuse and exploitation in the province of Iloilo, particularly in the municipalities of Concepcion, Lemery, and San Dionisio.

Now in its 3rd year of implementation, CAPIN Program has continued to impact key stakeholders in these communities. Here are accounts from two network members on how they are being equipped to better protect children in their community.

The Difference CAPIN Made: A Reflection from A Municipal Social Worker

Before we got involved in CAPIN, our reporting system was not so clear when it came to handling cases of abused children. We didn't have close coordination and records with the Women and Children's Protection Desk (WCPD). As a worker, I have limited knowledge of handling and interviewing abused children and doing proper case management. Youth and children in the community were not aware of their rights and have limited participation. BCPCs are not fully functional and they don't know their role.

When the CAPIN project was implemented it made a big difference. We were able to handle cases of abuse, different laws were learned and other stakeholders participated to work for the welfare of children. Collaboration and coordination improved, the reporting became easier and standard, the MDT (Multi-disciplinary team) was organized to work hand in hand. Proper interventions were given, Three (3) pilot barangays were able to activate their BCPCsl; then followed by a few more. The youth were empowered and improved in their participation. We are happy to work on the project. The local officials are supportive of the program. The LGU committed to having a Lemery Child Protection Center (LCPC). Parents, teachers, youth, children & the BCPC were helped to be more active members of the community.

We are hoping that the CAPIN program will be sustained. We dream that the construction of a Child Protection Center will materialize so that the community will have a proper venue for handling cases. We also wish to have additional staff, probably a social worker for the MSWD office. As a worker, I desire to be well-trained to work with and for children. We envision our municipality as peaceful and child-friendly, where no children & women experience abuse.

Cerlita Javellana, Head, MSWDO
Lemery

Helped to be of Help: A sharing from a Guidance Facilitator

My role as a guidance facilitator in a school with more than 2000 students is very vital. I deal with learners coming from varied family backgrounds and having complex personalities. As the one in charge of this task, I have encountered a lot of difficulties in handling cases and doing proper counseling to those who need it since I am not a full-fledged guidance counselor.

I'm thankful and blessed for the opportunity to be part of the advocacy of CAPIN. I am now able to manage various cases and make proper interventions. Through the expert trainers of CAPIN, I am now empowered to carry out the responsibility of Guidance Facilitation in the school. It is very rewarding because I am able to help the students.
The learnings I gained from the CAPIN training were not only for my personal development but also for my co-workers with whom I share the skills I have developed. CAPIN for me is one of the best partners of the school in the area of child protection.

Liza Sobrevega, Guidance Designate, Master Teacher 1
Lemery National High School

**Child Abuse and Prevention Intervention Network (CAPIN) is Consuelo Foundation's community-based child protection program designed to enhance systems and structures in managing child abuse cases in the community. The program equips municipal and city-level duty-bearers to adopt child-sensitive practices and mechanisms in the prevention and management of child abuse cases. This is being implemented in the municipality of Lemery by SAO Philippines.*

CELEBRATING MAKABATA GAINS

HIGHLIGHTS OF SAO MAKABATA END-OF-PROGRAM EVALUATION

The SAO MAKABATA Child Centered Community Development (CCCDP) framework for development was implemented in Pangasinan, Mindoro, Iloilo, Negros Occidental, and South Cotabato. Dubbed as Maunlad na Komunidad Angkop sa mga Bata (MAKABATA) program addresses growth and development of children living in poverty in the 5 project areas. Launched in 2011, the program goal is to create a safe and enabling environment for children to enjoy total well-being and to participate meaningfully.

MAKABATA is a more holistic approach to developing children's well-being and welfare compared to the traditional system in the Philippines. Adult and children stakeholders helped each other showing that it is possible for a community to raise a child together.

After ten years, the seeds for valuing child protection and development have been firmly planted; some have grown to a bush, others to a promising tree and been bearing fruits in the lives of children and families in the communities. Here are highlights of the end-of-program assessment conducted by an external evaluator.

IMPACT

Interconnected like living pillars that are being strengthened through time, providing the necessary complementary supports– this was how the external evaluator described the IMPACT of the program. Below are the key immediate effects observed and documented in the last 10 years.

Nurturing Children:

- **Children believe they have changed for the better and are evolving with support from the community.**
  An overwhelming majority of 96% of the children say that they have gained knowledge from the program. Children were able to develop academically and have discovered their own strengths and talents through arts, sports, and leadership.

- **Children are empowered and had early realization of their calling.**
  In all of the areas, children regard themselves as part of the community; capable of more than being dependent to adults. They have also gained a level of respectable position in the community. All the training laid out for them have shaped their desire and aspirations. This is reflected in the choice of career or college course among older children. Some of these college students shared that they have found their calling not just to aspire to become professiona and earn an income but a calling to continue being emerging leaders who shall become part of the nurturing community that the MAKABATA program has aimed to create

- **Rights based character development**
  Children who were equipped with proper knowledge of their rights have exhibited positive character development. In all areas, children know their rights and have a very high awareness on what it means to advocate for child rights in the family and in the community.

Strengthening Families

- **Spiritual guidance reinforces positive intentions**
  Parents, adults, children, and the duty bearers in the community were growing spiritually as change happens. They were encouraged to pray and reflect on God's word. Prayer is integrated into developmental activities of children and when working in the community. Prayer and belief in God seem to help people and the children practice gratitude and reflect and celebrate positive results.

- **Developed the habit to save and learn a life skill**
  Adults and children alike learned the value of prudence as they were taught that they can save and manage their resources responsibly. To this day, after the program has officially ended, some of the organized groups of children have maintained their savings system as reported by the Bright Child and Shark in Concepcion.

- **Rights awareness and empowerment breaks cultural divide**
  In Roxas, Mindoro where the project was implemented in the only indigenous community of the MAKABATA, it is noteworthy how Mangyan children's habits on hygiene and self-esteem have positively changed as a result of their awareness of their rights and responsibilities. The children have become less shy and could now mingle confidently among other non-Mangyan children in the community breaking down cultural divide between the groups.

- **Enabling environment created by empowered adults**
  In many ways, adults were present to enable a safe empowering environment for children. These are the SBPGs and the 14 CBOs organized and empowered to nurture children. In all of the communities there was an interconnectedness of purpose and action among the adults which shows how they were organized and followed a path set by SAO and in the ensuring phase over, they as adults now would take over.

Transforming Communities

- **MAKABATA awakened teams of problem solvers** properly trained to develop a positive approach in dealing with problems by helping parents and children realize the value of focusing on solutions rather than be complainers. exposing

- **Barangays are safer for Children**
  Within the family and among people in the community there is high awareness that children must be protected. At the end of the project the program was able to engage 383 structures, mostly within the barangay. Children are able to express their concerns and parents and adults who are part of the various community-based organizations and the 21 barangay government respond to their concerns. Disaster preparedness and risks reduction has been a common practice too in MAKABATA assisted communities.

- **Children participation makes for an inclusive community**
  Children participation in community discussions of issues that affect them is appreciated by the Barangay and the people in the community. Many communities and local barangay structures reached by MAKABATA were found to be listening to the voices of children and acting on their concerns so that children live and grow better.

- **Community recognition of children's rights and evolving capacities**

- **Developed citizenship with the Barangay**
  All 12 AKTIB groups in all of the areas were active by 2020 in Barangay institutions. This prominence in barangay activities shows that AKTIB has become a training ground for good citizens as they improve the situation of children and cooperate with parents and their CBOs and the barangay and the Sangguniang Kabataan. The net effect common among the MAKABATA communities is the development of barangay responsiveness to the clamor, problems, or suggestions of the children and the CBOs in at least 10 of 12 Barangays.

- **Ready and responsible CBOs despite Covid-19**
  CBOs continued the program in the two years of the Pandemic despite mostly communicating online or through calls with SAO. The success of activities and the involvement of some of the members in barangay activities to assist families during the lockdowns, found a level of maturity that has been achieved making them responsible elements of the community.

- **Cooperation towards a shared vision and goal for the families and the children has been** articulated by a great majority of the key informants of this version of the evaluation report.

- **Evolved a MAKABATA commitment**
  CBOs commitment to the program has evolved over the years through careful and sound planning using UNCRC framework. Ownership of the program has been well established from the beginning and this had a profound impact on the behavior of local community stakeholders and the CBOs.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

The MAKABATA program design and the decisions were mostly effective in achieving desired outputs and outcomes of the program.

The following are effective approaches and activities delivered by SAO, the community volunteers, youth leaders of AKTIB, and the small groups of children supporting each other:

✓ SAO TAI commitment to a long-term objective
✓ Use of a child rights framework
✓ Regular organizational planning and activity planning monitoring and learning
✓ Organizing CBOs, AKTIB and SBs
✓ No discrimination in selecting who benefit from MAKABATA
✓ Needs and capacity-based leadership development SB and AKTIB had a ladderized development track
✓ Transition to community volunteers or the SBV and CBO leaders
✓ Have fun approach to child development
✓ Emphasizing ownership and organization
✓ Sharing of success
✓ Continuity of Area Managers and staff
✓ Staff complement and capacity was sufficient
✓ Rapid Savings Mobilization Technique
✓ Collaboration for spiritual guidance and education
✓ Calibrated exit with a phase over process
✓ Sustaining quality in the cycle of succession
✓ Focusing on easy to do health and hygiene habits
✓ Coordination with Barangay on child nutrition
✓ Developing partnership with schools
✓ Constant reminders for maintaining good hygiene
✓ Active support from community health volunteers
✓ Raised awareness on adolescent issues
✓ Health policy development
✓ Creating value to learning and empowerment
✓ MAKABATA cooperated with schools
✓ Monitoring of school performance
✓ Tutoring among children
✓ Parents supported education for all children
✓ Children not active in SBs commonly do not complete tutorials
✓ Paglinang (camp) developed talents and character

EFFICIENCY

Efficiency is rooted in the design of the program and its activities. Fostering ownership of the program, skills development and intensifying value to children's rights and welfare have created a community that can meaningfully contribute to help the children of the community. As the program matures, there was increasing resources and means of achieving objectives that were no longer totally dependent on the grants, rather, on the resources that came from the community and the structures that the MAKABATA has created. These are the identified factors that contributed to program's efficiency:

✓ MAKABATA design evolves efficiency
✓ Community institutions are sharing resources for children
✓ Resources from government – 4Ps
✓ Action learning approach of the MAKABATA program
✓ Leadership at all levels
✓ Recognition and celebration of quick victories
✓ Mobilizing spiritual resources
✓ Investments in good hygiene
✓ Triad system and health monitoring
✓ Health insurance for children
✓ Investments in preparedness and harm prevention
✓ Academic support groups
✓ Multiple intelligence approach to education
✓ Policy adoption to address child issues
✓ Child protective skills

RELEVANCE

The approaches and actions designed to uplift and improve the welfare and quality of life of children and their families were generally relevant to the situation that existed at the start of the project. Hence, the MAKABATA implementation led to many positive changes and improved the situation of children, in particular.

Relevant approaches and actions such as:

✓ Promotion of a rights-based approach to child development
✓ Health, hygiene, and nutrition needed changes in behavior
✓ Multiple intelligence and holistic education
✓ Organized assistance coordinated with schools
✓ Harm prevention sensitivity
✓ Adult assistance in aid of evolving capacities of children
✓ Opportunity for self-discovery
✓ Supportive activities to family's' socio-economic development
✓ Creating development connections in the community
✓ Activating child protection and development mechanisms

SUSTAINABILITY

The more challenging requirements for sustainability, which is having a committed group of people, with knowledge and skills and more importantly who value continuing the MAKABATA program was organized over the ten-year duration. After SAO, the current leaders have to remain consistent and constantly inspired by their shared vision and be mindful to be always resourceful and know that eventually they would have to pass it on to the next generation.

Some factors present that could ensure sustainability:

✓ People involved in MAKABATA know they can
✓ An inspiring a shared vision
✓ CBOs were organized and trained to own the project
✓ Capacities and paying it forward (succession)
✓ Developed a resourcefulness mindset
✓ Health, hygienic, and learning behaviors maintained
✓ Concern for improved total well-being must be constant
✓ Ability to replicate leadership development paths
✓ Consistency of consciousness in sustaining safety of children
✓ Community cooperation has started on child rights

But as in other initiative, consistency is key to see lasting and sustained impact that would go beyond 10 years.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Demonstrate phase-over in the community – to show that MAKABATA still exists and its spirit is strong or people may shift attention and priorities among the established community partners. The period for SAO to CBO phase-over, realistically, is still ongoing. It would be best to re-escalate the activities in all areas to demonstrate that work of the MAKABATA program continues in all the areas.

2. SAO continues advising MAKABATA leaders - A development effort once started must not truly end. MAKABATA will be a legacy program for SAO to be in touch and ready to communicate and provide advice.

3. Make available reports, published tools, and documentation - completely provide the areas with all these documents to people continuing the program.

4. Organizational development strengthening - there must be plans, and such plans must continue to work within the strategic directions of the MAKABATA for the next two to three years. Monitoring and reporting among themselves in the community is an essential part of management and leadership. People learn if people measure and take note of their own progress.

5. CBOs initiate succession and sustainability discussions and planning - Succession as it was emphasized at the start of the MAKABATA in phase 1 could benefit future generations of children. CBOs today can establish the same mindset for the next generation of SBVs and CBO leaders.

Words from MAKABATA Partners

FROM TEACHERS & VOLUNTEERS

MAKABATA has been an instrument in shaping the total personality of a child or the holistic development of the students. Since MAKABATA partnered with the school, as a teacher I have observed the changes in the social and emotional aspects of the children.. They've been leading their fellow youth in school and in the community, manifesting confidence and high self-esteem. They've also become assertive. **(Ms Bernadette Vilbar)**

MAKABATA bridges the harmonious relationship between teachers and children. It helped nurture good values among children and developed camaraderie with other children. **(Ms. Marietta Ambulo)**

As a teacher, the MAKABATA Program helped me in the implementation of the rules and regulations in the school and in the community. In addition, with the help of the program, the school children became focused on their roles and responsibilities as pupils and as members of their families. It was easy for the teachers to reach the learners when they were members of the program unlike those who did not involve themselves. It did help me a lot in different ways. As a traditional parent, the rules that I imposed on my children at home were strengthened by the MAKABATA program. At the same time, as a teacher, I was able to deal with disciplined learners who are confident, responsible, and God-fearing. Learners were able to balance themselves in various tasks at home, in school, and in the community. Therefore, MAKABATA program has really helped us a lot in molding children into becoming responsible members of our society. Thank you SAO. I really missed our monthly meetings and gatherings and at the same time, I missed the times when my children were participating in the program. I do hope that those who were part of the program will continue to be responsible members of our society. **(Ms Joane Javier)**

As a teacher, the MAKABATA program helped me a lot, especially in the field of advocating for meaningful program implementations/activities relevant to child rights and protection. The program inspired me so much, especially in instilling the right values in our students. I am so glad to be one of the many teachers, parents, and stakeholders of the community who became the recipient of the program. **(Mayflor Neri)**

FROM CHILD PARTNERS

We can't choose where we are born; or to be born in a rich family is not within our control, but time and time, we meet people, oftentimes, they're a bunch of people with the passion to teach, encourage, and help the children, that's what MAKABATA is. MAKABATA is more than just a program set in a limited span of time. As for me, MAKABATA helped me to be a better brother, son, and citizen of this country. MAKABATA helped me to understand myself and to be understanding of others. It helped me to see the world from a different perspective, I thought that I should just settle just as my parents did, or my uncles and aunts, but MAKABATA lit a spark in my life to pursue a bigger dream, and now I'm a graduating Engineering student. I don't know how things would turn out if I hadn't joined MAKABATA, but surely I am not the man I am today if not for MAKABATA **(Benjie Brobo)**

MAKABATA Program helped me a lot. The benefits of after-school activities (MAKABATA Program) for me are wide and varied. I have been meeting a lot of different people and participating in a series of child-related activities and I am encouraged to engage and actively participate which aid my development and hone my personality as I grow up.

First, it develops my academic performance. A Series of seminars, programs, and activities are conducted for us and the learning we have is truly amazing. Though it doesn't directly relate to our classwork, we were able to develop our understanding of life perspectives and it boosts our confidence to deal with such academic-related stuff. I was able to translate my learning into positive behavior, especially in performing in school. Second, my life and social skills are developed! As I said, I met a lot of people and I am able to understand the culture and build friendships/relationships which is definitely ideal for providing a sensible environment. I became a team player, and was able to manage my fellow youth in achieving certain goals for the organization. As I continue to explore my abilities in outside school activities, I am able to build my own character and even develop leadership skills which allow me to understand the value of improvisation, sharing of thoughts, and offering support to my fellow children in difficult times. Lastly, I feel safer and happier. Of course, MAKABATA Program is a positive environment that helps me thrive to discover more and keep myself in line. I was able to create positive stressors which pushes me to go beyond limits. For instance, engaging in sports. It reduces and offers a happy feeling and positive pressure. Thus, this program is worth having. Up until now, I can say that I became the best version of myself because of actively joining the MAKABATA Program. **(Kerby Jib Cano)**

A chicken was once a chick. A butterfly was once a caterpillar. An adult was once a baby. Everything and everyone undergoes change, process, and development. It may take arduous years but it's worth it. MAKABATA gave me an opportunity to holistically grow as a child. It allowed me to optimize my God-given talent and potential while sharing it and inspiring my fellow children. No exact words of explication can demystify how grateful and blessed I am to be part of MAKABATA Program. It immensely molded me into who I am today. It empowered and enabled me to live a life of PURPOSE. The most unforgettable memory I had with MAKABATA was when I was given a life-changing opportunity to ride on a plane for the very first time, travel to Luzon, and meet passionate and devoted children who share the same vision as me. This was only one of a multitude of opportunities from as big and substantial as leadership training, environmental initiatives, and health advocacies; to more personal and critical ones such as saving, praying, proper hygiene, character development, and the like. Now that I am already in college, I'm still bringing with me and continuously equipping myself with these lifelong values and imperative skills that MAKABATA taught me. If I was given a chance to be a child once again, I would choose to be with MAKABATA over and over and over again. With this, as a sense of homage and gratitude, I am challenging myself to be in a PURPOSE of not just being a beacon of hope but also an instigator of visible change and a catalyst of sustainable development, especially towards the youth and the children. The purpose is not just a word. It is not just material. It is an attitude. It is a character and faith to believe that each one of us can make a difference. **(Nestor Onio)**

The MAKABATA program as a whole was an instrument to hone the best in me. They taught me to value the spirit of volunteerism, the act of kindness toward the needy, the sense of responsibility as a part of the community, the essence of good and sustainable leadership, and the significance of self-development towards the community's development and success.**(Zenielzly Zhane Asher Medrano)**

FROM PARENTS & VOLUNTEERS

MAKABATA is relevant to me as a parent because it helps me a lot to perform our responsibilities towards our children through training and seminar conducted by SAOPhilippines also our children as MABATA members become most respectful, they know how to save, Know their rights and responsibilities, develop their talents and skill / social development **(Ms. Mylen Danial)**

MAKABATA program is dere nako nadawat or ma recognize akong kaugalingun na naay diay rights ang mga na mutubag what I mean is mo explain sa ilahang side ... kay kami noon makatingug lang gani gamay kasab an dayun kay tubag tubag... and one thing more is when it comes in a decision making naa diay participation ang mga kabataan dili lang parents lang ang mag decide ... inshort nakahatag ang MAKABATA sa akoa ug knowledge unsaon pagdawat na ang mga anak have a rights to decide also.. dere pod ko as mama nadevelop akung self confidence na muatubang ug tao na dili na kaayo ma nerbyos labi pa ug ipatawag na sa school ... malaking kaugnayan ang program saking pamilya dahil hindi lang ako ang natoto sa amin anjan din Yung mga anak ko tulad ng first aid ...anong tamang gawin pag may sakuna tulad ng Lindol at sunog and most of all they teach me how to become a strong person..sa pamamagitan ng pag dedicated sa sarili and surrendered everything to GOD.

[The Makabata Program was where I learned for myself that the children have the right to express their views. Because growing up, we were reprimanded when we tried to explain. I also learned that children can share in the decision making. Makabata gave me the understanding why children should be included in decision making. It is also in this program that I gained the confidence to face people. I am not as nervous as before when called to drop by the school. Our family also learned many things such as first aid; what to do when there is an emergency like earthquake or fire. And most of all they taught me how become a strong person by dedicating myself and surrendering everything to God]
(Ms. Anita Sanchez)

Para sa akoa [For me] MAKABATA helped us by being prepared during calamities, and by enlightening our minds on what is the right and responsibilities of a child. As a parent naka tabang pud ni ug dako sa akoa [it has helped me a lot] to develop my self confidence. Ug sa akoa anak during sa pag discipline sa ilaha na never jud maka limot ug explain kung unsa ang tama sa mali and also listen there own explanations

[And every time I discipline my children, I always remember to explain to them what is right from wrong and I also learned to listen to their explanation]. **(Ms.Jenisa Macalam)**

Bilang magulang and wife. Dako kaayo ang natabang sa akoa, paano e guide everyday at paano mo Sila pakisamahan. Hindi sa lahat nang panahon tayong mga parent Ang tama. kailangan din nating pakinggan Ang kanilang opinion, Ang desisyon lalo na sa gamit nila. At natoto din akong maging mapagkumbaba sa sarili para sa kabutihan ng pamilya. Anduon na yong pagiging parent natin, pero mas maganda ituring din tayong kaibigan ng mga anak natin para sila mismo lumapit sa atin kung may problema sila. Pakisama sa kapwa at may takot sa Diyos. Bilang parent pod, dapat ibigay natin yong para sa knila. Like pangalan at nasyonalidad at pagmamahal. Kahit Hindi magarbong bahay basta ma feel nilang may tahanan at safe sila.

[As a parent and a wife, it has helped me a lot to learn how to guide and relate with my children and husband. (I realize that) even as parents, we are not always right. We need to listen to our children's opinion and decisions especially when it comes to their things. I have learned to be humble. It is also good to be friends with our children so that they can freely come to us with their problems. (I learned) how to relate with others and to have the fear of the Lord. As a parent (I realize) we should give to our children their rights: name, nationality, and love. And even though it is not a grandiose house, as long as we give them a home where they are safe.] **(Ms. Maricel Deligos)**

PASSING IT ON:
Makabata Handover Activities

At the tail-end of 2021, the phasing over of the 10-year Makabata program in four areas- SLM, NEG, PRG, and MNA, was completed. CNL area was the first area to have its turn-over and graduation in December 2020. (This was included in the 2020 Annual Report)

The four areas celebrated MAKABATA's culmination in their unique ways while exercising precaution and prescribed health protocols. It was a meaningful time of celebration for all the stakeholders and staff who have grown along with the program. It was also a time of forging a new level of commitment, especially for the various sectors and groups in the communities as SAO formally passed on the baton of continuing the work of ensuring children's well-being and development.

To have the courage to let go of something good, so that something far better can emerge and flourish is a gift of grace. SAO gratefully affirms God's abiding presence all throughout a decade of helping create an enabling environment where children are nurtured, families are strengthened, and communities are empowered.

God was with SAO from the beginning when it took on the call to plant and cultivate seeds of hope and change in these five areas. And God will continue to be present, reigning, ruling, and guiding as we keep the hope alive for children, families, and communities.

Join us in a joyful celebration of the gains and milestones of Makabata woven into these scenes and stories! A tapestry of God's work in and through Share An Opportunity Philippines.

"Not to us, O LORD, not to us
but to your name be the glory,
because of your love and faithfulness."
Psalm 115:1

Mindanao (MNA)

Certified and Ready

Nineteen child-partners (CPs) attended the graduation ceremonies held at Purok Makisama B, Barangay Silway 8 in Polomolok, province of South Cotabato. The limited attendance was due to the observance of the basic health protocols imposed by the government amid the Covid-19 pandemic. However, all child partners, including those who were not present received certificates of recognition, cloth face masks as tokens, and copies of a farewell letter from Transform Aid International (TAI). "These child partners are the youth advocates who will ensure that the best interest of the children and youth in their community is given priority, especially since the barangay council has adopted this program," a staff member of SAO PH said.

Pathway of Involvement

Liziel Joy Laulita, MNA area manager, explains the various ways child partners can remain involved in their barangay activities even after the Makabata Program is phased out: "Ang engagement sa Makabata Program ay mag-end, pero ang programa magpadayon kauban sa BCPC (Barangay Council for the Protection of Children), Community Based Organization (CBO) og AKTIB (Aktibong Kabataan Tungo sa Ikauunlad ng Bayan) [The engagement of Makabata program end, but the program will continue by BCPC, CBO and AKTIB]," Laulita said.

HANDOVER CEREMONIES

Thank You, Next

Stakeholders from partner communities- Barangay Glamang and Silway 8- in Polomok attended the symbolic "handover" and acceptance ceremony of the Makabata Program last November 3 and 4 held in the covered court of barangay Glamang and session hall of barangay Silway 8. The symbolic "handover" and acceptance ceremony was the final activity for the two communities in celebration of the 10-year journey of partnership. SAO Philippines handed over the responsibility to the Barangay Council for the Protection of Children (BCPC) to continue the Makabata Program in their barangay.

Honorable Kagawad Ronald Nogalada, who is also on the committee for education, women, and family had this to say about the program:

"Nakita man natu ang programa sa Makabata, daku jud ang opportunity para ang atung mga bata. Nasugdan na nila so kinahanglan time napud sa barangay council na mag invest para sa pagpadayon sa programa. Dili natu ikalimud nga daghan jud maayo nga outcome ang programa" (We saw that the Makabata Program provided many opportunities to our children. They started it so it is our time as barangay council to invest for the continuance of this program. We cannot deny that the program has many positive outcomes.)"

Continuing Commitment

Ms. Liziel Joy Laulita handed over a doll figure of two sitting children symbolizing the Maunlad na Komunidad Angkop sa mga Bata (Makabata) program as a token of appreciation to the members of the local Barangay Council for the Protection of the Children (BCPC) in Silway 8, Polomolok. Officials of BCPC said they were ready to continue the Makabata program and operate it as their own. The local officials signed a resolution to continue their commitment to all the children and youth in their community.

Negros Province (NEG)

HANDOVER CEREMONIES

Every beginning has its own sweet ending. On October 29, the official turnover of the Makabata program was held in the Barangays Bagumbayan, Central Tabao and Tabao Proper. Its Barangay Council members were present during the said turnover. A symbolic token of responsibility was handed to the Barangay, the CBO, and the AKTIB groups. The council members openly expressed how the program impacted the community through the transformation reflected in the lives of both adults and children. According to Brgy Chairwoman Gina Ellaga, "*We are truly grateful that SAO Philippines chose our Barangay as one of the benefactors of the MAKABATA Program. Because of this, domestic problems decreased in our barangay, specifically those problems between husbands and wives and also problems with the children. It is so heartwarming to see families are intact and living harmoniously, thus, also resulting in a peaceful community.*"

SAO Negros staff testified that hearing such words from the community leaders gives them a sense of fulfillment knowing that their efforts and work in the community are bearing fruits.

A Testimony of Hope: Queenie Marie Anojales

Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you, saith the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you hope and a future." This is a passage from the Bible that I heard shared with us during one Makabata meeting. I held on to it as my foundation. Being a member of the MAKABATA program brought me great hope. I have learned that despite my poor situation, I can rise above poverty because God's plan for me is for my good. This truth gives me so much hope and has become my inspiration to strive hard in my studies. While in the program, I participated actively and also spent time teaching younger children through tutorial activities. I am happy that the adult officers we are with allowed us to participate, especially in making decisions on matters that significantly affect us. So, I felt so much joy while I was in the group. I was excited to share what was happening in our group. I will always be thankful to SAO Phils. for choosing to implement Makabata in our barangay. It really made a big difference in our lives. From a simple child to a hopeful young woman who dreams of becoming a teacher someday. I am in my 2nd year in college taking up Bachelor of Elementary Education. I will continue to support the program here in our place even without SAO. I will live on this commitment because of its legacy to us. Thank you to all SAO staff and most of all, I thank the Lord for His love for all children especially to me and the children here in our barangay

Southern Luzon and Mindoro (SLM)

Photo by Harold and text by Oscar L. Alcachupas)

GRADUATION. 74 child-partners from Barangay San Mariano and San Vicente attended the Child Partners' graduation at the Basketball court of San Vicente Roxas Oriental Mindoro last November 18,2021. The activity was a celebration of the journey of the Child partners under the MAKABATA Program of Share An Opportunity Philippines. There were 250 child partners in these two communities and each of these children represents their small village (sitio). Child partners were selected by the children's group called Samahan ng mga Bata (SB) to represent them to Transform Aid International (TAI) partners through writing of letters reporting of what they learned, the situation of SB community and progress in the family. One child partner said ' mahirap magsulat kasi English pero enjoy naman dahil natututo din" (it's hard to write in English but I'm enjoying and learning from it).

WILLING TO SERVE. AKTIB leaders of Barangay San Mariano and San Vicente Roxas Oriental Mindoro share their smiles while holding the Certificate of Appreciation given during the Makabata Program closing ceremony at Grace Baptist Church in San Mariano last November 26, 2021. Aktibong Kabataan Tungo sa Ikauunlad ng Bayan or AKTIB is a youth group help organized and trained by SAO PH to be future leaders of their community.

Panay, Romblon and Guimaras (PRG)

Child Partners received their certificate of appreciation

Inspirational Message from the Area Manager of PRG

Receiving their certificate of appreciation

MOST SIGNIFICANT STORIES

SOUTHERN LUZON & MINDORO (SLM)

A Good Influence on the Family

Kenjie is the youngest of the three children of Donato and Ailyn Sescar, who both work on the family's small farm. Being the youngest, Kenjie is usually exempted from household chores and farm duties. Whenever his parents would ask him to go and work on the farm with them, he avoided the responsibility by hiding or simply sneaking into a friend's place.

He misbehaved countless times and disobeyed his parents on many occasions. It is fair to say that Kenjie was not a model son. Somehow, he escapes punishment with a shrug since, after all, he is the youngest among the siblings, and "the youngest usually act like that."

Neither was Kenjie a model student. He was average at best. Although not exactly a bully, he was seen as unruly and loud.

Despite this reputation, he was surprisingly elected as president of his Grade 7 class. Somehow, his classmates saw leadership potential in him.

When Share an Opportunity Philippines (SAO) first brought its Makabata program to the community, the children invited were reluctant to join its activities. After all, the organization and the program it was bringing were new to them.

Soon, however, the children and the community as a whole developed a fondness for Makabata, particularly after they began to observe that they were learning so much about proper nutrition, hygiene, saving money, and caring for the environment while enjoying eating and playing with other children during the community gatherings.

On the first year of the program, the meetings were held at a venue that was about one and a half kilometers away from Kenjie's home. The latter and his friends would walk excitedly to where the gathering was being held.

"I learned a lot since I was a kid until today," Kenjie said. "I learned to obey and respect my parents and was able to develop good hygiene habits."He was able to overcome his shyness and participated actively in both SAO and school activities. Kenjie's transformation became evident among the members of his family. In no time, his elder sister and brother also started attending SB meetings.

Kenjie's mother, Ailyn also became an off-and-on member of the Makabata's organized parent group named "Samaka." She had very little choice because she needed to help her husband manage their small fruit farm and tend to their livestock composed of pigs, goats, and chickens. In addition, Ailyn would buy neighborhood farmers' produce and sell them to middlemen in bulk.

But as they say, if there's a will, there's a way. Ailyn still was able to find time to join the group mainly because she wanted to be with his friends and neighbors. Secondly, it was not a bad idea to enjoy free snacks, which the meeting organizers regularly provides.

In spite of these, Ailyn was non-committal to Makabata. But her curiosity was triggered by the apparent change for the better of his youngest child. She was doubly amazed when Kenjie started to persuade his siblings to likewise join the SB meetings.

She was determined to find out Kenjie's motivation. Hence, Ailyn began observing the SB meetings and even volunteered to serve it. Her job was to take charge in maintaining order during big events and distributing snacks to SB groups.

Slowly but surely, Ailyn became convinced that the Makabata Program was having a positive influence on Kenjie. She saw it with her own eyes.

The staff and other volunteers were kind and patient with children while they promote care and well-being in every aspect of the activity. Children were taught about values that encouraged the love of God, the love of fellowmen, obedience to parents and authority, and the love of their community. To top it all, she was positive of what the program was doing in terms of empowering children to heighten their skills in leadership and personality development.

Before, her son had no interest at all in getting involved in any community activity. Now, he participates in clean-up drives and youth sports activities. She expects her two other children to develop the same passion and intensity Kenjie has in SB meetings.

Actually, they have both expressed excitements in SB meetings where they learn so many things such as hygiene, protecting the environment, child rights, what to do during and after a typhoon, floods and earthquake. What they like most was the games and activities that develop their life skills. They have gained so many friends even from other communities.

Kenjie is positive he will be able to finish high school and get a college degree. Right now, he is busy helping his father manage the family farm and his mother with her buy-and-sell business.

Kenjie continues to spread good influence and positive vibes in every activity he does.

The Unexpected Leader

Self-confidence is one of the qualities a leader must have. A leader must be able to articulate his or her thoughts and convince others to act on what he wanted to be done. A leader must be brave to take a stand and act decisively however high the stake is.

No one believed Arjay Mariano could stand in front of many people including the community leaders during the barangay council meeting much less be fearless in presenting plans and proposals that he believed would benefit the youth and children of the community.

Anyone who knew Arjay back in 2011 would suggest that this bold, young man was a different person. And no one could blame them because he was the total opposite of this articulate speaker. The Arjay of years ago was terribly shy and would rather get run over by a ten-wheeler truck than speak in front of a crowd.

Indeed, Arjay used to be aloof, his head always bowed to avoid eye contact even with the person he was talking to. He would rather be alone with himself. He preferred sitting at the back of the room during children's meeting and activities. He had a lot of ideas, yes, but was afraid to voice out all of these for fear of criticism and heckling from fellow children.

Arjay's mother, Sol, is a single parent, having lost her husband years ago. She had to work hard in order to raise her seven male children. She does laundry for neighbors for a fee. Understandably, she was out of the house most of the time. Arjay (he is next to the youngest) and his brothers had to fend for themselves. The lack of a father figure and the limited nurture of a mother probably made Arjay to grow up shy and aloof.

One day, a neighbor invited him to attend a Samahan ng mga Bata (SB) meeting. The SB was organized to become a venue for children to learn about health, hygiene, environmental protection, child rights. and the love of God for all children. They have games, skills development, and physical as well as spiritual development.

Just like other kids, Arjay learned a lot about how God treats children, his rights and his responsibilities towards his family, community and to his country. He learned the value of saving money for the future, attended camps, and participated in the cleaning and greening of the community. It was an enjoyable experience for him especially when he opened himself to other children by making a lot of friends. Her mother soon knew about the Saturday SB meetings. She also began to notice the positive changes in Arjay's attitude. She encouraged her son to be active in the Makabata Program. Shortly after, Arjay was elected by his peers to be the AKTIB president.

AKTIB or Aktibong Kabataan tungo sa Ikauunlad ng Bayan is a youth group composed of children aged 11-18 whose goal is to assist in the Makabata Program by acting as big brother of the SB. AKTIB members also actively participates in the development of the community.

Because of Arjay's dramatic transformation, people who knew him would often ask, "How did it happen?" He would just smile and say, "It is because of the Makabata Program. It taught me and trained me to be a responsible citizen and leader of our community."

Arjay is still a work in progress. He is still improving. Recently, he was chosen as the representative of AKTIB Mindoro in several youth leaders trainings held in Tanay, Rizal, Tagaytay City, and Iloilo City. These exposures were bound to further develop his leadership and management skills.

For example, Arjay stood up during a barangay assembly as the AKTIB representative and presented a plan of action for children and youth of San Mariano that would address issues such as youth gangs, gambling, and youth development.

His being knowledgeable and articulate became noticeable to all. He would soon be elected as president of his school's Student Supreme Government as President and also as a Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) council member. In fact, the SK chairman depended on his ability to organize and come up with plans for submission to the barangay council.

Arjay was then encouraged to run as one of the SK council members and he won. One positive resolution that he promoted was the prohibition of minors dressing inappropriately in a beauty contest (bikini). It was approved by the council.

Arjay will graduate with a Bachelor's degree in Education soon. He wants to continue influencing children and youth. His vision is to "see our community strengthened in protecting children" and have a functional Barangay Council for the Protection of Children (BCPC).

"I want to see the youth to be more involve in barangay activities, expressing their thoughts on wider range of audience particularly on planning and implementation of project," he articulated. "Also, I want to see children be a part of the changes and improvement in our community."

CENTRAL & NORTHERN LUZON (CNL)

Like A Mustard Seed: The story of Ron Tabin
By Alecia O. Araman

Ten years ago when Ron was then 12 years, did not expect much of himself. He described himself as "a withered plant" and his life as "undeveloped." The young lad thought nothing was happening—not in the past years and probably not in the years to come. Perhaps, he was just saving himself from devastating disappointment.

No expectation, no frustration, right?

Little did he know that a significant thing was bound to come his way that year. It was so life-changing that the once complacent kid is now a very hopeful young man excitedly looking forward to a successful future.

The turning point came when Ron was invited to an activity of Makabata, a program of Share an Opportunity (SAO) Philippines. Looking back today, Ron-ron G. Tabin, who is now a 22-year-old agriculture student of Pangasinan State University would tell you that it was, in fact, a gift from heaven.

From then on, his life has been a story of progress and of the blossoming of a young person.

When the Makabata held its Child-Centered Community Development Program in the community where Ron belongs, little did he know that it was bound to unleash his hidden potential and talents. Ron's participation in various activities of Makabata taught him he has rights as a child as well as responsibilities that go with these rights. He began to appreciate the values of participation, development, survival, and protection.

His interest in making children's lives better intrigued him deeply. He began to connect the values he learned in Makabata to his spiritual life. He found himself getting more active roles in church activities such as leading Bible studies with different families in his community and other nearby areas.

Another turning point in Ron's life came when he was offered the Makabata livelihood scholarship, an initiative of the three community-based organizations or partner

barangays of SAO PH in Central North Luzon. He was among the seven deserving young people who were able to enjoy the scholarship.

They were given monthly allowances from the contributions of the communities of Sobol, Macalong, and San Vicente along with those of the SAO-CNL staff for their school needs. Because of this, the scholars were able to focus on their studies.

Ron chose to study agriculture, a field that was introduced to him during one of the sponsored events of Makabata. They were taught about how to produce organic fertilizer for plants and to grow a livestock business. The thought that a career in agriculture can be of great help to his community and church thrilled him.

Ron now recognizes that an individual's path in life is influenced by his or her choices. He is thankful to God for guiding him to choose to join Makabata at that particular point in his life some 10 years ago. It proved to be the correct path for it gave him the opportunity to gain deep knowledge and enhance his abilities that served him well into his adulthood. It certainly helped that he was fully supported by his loving parents, Mr. Rolando Sr., 56, and Fely Gadiaza Tabin, 52.

Ron is convinced that his exposure and the many learnings he gained by participating in Makabata activities boosted his confidence. Overcoming his shyness was the first step to a more satisfying life. He no longer shirks from socializing with people from all walks of life. Many doors opened up after this.

Ron was not a withered plant as he first thought of himself. The fact is, he is like a mustard seed that was designed to grow into a huge tree that would spread its branches and grow its lush leaves to benefit many. All he needed was the right mix of elements – faith, natural gifts, and nurturing environment to grow on – and he was ready to blossom and bear fruits for all to harvest and enjoy.

Surviving the Covid-19 Pandemic: The Fernandez Family
By Alecia O. Araman

Like many parents, Ronald and Mary Cris Fernandez instinctively turned their sad gaze on their children – sons Kiel Andre, 18, and Michie Mae, 15, and daughter Cyrus, 13 – after the whole country was placed in lockdown due to the pandemic.

The first concern was, of course, food security and other necessities needed in order for a family to survive the prolonged quarantine. But what can parents or heads of the household do when they are not allowed to get out of the house?

It was no less than a miracle that most of the families, including that of the Fernandezes, came out of it unscathed, more or less.

When the lockdown was relaxed, Ronald was able to drive his tricycle again, albeit earning drastically lower than the old normal. He also worked as furniture upholsterer on an on-call basis, but the opportunity to earn in this field became almost nil.

On the other hand, Mary Cris was able to occasionally volunteer in the Barangay Health Center immunization campaign, Hence, the couple's salary was still unstable and dangerously low.

It was a good thing that Mary Cris had the means to compensate for the shortage. A member of Makabata Program in Macalong Asingan Pangasinan and a Parent Leader of Samahang Bata Parents Group 1, she is active in Makabata's livelihood and savings group, doing backyard gardening and other livelihood training and ventures. Hence, she's growing vegetables, peddling street foods, and processed meats.

"When my family got involved in the Makabata program, I learned many good things such as how to save money and how to properly run a small business selling street food and meat, which helped us to survive the pandemic," she disclosed.

Aside from that, the Fernandez family applied to good use what they learned about backyard gardening. She admitted that the program motivated the members of the family to be more prayerful.

"We prayed a lot – for health, the safety of each member of the family from Covid-19, and for the immediate return to the normal situation," Mary Cris added.

Her involvement in the Makabata program allowed her to broaden her knowledge in essential skills, especially in saving for rainy days and running a small business that is definitely beneficial for the upkeep of the family.
There were other subtle yet very important outcomes, too.

"My family became closer," Mary Cris revealed. "My children are more open to me."

Michie Mae became a leader of a children's group, and her husband Ronald always saw to it that he would be of help in many children's and parents' activities. He often extended his assistance in preparing venues and even made wooden chairs for the Makabata station.

The Covid-19 pandemic, ironically, became a blessing for the Fernandez household. The family, despite the overwhelming challenges, learned how to survive and cope with difficult times.

The resilience of the Fernandezes was due in most part to the skills they learned from participating in Makabata activities, such as Disaster Risk Reduction Management and proper hygiene.

"I am happy that I got involved in the Makabata Program," Mary Cris declared with a wide grin on her face.

NEGROS PROVINCE (NEG)

THE STORY OF IVY

Poverty can have a profound impact on one's self-esteem and confidence. On one hand, one who grew up lacking even basic necessities could have his spirit crushed. On the other hand, such a situation can greatly motivate the person to do everything in his or her power to rise above all odds. The latter aptly depicts Ivy's story.

A few years ago, nobody in her community including herself could imagine this daughter of a fisherman's hand and a laundry woman would one day be confident enough to talk to the mayor of their town much less to convince the municipal chief executive to agree with her perspective. But this was exactly what happened.

Ivy was able to lobby for the continuation of the college scholarship grant she and other young people were enjoying. Upon learning that the scholarship was on the brink of being terminated, she, on behalf of the other scholars, went directly to the mayor and clearly explained what the scholarship meant for the students, their families, and their respective community.

Thus, the mayor, who turned out to be an advocate of higher learning himself, agreed with her and granted Ivy's request. All the scholars and their families rejoiced and hailed Ivy as their champion. But no one was happier than Ivy. She is no longer the shy and awkward girl of years before.

Before the metamorphosis, Ivy was a simple girl who lived with her family near the seashore. Her father made a living by helping the owner of a pump boat catch fish. During the off-season, he worked as a carpenter which forced him to leave his family for weeks or months on end.

Ivy's mother, meanwhile, ran a small coffee shop that opened just after midnight and closed by the time it was dawn. The coffee shop catered to fishermen who were getting ready to sail to the sea or who had just arrived from the arduous task.

Ivy helped around her mother's store when she had no classes to attend later in the day. She also took care of her younger sister, who was three years old at the time.

Despite the economic challenges that stared her family in the face, Ivy did not allow her dream of getting the highest education she could have wither away. Instead, poverty and the desire to overcome it stoked, even more, the burning desire in her heart to make her family's life better.

She joined the Makabata Program of the Share an Opportunity Philippines (SAO PH). This got the ball rolling and soon, the whole family was all involved in it.
Her mother became a member of a mothers' group called "Universe" and her father, meanwhile, became a part of a fathers' group appropriately named "Pure Strength." Even her little sister was joining the Makabata activities because Ivy would always bring the latter.

Ivy became the chairperson of AKTIB. They called themselves Youth Carriers of Hope, composed of SB officers from 15 different groups based in the area. Eventually, she was also elected chairperson of the Youth Federation the members of which come from three barangays where the program exists.

She agreed to take on the responsibility because she could sense the significance of a federated group. Ivy became sure of this idea during an AKTIB Learning Exchange, where she experienced first-hand the beauty of the set-up. She became a firm believer when she realized the potential of a collective voice of the youth.

This belief was put to a litmus test when she walked up to the mayor and humbly but firmly and with confidence argued the value of the continuation of the scholarship program of the municipal government. And the rest is history.

Behind Ivy's transformation was SAO PH's intervention. She is the first person to recognize this. Now, there's no backing out from the fight for a better Ivy and a better future for her family.

WITH GOD, ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE

"With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." – Matthew 19:26

Edalyn Lubrico's difficult life became almost unbearable when she was retrenched from her job as a fishpond caretaker. Suddenly, the future appeared dimmer.

Although that work does not pay enough to provide food on the table for her young family, she stoically endured it. She had to since her husband, Arnold, had no regular job at the time.

That's why the couple thought of having a small business of their own, particularly drying fish. But this, too, is not an assurance that they will have enough.

At around this time, the Share an Opportunity Philippines (SAO PH) came into the picture carrying with them the Makabata Program. Edalyn joined its activities and found herself enjoying the experience.

With these new-found skills, she was able to make crucial decisions that made their little enterprise sustainable. Carefully, Adelyn and her husband invested their small capital intelligently. With hard work and perseverance, coupled by their harmonious working relationship, the couple began to achieve success.

Aside from helping in the family's dried fish business, Arnold also earns extra by working as a tricycle driver. Meanwhile, their eldest son, Lynulf, works in Bacolod City. Their youngest is a child-partner and an active member of their SB group.

The Lubrico family have always believed in God. They lived out this faith in the way they treat each other – full of love, respect and trust. They put prime importance on caring for each other. The truth is, Edalyn still takes care of her 92-year-old mother.

One of the SAO PH activities that really touched Edalyn was the one held on Family Day entitled, "Honoring Your Parents." This activity emphasized what she knew and what she has been doing since she was a child – paying respect to her mother. The activity, though, clarified that this was a command by God.

That made Edalyn love her widowed mother even more. She learned that it is not enough to provide for the basic needs of parents; they also need love. This love must be demonstrated by spending time with them.

Love of parents – particularly those in their advanced years – is one advocacy that Edalyn has been passionate about ever since.

It is the practice of the members of the Lubrico family to make decisions together. Edalyn and Arnold make sure that every decision is in the best interest of their children.

The couple's generosity is not confined within the family. They shared their blessings with the larger community and were happy to do so. One of the ways Edalyn serves other people is through CENTAVEA, a community group where she formerly acted as its vice chairman. Presently, she is a "kagawad" or council member of Barangay Central Tabao and is a member of the committee on health and education.

She is involved in these activities even while earning by making bags and cord bets, another skill that she acquired by participating in a training sponsored by SAO PH. What used to be an activity meant to produce items for family use became another income-generating venture when people started asking her to sell the products to them.

There was no idle time for Adelyn, who, after doing her tasks in the family business, would sit down under the shade of her "tambis" tree and make bags and belts.

Her involvement in SAO PH's activities widened her horizon. She became aware of the need for her community to be free from pollution, drugs, abuses, crimes, and garbage. She began to dream of a happy, healthy, and friendly community for her family and her neighbors.

Not only did Adelyn become socially aware, but she also became spiritual. She now appreciates the importance of going to church, praying, and listening to the Word of God.

The Lubrico family and the Adelyn of today have gone a long way since she was retrenched from her low-paying job as a casual caretaker of a milkfish pond. With SAO PH as his instrument on earth, God truly made something impossible possible.

PANAY, ROMBLON & GUIMARAS (PRG)

Going Full Circle: Nathalia's Story

Nathalia Kyle Linda first joined the Makabata Program in 2011. After attending the program orientation Nathalia and her mother decided to be part of it. Thus, Nat-nat, as she is fondly called, became a child partner.

Nat-nat was a shy and timid girl. After regularly attending MAKABATA activities, she developed a sense of confidence borne out of a feeling of belongingness and acceptance of the group.

Years passed by and the positive change in Nat-nat became evident to many, especially to her mother, April Joy. The latter had observed a change in her daughter's attitude. The more Nat-nat participated in the activities of the Makabata Program, the more positive her attitude became.

"When I joined the Makabata Program, I learned many things that my school did not teach me. Through the activities that I attended, I gained confidence and I find it very helpful and enjoyable," Nat-nat said.

She actively participated in school activities, began to get good grades, and gained new friends. Intrigued by what she was seeing in her daughter, April decided to volunteer to find out for herself. She discovered how her daughter's young mind developed and how she acquired her new-found leadership skills.

Nat-nat became an SB leader. She displayed skills in handling a group and how she took on responsibilities. She attended seminars, training and camps that enhanced her skills some more. She is particularly talented in drawing.

Nathalia became an AKTIB officer who represented the whole SB in their community. Together with other officers, they represented Makabata Program during the barangay assembly or council meeting. They reported on their activities and accomplishments; sometimes, they would air issues concerning the youth and children.

Years passed, and eventually, Nathalia applied to become a youth volunteer for the program. She assisted in the evaluation and monitoring activities and also in the program implementation. She was particularly effective in disseminating information to stakeholders who were eager to know what had been done.

Her sense of volunteerism was a very big help during the Covid-19 pandemic when travel and mobilization were limited.

Even now, Nathalia continues to be a good example of what the program has brought to their community. She has transformed from being a shy and timid child to being a young and confident advocate for the children in her community. In her journey with the Makabata program, Natnat has come full-circle

Hope Comes to Fruition

In chapter 17 of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus said the smallest of things, a mustard seed, for example, can grow into something very significantly huge.

The Lord said: "For truly I say unto you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there', and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you."

A small share group – merely nine active members who all reside in Barangay Nino, Concepcion, Iloilo – showed resilience in keeping the fellowship alive. Its members called themselves "Paglaum" or "Hope," which perfectly describes the motivation that has been keeping the group alive.

Perhaps, at the time, the vision of Paglaum members was not as clear as today as well as the "why" of their being together. Little did they know that, like faith albeit as little as a mustard seed, their small group was about to move a mountain.

Three other like-minded share groups in the area were organized in 2012 after the Share an Opportunity Philippines (SAO PH) introduced the Makabata Program. Still, the Paglaum group stood out because of the excellent leadership of its officers coupled with the burning spirit of cooperation demonstrated by the members.

Two years after, the four groups agreed to transform into a Community Building Organization (CBO), believing that unity can propel them to higher achievements.

With the Paglaum group at the helm, the CBO members gathered these monthly savings to start their own lending enterprise, which proved to be very helpful to families who were finding it hard to make both ends meet.

Because the members of the CBO demonstrated such faithfulness and discipline in saving up to pay their loans, SAO Philippines allowed them to access a bigger loanable amount to serve the organization's growing clientele.

As the membership and services of the CBO expand SAO encouraged the former to acquire a legal identity from a government agency like the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) or the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA).

The CBO members were reluctant at first. "Can we handle the responsibility?" they asked themselves.

After a period of soul-searching, they finally decided to register with the CDA as their way of institutionalizing their duties and responsibilities to a growing membership and ensuring good governance of the organization, especially the wise management of finances.

Hence, the NICOA Credit Cooperative was born, thanks to the leaders' service-driven and goal-oriented mind-set. They were able to accomplish their CDA membership in 2020.

The NICOA co-op was able to extend its services to three barangays. They are engaged in microfinance while implementing the activities inspired by the Makabata Program at the same time.

Allotted budget for children's education like miscellaneous fees and school supplies (for those who are members of the cooperative), budget for DRR, budget for benevolent help and feeding activity for children.

They are now linking with other government agencies like the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the provincial cooperative office, which both facilitated their participation in government-sponsored trainings that taught them how to manage the newly formed cooperative better.

The growth and success of NICOA Credit Cooperative are proof that a co-op when combined with a child-related program like Makabata can be successful. The formula may not be conventional but, who can argue with success?

Indeed, there are still many challenges and potential dangers that may lurk at every corner. They may be external or even internal. However, what's important for an organization is that it has not stopped looking for solutions to problems, which are constants.

At the end of the day, the group must settle on a decision that will benefit the majority of the co-op members.

The once seemingly irrelevant group that only had nine active members has gone a long way. And it has not stopped blazing a trail until now. Look! It's even moving a mountain.

MINDANAO (MNA)

After the Challenges, the Prize Awaits

Benjie Brobo began his journey as a child partner of the MaAKABATA Program when it started in Barangay Silway 8, Polomolok, South Cotabato in Mindanao in 2011. Benjie was only 10 years old then.

This small thin boy was painfully shy and spoke only when asked. It was a good thing that Benjie overcame his shyness and found the courage to raise his hand along with others including his 5 younger siblings when asked who among them were willing to join MAKABATA.

The Brobo children came from a broken home. Their father abandoned them when Benjie was still in primary school.

Yearly, the Makabata staff would visit the modest house of the Brobos where they got to meet Benjie's mother, Mary Grace, a small woman who always wore a smile on her face. They also got to know Benjie more as he shared his story.

"I have a simple family. Before, we were complete," he narrated almost in whispers. "We have our parents to take care of us. But it all changed when my father went to Luzon to look for a better life."

At first, their father would communicate more or less regularly and send financial support to the family. Then one day, it all stopped. They suddenly lost contact with him.

"We heard nothing about him after some time. As simple as that," Benjie told the Makabata staff.

Hence, Benjie's mother was forced to raise all six children alone. She willingly took on odd jobs just to get by and provide food on the family table. However, this was not enough. There were simply too many mouths to feed.

At an early age, Benjie had to pitch in to lighten the load his mother bears. Benjie's mom desires two things: to provide something to eat for the family and to have money so her children can continue studying. But she was aware itis almost impossible for her to land a stable job.

Life was hard for the family as they face varied problems, but fortunately, they got much-needed assistance from concerned neighbors who extended their financial and moral support to the troubled family.

But it did not take long when another life-changing development shook young Benjie to the core.

Benjie's mom met a man, fell in love with him, and shortly after living in together, decided to relocate to a nearby town. The couple took with them four of his siblings, leaving him behind and his sister who at that time was in the care of their mother's former employer who promised to help the child continue her education.

Benjie was left alone to live in their house. It was a good thing his grandmother and uncle live nearby, although they seldom looked after his needs. At a young age, Benjie learned how to survive by himself.

"I didn't stop going to school even when there was no support from my parents and relatives. I walk to school every morning and do the same in the afternoon because I don't have money," Benjie said matter-of-factly. "I work during weekends so that I have money to buy food and to support my education."

He went around the neighborhood offering service to remove weeds during weekends for a fee and volunteers to clean the school premises in exchange for free lunch.

Though busy doing odd jobs, Benjie still has time to study. In fact, he was able to excel in class and became an honor student. He became an inspiration to those who knew him and his life story. They were so touched that they wanted to help him in his struggles. Everyone was rooting for him to keep on studying up to college. They wanted him to succeed in life!

Benjie's involvement in Makabata Program was a step in the right direction. He became one of the leaders of Aktibong Kabataan Tungo sa Ikauunlad ng Bayan or AKTIB, a federated youth group comprised of officers from children's organizations.

The Makabata Program provided a venue for Benjie to enhance and showcase his skills in drawing and paper animation. It also gave him the confidence to share what he learned with other children in their community. Indeed, he is grateful for being part of the Makabata Program.

"Because of it, I was able to go places I've never been before," he said. "I met a lot of friends."

Benjie shared that Makabata Program made him a better person. He learned how to be more resilient and determined in changing his present situation. Recently, he passed two college scholarships—that of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) and the Real Life Foundation (Victory General Santos City)—two institutions that were very helpful to him.

Benjie thrives amid life's challenges. His hardships did not stop him from reaching his goal to finish his studies. He is now a third year BS Mechanical Engineering student in Mindanao State University, a well-known university in General Santos City. He is a scholar of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) and Real Life Foundation of Victory (church) in General Santos City.

"At the age of five I know what I want to become, an engineer," he disclosed.

He admitted that what he went through and is still going through is not exactly a walk in the park.

"Aside from academics, I often have problems with my finances," he said. "But every struggle I was able to overcome makes me stronger each day."

Soon, Benjie will graduate from Mindanao State University with an engineering degree. His story and his quest for a better future continue. By God's grace, Benjie will soon fulfill his dreams and would be able to inspire others to hope and to persevere.

A Program Worth Spreading

Ten years ago, the see-saw, slides, swing, and other facilities one can see in a typical playground or public park are alien to the children of Barangay Silway in the town of Polomolok in the province of South Cotabato in Mindanao Island. Instead, they spend their free hours playing "taksi," a form of gambling played by putting coins on the ground and drawing a square around it.

Barangay Silway 8 has a large number of children population spread over its nine "puroks" or sub-villages – namely Pag-asa, Makisama-A, Makisama-B, Maligaya, Masigla, Mabuhay, Maunlad, Luwalhati and Honeyville – inside its 1,187-hectare land area.

Sadly, however, these children are often unseen and unheard. In a sense, a whole generation who are expected to carve the future for the village are suffering from neglect and lack of nurture from the adults.

For example, children are often relegated to being mere spectators of sports competitions sponsored by the local Sangguniang Kabataan (SK). These events, usually basketball leagues, are meant for adolescents or young adults. Neither can they freely express ideas. For one, they have no venue to do so. They are not perceived as important players in the development of their community.

If children are apparently marginalized, how much are the children with disabilities? If children are seen as weak, hence, inconsequential, how do you think are the children with disabilities or CWDs are treated?

For years, children with disabilities are hidden from sight and considered as worthless to the community. But all this changed with a group of compassionate women began a program that aims to look after the welfare of CWDs.

This brave group is the Silway 8 Makabata Community Association (S8MCA), a group of women under Makabata Program who organized themselves to look after the best interest of every child in their barangay. The Silway 8 Makabata Community Association started an initiative for children with disabilities in 2015, a year after the group was organized.

The initiative came after a survey was conducted by Makabata where they found out that there are 24 children with disabilities in Barangay Silway 8. Driven by a passion to build a community where every child is valued and recognized, the S8MCA proposed an initiative, an event called CWD (Children with Disability) Day. It was funded by the Makabata Program from 2015-2019 with counterparts from the S8MCA fund and Barangay Council of Silway 8.

The group's objective is to encourage and give opportunities for children with disabilities to exercise their right to participate, to express their views, and to increase awareness in the community that these children should be valued and recognized.

The S8MCA received positive feedback that inspired its members to continue with what they have started. In 2018, they lobbied for a resolution for the continuation of the activity.

Purificacion "Fe" Beronilla, S8MCA President, attended Barangay Council sessions and explained the purpose of the initiative. Her dedication in looking at the welfare of the

children in their community influenced the barangay council to fully support the initiative.

"I'm so grateful to God that He gave me the opportunity to be part of the Makabata Program in which I can share God's love to children," Fe said.

The Barangay Council approved and passed Barangay Resolution No. 01 series of 2017 making the CWD Day an annual event that Barangay Silway 8 will celebrate in December of every year. The resolution specified that the event must be attended by identified children with disabilities of the barangay and their parents or guardians.

The celebration was much-awaited by the residents of the barangay, especially the CWDs and their parents despite the inconveniences of their various conditions. The upside is the happiness it brings to the CWDs, especially when it's time to receive their gifts and toys and to have the performances.

The trouble came when the pandemic hit, which was a real challenge to the S8MCA. With no budget nor income to support the activity Silway 8 Barangay Council came to the rescue. Instead of gathering the children in one venue that could pose danger to their healt, they visited the CWDs in their respective homes and gave them gifts and food packs.

Every year the number of identified children with disabilities increases. When the group started in 2015, the figure was 24, which now rose to 43. It has also expanded to another area, Barangay Glamang in Polomolok, South Cotabato.

Barangay Glamang is the neighboring village of Silway 8 where there is also a Makabata Program. The Glamang Child-Friendly Community Association, another Community Based Association organized under Makabata Program in Barangay Glamang, started the initiative in their barangay in 2017. They funded the activity from their income, donations coming from establishments within their barangay through solicitation, and proceeds from the partnership with the Barangay Council of Glamang.

The community-based organizations in Barangays Silway 8 and Glamang are truly impacted by the Makabata Program. Who knows, this worthy program for CWDs may be replicated in many, many more areas in the future.

That's one step closer to the vision of Makabata to provide a better life for each and every child, including those with disabilities.

National Staff Retreat 2022:
GRIT IT OUT!

At last! After two years of holding the annual staff conference virtually, the staff team of Share An Opportunity Philippines was able to have an in-person retreat this 2022.

The five-day National Staff Retreat was held at ROSMA Pebbled Cove Resort at San Joaquin, Iloilo on June 21-25. Nine (9) staff from the two programs and one (1) member of the Board of Trustees (Ms. Dilsy Arbutante) came together for this event.

With the theme, " GRIT it Out! ", the retreat was highlighted by different activities aimed to inspire and continue to arm the staff team as they brave a new fiscal year with grit and grace.

Ms. Dilsy Arbutante facilitated a workshop on Empowerment Assessment Tool (EAT). Juniper Bibiolata (Management Team) led sessions on the review of Module Development and Basic Facilitation Skills. There were also significant discussions on program operation and finance and admin concerns. The theme exposition was given during devotional time by the Executive Director Ms. Armi Martinez. The arts and crafts workshop was led by Mr. Gaudencio. Boko Jr. and a night of Karaoke sing-along capped the meaningful and fun time of being together as a staff team.

The (five) 5-day retreat refreshed the mind, recommitted the heart, and restored hope.

Here is a testimony from a new staff member, Janbeth Alindog*:

"I know some friends who work for NGOs but working for one did not even cross my mind. At first, I had no intention of joining SAO Philippines not until Pastor Aman shared and asked me to consider it. Before this, I did not have much idea of how NGOs work and operate. I thought that these organizations just conduct charitable activities in typhoon-stricken areas. That's how I see them.

I decided to join SAO last February 23. The first activity I attended was a workshop on Children's Rights held in Brgy. Libertad. Honestly, I felt a bit excited when I saw the children's enthusiasm to participate. They were enjoying the activities while the volunteers were assisting Pastor Aman in giving out the materials. I went home feeling hopeful that day, thinking that I can also lead the activity one day. But as the days went by, my hesitation in doing the tasks grew stronger. The responsibility was overwhelming, knowing that I work for the community but I didn't have enough knowledge on community development. Some jargon is foreign to me. I doubted myself.

Then came the month of June, and I was thrilled to join the National Staff Retreat in San Joaquin, Iloilo. I got to meet my colleagues, and somehow, knew them a bit personally. It was my first time being around people with the same passion for building the community. As a first-timer in the industry, I realized that being a social worker or community development worker is more than just meeting people. It is a commitment made by these people to change the community for the better, holistically.

The retreat was fun, educational, and life-changing. It opened my mind to the possibilities of what I can do. As a person, I am not sociable and it's always a struggle for me to do networking. But working for the community is more than that. I learned from the retreat that to be an effective community worker, you need grit. I need the strength of character to perform my duties. I need the willpower to overcome all adversities. I need to strengthen my relationship with the Lord to be a steward and a witness to others.

Having attended the retreat changed my perception of my work in SAO as a newly hired staff. I now fully understand why SAO is present in Banate and that my job is important. I am a work in progress and I would say, I am happy to be part of this organization."

**Janbeth Alindog is serving as Holistic Development Facilitator (Project CHAMPS), before joining SAO, he worked as Operations officer of a coffee shop for the Almajed Group in Qatar*

SAO at 25
GOD WITH US

The invitation to remember and mark milestones of one's journey abound in the book of Psalms.

" Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name!
Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits,"
(Psalm 103:1-2)

God's people were enjoined to celebrate, to call to mind, and not to forget God's mighty acts, His awesome work, and great deeds. Interestingly, this call was often issued against the backdrop of seeming hopelessness, chaos, and great difficulties.

This 2021, SAO Philippines did just that as it turned 25! A fitting occasion to look back and celebrate the gains and learnings of two decades and 5 years of participating in the work of transforming communities through its care for children and families.

The Anniversary celebration was unique and challenging as it was done online by project areas and then culminated with the virtual National Staff celebration on August 28. SAO family and friends were not just ushered to remember the good old days but were inspired to reflect deeply on how God was present in the different seasons of the journey. Through the season of beginning, of letting go, of harvest, and of uprooting, God was with SAO. Through the building and breaking, the birthing and closing, God was with SAO. Remembering this truth enables SAO to continue to choose to hope and to move forward. Against the backdrop of a seemingly dim prospect, Ms. Armi Martinez shared:

"On our 25th year, we see the beginning of a new season, an unfolding of something new that would show forth the grace and the glory of God. This new season starts with a great challenge. At 25, the Lord allowed SAO Philippines to be in a very challenging situation. And knowing the Lord, it is always for a good purpose - especially for the people involved even if it does not seem so at the moment."

The national staff celebration was attended by former and present staff and BOT members. It was a meaningful gathering of kindred spirits who share the same calling of ensuring children's well-being and development.

Ms. Adlin Bibiolata, a former MNA staff expressed, "It was prominent how the relationship among the staff grew from the beginning until the end. As we talk about who we are as an organization and as a people, we can't help but be grateful for all the learning and the relationships that were established over the years. SAO Philippines is not just a workplace, but it has become our home."

As a new leaf turns for SAO Philippines, our confidence is in the same God who was, and is, and will be with us!

SAO Farm Update

LEARNING ABOUT NATURAL FARMING

SAO remains committed to faithful stewardship of resources that are in its care. Finding ways to improve and optimize the care and use of the 5.5-hectare farm in Polomolok, South Cotobato is part of the strategic direction SAO leadership has set.

As a step forward in this direction, SAO sought to beef up its knowledge of relevant technologies. Last June 28-29, 2022, SAO sent two representatives to a seminar on natural farming hosted by Mr. Andry Lim, an advocate and a practitioner of Jadam natural farming in General Santos City. Farmers from all over Mindanao and a few from Luzon came to take part and learn about this technology that promotes ultra-low-cost agriculture.

Adlin Bibiolata and Rolito A. Tanting who represented SAO in the training share these thoughts:

The seminar was both interesting and challenging. One has to really decide to practice the technology and be consistent with it. The technology will be a big help to the farmers in terms of lowering the cost of farm input provided the farm has the raw materials and an ample water supply. One has to start planting and propagating necessary materials in the production of natural fertilizers, pesticides, and growth hormones.

Food security and farm sustainability are what the seminar is emphasizing using the natural method of farming and food production. It needs a lot of re-training and mind-setting among farmers in order for them to appreciate the value of natural farming and not rely on chemical or artificial farm inputs. A mindset that high yield is not dependent on high artificial farm inputs. A reminder too that as believers of Jesus Christ, we must help restore the environment that God created perfectly for us to enjoy.

SAO hopes that such a step forward (albeit small) will yield results in His time.

FORWARD-LOOKING

SAO continues to look forward to the coming years with hope and expectancy. Though the horizon may appear hazy from the vantage point of where SAO is at the moment and the road is wrought with various challenges (such as the urgent need to mobilize needed resources and the inevitability of organizational change to name a few), SAO is clear about where it wants to go and is determined to move forward with God who abides and enables.

As shared before, this is SAO's STRATEGIC DIRECTION:

- Safe & Resilient Children & Youth
- Cutting-edge Transformational Program
- Transformative Partner and Public Engagement
- Responsive Governance
- Lifelong Learning Organization

At the end of 2024-25, SAO has set the following goals:

- All historical ministry areas of SAO would have at least one ongoing project.
- A researched based Cutting-edge Transformation (CeT) program would have been designed and implemented.
- SAO PH would have established different resource mobilization streams such as crowd funding, public offerings, farm development, partnership with like-minded organizations
- SAO PH Board committees are functional and productive.
- SAO PH would have installed mechanisms for continuous learning

To work toward realizing these goals, the Board and the Leadership Team has set the following imperatives that encapsulate in broad terms SAO plan of action for the next two years (2022-2024).

PREPARE SAO - Organizational Strengthening

Review of the Articles of Incorporation, Constitution and By Laws and
Child Safegaurding Policy Manual
PCNC, DSWD RLA, PSP Renewal application
Secure BIR Tax Exemption
Conduct National Staff Conference
Crafting of Volunteer Policy & Manual
Ensure Organizational Legitimacy Credentials
Board Development
SAO Staff Core Course launched (SAO Staff Institute)
Conduct National Staff Conference
Learning Visits (Board Development)
Data Recording & Management

PRESENT SAO - Fundraising & Resource Mobilization

SAO Polomolok Farm Development
Annual Fund Campaign launched (200 individual donors; 2 new institutional donor)
Maintained website & social media platforms
Regular e-Newsletter
Increase membership to GA
CBO Learning Exchange

POSITION SAO - Responsive Programs

Project Champs
CAPIN Project
Relaunch RSDP
Development of new program (research on new target sector; planning for CeT)
New Project in Polomolok
New Project in Mindoro
Cutting-edge Transformational Program
Project development & proposal writing

The past, present, and future belong to our Creator-God. SAO moves forward one stepping stone at a time trusting that God's will and work in and through SAO will prevail.

"Many are the plans in the mind of a man,
but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand."
Proverbs 19:21 (ESV)

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

ZALDY V. BAROTIL
PRESIDENT AND CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD.
BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN AGRICULTURAL ENGINEERING.
MASTER IN DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT.

Zaldy is the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Transforming Asia Pacific Inc., a Christian and Filipino research and consulting firm based in Cavite. He also manages the Wholeness Family Medical Center. Zaldy was Regional Director of the Medical Ambassadors International in Central Asia and also served as the International Program Director and Executive Director of the Asian School of Development and Cross-Cultural Studies (ASDECS) from 2004 to 2013.

RAY ELEVAZO
VICE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD.
CIVIL SERVANT AND A RESERVE OFFICER.

Ray is the Executive Director of Cooperative Development Authority. He is a Public Administration Practitioner and has a long experience in implementing the cooperative development and regulatory program of the government. His knowledge, skills, aptitude and attitude were honed along this line and recently enhanced by strategic development and security mindset.

DILSY ARBUTANTE
SECRETARY OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES.
REGISTERED SOCIAL WORKER. MASTERS IN SOCIAL WORK.
MASTERS IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

Dilsy is passionate about community organizing, community mobilization, and community empowerment. She has a vast child focused NGO experience and expertise in governance and project/program development & evaluation. She's previously engaged with International program management and quality assurance experience in various types of inclusive community development programming with NGOs and civil societies in Asia, Pacific (including Mongolia), Africa, Middle East and Europe. She was Country Director for leadership and management in the Pacific (covering Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Solomon Island and Fiji) with World Vision International and in the Philippines with Norwegian Mission Alliance Philippines, Inc. She has experience in working with program management, project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation including bilateral and multilateral funded projects in Asia including Mongolia, Pacific, Africa, Middle East, and Europe.

ADONIS ADLAON
TREASURER OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES.
BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING.

Adon is an inspirational and motivational speaker and a sought-after counselor and life coach. His passion is connecting with people and works as a freelance facilitator and trainer for government institutions, such as the Philippine National Police (PNP). He was SAO Philippines' former Admin and Finance Officer from 2003-2012.

ESTRELLA DELA ROSA
MEMBER OF THE BOARD.
BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN MATHEMATICS.
ASSOCIATE IN ARTS IN ACCOUNTING

Estrella Catilogo dela Rosa holds a B.S. in Mathematics degree from the Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila (PLM) and an Associate in Arts degree in Accounting from a prestigious learning institution in Los Angeles City, California, USA. She became a missionary in Porac, Pampanga from 1986 to 1990 doing literacy, health, and livelihood programs for Aetas, She became a part of the Share An Opportunity (SAO) Philippines, when it was still called the Support an Orphan, under its Sponsorship Program. Her desire to serve others did not wane even after she left for the United States. Today, the missionary in her compelled her to continue serving her fellow human beings as treasurer of the Southeast Area Neighborhood Development Council of Los Angeles. When asked what is her vision for SAO PH, Ms Dela Rosa said she wants the organization to "become an instrument of help to children and their families through education [until] they become productive citizens of the community."

RODERICK D. JACINTO
MEMBER OF THE BOARD.
BACHELOR OF ARTS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE.
BACHELOR OF ARTS IN THEOLOGY. MASTER OF ARTS IN MINISTRY

Pastor Rick is the Mission and Community Outreach Pastor of the International Baptist Church of Manila in Makati City, a position he held since January 1, 2010. He leads in the development and implementation of the church's missions and outreach ministries and supervises missionaries and church planters assigned across the country and in other parts of Asia. He also sits in the Boards of Two-Thirds World Network, Inc., Asia Pacific Mission Institute, Inc., and Southern Baptist School of Theology, Inc.

THE MANAGEMENT TEAM

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FINANCE MANAGER

Juniper Bibiolata
PROGRAM MANAGER

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DSWD

Department of Social Welfare and Development

AFFILIATIONS

Micah Global

Philippine Children's Ministries Network

Alliance of Christian Development Agencies

PARTNERS

Transform Aid International

Mission Alliance

Consuelo Foundation

Share An Opportunity
PHILIPPINES

VISION STATEMENT

Generations of Filipino children nurtured to their God-given potential for nation building.

MISSION STATEMENT

We depend on God in engaging children, families and communities of partners for transformation.