

CHANGE STORIES

Keeping the Hope Alive



for Transform Aid International, our token of deep appreciation



For TAI, whom God used to birth SAO Ph,

We present to you these stories as a token of our gratefulness for all our years of active partnership. These stories of change, representing thousands more, maybe even more dramatic ones, is the essence of the partnership between TAI and SAO PH. It is in fact the reason for our being as organizations. They also tell us of staff's commitment and of God's abundant grace.

May the truth that these stories of change convey stir your heart, igniting your passion to restore dignity in people and how they live, filling your hearts with thanks and praise to the Father, who is always with us in our journey together.

It is a journey of creating one change story at a time, together or apart, so that the earth will be a reflection of heaven, however faint it maybe for now. We press on, believing and moving with the Spirit of the Lord until His kingdom will be fully established on earth.

Thankful of our partnership,

ARMI A. MARTINEZ
With the whole SAO PH Team



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COMMITTED TO TEACH CHILDREN

BY OSCAR ALACACHUPAS

Arjay Mariano facilitates an activity in a Samahan ng mga Bata (SB) group in the community of San Mariano Roxas, Oriental Mindoro. His long engagement with the Makabata Program has prepared him for this task of teaching children during one of the SB meetings. SB is a group of 10-15 children living in the same community. Once a month, they meet to play games and learn new things about God's Word, health, child rights, environmental protection, and inter-personal skills development. (Photo by Aaron Fodulla)

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 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 proposals that he believe 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's metamorphosis 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."



AR-JAY'S LEADERSHIP JOURNEY

BY ALECIA O. ARAMAN

Modesty aside, I did not experience the usual difficulties of novice politicians when I ran for a Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) post. By that time, I was already known in my village as a “kuya” or older brother, a friend, and a tutor of children.

Perhaps, the young voters in our area put their trust in candidates like me who can talk in front of the people, capable of articulating the vision and platforms, and is able to entertain them at the same time.

I was not born with these skills, I must confess. It was my collective experience and exposure to the various activities of the Makabata Program of Share an Opportunity Philippines (SAO PH) that molded me to what I am today.

If not for Makabata (and, of course, for my mother who encouraged me to join it), I would be the shy Ar-jay Tabin, an introverted, run-of-the-mill 22-year-old fourth year college of Urdaneta City University taking up a bachelor's degree in physical education. That and no more, most likely.

I thank God for leading me to another fate, which started when I was an 11-year-old six-grader. At the time, my life was uneventful. I would go to school early morning and would be back at the house by late afternoon. Weekends would be more exciting, though. I got to play inside our backyard with my limited circle composed of cousins and classmates who lived nearby. I was not allowed to go to my friends' respective residences and places.

No wonder I grew up to be shy and introverted. But that changed when the Makabata Program came to town. It conducted activities on Saturdays that allowed me to play, have fun, and learn new thing with my other classmates who live farther away.

My most unforgettable experience was when we participated in the Learning Forum held in Pranjetto Hills Resort, Tanay, Rizal in May 2015. The theme of the event was, “Youth Leadership in Climate Change Adaptation.” It gave me the chance to meet the members of the two Communities in Asingan and AKTIB leaders from all over the Philippines.



It was exciting because of the fact that it was my first time to travel with my friends in an occasion that was not school related. I found the forum at the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) office stimulating and wholesome. The experts talked about issues pertaining to the environment that even children like us should be aware of.



AFTER THE CHALLENGES, THE PRIZE AWAITS

BY LIZIEL JOY LAULITA

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

The small, thin boy was painfully shy and spoke only when asked. Mercedita Castino, a child development worker, could see that Benjie went to the camp with clothes that were not folded properly and were apparently thrown hastily inside his small backpack. It was a good thing that Benjie overcame his shyness and found the courage to raise his hand along with others when they were asked who among them were willing to join the Makabata Program.

Among those who also raised their hand were Benjie's younger siblings Mariel, Dennis, Rolando Jr., Cristina, and John Dave. Benjie is the eldest among them.

They lived in a small nipa hut made of light materials located in the village's Purok Makisama-B. More tragically, the Brobo children were products of a broken home. His father Rolando abandoned them when Benjie was still in the elementary level.

After that, we had a team-building activity in Pranjetto where leaders from different provinces learned teamwork and the value of “becoming one.” Indeed, the bonding was such that everyone would remember the event at least in the next several decades. I am not exaggerating! The overall experience was really a blast.

After I joined Makabata, I began to develop a sense of leadership. When I was elected as AKTIB leader in our community I brought my trainings, exposures, good habits and attitude with me in school. I was elected as secretary in Supreme Student Government school year 2015-2016. Then I was elected as the president of the same organization in the fiscal year 2017-2018,

I was also elected as 6th District Representative in the Pangasinan II organization and was elected as SK member in 2018. Without my exposure, I doubt if I would accept such challenges. However, Makabata transformed me from a wallflower to a confident leader. Makabata helped me conquer my fears.

Like the Bible says, “Fear not.” Now I have realized the indubitable truth that God will always be there to guide and give strength.



Yearly, the Makabata staff visited the modest house of the Brobos as part of the requirements of the child-partnership program. There they met Mary Grace, Benjie's mother, a small woman who always wore a smile on her face. It was apparent Benjie took his looks from her.

All of the program participants are interviewed thus the Makabata staff learned that the Brobos did not own the house where they are living in and it was a property of his uncle, his father's brother. When they interviewed the shy Benjie, he opened up to tell 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, Rolando, Benjie's father, would communicate more or less regularly and send financial support to his family. Then one day, it all stopped. Their mother, Mary Grace, and her children suddenly lost contact with him.

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

Hence, Mary Grace was forced to raise her 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.

From time to time, Benjie would help his mother in whatever way he could to lighten her load. Mary Grace's two basic goals were: to provide something to eat for the family and money so her children can continue studying.

Mary Grace was aware that it would be impossible for her to find a stable and well-paying job since she had to real education to boast of. In fact, she didn't even finish grade school.

Benjie's mother's difficulties were not limited to raising her children well. She also had to endure a not-so-smooth relationship with her mother-in-law, who, instead of supporting Mary Grace survive her family's extremely difficult circumstance, even discouraged her and cast false accusations against her.



The Brobo family, fortunately, got the much-needed assistance from concerned neighbors who extended their financial and moral support to the troubled family.

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

One day, Mary Grace met a man and fell in love with him.



Shortly after they began living together in Purok Makisama-B and after a month, decided to relocate to a nearby town. The couple took with them four of his siblings, namely, Dennis, Rolando, Cristina and John Dave.

Mariel lived with her mother's former employer, Lola Maring, 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 in the absence of my parents' and relatives' support. 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 for my food and to support my education."

He goes around the neighborhood offering his services of removing weeds during weekends for a fee and volunteers to clean the school premises in exchange for free lunch.

Despite being busy with these odd jobs, he 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.

Benjie's involvement in Makabata Program was a step in the right direction. He became one of the Aktibong Kabataan Tungo sa Ikaunlad ng Bayan or AKTIB leaders, 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 to 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 would be the first person to tell you that the 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."

Benjie is included the 2023 graduates of the prestigious Mindanao State University with an engineering degree, something that he had always dreamed of. His story and his quest for a better future is still unfinished but his story is already an inspiration to many and a testimony of hope, optimism and God's grace.



JOIN MAKABATA AND REAP THE BENEFITS OF POSITIVE CHANGE

BY MARY JOY RELENTE

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 spent her early childhood as a shy and timid girl. After attending the activities of the program of Share an Opportunity Philippines (SAO PH) on a regular basis, she developed a sense of confidence borne out of a feeling of belongingness and acceptance of the

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, her mother, 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.

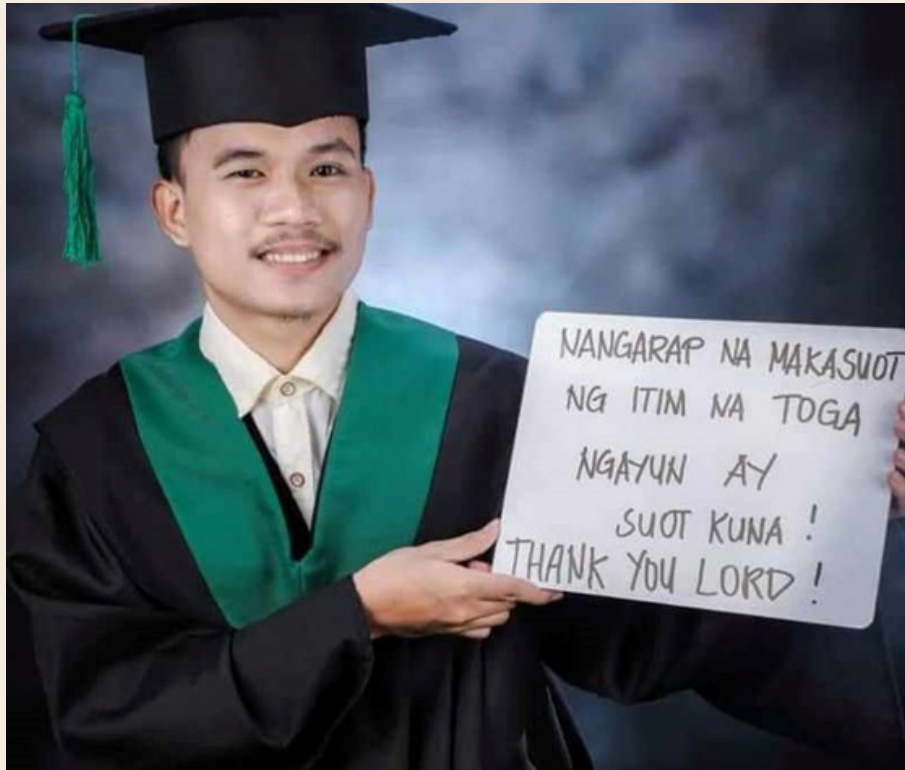
Nat-nat became an SB leader of her group where she displayed skills in handling a group and how she took on responsibilities. She attended seminars, trainings and camps that enhanced her skills some more. She is particularly talented in drawing.



Nat-nat 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, as well as issues and concerns affecting the youth and children. Eventually, Nat-nat applied to become a youth volunteer of 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. Nat-nat's sense of volunteerism was a very big help during the Covid-19 pandemic when travels and mobilization was limited. Even now, Nat-nat continues to be a good example of what the program has brought to their community.

LIKE A MUSTARD SEED

BY ALECIA ARAMAN



Ten years ago when Ronron Tabin was still 12 years, he did not expect much of himself. He described himself as “a withered plant” and his existence as “no development.” The young lad thought nothing was happening—not in the past years and probably not in the years to come. No expectations on himself, perhaps to save 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 child 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 a non-governmental organization (NGO) called the Share an Opportunity (SAO) Philippines.

Looking back today, Ronron 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, it was a story of progress and a blossoming of a young person.

When SAO PH implemented its Child-Centered Community Development Program dubbed Makabata in the community where Ron resided, he did not know that it will be used to unleash his hidden potentials and talents.

Ron's participation in various activities of Makabata taught him that 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.

The idea of in making children's lives better captured his interest deeply that he was drawn to this. He began to connect the values he learned in Makabata to his spiritual life. He found himself getting more and more active 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 organized by SAO PH in Central North Luzon. He was among the seven young people who were given the opportunity to enjoy the scholarship.

They were given monthly allowances from the contributions of the CBO groups of Barangay Sobol, Macalong, and San Vicente as well as from the project staffs for their school needs. Because of this, the scholars were freed from the burden of thinking where they would get the money for their school needs and were able to focus more 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 dictated 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 a good choice for it gave him the opportunity to gain knowledge and enhanced 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 to the many learnings he gained by participating in Makabata activities boosted his confidence. He overcame his shyness was the first step to a more satisfying life. He no longer shirked from socializing with people from all walks of life. As a result, many doors opened up for him after this.

Last month, for example, Ron participated in the 29th National Children's Month Celebration photo poetry writing contest conducted by the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) with the theme of “New Normal na Walang Iwanan Karapatan ng Bawat Bata ay Tutukan.” He won the third prize.

Ron completed his Bachelors of Science in Agriculture degree from Pangasinan State University. He was not a withered plant as he first thought. He was in fact a mustard seed that was fated 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 – water, sun, and a fertile soil to grow on – which the Makabata Program was able to provide by the grace of God, and he was ready to blossom and bear fruits for all to harvest and enjoy.



THE STORY OF IVY

BY NERISSA P. SOLEDAD

Poverty often subdues a person's confidence. He or she who grows up deprived of material possessions and means to acquire even the basic necessities of life – such as food, shelter, clothes, and education – deflates one's spirit. But there is always the other side of the coin – one's lowly station can inspire and greatly motivate the person to do everything in his or her power to crawl out of the rut against all odds. Poverty can breed fierce fighters. Ivy Sun belongs to the latter category.

A few years ago, nobody in her community including herself could imagine that a daughter of a hired 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 to her way of thinking. But this was what happened exactly.

But this was what happened exactly. Ivy was able to lobby the continuation of the college scholarship grant she and other young people were enjoying but was threatened to be terminated. On behalf of her co-scholars, she went directly to the mayor and clearly explained to the official how important the scholarships were to the students, their respective families and to the town itself. Thus, the mayor, who turned out to be an advocate of higher learning himself, agreed with her and granted Ivy's request.

As a result, all the scholars and their families rejoiced and hailed Ivy as their champion. No one was happier than Ivy. The shy and awkward girl of years before was no longer. That "stranger" has become a thing of the past now.



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 to catch fish. During off-season, he worked as a carpenter that 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 have just arrived from the arduous task.

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

Despite the economic challenges that her family needed to hurdle, Ivy did not allow her dream of getting the highest education she could have, wither away. Instead, poverty and the desire to overcome it, fanned even more the burning desire in her heart to make her family's life better. Joining the Makabata Program of Share an Opportunity Philippines (SAO PH) got the ball rolling, not only for her but for the whole family.



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 her along.

Ivy became the chairperson of AKTIB. They called themselves Youth Carriers of Hope, which was composed of children's club officers from 15 different groups based in the area.

Eventually, she was also elected chairperson of the Youth Federation, members of which came from the three partner-barangays of the Makabata program.

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 continuing 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. Ivy recently graduated from college completing Bachelors of Science in Elementary Education from La Carlota City College. She has a soft spot in her heart for children with special needs and struggling to cope with the demands of formal school.

Now, here's no backing out from the fight for a better Ivy and a better future for her family.

SURVIVING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

BY ALECIA O. ARAMAN

Like many parents, Ronald and Mary Cris Fernandez instinctively turned their sad gaze at their children – sons Kiel Andre, 18, and Michie Mae, 15, and daughter Cyrus, 13 – after the whole country was placed in a lockdown to curb the spread of the coronavirus that caused fatal Covid-19.

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

It was no less than a miracle that most of the families, including that of the Fernandezs, 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 during 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 volunteered to the Barangay Health Center immunization campaign, but it was only occasional. Hence, the family's income was still unstable and dangerously low.

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

"When my family got involved in 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. "We grew our own vegetables in our backyard, too. This helped lessen our expenses for food," Mary Cris said.

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 to 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 the rainy days and running a small business that is definitely beneficial for the upkeep of the family.

There were other subtler yet very important outcomes, too. "My family became closer," Mary Cris revealed. "My children became more open to me."



Her daughter, 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 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 with 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 Makabata Program," Mary Cris declared with a wide grin in her face.

WITH GOD, ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE

BY NERISSA SOLEDAD

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

Edalyn Lubrico's difficult life became almost impossibly hard when she was retrenched from her job as a fishpond caretaker. Suddenly, the dim future turned to total darkness.

Although her pay in the job was not enough money to provide food on the table for her young family, it was better than nothing. She chose to stay and endure since her husband, Arnold, had no regular job at the time.



To augment the family's income, the couple thought of having a small business of their own, particularly drying fish. But this, too, was not an assurance that the needs of the family will be sufficiently met.

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



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 ask her to sell the products to them.

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

She began to dream of a happy, healthy, and friendly community for her family and her neighbors.

Not only did Edalyn become socially aware, she also started to have spiritual yearnings. She now appreciates the importance of going to church, praying, and listening to the Word of God.

The Lubrico family and the Edalyn 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.

A GOOD INFLUENCE TO THE FAMILY

BY OSCAR ALCACHUPAS



Kenjie is the youngest of the three children of Donato and Ailyn Sescar, who both work in the family’s small farm. Being the youngest, Kenjie enjoyed the privilege of being exempted from household chores and farm duties. Whenever his parents would ask him to go with them to work on the farm, he avoided the responsibility by hiding in some corner or simply sneaking to a friend’s place where he could not be found.

He badly behaved countless times and disobeyed his parents in many occasions. It is fair to say that Kenjie was not exactly a model son. Somehow, he was able to escape serious punishment with shrug since, after all, he is the youngest among the siblings and “the youngest usually act like that.”

Neither was Kenjie a good example of how a student should behave and perform. He was an average student at best. Although not exactly a bully, he was seen as unruly and loud.

She was particularly impressed by the training on Financial Discipleship, which she considered very practical and useful. It helped her in budgeting the family’s financial resources, and more importantly, the cash-flow of their small business.

The training on entrepreneurship and simple bookkeeping gave her the knowledgeable on how to manage her business and learn the strategies of marketing. With these new-found skills, she was able to make crucial decisions that made their little enterprise sustainable. Carefully, Edalyn 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 earned extra by working as a tricycle driver. Meanwhile, their eldest son, Lynulf, works in Bacolod City and 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 in caring for each other and for Edalyn’s 92-year-old mother.

One of the SAO PH activities that really touched the heart of Edalyn was the one held on Family Day entitled, “Honoring Your Parents.” This activity emphasized what she knew and have been doing since she was a child –pay respect to her mother. The activity, though, clarified that this practice is not only good, it is a command by God. This made Edalyn love her widowed mother even more. She learned that it is not enough to provide 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

Edalyn and Arnold also learned and made sure that every decision is for the best interest of their children. It has become the practice of the Lubrico family to make decisions together.

The couple’s generosity is not confined within the family. They share their blessings to the larger community and were happy to do so. One of the ways Edalyn serves other people is through CENTAVEA, a community group where he 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.

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

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

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

During 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 really 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 the 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 provided.

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.

Kenjie Sescar poses in front of a small pig pen, which was entrusted to him by his parents. He has the responsibility of regularly feeding the livestock, ensuring that the pig would weigh enough to fetch a good price from interested buyers. Kenjie's parents have taught him early on how to take care of the pigs that provide a good source of income for the family. And Kenjie learned fast and well, being the obedient and respectful son that he is.



A PROGRAM WORTH SPREADING

BY LIZIEL JOY LAULITA



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 up after a survey was conducted by Makabata where they found out that there are 24 children with disabilities in Barangay Silway 8. Driven by 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 counterpart from the S8MCA fund and Barangay Council of Silway 8.

The group's objective is to encourage and give opportunities for the children with disabilities to exercise their right to participate, 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 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 the performances.

The trouble came when the pandemic came, 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 infection, they visited the CWDs to their respective homes and handed to 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 incomes, 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 to many, many more areas in the future. That's one step closure to the vision of Makabata to provide a better life for each and every child, including those with disabilities.

BAGUMBAYAN FEELS LIKE A BRAND-NEW VILLAGE

BY NERISSA P. SOLEDAD



Bagumbayan was the first “barangay” or village in Negros area where Share an Opportunity Philippines (SAO PH) implanted its flagship program Maunlad na Komunidad Angkop sa mga Bata (Makabata).

Being a coastal village, the residents of Barangay Bagumbayan eke out a living through fishing and farming. Still, poverty is prevalent. Based on the Adult Survey Result, the poverty level of the community was at 76%. The prevalence of unemployment and underemployment among its residents is perhaps the main reason for this sad state.

Where poverty prevails, other problems are bound to be close on its heels. In the case of Bagumbayan, it’s the lack of housing and malnutrition, just to name two.

Aside from these human-made scourges, Mother Nature, too, is not always kind to Barangay Bagumbayan. Village residents had to endure unwelcome “guests” on a regular basis. We are talking about typhoons and heavy downpours, especially during half of the year, at least.



The Philippines is located in the world’s typhoon belt and is visited at least 20 times annually by these natural phenomena. Although it has its advantages, being near the sea, can also be a vane for Barangay Bagumbayan.

The lack of environmental sanitation and the lack of income which has also caused some children to stop attending school to help augment the income of the family, have clearly deprived the children of Barangay Bagumbayan the right to enjoy the best health possible (UNCRC Article 24) and the right to education (Article 29 & 32).

That was the situation that the staff of Makabata, a child-centered community development program (CCCDP), saw upon arriving at the village.

The program title “Makabata” is actually derived from Filipino words “Maunlad” or developed/progressive, “Komunidad” or community, “Angkop” or fit for, and “Bata” or children. Thus, “Makabata” means “a developed community fit for children.” The Makabata Program is designed to consolidate efforts of SAO in selected communities through a strategic work with indigent children who will be involved in their own development and the development of their community around the priority needs of children.

Because of the presence of the program in the said barangay, children were given the opportunity to enjoy their rights, especially in survival, development, and participation. Through its various activities and networking with other like-minded organizations, parents and other stakeholders were equipped on how to access opportunities for the benefits of the children.

The program lasted in the barangay for more than 10 years and it has successfully done its share in creating a childfriendly environment, thanks to the collective efforts of groups of children and parents, local barangay government and residents, schools, the Municipal Health Office, and the municipal social work and development office.

Today, Barangay Bagumbayan is blessed with a generation of children who enjoy living in a clean, safe, and child friendly community whose basic needs are provided for. The village is now a model of a functional and child-friendly community led by responsible children, youths and adults benefiting children in the community.

GOOD THINGS NEED NOT END

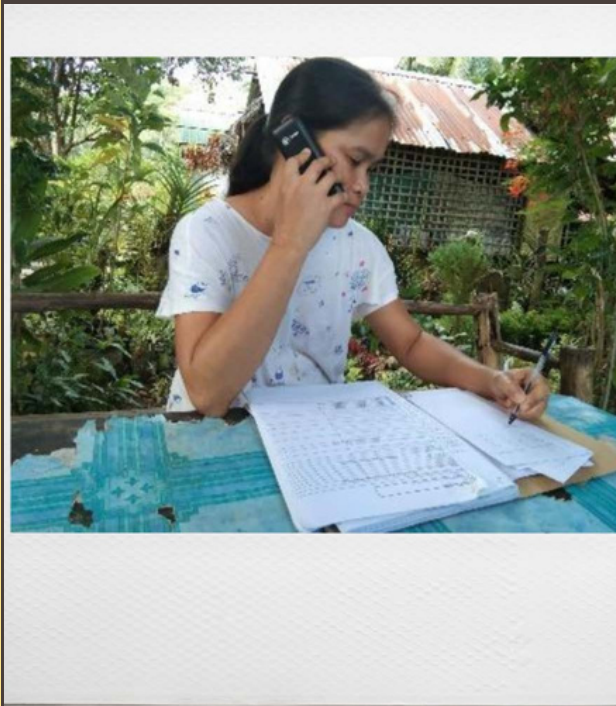
BY MARY JOY RELENTE

Now that the implementation of the Makabata Program had ended, life will never be the same again, right? Not exactly. Everyone was saddened by the discontinuation of the program, but the momentum it created (at least in the life of one family) was enough to last to the present and, perhaps, the future.

Out of Makabata Program, came the existence of the NICOA Credit Cooperative, which provides its members like the Igcasan family a venue where they can continue to live out the past as active participants of Makabata. After all, the co-op sponsors activities that mirror those of the beloved discontinued program.

Jesus, his wife Avy, and their four boys were involved in the program since 2012, when it reached their community. That year, Avy attended an orientation about the program and became convinced that Makabata was heaven-sent.

Hence, Jesus and Avy allowed their children to join its activities and be active as members of a children's group called Samahang Bata (SB). When JC Kyll, the eldest, graduated from the program as a child-partner, he even transitioned to a youth volunteer who contributed hugely in monitoring the program, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.



Meanwhile, the couple joined the organized groups of parents called "share groups." Jesus, in particular, became an active member.

Avy, a Bible woman who knows how to handle children, volunteered to help SB implement activities. Eventually, she was elected as an officer of NICOA Credit Cooperative.

"I am very thankful that this program was brought to our community because through the Program we learned how to save money, and helped us in rearing our children by teaching them to be good citizens," Jesus said.

He disclosed that the program created a positive change in his family. "There's now peace and harmony inside the home; everyone helped each other," Jesus said.

The Igcasan family is grateful to NICOA Credit Cooperative for giving them access to its loan and credit facilities. It enabled them to acquire a motorcycle that saved them a lot of fare money since they are far from the town proper. Also, the co-op helped them pay for school fees and some household needs.

Some good things do come to pass like the Makabata Program. But its effects will linger and its positive impact will continue to be felt by the Igcasan family and many other families whose lives the program was able to touch.



A SEED OF HOPE TO A FRUITFUL TREE

BY MARY JOY RELENTE

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 described the motivation that has been keeping the group alive.

Perhaps, at the time, the vision of the Paglaum members was not as clear nor the “why” of their being together. Little did they know that, like faith albeit as little as a mustard seed, their small group will grow into a fruitful tree.

Three other like-minded share groups in the area were organized in 2012 after 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 by the burning spirit of cooperation demonstrated by the members.

Two years later, the four groups agreed to form into one Community Based Organization (CBO), believing that together, they can achieve more.

With the Paglaum group at the helm, the CBO members gathered their 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 CBO members demonstrated such faithfulness and discipline in saving and paying their loans, SAO PH allowed them to access a bigger loanable amount to serve the organization’s growing clientele.

As the membership and services of the CBO expanded, SAO PH encouraged the group to officially 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, unsure if they can fulfill the requirements to be duly registered group.. “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 receive their CDA membership in 2020.

The NICOA Cooperative was able to extend its services to three barangays. They are engaged in microfinance while implementing the activities inspired by the Makabata Program. They allotted budget for children’s education like miscellaneous fees and school supplies (for the children of the 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 is proof that a co-op combined with a child-related program like the Makabata is not only responsive to the needs of its members and the community at large but also profitable. The formula may not be conventional but, who can argue with success?

Indeed, there are still many challenges and potential dangers that maybe lurking at some corner. They may be external or even internal. However, what’s important for an organization is the mindset of not to be deterred by challenges but to continue looking for solutions as problems arise. At the end of the day, the group must settle with a decision that will benefit the majority of the co-op members.

The once seemingly irrelevant group that only had nine active members has indeed gone a long way. It has not stopped blazing a trail until now. Look, the seed of hope has become a fruitful tree!



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