

From Public High School Girls To Able Women of Virtue

Values education and life-coaching are the key elements that distinguish this club that prepares public high school girls in the Philippines for a productive and meaningful work life.

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Public education in our country does not enjoy general esteem. Lack of competent teachers, unmanageable

student-teacher ratio, pathetic classroom facilities: these are but some of the culprits.

In addition, save for a handful of achievers, the quality of students who go to public schools is not at all remarkable.

With due respect, the Philippine public educational system can perhaps be likened to a dilapidated machine churning out sub-standard merchandise. The Department of Education (DepEd) can be lauded for its continuous effort to address these technical problems. But along the way, attention to character formation –a basic building block of a healthy nation- sadly lags behind.

In this need, Kabataan found its niche. Now on its sixth year, Kabataan counts on 35 woman volunteers who positively contribute to improving the quality of students who come from public schools.

TOWARDS HIGHER ASPIRATIONS

“Dream and your dreams will fall short.”

These words of St. Josemaría Escrivá, author of *The Way*, a book of modern spirituality, have posed a challenge to Agnes Dayao since she first read them.

With her retirement and her husband's demise, Agnes found herself with time in her hands. She realized that apart from taking care of her grandchildren, and getting involved in a local girls' club among the underprivileged sector, it was time to reach greater heights.

To ensure the girls' continuous character education, she launched the Kabataan Public High School Girls' Club, together with Nanette Corcuer, another retired professional from Las Piñas City, and other volunteer friends.

Their pilot schools were at Verdant, Golden Acres, Equitable Talon, and EastTalon, all located in Las Piñas.

The program consists of values formation classes and a mentoring program. The vision: help mold public high school girls into women of virtue to complement their technical know-how.

Kabataan teaches the basic human virtues that are the stairwell to a person's higher aspirations. "Since half of those who attend Kabataan come from dysfunctional families, we primarily aim at forming these girls to be good mothers and good workers" says Nanette.

ONE-ON-ONE LIFE COACHING

Most of the students live in the urban poor areas of Las Piñas, where it is difficult for the most basic human virtues to thrive.“

They need to have a good dose of fortitude to stand up for what they learn in Kabataan which may clash with what they usually experience at home and in their neighborhood” says Agnes. “I know how it is to be poor... but with perseverance you can improve your situation.”

The backbone of Kabataan is the mentoring program where adult leaders volunteer their time for one-on-one life coaching. With this, they are able to monitor the academic and personal development of the students.

Crysjoy and Eloisa, both alumnae of Kabataan are now enrolled in the twoyear Dual Training Program in the Food & Beverage Services course of Punlaan School and are both presidents of their respective classes.

When asked what inspires her in life, Crysjoy talked about the STRONG virtues (Steadfast, Trustworthy,

Respectful, Open-minded, Noble, Gutsy) that she learned in a workshop sponsored by Kabataan. In fact, on a recent visit, the Australian Ambassador was impressed with the storytelling talent of Crysjoy who won first prize in a school contest.

He asked about her background and discovered its roots in Kabataan. A good number of the club's alumnae make it to the top in their respective schools. With their training in Kabataan, they pursue higher studies better equipped and with stronger convictions.

In 2010, 80 graduates of Kabataan entered college. Eight of them are enjoying scholarships in tourism-related courses at Punlaan School in San Juan and at the Maligaya Institute for Culinary Arts and Residential Services in Manila.

Partnerships have also been forged with institutions that are very willing

to support Kabataan like the I Am STRONG Program of the University of Asia & the Pacific, and the entrepreneurship training program sponsored by De La Salle University, spearheaded by its professor Dr. Aida Velasco.

SOLIDARITY

Part of the virtues they learn is solidarity.

There was a girl who leaves her house early morning to help her parents sell wares in the public market. She would go to school in the afternoon and walk a 30-minute distance back home because she has no money for fare. Knowing this, some friends in Kabataan decided to shell out a peso everyday to cover her fare home.

Regular Kabataan club activities are held at Las Piñas Center, a venue for youth development where the

doctrinal and spiritual formation are entrusted to Opus Dei, a personal prelature of the Catholic Church whose main aim is to help people seek holiness through their work and in the ordinary circumstances of their lives.

(To volunteer at Kabataan, inquire at 109 M. Alvarez St. Las Piñas City, tel. no. 806-7273.)

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