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Home Sweet Home Academy

Home Academy is a school in Las Piñas City, Philippines, which provides formal training for domestic helpers leading to a TESDA certificate in Home Skills.

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Culinary courses alongside catechism classes. A school ambience in the company of new friends, and quiet time to spend in prayer at the school's chapel. And at the end of this

training experience, a TESDA certificate for a Home Skills Course.

For many of Home Academy's "students," these novel features on top of the new skills they acquire, work wonders in their performance on the job and on their self-worth.

Home Academy is a formal training program for domestic helpers launched as a social initiative of some members and cooperators of Opus Dei in Las Piñas City. Opus Dei, a Personal Prelature of the Catholic Church, provides the doctrinal and spiritual formation imparted in the school.

In 10 sessions, the trainees learn basic culinary skills, laundry technology, housekeeping and table service. What makes the academy unique is the "real time" hands-on training the students acquire in the school's innovative "home showcase." They cook in a real

kitchen, clean a real living room, declog a sink in a real bathroom, etc. Students become enthusiastic about learning new techniques like cleaning the bathroom using a cheaper solution of vinegar and water.

A typical example is Em-em, who came to Manila with her younger sister to try their luck at improving their lives. Through the support of an aunt, the younger sister was able to enrol in high school. While waiting for a chance to pursue higher studies and to avoid being a burden to her aunt, Em-em decided to work for a family to earn her keep. On seeing her enthusiasm at work, her employer enrolled her at Home Academy to improve her skills.

Her interest to take up a course in food service was spurred on by what she learned at Home Academy: care for details, openness to learn, hard

work, and time management.

Drawing up a daily schedule, she tries to allot only the necessary time for each task and avoids shortcuts in her work.

Since sending their helpers to Home Academy, employers have noted their improvement both professionally and spiritually.

Education increases their sense of self-worth, and while it primarily benefits the househelp, the good redounds to the family in improved services. The homeowners who send their helpers to the school express satisfaction at the results. Many are pleasantly surprised with the changes they see: beds made up like in hotels, dinner tables set in formal style with napkins and cutlery, and a more cheerful attitude.

Another novel feature of the training is that the teachers are homemakers themselves. Since the Home

Academy opened in 2005, there have been about 720 women helpers who have benefited from the program. For many, it might be the only schooling they will ever get after elementary, for which they are very grateful. Aside from the Home Skills course, the school now offers courses for homemakers too. With the training provided, Home Academy continues to touch the lives of women who help bring back the true sense of service in the homes that they serve. Home Academy is located at 109 Marcos Alvarez St. Las Piñas City, Tel. No. (02) 806-7273.

Ayie Navarro // Sunday Inquirer Magazine, 19 June 2011