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From Macau to Tacloban City

In July 2007, Onida and six other young women from Macau volunteered their services to a community in Tacloban City, Philippines. She said, “The experience helped me understand life’s realities better; it broadened my mind... Life can be a lot more beautiful and meaningful by helping others.”

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Organised by the East Asian Educational Association of Macau (EAEA), the volunteer work camp, *Youth for the Community 2007*, prepared seven university and young professional women to reach out to a community school in Cabalawan, Tacloban City. There they taught English, Arts and Crafts, dental hygiene and enrichment classes on virtues. They also helped set up a library for the school.

One member of the team, Millie, a student from the Institute for Tourism Studies of Macau (IFT), said that what she enjoyed most was teaching the children. “They were all willing to learn. They enthusiastically answered all my questions... I found them totally different from children who could easily get an education.”

Prior to the trip, the participants and friends collected clothing, toys,

books, stationery, and other similar items from their relatives and acquaintances to be distributed to the underprivileged families of Cabalawan community. The team also worked with a local civic organization, *Soroptimist International of Tacloban City*, to offer free dental services to the school children with the collaboration of a team of local volunteer dentists.

Seeing the poverty of the people and the lack of basic necessities helped the volunteers ponder on what it means to help others. For Sandy, another student from IFT, the trip to the Philippines made her understand another culture better, “You put yourself in their shoes and you see things from another angle.”

More importantly it made Sandy realize what makes one truly happy. “It’s not money or power. It can be as

simple as cultivating human relationships. Actually, when you help others, you're the one who gains most from the experience."

The team also visited *Regional Haven*, a home for battered wives, and *Home for Girls*, a shelter for young girls who are victims of physical and sexual aggression. They brought some donations and also gave talks on personal hygiene and grooming, and classes on basic computer skills.

Onida, a young professional, said she could not forget the smiles and the joy of the school children and the girls in the shelter. "The experience helped me understand life's realities better. It broadened my mind and changed my values in life. Life can be a lot more beautiful and meaningful by helping others," Onida added. She hopes to do similar activities in the future.

For Chris, another young professional, it was the little things that made the experience unforgettable. “It’s when the children call me *Ate* Chris.” *Ate* (Ah-te) is a Filipino word used to address someone older politely and endearingly. “I’ve also learned from this trip how to use my heart in my relations with my family and friends,” said Chris, who was heartened by the warm welcome of the team’s local host family.

As Celia, another IFT student in the work camp, puts it, “Our host family made me see and feel what a real family is... and I really enjoyed that!”

Though the camp is long over, whatever the volunteers have seen, heard and felt is something they can look back on as they move on in life. “Life is beautiful and we should respect and appreciate others. We have to always find and experience

something true, pure and good so as to be able to continue living in this complicated world. Don't let unpleasant things blind you, there's still something perfect in this world," concluded Sandy.

And for Millie, besides the "big things in life", the work camp helped her make resolutions to appreciate life's daily realities. "Now I am thankful for what I have. I've learned to be more patient with others especially my family... my temper improved a lot. I try to be more understanding towards others now. I'll try not to easily get angry when things do not go as I expected or planned," she said.

"We are indeed lucky," she added.

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EAEA is a not-for-profit organization in Macau which aims to promote programmes and activities that

supplement the formal education of young people.

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