



Philippines, Southern Tagalog Region, Laguna Province, Calauan Supporting Victims of Violence and Abuse

“Lord, I hope that I will have a new family”. “I hope to finish my education”. “I wish to be with my siblings again”. These are some testimonies from young girls living in the Crisis Center.



The Crisis Center is home to young girls aged three and above who have been victims of violence, physical and sexual abuse in their own homes and neighborhoods. To distance them from the perpetrators (most commonly relatives or family members) and avoid repeat incidences, they are rescued and kept safe at this home for women and children. This means that at a very early age, they are separated from their families and their future is unknown. Because of the trauma, it becomes difficult for them to trust others again and ‘paint their road’ towards the future. The children only stay at the center while their legal cases are ongoing.

Context

The Crisis Center, located in Calauan, Laguna, in the Southern Tagalog Region of the Philippines, caters for victims of violence and abuse across the whole province. The average number of residents is 30, but in reality there are hundreds or even thousands more victims of these kinds of crimes, which are often left uncaught by authorities or kept as undisclosed secrets. Due to poverty and legal impediments, the mothers (who are probably victims of abuse as well) are unable to visit their children at the center. The children thirst for the affection of a family yet are unable to go home, as their own family members are usually the source of the harm and danger inflicted. The majority (about 80%) of these children will never be able to go back home. Not only do they lose their families who are supposed to take care of them, but many of them suffer from fear and depression, which if not addressed will prevent them from moving forward in their lives. The AIC volunteers try to help look for financial support to sponsor further costs of education after the girls leave the center, though so far, only a few have been sponsored due to budget constraints and limited benefactors.

Project Theme and Activities

Since July 2014, four groups of AIC volunteers have been visiting these children regularly and so have become their second mothers, showing them love, inspiration and hope. With the

benefactors' help, they provide toiletries and materials needed for professional training programs.

Every Sunday, AIC volunteers bring a priest to celebrate mass with the children. Before the mass, short catechism classes are conducted. The ongoing spiritual services facilitated by AIC volunteers substantially alleviate the depression of the girls. After the mass, a sumptuous family feast is shared by the children and the volunteers as their regular bonding experience.

The girls are beginning to trust, love and dream again. They have started to look forward to another week because they are assured that our AIC volunteers are coming again to surprise them with sumptuous food and small gifts after celebrating Sunday mass with them.



Key Figures

- 30 residents on average live at the center. The length of their stay depends on the speed of the litigation process.
- Some stay there for more than 5 years while some for less than 2 years.
- Since AIC began working with the Center in 2014, about 100 victims of abuse and violence have been supported.
- AIC volunteers spend approximately \$100 a week for the priest's stipend, food, toiletries and supplies. On special occasions, AIC volunteers also give toys, dresses, shoes and bags to the children.

Partnerships

- Provincial Department of Social Welfare and Development
- Diocese of San Pablo (clergy and parishes), SVD & Salesian Priests, Holy Face Sisters
- Benefactors

Future Prospects and/or Impact

The AIC volunteers of the Southern Tagalog Region Diocese of San Pablo would like to develop their work further by providing an organized and effective scholarship assistance program to the residents after they have left the center.

The AIC group also dreams of building a chapel within the compound to help the residents more in their spiritual journey, as they continue to face significant challenges in their lives.