

Supporting drug dependents through aftercare rehabilitation program

Marilen Enriquez, 42, has not seen life through rose-tinted glasses. For 18 years, she has struggled with substance abuse, a muddled family life, and odd jobs.

Marilen's life is but a microcosm of the myriad of painful life stories of individuals who succumbed to drug abuse. In 2002, Marilen realized she needed to change. "Simula noong nahuli ako, napag-isipan ko na magbago na. Nahirapan na din kasi ang pamilya ko, nagkaroon ako ng iba-ibang asawa. Personal na desisyon ko na na magbago." (I was apprehended by the authorities in 2002 and that was when I decided to change. My family suffered and I had different husbands. It was my personal decision to stop taking drugs).

After finishing a rehabilitation program at the Bicutan facility, she has been attending recovery meetings every two weeks at the Makati City Hall. "Yung ibang kasamahan ko sa meetings, minsan mawawala na lang. Nalalaman namin nag-drugs uli (There are times when we no longer see others who used to attend the meetings. We would find out that they are back to using drugs)," Marilen said. "Kelangan talaga ng suporta gaya ng group therapy o negosyo (We really need support like group therapy or how to start a business)," she added.

Today, Marilen has mended the broken pieces of her life. She lives with her four children, and works as a street sweeper under the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH). For people like Marilen, the group therapy sessions have helped her muster the courage to look at life without rose-tinted glasses, for the first time.

Helping low-income drug dependents like Marilen who cannot afford expensive private rehabilitation centers is what brought together the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Asia Pacific Addiction Research Institute (APARI), Rotary Club of Makati, and Family Wellness Center.

UNFOLDING THE STORIES OF THEIR LIVES

Mr. Reniel Cristobal, executive director of non-profit group Family Wellness Center and himself a recovered drug dependent, said "Family intervention helped me cope with my addiction. Usually with drug dependents, there is a 40% chance of relapse. This is why this aftercare rehab project is very important because recovery cannot be done alone."

Mr. Cristobal is now an entrepreneur and a counselor of addiction victims, including some 12 former drug dependents in Tatalon, a poor community in Quezon City.

The aftercare project is also supported by the Makati Anti-Drug Abuse Council or MADAC. According to Superintendent Jaime Santos, Makati police chief, "The training, exchange of information, and relationship building from the program are key in the overall effort to curb the drug problem."

PAVING THE WAY TO SUCCESSFUL RECOVERY

Japan-based non-profit organization APARI is also an international partner of the aftercare rehabilitation project. APARI and some recovered Japanese drug users joined recovery sessions when they visited the Philippines October 2011.

Mr. Tsuneo Kondo, founder and executive director of APARI, said, "We want to help drug dependents in the Philippines in their recovery, especially those below the poverty line. We want to find out how we can enhance their self-resiliency and survive by themselves upon recovery from substance abuse."

According to APARI's website, there are about 2 million people in Japan suffering from drug addiction and it has widened to different demographics. "In Japan, we support recovering drug dependents get back to society. They are given public assistance and social security. We hope that in the Philippines former drug dependents will also be given opportunity to have jobs and get back to society," Mr. Kondo said.



Recovery meeting help drug dependents reintegrate in the society and interact with peers

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- Reniel Cristobal, Family Wellness Center

Although data on the number of drug users in the Philippines is difficult to conclude depending on admission, recent statistics from the Philippines' Dangerous Drugs Board (DDB) show that drug users dropped by at least 70% in 2008.

There is a saying that goes, "In the shelter of each other, we will live." The beauty of the aftercare rehabilitation program lies in the idea of a community support for drug dependents who cannot afford after-care treatment, that are given the chance to change their lives, one step at a time.

