

PRESS RELEASE

ALS goes behind bars

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) being implemented by the Department of Education has become a source of hope for many people who are outside the formal school system. And they include learners who are behind bars.

ALS addresses basic education needs of school-age children who are out-of-school. Moreover, it caters to those who are beyond school age but who have not been to school at all or those who have dropped out of school. It also seeks to reach those living in far-flung areas and isolated communities.

Ruty, 27, a widow, is charged with robbery and hold-up. She has been in jail for one-and-a half years.

A member of “*Estribo Gang*” (highway robbers), *Ruty’s* adventures were far from easy. “*Sumasampa kami ng tropa ko sa mga dyip, nanunutok at gumagawa ng operasyon. Pero natiklo ako ‘nung huli,*” she said. (My friends and I rob passengers of public utility jeepneys. In the end, we were caught by the police), Local police tracked her down after months of hide-and-seek.

“*Dito na nga lang ako sa loob ng kulungan tumaba at nagkalaman. Dito rin lang ako nakaranas ng salita ng Diyos. Natuto akong magsulat at magbasa dahil sa A&E ng DepEd. Magbabago na ako,*” she said. (It’s while I am incarcerated that I got to gain some weight. And while I am here, I also got to hear the word of God. I learned to write and read because of the A&E of DepEd. I will endeavor to change my ways.) She will be joining 49 A&E test takers in October.

In 2004, it was estimated that 16 million or 20% of the total Philippine population were either school drop-outs or stay-outs. This population is considered the target groups of the alternative learning system.

Specifically, this group of learners consists of street children, indigenous people, farmers, fisherfolk, women, adolescents, solo parents, children in conflict areas, rebel returnees, and others.

To reach these marginalized learners, BALS offers the Basic Literacy Program (BLP) for illiterates and the b) Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) System for elementary and high school drop-outs.

Maria Arleen is 39 years old, personable and a mild mannered native of Bohol. She has three grown up children and is serving out her sentence for pornography and child trafficking.

Arleen shuts her eyes to summon a memory of her experience. “*Three months ako sa National Bureau of Investigation at four months na ako dito sa preso. Inaayos ng isang private lawyer ang kaso ko,*” she said in a soft and measured voice. (I spent three months at the National Bureau of Investigation and I am in my fourth month in jail. A private lawyer is working on my case.)

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“Mahirap dito sa preso pero dito ko na-appreciate ang di ko nabigyan ng panahon noong nasa laya ako. Nagrereview ako dito sa kulungan para sa A&E exam, pumasa na rin ako sa screening at mag-eexam na sa Oktubre. Sana naman ay pumasa ako, makalaya at makahanap ng trabaho,” Arleen, a second year high school dropout manages a smile. (Life in jail is hard but I really appreciate having time for those things I was unable spend time with when I was free. I am currently reviewing for the A&E exam in October and I have passed the pre-exam screening. I hope to pass the exam, be released from jail soon and be able to find a job.)

ALS is flexible. It is an anytime, anywhere learning. It uses interactive modules and learning sessions are conducted at any available space at an agreed schedule between the learners and the learning facilitator.

Primarily, ALS teaches life skills that the learner can use in everyday life. The learning goes beyond obtaining information but is more concerned about the application of the competencies and values to develop their capability to make decisions that can improve their life.

ALS uses multilingual where the mother tongue or the first language of the learner is used.

The basic curriculum of ALS include communication skills, critical thinking and problem solving, sustainable use of resources/productivity, development of self and a sense of community, and expanding one’s world vision.

After completing the A & E, learners will have to go through assessment & certification. The A&E Assessment & Certification is a test that is offered in two levels: elementary and secondary. Those who passed are issued certificates of passing signed by the DepED Secretary.

The ALS A&E Test Passers has the following options: enter college/university; enter other ALS programs; enter formal training programs; enter/re-enter the world of work; enter/re-enter elementary or secondary formal school system.

Ma. Liezel “Kukay” Ellyn, 19, is a first year high school drop out with three kids. She was jailed for theft.

“Noong una, pa solvent-solvent lang hanggang sa uminom, nag yosi, nag drugs.” (At first, I was sniffing solvent fumes as a way to relax until I got to drinking alcohol, smoking and later on taking illegal drugs.) Enjoying the adventure with friends on the streets, she turned to small-time crimes. *“Hanggang sa tumigil ako ng pag-aaral, nabarkada at napariwara,”* she admitted. (Then I stopped going to school, wasted time with my friends, and eventually lost my way.)

“May tatlong anak ako ngayon six years old, three years old at saka one-- iba-iba ang mga ama pero dito ako sa kulungan nakapag-isip-isip. Siguro, aral din ito sa akin.” (Now I have three children a six-year old, a three-year old, and a one-year old – each from different men but while in jail I got to thinking. Maybe this is a lesson for me.) Now, Kukay reviews for the A&E exams from Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 11 a.m. with 16 female cellmates. *“Ngayon, marunong*

na akong mag plus (addition), mag times (multiplication) at mag-essay (essay writing),” she says before breaking into a giggle. (Now, I know how to add, multiply, and write essays.)

She continues: *“Hindi ko iniintindi iyan noong nasa laya ako. Malaking tuwa ko at dito sa kulungan ko napagpatuloy ang aking pag-aaral. Paglaya ko, makakasama ko na rin ang mga anak ko,”* she says. It’s not a bad life after all. (I did not think about those things when I was still free. I am overly joyful that I got to study here in jail. When I get out, I will be with my kids again.)

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