

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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### **Happier this Holidays**

## **14,000 OSYs benefit in Tarlac, Pampanga**

Many families of out-of-school youths in Tarlac and Pampanga celebrate a happier Christmas this year as the government pumped in some P56.5 million for employment and livelihood projects this holiday season.

Jeffrey Arcinal, 21, eldest in a family of four, is one of the 14,000 out-of-school youth (OSY) beneficiaries in the Out-of-School Youth Servicing Towards Economic Recovery (OYSTER) program. He was given work as utility worker in San Agustin Elementary School in San Fernando City.

“This job is a timely blessing for my family, now we’ll have something for noche Buena.” He added that he’ll save some of his earnings to continue his education: “Finding employment is hard so when I get my paycheck I will use it for an electronics course in TESDA.”

Education Secretary Jesli Lapus was assigned steward of Tarlac and Pampanga who was also directed by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to implement pro-poor programs in all regions to mitigate the effects of the global economic crisis.

Lapus said, “This program will have a multiplier effect on the local economy as it will lead to the creation of more jobs and the generation of additional income.”

“We hit two birds with one stone in these projects. We do not only offer income to our out-of-school youths but we also address the health and hygiene needs of our students,” Lapus noted.

Beginning November, DepEd has deployed some 1,500 OSYs as utility workers in public schools while more than 12,300 OSYs are beneficiaries in the production of health soaps for school children. They come from the districts or barangays where the schools are located.

### **Help Becomes Handy**

The utility workers were assigned in 1,200 elementary and secondary schools under the Divisions of Angeles City, Pampanga, San Fernando City, Tarlac and Tarlac City. The project has been earmarked a budget of P7.5 million.

“You see, we have very large schools and the OSYs we hired are indeed a big help for the upkeep of the school and its vicinity,” said Assistant Secretary Thelma Santos.

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Santos added that the new hires are particularly helpful in the prevention of dengue in the schools as they were given instructions to clean the surroundings and ensure that the breeding grounds of mosquitoes are destroyed. They also do daily cleaning, particularly of the toilets, and minor repairs of wobbling chairs and tables.

“Before, the students are the ones responsible for the upkeep of their respective classrooms, but now with the OSYs in our schools, our students can better focus on their studies while our teachers can begin the classes promptly,” Santos shared.

San Agustin Elementary School Principal Graciela Subala affirmed: “Our school was among those affected by dengue a few years ago. So the two OSYs we got for the school became handy in ensuring cleanliness of the surroundings such as proper waste segregation, maintenance of sanitation in the toilets, and clearing of stagnant water.”

“The OYSTER program has really benefited our school. But what is also important is that there are families who are made even happier this Christmas because of the job opportunity opened to the OSYs,” said Subala.

“These workers showed enthusiasm in their work, “noted San Fernando City Superintendent May Eclar. “They clean the school even before classes start and they are the last people out as well.” The San Fernando City division has 54 OSYs as utility workers.

### **Cash in soaps**

Meanwhile, under the cash-for-health-care livelihood project, some 12,300 OSYs are expected to start producing bars of Citronella, Acapulco/Guava, and Calamansi soap in January 2009. They have already been trained on how to prepare the medicinal soap as formulated by the Philippine Institute of Traditional and Alternative Health Care (PITAHC).

Sec. Lapus explained: “The medicinal soap they will produce will be given to public elementary school pupils who will receive their year’s supply of four bars of Citronella soap for their head lice, four bars of Acapulco or Guava soap to combat skin diseases, and twelve bars of Calamansi soap for personal hygiene.

Through time-motion studies by the Department, each OSY is expected to earn P4,000 for making 2,000 bars of soap. All raw materials will be provided by DepEd.

The 20-day production period will yield about 24.6 million bars, which will benefit more than 1.2 million children in Region III. Studies showed that 46% of children in Region III have pediculosis or head lice while 40% have skin diseases.

School nurses were earlier given training on soap making. Those who have been assigned to train OSYs had refresher courses from DepEd Health and Nutrition Center in coordination with the PITAHC of the Department of Health.

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“This livelihood was inspired by school nurses in Maguindanao who after being trained in soap-making ventured into business to fund some clinic expenses such as medicines and supplies. They sell the soaps they produce to the teachers in their schools,” shared Santos.

She added, “In the future, the department may be looking at this region as the main supplier of health soaps for our school children. PTCAs may get funding capital thru micro financing scheme under the Accelerated Hunger Mitigation Program to produce the health soaps.”

Lapus believes that the soap-making venture can be a sustainable livelihood project. “There is a real need to produce medicinal soap at a minimal cost to keep our school children free from head lice and skin diseases,” the education chief said.

He added, “We can tap partners in the community who can take this project to the next level. We see the local government units who are always in the look-out for livelihood opportunities and the private sector which can also pitch in to better improve the technology and marketing.”

Dr. Elena Herrera, Principal of San Fernando Elementary School has high hopes for the soap-making project. “Our students have a real need for these health soaps,” she said.

Sammy Sampang, Alternative Learning System (ALS) Education Supervisor in San Fernando City led the selection of OSY to be employed. “I told our district coordinators to seek those who really need this employment and cross-check their lists with the barangay officials since we were given direction to be very selective,” Sampang disclosed.

Filipinos always look forward to a joyful holiday celebration – and they include the thousands of OSYs beneficiaries under the OYSTER project.

Just like Jeff who will be assured that there will be food on the table this Christmas season.

**END**

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