

PRESS RELEASE

“PALENGSKWELA: market workers get a crack at education

Inside the “bagsakan” area of the Tagum Public Market the air is damp and the heat is sweltering on that Thursday morning. But for Delio Caya, 38, an Alternative Learning System (ALS) mobile teacher, this is another day of interesting encounter with his students under the Department of Education’s “Palengskwela.”

His 17 learners (11 boys and six girls) in the secondary level are mostly market vendors, street sweepers and out-of-school youths. Used to economic deprivation and sometimes emotional stress, these 15 to 29 year-old learners at times attend their Thursday classes a little drunk. “*Dahil sa pagod at para makalimot sa mga problema, may mga pumapasok sa klase ko na naka-shot*” (drunk),” opened Delio.

And he goes on: “*Pero hindi mo sila basta-basta mabulyawan, masindak o makuha sa tingin dahil hindi sila takot sa teacher. Sanay sila sa komunidad na may bangayan.*” Classes start at 8 and ends at 4:30 p.m. every Thursday.

Delio is one of some 1,000 ALS mobile teachers of DepEd nationwide who provides basic education to learners outside of the formal school system. ALS targets learners who dropped out or those who never experienced what it is to be like in formal school. They can be youth and adults, people with disabilities, indigenous people, those living in inaccessible areas of the archipelago.

DepEd’s marching order to ALS mobile teachers is to provide them with functional literacy to enable them to become productive members of society. “*Sila yung ang mga taong halos mawalan na ng pag-asa sa buhay dahil sa maraming sitwasyon na wala sa kanilang kontrol . Nilulubos ko na lang ang serbisyo ko sa kanila... kung ano ang pinakamagandang edukasyon na maipagkakaloob ko ay aking ginagawa,*” added Delio.

Those who went through ALS and earned their elementary or high school diploma can take up technical vocational courses or pursue a college degree.

Delio holds his classes just above the market’s comfort room, a 4 x 6 meter cramped space, partially painted and with improvised tables and chairs. “*Na-short sa budget kasi galing sa non-government organizations at sa aming pag ambag-ambag,*” he admitted when asked why the classroom is not fully painted.

Delio employs a lot of creativity in delivering lessons to his non-traditional students. Through group and individual activities, Delio develops in his wards their communication skills, critical thinking and problem solving skills and expansion of their world view. “*Ito yung mga learnings na pwede nilang i-apply sa kanilang araw-araw na buhay,*” Delio explained.

Saturdays are not sacred for Delio. This is the day he dedicates for his elementary learners in the “bagsakan” area. He has 12 learners (8 boys and 4 girls), 11 to 16 years old. Their class starts at 8 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. Most lessons are done in Filipino and in the local dialect.

Tuesdays are for another group of learners at Barangay Pagsadangan Learning Center, a community 18 kilometers from Tagum City. Here, he teaches writing,

reading and basic math to his learners. He also offers livelihood skills to 33 out-of-school youth and adults in three *puroks* near the Center. He spends four hours each week at the Center and shares that despite the age disparity (from 15 to 54 years), his learners relate well with one another.

Two years now on the job as a mobile teacher, Delio finds his calling very fulfilling: "*Nakakatuwa at nakakataba ng puso na natututo silang bumasa, sumulat at bumilang,*" he said. "No one gets rich here, but mobile teachers get decent salary." And the respect of the community.

He said his toils and hardships are paying off. Of his learners who took DepEd's Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) examinations, eight passed the tests where four joined the formal school system and the other four are still contemplating to study in a regular school.

Tagum City Superintendent Nenita E. Lumaad who initiated the putting up of the Palengkeswela is happy that what they planted among the informal learners is now bearing fruit. "*Maraming kabataan dito sa palengke at sa mga katabing lugar ang hindi nakakapasok kaya minabuti naming buksan ang 'palengkwela' para sa kanila.*

I felt it's my duty to try to do something for these people," Lumaad said.

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