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46 years and counting: Boys Town Davao fires up dreams

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## 46 years and counting: Boys Town Davao fires up dreams

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Stella A. Estremera

BOYS Town Davao celebrated its 46th year anniversary on Sunday, November 20, facing a greater challenge: Senior High School, but are ready and determined to bring the boys to much higher achievements than basic education.

With Senior High School now in place, Welfare Action Foundation of Davao Inc. (Boys Town Davao) will have to raise more funds to allow their boys to finish high school.

The group was incorporated with the vision of providing basic education for boys who need help the most, 46 years ago, when the K to 12 basic education system has not even been conceived yet.

Boys Town Davao president Salvador Angala admits running a center that houses, provides for, and sends boys from destitute families to school requires a lot of philanthropists to keep their heads above water.

"Ang pinaka malaki na expense dito yung for daily operations," Angala said at the sidelines of the small anniversary gathering attended by long-time donors and supporters.

The center in Ma-a ha boarding facilities, workshops, classrooms for special classes, and a pizzeria. It has also graduated from catering to children in conflict with the law, as many other facilities are already taking care of these. Their focus now is more on those from destitute families.

The beginnings

Boys Town Davao was set up by Dr. Lourdes "Unding" Solis, who at that time was the wife of the chief of Police of Davao. Solis wanted to help the boys whom she sees begging on city streets and being involved in petty crimes.

The boys were first provided quarters at the PC Barracks, now the Camp Domingo Leonor.

Angala confirmed that their first boys were then called juvenile delinquents. The same children these days are referred to as children in conflict with the law.

Solis' friends started soliciting help to provide for the boys' basic needs.

Police Colonel Honorio Garcia donated two hectares of marshland in Maa and through the efforts of erstwhile Judge Vicente Cusi of The Knights of Columbus, the boys finally had their first building, their workshop in October 1970.

With expenses to provide for the boys and keep them away from a life of crime, the Welfare Action Foundation Davao Inc. was formed and the city government was tapped for help. Seven years after the center was built, Dra.

Unding passed away on February 23, 1977, which saw Mrs. Soledad "Nanay Soling" Duterte, the mother of President Rodrigo Duterte, was designated by the group to head Boys Town.

At that time, the President was not yet in politics but his mother had always been active in civic organizations and involvements. It was Nanay Soling who introduced the boys to backyard farming and fowl and hog raising.

Nanay Soling rounded up her friends as well, among them Angala and Pablo "Cholong" Lorenzo, who served Boys Town until he passed away. It was in November 1999 when the group decided to offer the management of Boys Town to the Salesians of Don Bosco (SDB).

### AD VALUE

**28,543.61** PHP

### PR VALUE

**28,543.61** PHP

KEYWORDS	MENTION
DAVAO LIGHT AND POWER COMPANY	1

\* NOTE: PR VALUE IS COMPUTED BASED ON MEDIA VALUE + ADDITIONAL MODIFIERS WITHOUT VAT.

\* DISCLAIMER: ALL MEDIA VALUES ARE CURRENTLY COMPUTED BASED ON THE FOREIGN EXCHANGE RATE OF 48.53 PHP TO 1 USD AS OF

TOWN to the Salesians of Don Bosco (SDB).

A memorandum of agreement was signed on June 28, 2000 and Fr. Franco Uras was named Executive Director.

The Salesians' expertise was in handling street children, CICLs, and disadvantaged youth – the very profile that Boys Town serves – through their Salesian Preventive System, which is based on three pillars: reason, religion and loving-kindness. Instead of punishment for misdemeanors the boys are trained with loving kindness, the type of teaching implemented across Don Bosco Schools and Institutes globally for educating the youth.

While having committed only to provide basic education for boys who need help, Boys Town has been able to solicit scholarships for some of its boys and has been instrumental in allowing their boys to finish a tertiary course.

Nanay Soling and the President

Milagros Lorenzo, the widow of Cholong, attributes her late husband's full involvement with Boys Town to Nanay Soling. The same was echoed by Angala. That was just how Nanay Soling was, persistent, such that they could not say no to her appeals for help.

Quietly helping in the background was the son, now the President, whom Angala said would treat their boys every Christmas ever since he became mayor and was always there to provide whenever help is needed.

"Alam na niya yan pagnapakita ako sa kanya," Angala laughingly recalled.

"But on his own, every Christmas he'd have the boys picked up and brought to a mall, then he will give them shopping money and treat them for lunch. Madali lang pakiusapan si Mayor basta para sa bata at matatanda."

Will they be getting some support now that the President has bigger tasks ahead? They can only hope so. As they have long learned from Nanay Soling, it pays to be persistent. With the expenses of two more years for basic education, they have no choice but to persistently knock on everyone's doors.

"Marami namang tumutulong at gustong tumulong, but running such a facility really requires a lot of money," Angala said.

Breaking barriers

Just last Thursday, the art exhibit of the Boys Town boys opened at Alliance Francais in Bel-Air 2, Makati. They hope to generate some funds from the two-month long exhibit, but that can only generate a little considering the expenses required to set up such.

The exhibit itself, however, is not really geared toward raising funds by in raising the self-esteem and ambition of the boys as they are given a venue for their art works that is way above their earlier imagination.

Entitled "Collective Dreams", the artworks are the collaborative works of 50 boys created through several workshops that started last year with the group of Mindanao artist Rey Mudjahid "Kublai" Millan.

The workshops and the paintings revolved around the boys' dreams and aspirations for their lives as Millan's group of artists encouraged the boys to dream of happy thoughts and better lives.

Recently, Millan also put up the boys paintings all over the Boys Town Center as he envisions the property to be the showcase of the boys arts and skills, that will bring in visitors and donors and even fill up the center's pizzeria.

Providing help for the basics are groups like Davao Light and Power Company, which has been consistently giving some financial assistance, then the University of Mindanao through its president Guillermo Torres Jr. has assured Angala of assistance for the boys' technical skills education and senior high, and Angala is also hoping to revive an earlier arrangement with the University of the Immaculate Conception also for senior high, and Rotary Clubs that have been itching in whatever they can through the nearly five decades of Boys Town.

"I've often told our boys here that they are very lucky because what they have been receiving here are much more than what they would have normally get on their own in public school."

At present, Boys Town has 48 boys, down from the 50-plus they had last year after a few graduated high school. Part of the character development introduced by Millan through his art is introducing the value of gratitude, where boys are encouraged to create artworks to give away as gifts of thanks to people who come in to help.

"We have to learn to be grateful because it is with a grateful heart that you receive more blessings," he said.

For those interested to contact Boys Town, call telephone No: (082) 244-04-96 and Telefax No: (082) 244-04-96.