

# Community in Action



## Volunteering starts with an open mind and a JOYFUL heart

Filipino organization in Japan brings happiness to Japanese children in care through literacy made fun

BY SOMEWELL

When Japan-based Filipina Liza Minglana – Sato left the Philippines more than 20 years ago, her love for her country and her affinity towards children remained intact. As an education advocate, she was looking for a way to pay it forward to her second home. With her unwavering belief that education must be accessible to everyone, she was able to establish a volunteer group in 2013 that aims to provide education for underprivileged children in care and to help children in her home country as well. The result was JOYFUL or Japan Outreach Youth Foundation for Underprivileged Learners.

Tracing her story back home, Sato was born in Siargao (Mindanao) in the Philippines and is the youngest of 10 children. Even before she left her the Philippines in 1991 for Japan, to help her family gain a better future, attachment to her country, her hometown, and her *kababayans* never faded. She shares that she has experienced two different lives growing up.

Sato's family experience a twist of when growing up, her father died and they needed to help each other through work. Her mother, in order to provide for the family, managed the vast lands of coconut trees and rice plantation. Because of the sudden change in their lifestyle, Sato also experienced a shift. She lived in a nun's dormitory and then worked as a student under the College Department, as a secretary to the College Dean among other tasks assigned her. Despite what she went through, she still considers herself

nakakatulong ako sa mga bata. Hindi ma-explain yung pakiramdam pero it's something uplifting," says Sato. She adds that the enthusiasm of the kids is infectious and truly inspiring, especially the hugs and their expecting eyes. I always look forward to my next visit."

After JOYFUL's establishment in 2013, Sato together with her friends who were also teachers in her school, catered to more orphanages. Now, JOYFUL serves seven orphanages in the Tokyo and Kanagawa Prefecture. The organization also now has more than 20 volunteers who willingly and selflessly enjoy teaching kids in orphanages. "I am overwhelmed with the support I receive from my fellow *kababayans*, my Japanese students at ALIS as well as other expats here from England, Greece and the United States. Gusto rin talaga nila makatulong sa mga underprivileged children" adds Sato.

In February this year, the Japan government officially recognized JOYFUL as a charitable organization, granting them NPO (Non-profit organization) status.

Sato was also able to give back to her community in her hometown of Siargao. The organization has helped build a new playing ground and park in the eighth remotest barrio in Siargao, Barangay Libertad. Last year, they added a *gazebo* to the park for kids and for the locals of Siargao to enjoy. During the catastrophic aftermath of typhoon Ondoy (*Haiyan*) in the Philippines which killed thousands, Sato also found a way to give back to her mother land. She

donations and solicitations for the project to come into fruition. "Masisipag mag-aral ang mga bata sa Barangay Libertad but they can't afford to buy books. They are cramped in the small library that is currently shared within the faculty room. There are not enough books to borrow and a place to read and study. This is why we really want this project to push through to be able to help these kids," Sato adds.

With the Christmas spirit just around the corner, Sato is now preparing fun activities for kids in the seven orphanages they are supporting. According to Sato, they will set-up a food stall for baked goodies in the upcoming *Autumn Festivals* in Kodomo no le- Children's Home on September 27th and in the biggest bazar in Seibi Home Orphanage in Akabane on November 3rd. She has also asked her students from ALIS to donate some of their old stuff and sell them during the festivals. Proceeds from these events will go to the children in the orphanages. Come December, ALIS will also be helping by sponsoring the party needs and snacks for the Christmas parties they will be throwing for the kids in the orphanages.

Sato together with her organization JOYFUL continues to hope that they can make a difference in the children's lives. "My mother was a great influence in my life. I understand now why she led a simple life. It was because she was sharing what she had. So, now I'm trying to follow what she had started. For me and my organization, it's all about making a difference in the lives of these kids. This is what I want to share to