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A youth club harvests dreams

Kabataan Public High School Girls Club has successfully partnered with Aniham Technical School to assist girls with limited finances to achieve their dreams of personal and professional advancement.

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Raziel, Vanessa and Dana look back with thankful hearts on how the *Kabataan Public High School Girls Club* became, for them and their families, a saving grace midway

through the pandemic. Through *Kabataan*, they got to know *Anihan*, and qualified for the culinary school's Senior High School Scholarship Program in the Home Economics Strand Technical-Vocational Track. They are national certificate holders in Cookery, Bread and Pastry Production and Food & Beverage Services, and are now gainfully employed, helping their families in their daily needs.

“Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”

That ancient Chinese proverb, widely attributed to the philosopher Lao Tzu who lived some time in the 6th Century BC, has both inspired and guided development planners, non-government organizations (NGO) and even plain individuals out to make a difference in the lives of the less privileged to this day.

And, perhaps, nowhere is that guide more apt than in the Philippines, where a vibrant civil society has been picking up the slack in government efforts to lift more Filipinos out of poverty. Latest official data show that while the country's unemployment rate stood at 3.8% for the entire 2024 — marking the lowest annual reading since 2005, when the government adopted a new international definition of “unemployed persons” — the monthly rate picked up to 4.3% in January from 3.1% in December 2024. That latest reading was equivalent to about 2.16 million jobless Filipinos in January, compared to 1.63 million in December 2024 (perhaps as seasonal jobs during the Christmas season ended).

Thus, Pope Francis — during his January 2015 visit to the Philippines — pressed those who have more in

life not to be content with just handing out loose change from one's pocket to give to the poor, while Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, who came to the Philippines in January 1987 as then Prelate of Opus Dei, could not help but remark at a public get-together at the *Philippine International Convention Center* that his sons and daughters in the country have their work cut out for them with poverty in plain sight almost anywhere one goes.

And so, the pioneers of *Kabataaan Public High School Girls Club (Kabataaan)* pursued a dream: that of helping public high school students, not by giving them material assistance, which is always finite, but by helping them help themselves and their families to be self-sufficient, and enable them to achieve a quality of life consistent with human dignity. *Kabataaan* is a non-government, non-stock, non-profit, faith-based, social

development organization that was established on September 1, 2006. It is an outreach program of *People Engaged in People Projects Foundation, Inc. (PEPPI)*. Its mission: “To mold public high school girls into future women of virtue, responsibility, integrity, courage and truth who will contribute to upholding a morally upright society.”

“All that I needed”

Raziel, 18-years-old, is a junior high school graduate of *Poblacion National High School* in Muntinlupa City in southeastern Metro Manila. Originally from Cagayan de Oro City in northern Mindanao, her entire family moved to Muntinlupa before she finished elementary school. She is the eldest among 3 siblings. Through *Anihan Technical School*, she was able to work at an early age.

“I was a hard-headed daughter and sister, always hiding from my

parents and sneaking out of the house with friends. I also told lies frequently and sought to justify frivolous pursuits. Neither did I go to Mass, forgetting God altogether,” Raziel recalled.

It was in her 10th year of schooling when she became interested in transferring to a private school. When she asked her parents, however, they were honest enough to say they could not afford the cost of private school tuition. Her father is a construction worker, and her mother tends to their small poultry business.

Raziel realized that she could not have everything she wanted. But, she said, “God is good. He gave me wonderful *Kabataan* titas, who became my sponsors and mentors. I joined the *Kabataan Girls Club* when I was in Grade 8. Because of *Kabataan*, I was able to study at

Anihan Technical School for two years, enjoying free tuition. That was where I learned about the teachings of St. Josemaría Escrivá, the Founder of *Opus Dei*.”

“I learned the pursuit of sanctity through ordinary work. I changed in *Anihan*, which shaped my spiritual, social, and personal life. I asked only a few things of the Lord, but He gave me all that I needed.” Raziel topped her batch with honors of distinction in academics and work immersion excellence.

Soon after graduating from *Anihan* in June 2024, she was absorbed by her work immersion venue, *Vivere Hotel* in Alabang, Muntinlupa where she now works in the Pastry Department. After graduation, and despite her tight work schedule, Raziel managed to find time to attend formative activities in a center of *Opus Dei* near

her workplace, for which she is grateful.

Profound impact

Twenty year old Vanessa from Las Piñas City (southwestern Metro Manila) and a junior high school graduate of *Talon Village National High School* — shared a similar experience with *Kabataan*.

Her father worked as a cook and a family driver, while her mother is a housewife. She has 4 siblings: 3 girls and a boy.

She recalls how she got to know the youth club: “The ladies of *Kabataan* visited our school, and I learned that they came to encourage 7th graders like me... to join the girls club, to meet new friends, learn how to make good use of time, and to broaden our culture. So, I became a *Kabataan* member-scholar after graduating from junior high school.”

“Being a *Kabataan* scholar has had a profound impact on me in so many ways. It taught me the importance of living with virtue, which means being true to myself and my values. It helped me develop leadership skills, not just in how I interact with others, but also... I’ve learned how to be disciplined and responsible. *Kabataan* also inspired me to work harder in school and helped me grow closer to God,” Vanessa said.

“When *Kabataan* referred me to *Anihan* during the pandemic in 2022, I felt a mix of emotions. I was overwhelmed at first and asked myself, ‘Would I fit in?’ ‘Am I truly deserving of this opportunity?’ and ‘Am I ready to take the next step towards independence?’ It was a lot to take in, but deep down, I knew it could be a life-changing experience if I accepted it.”

For Vanessa, *Anihan* has been incredibly impactful. Beyond just learning new skills, being an *Anihan* scholar taught her the importance of prioritizing what truly matters in life. It gave her the strength to face challenges and helped her realize that she has the potential to dream bigger and pursue those dreams. Vanessa noticed she became more resilient, more aware of her abilities, and more confident in pursuing her goals. She is also more determined and focused on what she wants. She now understands the value of hard work and faith.

“In *Anihan*, I met amazing people who became like family, and teachers who showed me innovative ways to learn. We didn’t just focus on academics but also on life skills like cooking, baking, and serving food and wine. I have so many memorable moments from the two

years I spent in school, which I will always look back to and treasure.”

Upon graduating from *Anihan* in June last year, Vanessa received an academic excellence award. She did her work immersion at *Fiddleleaf* in Alabang, an industry partner of the school.

She now works at *Tagaytay Conference Center* in Mendez, Cavite, just south of Metro Manila. There, she works in the kitchen, the bakery and laundry sections. She relates that life in Tagaytay is both challenging and enjoyable, as she happily attends formative activities like Catholic doctrine classes, meditations and monthly recollections. She said she is also happy to be teaching catechism to kids in their own girls’ club there, *Cattleya*.

Scared at first

Dana, 19 years old, is a batchmate of Razel and Vanessa, and is working at *Dalayrayan Center*, a catering facility of a student's residence in Pasig City. She got to know *Kabataan* through her mother who is a guidance counselor of her junior high school, *Talon Village National High School* in Las Piñas City. Her mother is currently a coordinator of the *Kabataan* Girls Club. Her father is a liaison staff who works for a small company owned by an uncle. Dana became a *Kabataan* scholar when she was in Grade 7.

Kabataan has been a big help to her and her family especially in times of crisis. They offered not just material help but also prayers. Dana has this to say when she became a scholar of Anihan through *Kabataan*. "When *Kabataan* introduced *Anihan* to me, I was scared. First, because I will live far away from my family for the first time. I will also be waking up

without them, dine with different people that's not them. I was so dependent on my family that I was scared that I would not be able to survive 2 years away from them.”

“But, luckily, I survived. With the help of *Anihan*, I became independent and I am no longer scared of exploring things on my own. Anihan helped me outgrow my fears and drew me closer to God. Through the mentoring program, I no longer feel scared in opening up to people about my problems. Above all, they helped me to be open to God. I also learned how to offer up everything I do to Him. To *Kabataan* and *Anihan*, I am beyond grateful.”

Dana, like Raziel and Vanessa, was also an Academic Excellence awardee on graduation day, and was recognized for her outstanding performance during her work immersion at *The Pigpen* in Alabang.

Nothing less than your best

These young achievers of *Kabataan* and *Anihan* have some things to share to young ladies like them: Dana said: “For students who let their fears control them, I hope you will overcome them. Do not be afraid to take risks because it’s always better to take the risk rather than lose the chance and regret that you didn’t grab the opportunity you were given. You have nothing to lose if you try something new. Instead, you’ll gain new knowledge and lessons from it. If you try to get out of your comfort zone you’ll say ‘It’s good I tried it. At least I learned something’ Instead of saying, ‘I wish I tried it; then at least I could have learned something.’”

Vanessa has these pearls of wisdom: “To all the young women still studying, enjoy this time in your life as a student. It won’t last forever, and while it’s important to work

hard for your dreams, it's equally important to enjoy the journey. Life as a student can be difficult, but it's also full of opportunities for growth and discovery. My advice is not to settle for anything less than your best. Dream big and take steps toward making those dreams a reality. You have the power to shape your future, so believe in yourself and never stop striving for more."

And from Raziel: "My Mama would say: 'Child, whatever happens, never forget to pray and give thanks. Be sincere in prayer, and always remember to entrust your life and everything to the Lord.'" My mom taught me how to have faith in Him. And my *Anihan* teachers and mentors taught me to practice faith in Him. "At each and every moment, I always remind myself that I will never be alone because I love He Whom I trust."

Raziel, Vanessa and Dana are joined by other senior high school batchmates who were all high-flyers in *Anihan*: Michaella, Judy Anne, Samantha, Meriam, Joy and Dani were all referrals of the *Kabataan* chapters in Las Piñas and Muntinlupa. When these girls were studying in *Anihan*, they also made time on weekends to help out in socio-civic work like teaching catechism to the kids of Barangay Milagrosa where *Anihan* is situated. All of these *Kabataan* girls are now working in various food establishments in the country.

Kabataan, meaning the “youth” in Tagalog, was conceived to help poverty alleviation through education, training and employment. Operating in southern Luzon, it has partnered with *Anihan* in offering skills training for female youth with limited financial resources. Values education and life-coaching are key

elements that mark *Kabataan*, which prepares public high school girls for a productive and meaningful life.

The NGO gives modules on leadership and values education to its member-scholars, aside from providing academic support.

The stories of Raziel, Vanessa, Dana and countless others should inspire many other young ladies to pursue their dreams in this Jubilee Year of Hope.

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