

Smiles as sweet as sugar from the children of Bacolod City – A Promise of a Better World

How do you start making this world a better place for children?

Bacolod City, a place where people's smiles exude genuine happiness, is not exempted from the sad realities that this world has. Child labor is apparent. And they're doing something about it.

Bacolod City believes that local governments should know first who need help so they can provide the necessary assistance efficiently and effectively. So how do they start making their city a better place for children? They get to know first the children who need be saved.

"Getting to Know"

The local government unit of Bacolod City initiated a series of interventions to identify child laborers and assist in providing solutions to effectively transition them from hazardous situations in the sugarcane fields to better living conditions while growing up. One of these interventions is the Child Monitoring System or CMS.

To stop child labor and prevent children from engaging in hazardous work, Bacolod City intensifies its advocacy in protecting children's rights and well-being through the CMS, established in partnership with *Ang Pag-aaral ng Bata para sa Kinabukasan – Livelihood, Education, Advocacy and Protection (ABK3 LEAP)*, an NGO under the guidance of World Vision Development Foundation.

Formerly known as the Child Labor Management System, CMS is an active framework of identifying child laborers to determine the risks to which they are exposed, to refer them to social services that could assist them in their well-being, to verify that they have been extracted from hazardous situations and to track and ensure that they have satisfactory alternatives after the intervention.

Through the Community Based Monitoring System (CBMS), implemented by the city government since 2010, the ABK3 LEAP used the information gathered by CBMS to come up with new interventions to effectively address the issue of the city's 420 recorded child laborers.

The CMS is implemented through a memorandum of agreement signed between four barangays (Felisa, Cabug, Vista Alegre and Granada) and ABK3 LEAP. The city provided technical assistance through the City Planning and Development Office, and the *Sangguniang Panlungsod* supported the program through a resolution.

Searching high and low city-wide

The CMS is a database that intends to help the local government to enhance existing monitoring system and integrate the issue of child labor status in sugarcane areas.

The database captures all the specified data for profiling, monitoring referral and support action. The data include profile of children and their household, availed services, education and work status of child labor and children at risk.

The CMS likewise provides data that are relevant to the three support action programs which are prevention, protection and withdrawal.

With available data on children at risk and child labor, the barangays know now who these children are, where they live, and what services are mostly needed.

Towards a child labor-free city

The most notable impact of the program as far as barangays are concerned is the strengthening of the capacity of the members of the Barangay Council for the Protection of Children (BCPC) in providing interventions to the children and their families, particularly in advocacy and in raising awareness of the parents about the rights of children.

The program also highlighted the importance of monitoring the implementation of the various program components such as the livelihood projects, capacity building, education of students and pupils and vocational/technical students.

“I am happy and satisfied to see that school participation has greatly improved, and that our barangay had the most number of graduates in the Alternative Learning System (ALS),” Mr. Alfredo P. Talimodao, Jr., *Punong Barangay* of Brgy. Granada, expressed.

The project has also opened doors for more partnership with other NGOs and people’s organizations for the delivery of services for children, particularly in adding to the number of Day Care Centers in the barangay. “Result-based approach and close monitoring are very important in providing services to our children,” Mr. Talimodao said about his most notable insight on the program.

As for Brgy. Cabug, *Punong Barangay* Juan Zonuel T. Malayang appreciated the involvement of planters (farm owners) and parents in the reduction of child labor in his barangay. “The project does not only provide the data for evidenced-based services, but it also involves active participation of the barangay in ensuring that the children and parents are given support such as venue and transportation during trainings, advocacy, and monitoring activities,” he said.



*Brgy. Cabug Catch-up Classes of Little Teacher
and Certificates of Recognition for being Child Labor Free*

The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) recognized the efforts of the barangay that made Mr. Malayang very proud. DOLE certified that Brgy. Cabug is a Child Labor-Free Barangay.

Mr. Jose Maria Leandro Norberto de Leon and Ms. Mona Dia Jardin, *Punong Barangay* of Brgy. Vista Alegre and Brgy. Felisa, respectively, echoed the same sentiment. "The recognition by DOLE and CHILD FUND ABK3 LEAP of our efforts proved that this program is worth investing and we believe that it should be implemented in the remaining barangays," they said.

Way Forward

The CMS will be further implemented in 61 barangays in 2016. It is aimed to serve 10% of the total population. The program will establish a new database on children covering not only child labor in sugarcane fields, but also children at risk, and children in conflict with law.

The program has an allocation of P150,000 and will be logged at the City Planning and Development Office, in close partnership with the Department of Social Services and Development and other stakeholders.



Finally, the efforts, dedications and hardships of the Barangay Council and ABK3 LEAP Child Fund Philippines paid off because the main goal which is to eradicate Child Laborers in the barangay was achieved. On September 23, 2015, Brgy Chairman Alfredo P. Talimodao Jr. received the award for Barangay Granada as "Child Labor-Free Barangay" which was awarded by DOLE Secretary Rosalinda Baldoz at Planta Hotel and Residences, Bacolod City.

These efforts are but small investments to ensure that children in Bacolod continue to be the City's hopeful treasures. And without them being engaged into work at their very young age,

their smiles will light up the city as it fulfills its promise to be the sweetest place for them to live in.

Making the world better for children starts by knowing them.

