
Manila Women's Forum

A Network of Women Professionals

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Defying Gravity

By Kathryn E. Nelson

The Philippine Community Fund (PCF) has a simple dream: to lift the children at Smokey Mountain up and out of the dumpsite

2013 November 11



Left to right: Anita Sarnicula, Melissa Alipalo, Arlene de Vera, Wabel Animoza

Eighteen young Philippine Community Fund (PCF) scholars travelled from Smokey Mountain's dumpsite to the upscale North Forbes neighborhood to sing and share their story with members during the most recent Manila Women's Forum (MWF) monthly meeting. They joined long-time volunteer and newly-elected PCF President and CEO, Melissa Howell Alipalo, who spoke passionately about PCF's work and the communities the Fund serves. Her voice filled with emotion several times as she described the harsh realities of daily life and the "simple dream" PCF founder Jane Walker had 10 years ago to help these children find their way beyond the dumpsite.

Alipalo began her presentation with a question, challenging the group to identify a strange object that she pulled out of a plastic bag. While only a few MWF members were able to identify the object, every PCF scholar
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January MWF Meeting ■ **When:** 6:30 p.m., Monday, 2014 January 20. ■ **What:** It's a New Year. New Year's Resolutions. If, like us, you have wondered how to create a smoother, more open family atmosphere, you are invited to The Five Love Languages presentation by Catherine Watson and Pan Yone. The Five Love Languages helps us to communicate in a way that is unique to each of our children, as well as spouse/partner. We will also show how you can discover your child's Love Language and discuss different ways in which to show love in their "language." ■ **Where:** Pan Yone's house, 1186 Tamarind, Dasmariñas Village, Makati. ■ **Bring:** Something to share for the potluck dinner. ■ **February Meeting:** Monday, 2014 February 17.



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 present knew what it was. A lanky boy jumped up to demonstrate how to use the primitive short-handled long metal hook. In one quick motion he deftly stabbed and picked up a soda can from the floor with a “garbage picker,” an ubiquitous and critical survival tool for life in the dumpsite. Again, Alipalo’s voice filled with emotion as she described the plight of these child garbage pickers: “Thirty-five pesos. Children, some as young as three years old, can be found garbage picker in hand, trudging barefoot through rubbish—for eight hours a day—to gather one kilo of aluminum cans, which will only earn them thirty. five. pesos.”

Despite the implications of this graphic imagery, Alipalo suggested that the distance between Tondo and

“The poverty of our century is unlike that of any other. It is not, as poverty was before, the result of natural scarcity, but of a set of priorities imposed upon the rest of the world by the rich.”

John Berger (born 1926),
 English art critic, novelist,
 painter and poet.

North Forbes is not so vast, stating that “The parents of these children simply want what we want for our children.” She shared a short (15 minutes) but incredibly compelling documentary called *Angels of the Dump* that she and her husband Tim Alipalo produced through their media production company, Sugar Mountain Media. The film recounts PCF’s origins and highlights one father’s hope for his daughter to follow her dream to become a teacher. This family’s story is one of many and echoes the plight of all such children who have the same simple dream of moving beyond their unchosen fate of collecting garbage for a meager income.

**From the Window of a Taxi Cab:
 PCF’s Simple Dream**

During a reflective sabbatical from work, British expatriate Jane Walker travelled to the Philippines in 1996. She was in a taxi cab near the Tondo

dumpsite when she first encountered the extreme poverty and shanty-town living conditions of the Filipino poor. Through the window, she saw barefoot unsmiling children looking at her. After following them to their home in an open dumpsite, she looked back at them knowing her life would never be the same.

By 2003, what started as “a simple dream” to start a day-care center for the children of that dumpsite had evolved into a non-profit social development organization registered in the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Philippines. In 2007, PCF built an on-site school now accredited by the Philippine Department of Education and supported by the British School of Manila (BSM). An apt metaphor for the buried treasure hidden in the dumpsite, PCF’s school itself is made out of 70 recycled and repurposed shipping container vans. Walker recognized that education would give these children choices and the freedom to pursue a life outside the dumpsite. Moreover, the fact that Walker did not have the

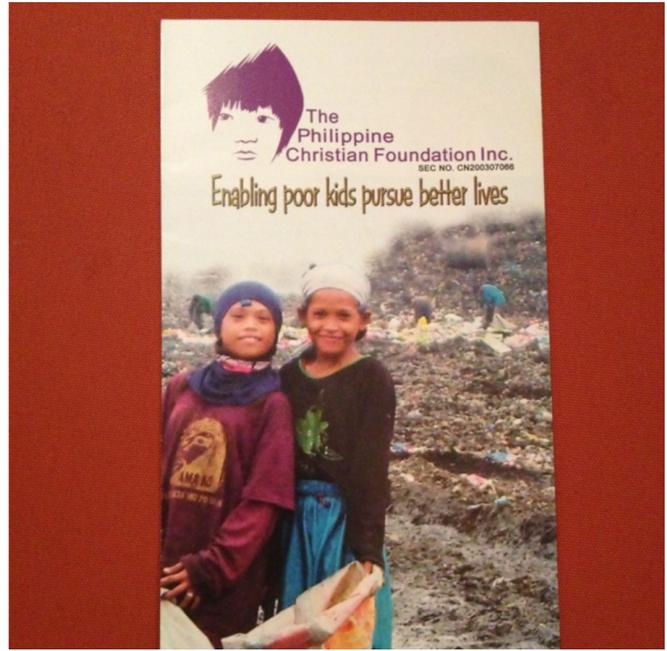
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“Child labor and poverty are inevitably bound together and if you continue to use the labor of children as the treatment for the social disease of poverty, you will have both poverty and child labor to the end of time.”

Grace Abbott (1878-1939),
 American social worker who
 specifically worked in advancing
 child welfare.

***In a country well governed,
 poverty is something to be
 ashamed of. In a country badly
 governed, wealth is something
 to be ashamed of.***

Confucius



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 opportunity to finish her own education makes her dedication to help provide this opportunity for others even more remarkable.

Today, more than fifteen years after that life-changing taxi cab ride, Jane Walker and the staff and volunteers of PCF have expanded their efforts to reach and educate more than 1,000 children in three sites: the Smokey Mountain Reclamation Area and Pier 18 dumpsite in Tondo, the San Isidro Cemetery in Navotas, and the Irisan dumpsite in Baguio City.

Recognizing that education alone is not the answer, PCF takes a holistic

approach, focusing on five core interrelated factors to lift these children out of poverty. To support their children's pursuit of an education, PCF families receive two free meals a day, health services, and access to livelihood skills training and job opportunities. PCF's five focus areas are: (1) education, (2) health and nutrition, (3) social intervention, (4) livelihood and skills training (recyclables), and (5) values formation and spiritual care.

Commenting on PCF's fifth focal area, Becca Halliwell, PCF board member and BSM teacher, described the importance of instilling the value of community service in these children, suggesting poignantly that those that appear to have so little actually have so much to give.

Defying Gravity: Harnessing the Power to Change

Even as Alipalo spoke optimistically about these children's futures, she acknowledged the fragility of hope among this vulnerable population and the difficulty of "keeping the light on" behind their eyes. While ensuring that these children have access to basic needs and education is critical, she emphasized the need to also move beyond the 1-2-3s and A-B-Cs to provide the inspiration for pursuing a life beyond the dumpsite.

To this end, in 2008, PCF partnered with Ballet Manila to mentor young dancers living near the dumpsite. This growing partnership has already begun to bear fruit as PCF Scholar

Jessa Balote joined Ballet Manila's professional company this year. Building on this partnership, PCF's current plans to build a dance and art studio within the dumpsite school aims to harness the power of dance, music, and the arts to inspire and uplift these children to see a new horizon beyond the dumpsites and cemeteries where they live.

Doing just that, the PCF Scholars' first song challenged the group to "make some noise and find your voice tonight." And the simple yet powerful lyrics of their final song that evening, "Defying Gravity," echoed this call to action, providing a hopeful refrain:

*I'm through accepting limits,
 'cause someone says they're so;
 Some things I cannot change,
 but 'til I try, I'll never know.*

*So if you care to find me
 Look to the western sky!
 As someone told me lately:
 "Everyone deserves the
 chance to fly!"*

"No family should have to depend on the labor of its children to put food on the table and no person should be forced to work in captivity."

Hilda Solis

"The real solution is to improve the incomes of the poor and provide their children with decent education."

". . . education is crucial, it enables children to become more aware of their rights and to exercise them in a respectful manner which helps them shape their own future."

Carol Bellamy (born 1942), former Director of the Peace Corps, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and President and CEO of World Learning.

How Can You Help?

Help end child labor and consider becoming a PCF Child Sponsor!

PCF knows that the most effective way to change children's lives is to give them an education. By sponsoring a child for just 1,500 pesos a month (about 50 pesos a day) you will bring about real change not just for that child but for his or her whole family, giving them the opportunity to change their lives permanently for the better.

What does 1,500 pesos/month or 50 pesos a day provide?

- a place at school
- two meals a day
- a weekly food parcel linked to academic achievements and attendance
- two school uniforms and a pair of shoes
- transport to and from school

"In 1995, a British newspaper distribution manager, Jane Walker, set up a center for the children living (and as she quickly discovered, working too) on the nearby 'Smokey Mountain' dump sites." Read Yasmin Newman's article at Red Flag Magazine <http://tinyurl.com/my92rjk>

- regular medical check-ups
- support and medical care for the child's entire family

Besides child sponsorship, you could consider providing non-cash/in-kind gifts:

- sacks of rice, fresh meat products, and canned goods to support PCF's feeding program and incentive program "food for school"
- school supplies such as bond paper, notebooks, coloring pencils, ball pens, and bags
- good quality clothes and shoes
- medicines, first aid, and hygiene kits
- used tarpaulins, "ring pulls" from soda cans and old magazines to support PCF's livelihood training programs
- office equipment to support PCF's administration

For more information on how you can help, please contact PCF at info@p-c-f.ph or (02) 635-6913.

Buy tickets for a special benefit performance of Ballet Manila's The Nutcracker!

Enjoy a Christmas classic and help the children of Smokey Mountain! Ballet Manila and the Philippine Community Fund (PCF) present The Nutcracker on Sunday, December 8th at 3 pm at the Aliw Theater, CCP Complex. Don't miss this Christmas classic featuring PCF Scholar Jessa Balote who will join Prima Ballerina Lisa Macuja in her final "swan song" performance to benefit the children of

the Smokey Mountain dumpsite.

One-hundred percent (100%) of the proceeds from tickets sold via PCF for this performance will go towards building dance and art studios for the children of Smokey Mountain.

Please contact PCF President and CEO Melissa H. Alipalo directly at melissa_alipalo@yahoo.com to purchase your tickets today! 'Tis the season - if you need a reason! ;)

For more information about PCF and Ballet Manila, please visit: www.p-c-f.org and www.balletmanila.com.ph

Manila Women's Forum

Manila Women's Forum (MWF) is a cross-cultural network for women. It provides opportunities to build friendships, talk to women of various cultures, and share information about resources. Our meetings are intended to provide intellectual stimulation and lead to personal and professional development. All women are welcome to join.

The current officers are: **Lisa Lumbao**, Chair; **Julia Holz**, Treasurer and Membership; **Beulah P. Taguiwalo**, Newsletter; **Lisa Stuart**, Message Board Moderator; **Evelyn Mendiola**, Membership; **Shari Virjee Tañada**, Message Board; **Camille Dalmacio**, Message Board.

Cost of membership is P300 per year. Members receive a copy of the current mailing list in addition to the newsletter, which is also sent to non-members. A contribution of P50 is collected from non-members at each monthly meeting. For more information about MWF, please contact Lisa Lumbao at Tel. 813-0168, or at lumbao@mozcom.com.

MWF Newsletter

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