



A Million Voices Newsletter

December 2015

A QUICK OVERVIEW OF THE YEAR SO FAR – MAY '15 TO DECEMBER '15

IN THIS ISSUE

The School Year so Far

The school year officially starts in June each year, but in the month of May the scholars begin to participate in activities and evaluations. As you will see later in this newsletter, this year's activities have focused on self-development. It may not immediately seem like such an important topic, but for a child from a depressed area it is not always enough to have good grades. The way a child perceives him or herself is equally important, because it permits them to dream and to follow those dreams.

Self-development has been a theme throughout the school year so far and has been applied in many different aspects of learning including in health awareness, parenting skills, study habits, and child protection. Plans for the remaining part of the school year focus even more on the development of self-awareness. We see it as important at AMV to not only encourage academic growth, but also boost the self-confidence levels of our scholars and their close family members. It becomes apparent in the academic performance of scholars and in the actions of parents, that self-esteem affects several aspects of daily life, as it would for any person living anywhere in the world.

Among our scholars there are already natural leaders emerging. We have young boys and girls who take the lead in talking on behalf of their peers, and who wish to inspire others. There are other scholars who are coming out of their shells and are interacting more and more with others – both in Filipino and in English.

This school year, we have also welcomed 10 new scholars into the Scholarship Family. The children come from the same area as the majority of our scholars – the Baseco slum – and are all Grade 5 students in Elementary School.

It is also a pleasure to announce that we have as many as 19 new scholarship sponsors, in addition to nine existing scholarship sponsors who have continued their support for several years. The travel agency 'G Travel' has continued their project support for many activities of the organization, and even extended this support to include monitoring travels for A Million Voices to the Philippines.

We would like to express how grateful we are for all the support given to AMV – it is by joining hands that we truly make an impact and give a voice to the millions silenced by poverty!



The Sponsor Package

Read more about exactly what is included in the Scholarship Sponsor Package which each individual sponsor provides to an AMV scholar.

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Third Place Winners

Our scholars won 3rd place for their performance during the Children's Month event in Baseco in November. The event was a collaboration between schools, NGOs, and the local government in the area.

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The Schedule so Far

Outlined below is a brief summary of the activities conducted so far this school year:

May

- ✓ Self-Development Workshops
- ✓ Annual Medical Check-Ups
- ✓ Academic Tutorials

June

- ✓ School Supplies Distribution
- ✓ Start of the New School Year

July

- ✓ Evaluation of New Scholars
- ✓ Health Seminar on Rainy Season Diseases

August

- ✓ Inclusion of New Scholars

September

- ✓ School Supplies Distribution
- ✓ Health Seminar on Vaccines
- ✓ Workshop on Good Study Habits
- ✓ Seminar on Disaster Preparedness
- ✓ Influenza Vaccination

October

- ✓ Workshop on Good Parenting Skills
- ✓ Card Making Activity for Sponsors

November

- ✓ Health Seminar on HIV/AIDS
- ✓ Preparations and Participation in the Children's Month Event

December

- ✓ Health Seminar on Food Safety
- ✓ Distribution of Food Baskets and Holiday Presents



The Scholarship Program – the Sponsor Package

This year there have been some changes to the program. One reason for this being that there has been a drastic shift in the currency exchange rate between the Norwegian Krone and the Philippine Peso. Another being that the structure of the organization has changed, making some included items part of other programs as of this year.

Every scholarship sponsor provides a package, which contains the same items for all scholars. This package includes the following:

- 2 sets of uniforms
- 1 pair of school shoes
- 1 set of gymnastics clothing
- 1 school bag
- 1 set of one-time school supplies (such as plastic folder, scissor, ruler)
- 3 sets of refillable school supplies (such as notebook, pencil, eraser)
- Project expenses and magazines (expenses necessary to pay to the schools)
- Birthday present
- Inclusion in a bonus system where policy compliance and grades can lead to points accumulation. The points are exchangeable for items, such as food, clothing, and hygiene products.
- High school scholars may also receive school IDs and school patches.



DID YOU KNOW...?

A scholar may be included in other programs and/or activities where she or he can benefit from additional services. This could include health programs or academic tutorials.

Some Included Items Explained: Project Expenses

You might be wondering what some of the items in the sponsor package are, especially as the schooling system in the Philippines is different from many European ones. Here is a brief explanations of one of the included items - the project expenses.

Although in theory school attendance is free in the Philippines, there are a lot of hidden expenses that may prevent a student from completing a school year. One such expense is related to projects.

Teachers often require their students to complete and hand in projects that will count towards report card grades – and these projects often require materials.

If a student is unable to purchase these, they will not be able to complete the required projects. The teacher may then hold back his/her grade or give a lower grade.

The scholars of A Million Voices get an allowance for project expenses, meaning that there is a fixed amount for Elementary School scholars and a higher fixed amount for High School scholars to cover project costs.

AMV pays such expenses directly to the teachers or buys the necessary materials to directly give to the scholars – as the organization has a strict **no cash** policy towards beneficiaries.



SPONSORED BY G TRAVEL



The Corporate Sponsorship

The travel agency G Travel is a long time donor of A Million Voices and is a full or participating sponsor of several of our programs and activities. This includes:

- **Transportation Service**
The School Transportation is for scholars who are in need of assistance with getting to school on a daily basis.
- **Vaccination Program**
Our scholars received the flu vaccination this year, as well as a vaccine awareness seminar.
- **Health Assistance**
Scholars receive a fixed allowance for medicine, laboratory and health check-ups, always paid for or purchased by AMV directly. A Million Voices has also welcomed a part-time Nurse this school year who provides medical monitoring of the scholar's health as well as holding necessary seminars.
- **Awareness Seminars**
Health and protection seminars focusing on increased awareness among both parents and scholars. These seminars include important health and protection related matters, such as child protection, good parenting, HIV/AIDS, and disaster preparedness.
- **Travel Support**
G Travel sponsors travel costs for one visit per year to the Philippines for an A Million Voices Norway staff. This is to ensure that proper monitoring can be carried out without using vital funds which could be better employed for projects.



Promoting Self-Development

Some of the first activities at the beginning of this year's scholarship program were directed towards self-development. Our Community Development Worker facilitated weekly workshops with all the scholars and each week had a different focus.

One aim of these workshops was to allow the organization to get to know the scholars and their families. This enables AMV to better shape the activities for the year ahead, based around the students' observed needs. However, the primary intention was for the scholars to get a deeper insight into who they are and what the dynamics of their families are like. This is especially important when living in depressed communities, as these children and their families face many additional challenges.

As part of the workshops, hands-on activities were frequently included. The scholars were engaged in creating family drawings, keeping a personal journal, mask-making of the four basic emotions (sadness, happiness, fear, anger), and narrating significant life events.

Not all of the scholars may have had an eye opening experience from the month of self-development activities, as it is a sensitive and difficult topic. However many did share reflective thoughts about life and it altogether unified the group in the sense that sharing brought the scholars closer together.

The second part of the self-development activity was a seminar on developing good study habits. It was a one-day seminar focusing on the study habits of each individual student. The scholars were able to share with each other how they prepare for class and exams, how they complete their assignments, and how they behave during classes. Other scholars and AMV staff gave feedback, especially in regards to time management and tips on study habits with proven results. The seminar provided a good insight for the scholars and AMV, giving tools to adapt study habits for improved school results.

During the third part of the self-development theme, the focus shifted towards the parents. A two-part workshop was provided for the families of the scholars, focusing on good parenting skills. The primary objective of these workshops is to create awareness around different parenting styles and what effect these may have on children. Due to the open atmosphere, parents were able to ask for advice from the facilitator and from each other, as well as to reflect on their own choice of parenting style.

The second part of the parenting skills workshop will take place in 2016, and will include activities focusing on providing a tighter bond between scholars and their parents. By addressing self-confidence, not only of the scholars but also the parents, it creates a more holistic approach.

WANT TO JOIN HANDS AS A PARTNER?

We would love to discuss any potential partnership with you. Do not hesitate to get in touch! You can e-mail us at:

amillionvoices@amillionvoices.no

The Health Pillar

The foundation of A Million Voices' contains four main pillars - one of these is health.

Poor health can have a catastrophic effect on a family, as essential income may be lost. It also has an impact on the education of students, as sickness is one of the leading causes of school absence. With low school attendance, children will be left behind and struggle to progress in school, and in society. By focusing on initiatives in mental and physical health, one can therefore save lives, secure the living standards of families, and provide society with an efficient and active worker or student. This is why health is one of the main pillars of A Million Voices.

Good health can influence many things and A Million Voices addresses this in a number of areas. Included in the Sponsor Package for each scholar are school meals, which ensure that the child will not go hungry during the school day. It also ensures that the child receives essential vitamins and nutrients which can boost energy, aid concentration levels and promote healthy eating.

Preventative measures are also important – if not the most important health measure. A Million Voices has additional activities that focus on preventing illnesses in the first place, such as vaccinations and health awareness seminars.

Basic Health Package

All scholars receive a Basic Health Package. This means that they are entitled to have an annual medical check-up with a doctor's consultation, blood, stool and urine analysis, and chest x-ray to ensure proper health evaluations. In collaboration with the private clinic 'Vizcarra Diagnostics Centre', the scholars also receive free medical consultations during the school year.

Included in the package is also an allowance – or a fixed budgeted amount – for additional medical needs during the school year. This could be additional diagnostics test or prescribed medicine. Any larger medical incidents are evaluated on a case by case basis, and if A Million Voices does not have the capacity to assist, the organization will attempt to refer the patient to a specialist.

Influenza Vaccination

In September, a vaccination seminar was held as the pre-cursor to the following Influenza vaccination. In developed countries, the vaccination is primarily suggested for those citizens who have lowered immune systems. In developing countries, this demographic is dramatically higher than in a developed country and most people living in depressed areas are at risk of contracting such illnesses.

Influenza and pneumonia are the third leading cause of death in the Philippines and by providing the vaccine; the children are protected from this risk for one year.

Awareness Seminars

During the school year, scholars and parents receive invitations to voluntary and mandatory awareness seminars. Some of them focus on cross-pillar topics, such as disaster preparation, while others are purely health related.

The seminars have various topics, but they all are considered preventative measures – may it be related to diseases, early pregnancy and sex education, body awareness and substance abuse.

A Million Voices is not hesitant about addressing sensitive topics, and even has an open view on sex education. We wish to provide our beneficiaries with the skills and tools to make healthy decisions about i.e. sex and relationships, as they themselves as individuals must make their own choices based on the information shared with them.

HEALTH SNAPSHOTS



Annual Medical Check-Up

One of the scholars attending his annual medical check-up. He is ready for a blood sample, yet still striking a pose for the photographer.



Vaccination Seminar

The pre-vaccination seminar provided more information about the vaccine to allow for any questions to be addressed and to enable the parents to decide if they would like for their children to receive the free vaccination.



HIV/AIDS Seminar

As local authorities have advised of a drastic increase of the number of HIV/AIDS cases in the Baseco community, A Million Voices joined hands with another NGO for a resource person to conduct a seminar on the important topic.

Children's Month

November is the National Children's month in the Philippines and it did not go unnoticed. Together with the members of the network BIAN in Baseco, scholars and parents of A Million Voices participated in a day's event on November 25.

The month is officially part of a Republic Act signed by the Philippine President and seeks to instill the significance of the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in the Filipino consciousness.

A total of 15 parents and 23 scholars were able to participate on November 25. It started as early as 7am with a parade, in which scholars and parents were holding a group banner, pom-poms and self-made posters highlighting children's rights. Once the parade had finished a series of talks on Children's Rights topics followed on stage, before presentations from various groups started.

We are happy and proud to announce that the group from A Million Voices won 3rd place! It was a grand moment not only for the organization, but also for the scholars and parents who all jumped with excitement. We congratulate them all on their success!



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