

**DepEd Story****A superhero from the sidelines: The story of an ALS mobile teacher**

*September 7, 2019* – In every celebration of the National Teachers' Month, we commonly see and hear tributes to teachers in the formal education sector. Little attention is given to the equally commendable work of teachers in informal education programs such as the Alternative Learning System (ALS) — the Department of Education's (DepEd) second chance education program for out-of-school youth and adults.

It took a long trek going to the ALS Community Learning Center (CLC) of Barangay Salawag in Dasmariñas City, Cavite. After walking past a public market and a bridge, I arrived at a building under construction. On the third floor, amid the heat and noise from the welding machines, I found Teacher Consolacion Tag teaching the basics of a job application letter. The 20 ALS learners — including a student taking care of a toddler — were paying attention. This is the usual scenario in an ALS learning session.

Teacher Tag would not have been a teacher if not for ALS. Growing up in a family of modest background in Zamboanguita, Negros Oriental, she had to work at an early age to support her family. Attending school was a struggle. It was only through ALS that she was able to continue her studies years after she was married.

While juggling her time and work as a wife, a mother, and a leader of their local church's women's group, Teacher Tag attended ALS classes and managed to pass the Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Test.

She then enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts in Theology program of the Philippine Missionary Institute. Although she was already 35 years old at the time and a mother of two, she was able to complete her studies and even graduate with honors in 2009.

After passing the Licensure Examination for Teachers, she served as an elementary school teacher in values education at her alma mater. Two years later, she decided to return to her roots. She started her work as an ALS mobile teacher and has been in the service for eight years now.

### **Stories of struggles**

Every week, Teacher Tag travels to two (2) CLCs in Brgy. Salawag and Brgy. Paliparan II in Dasmariñas City to meet her students.

Every day, she spends six to eight hours for the regular ALS classes. After these, she stays to give tutorials to students who struggle with the lessons. Sometimes, tutorials extend to counseling sessions. Teacher Tag shared stories of students running away from home or confessing to being a victim of violence. As a teacher, she said she cannot just sit and watch. She tries to do whatever she can to help her students and make their situation better. She experienced mediating between a student and his parent to mend their relation. She also helped a student report a case of domestic violence to the barangay Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) help desk.

*"Bilang ALS teacher, bahagi ako ng buhay nila. Bahagi ako ng bawat pinagdadaan ng mga estudyante, maging mahirap man o malungkot. Hindi ko sila maaring basta lang iwan,"* Teacher Tag said.

Teacher Tag also shared the difficulties faced by ALS teachers in terms of resources. Over the years, ALS has been receiving less than 1% of the national education budget. In 2018, the budget was even reduced by a million. Resources for the construction of learning centers and procurement of instructional materials are very limited.

In Dasmariñas City, not all the CLCs are as good and well-designed as the classrooms in formal schools. Most of the time, ALS teachers must find ways to have decent chairs, tables, and learning materials. There are even cases when they spend their own money to reproduce modules and purchase paper, pen, and even food for some of their students.

### **Stories of success**

A proud product of ALS herself, Teacher Tag is an inspiration to her students. Shirley, 23, shared how she looks up to Teacher Tag as a role model in pursuing her dreams. Now a mother, Shirley brings her kid to the CLC just so she can attend ALS classes.

She said Teacher Tag is very patient not only in teaching her, but even in giving consideration to her situation. Whenever she misses a class due to childcare or housework, she said Teacher Tag always helps her catch up.

Teacher Tag's dedication as an ALS teacher is reflected in the excellent fruits of her work. Since 2011, she has produced over 200 A&E test passers and graduates. She said most of her former ALS students are now professionals working in different industries in the Philippines and abroad.

There were also ALS graduates who became ALS teachers like her. Teacher Tag was teary-eyed when she talked about her former students who thanked her for her work in ALS: *"Masarap marinig sa kanila na naging bahagi ako para mabago ang buhay nila."*

Teacher Tag wrapped up the lesson for the day and reminded the class about their homework. I took the chance to ask the students about their message for TeacherTag for Teachers' Day. Without hesitation, they said, *"Mahal na mahal namin si Ma'am Tag. Siya ang superhero namin."*

**END**

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PRESS RELEASE