



ERDA Foundation Updates

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Virgie and Joniel by Ate Edlyn

I first encountered Virginia Flores and Joniel Ferrer in a Leadership Training where I also accompanied other ERDA children and youth from a partner community of BK-ReSToRe. BK-ReSToRe was my first assignment in ERDA. It was ERDA's project for children who had conflict with the law. My experiences in this project would be for another ERDA Update.

This Leadership Training was one of the many trainings that ERDA has organized especially for the ERDA children and youth who expressed even a partial interest in becoming a child leader. At that time, Virginia and Joniel were already Officers of their respective Barangay Children's Association (BCA).

In this training, I saw that Virginia and Joniel were deep thinkers. Virginia seemed so serious in speaking about the issues of the children. Joniel was also articulate and had another talent for mimicking other voices. Both were sincere, confident and unassuming.

Years passed and I was transferred to the ERDA Social Marketing Unit (SMU). I would encounter Virginia in the annual monitoring visit of the Pag-Asa Group of Japan that supported her education for college.

I would learn that Virginia took up BS Education at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP). She tried commuting from her home in Bagong Silang, Caloocan City to PUP in Sta. Mesa, Manila until she decided to stay nearer her school.

After four years of hard work and sacrifices, Virginia completed her course and graduated. She began working right away in a private school near her home.

She took and passed the Licensure Exam for Teachers (LET). LET was given in the middle of the school year. To earn more, she even took a part-time job in another school during the summer of her first year of work.

Virginia eventually transferred to another school because she needed higher compensation to be able to support for her family. I met her at this school early this year after she invited ERDA to participate in the "Millennial Bazaar" of her students.

She said that she is happy in this school, Mystical Rose School of Caloocan City. Her students also seemed happy that she was their teacher.



Her students were Senior High School students. Probably, many were as tall as or even taller than her. Their ages were also near hers but this was not a problem to her.

I was so happy that Teacher Virgie has not forgotten ERDA, and that she was able to immediately remember ERDA when a chance came up. I was proud of her. I knew the whole ERDA felt the same.

Joniel is still finishing his Industrial Engineering course at the University of the Philippines in Diliman, Quezon City. But I am proud of him. We are proud of him.

We are proud of him not because he is studying an engineering course in UP or in this Diliman campus. We are proud of him because he persists.

We could only imagine the challenges he has faced and has overcome. We would not be surprised him if he has become more spiritual because of all these experiences.

Despite the hardships, Joniel still has time and energy to serve his community, the ERDA area in Bagong Silangan. Like Virgie, he also mentored the next line of child leaders in the ERDA Barangay Children's Association (BCA) where he came from.

He has been among those who led his fellow ERDA youth to stage advocacy concerts like the very relevant one on Mental Health. In school, he was also concerned with the welfare of his fellow students. He also said that he experienced working on the "Life Cycle Analysis of Wave Energy" with American students.



And we are happy that Les Amis des Enfants du Monde (AEM) continues to sponsor Joniel's college education.

Life has not been easy for Joniel and Virgie. This ERDA Update has not captured all the sorrows and joys they have experienced as they strived to make a better life for them, their family and for their community.

But again, we are proud of Virgie and Joniel. And we are deeply thankful to their loyal sponsors.

(Ms Edlyn Ortega-Burgonio or Ate Edlyn to ERDA students is the Communication and Social Marketing Manager of ERDA Foundation. This piece will be the first of a series of ERDA Updates for the 45th Anniversary of the ERDA Foundation.)