



GK TIMES

GK HARVEST 2011 EDITION



WHAT'S INSIDE

- CHILD OF POVERTY 2
- PRIVILEGE REALISED 3
- GKY GAT 2011 IN HINDSIGHT 4
- OPEN LETTER: TRIBUTE TO INSPIRATION 8
- REFLECTIONS ON GKY GAT 2010 AND 2011 10
- GK SOCCER - FAITH AND HOPE THROUGH A LOVE OF FOOTBALL 16
- GK LIVE SESSIONS 17
- GK GLOBAL SUMMIT 17
- WHAT IS GKOM? 17
- KEY DATES FOR YOUR DAIRY 18



Child of Poverty

By Carmelle Cuanan

Gawad Kalinga and Tony Meloto in particular have had a life-changing impact on me. I feel as if I am on the cusp of greatness, as if I have so much to offer and now that I have discovered a cause worth fighting for, a cause I can be passionate about because it relates to me, I can be a hero. I feel that YGAT 2011 was destined for me, a reality check that was bound to happen, beseeching me to re-discover the lost Filipino in me.

Perhaps I should start from the beginning. My family moved to Australia when I was three years old and I went back to visit when I was ten. Nine years later, as a young adult, I had the opportunity to give back to this country during YGAT and it gave something back to me too. My identity. Not that I ever lost it, but sometimes it was hard to identify myself as Filipino when I knew little to nothing about it; when the bloody civil wars, the poverty and the suffering were all distanced from me so I could not know how to empathise with them. When the key to their world is the language, my 'native' tongue that I no longer understand or speak. When in Australia, assimilating is the key to cultural success.

YGAT gave me the opportunity to dwell among Filipinos, to help them reconstruct their lives by reconstructing their houses. I was among people who used to be the poorest of the poor, eating, living and bathing as they do, with manual labor thrown in to make the culture shock even harder to deal with. I was able to fall in love with their children, their sweet hospitality and sense of humour. I was able to walk wide-eyed through the streets of the notorious Smokey Mountain, my heart breaking as I saw children rummaging through the rubbish tip, an image I had only ever seen on World Vision advertisements.

One of the talks during the program struck a chord within me: that all these people need is someone to help them. It reminded me of my father's own story whereby as the oldest son, he was forced to drop out of high school to sell newspapers on the street to help provide for his nine siblings. Through an act of divine providence, the city Mayor, an apparent distant relative, decided to send him to school where eventually he worked his way to graduate as a student on a full scholarship of his University. My own father was a recipient of the type of charity and love that GK promotes and fosters, without which I, myself, would have probably been born as a victim of the tragic poverty cycle. I came to the realisation that I, too, am a child of poverty as much as the rest of them. The only difference is that my father had someone help him.



"I have discovered a cause worth fighting for, a cause I can be passionate about because it relates to me, I can be a hero."

Listening to Tony Meloto talk during one of the last days of the program was a blessing. I absorbed everything he said as if he was speaking to me alone. He affirmed our presence, telling us how grateful Filipinos are to have us come back to our native country and help them. That part of his speech in particular stands out in my memory. It made me think "Who else but us?" We are, as Filipino Australians, in a position of more wealth, more knowledge and thus more power. Who are we to leave and to never look back? Who are we to shrug off our Filipino heritage as something of the past and forget about those who are waiting and hoping for our aid? My desire to make a difference to this world had finally found its means, the organisation in which I can divest whatever skills I have, for a cause I feel directly part of.

The GK Youth Great Adventure Tour gave me the opportunity to love being Filipino, to love my fellow Filipino, to love the Philippines and to see Filipinos love each other enough to build each other up and out of poverty. I feel more fulfilled, as if reaching out to those Filipinos has helped me reach out to the lost Filipino in me, awaking in me the desire to become a hero. Not for my sake, but for the Filipinos who just need someone to believe in them and help them.

Privilege Realised

By David A Luschwitz

As I round the corner,
familiar park,
basketball court, the kids in their designer jerseys,
the corner store with its inflated prices,
a woman from the housing commission sector,
chocolate ice cream in her right hand,
purse in the other.

As we rounded the corner,
dust and stench,
dilapidated court, the kids all gathered round,
smiling and cheering at
their comrade's sheer athleticism.
Evidently Nike Air is no prerequisite
for success on this court.

Blue sky, clean air,
quiet streets, peaceful in suburbia,
full stomachs..
And yet everywhere, misery.
domestic disturbances,
abuse... of spouse and liquor.
Blessed? Naturally!

Smog, pollution,
city in chaos, intersected intersections,
starvation..
Smiles, thanksgiving,
malaming
respect, '..po'
What an incredibly beautiful word!
Thanks be to God!

Interactive whiteboards,
twenty-eight students,
laptops compulsory,
personalised..
Schoolbags also personalised,
obscenities,
appreciation.

Warped blackboards,
sixty-eight students,
buddy system means four to a book,
eagerness and anticipation,
early mornings,
late nights at the shop,
aspiration.

What do you choose?
Riches or a smile?

Which is better?
Nike Airs or pure passion?

Is this fair?
Laptops in one classroom and insufficient paper in
another?

Not enough of us ask these questions..

Most of us never have to..

GKY GAT 2011 In Hindsight

By Marie Reyes



On 16 January 2011, I embarked on a two-week trip that would enrich my life. Along with 76 courageous Australians, we flew to the Philippines in a united quest to eradicate poverty through the Gawad Kalinga Youth Great Adventure Tour (GKY GAT) program. Gawad Kalinga (meaning “to give care”) is a movement that seeks to build viable and sustainable communities to end poverty. On this trip we got to see first-hand the holistic work of GK among the poor and be actively involved.



On the first day, we met our subgroup teams, had an orientation on GK and had three hours sleep before waking up at 3am the next day to catch a 6:50am flight to Mindoro Occidental. Arriving at San Jose Airport, we were met by an amazing entourage of people, including the Mayor, who were excited to welcome us, giving us the first taste of Filipino hospitality.



Then, our group headed to GK Rizal, an Australian-sponsored village, where many previous flood victims who lost their livelihoods were given not just a home but a chance to empower them and lift them out of an otherwise dire poverty situation. We were overwhelmed by their welcome as the residents greeted us with smiles, waves and greetings and gave each one of us beautifully hand-made neck adornments and trophies of honour even before we had begun any hard work.



It dawned on me that the gratitude and honour they extravagantly expressed and we were blessed to have received was the fruit of the seed that people before us had planted as they also chose to sacrifice time to volunteer and to give. It was the fruit of the seed planted by past volunteers and givers who believed that poverty can be made history as they invested in the work of GK. Fast-forward to years later, our group became the recipient of the harvest that came from the seed planted from before. We were reaping what previous volunteers have invested in. I realized that if I was looking for evidence of whether the work of GK truly does work, I just had to look at the smiles, the immense gratitude of these people to know that investing in building GK communities truly does transform the lives of the poor. Even the Governor and other local Government officials came to visit us and to thank us for what the previous volunteers and givers have invested in their District. Just as our welcome experience was, future volunteers and families, I believe, will definitely reap what we have sown in these two weeks. We were leaving a legacy just as those before us had done.



We were then immersed in the nutrition project arm of GK, known as “Bayanihan”, which aims to end hunger in the community by investing in planting vegetables and sharing the harvest. After eating a fabulous feast prepared for us and mingling with the children, we headed for a six-hour rough drive to Oriental Mindoro, where we would be spending most of our time.

Arriving at GK Victoria late at night, we were welcomed warmly with dance and song presentations and a visit from the local head of authorities before we were given a buddy and allocated a GK family and a GK house to live in for the rest of our stay. Here we got to live and learn the simplicity of how the poor live, without the comforts of a mattress or a hot shower, or readily running water. My buddy, Leah Subijano and I slept on hard wooden beds and pumped water to enable

us to wash our clothes. I definitely learnt to not take things for granted and at the same time learnt that I can live without the extra that I have.

The presentations from the youth the night before gave me a taste of the incredible pool of potential and talent that lies in the youth of the GK Victoria village, fostered and encouraged by the Child Youth Development (CYD) arm of GK. On the second day, we took part in a CYD program for the children as we played games, presented a song and dance with them and witnessed as they were taught by their teacher. With the vibrancy, the smiles, the energy and talents of these children, my belief in their worth was strengthened... that they are worth being given a fair go to hope and to dream and to aspire for their dreams. GK is giving them the chance to achieve their dreams.

In the afternoon, and the next couple of days after, my team and I absorbed ourselves in the actual building of the extra seven houses that will house and give hope to more families in deep poverty in the future. As someone who does not go to the gym, my muscles were definitely stretched and grew as we dug up three metres deep of soil to build a septic tank, plastered walls, sieved and mixed cement, carried bricks and buckets of cement and shoveled some more.

Despite getting sick, in my mind, I knew that every shovel in the ground I labored to do, every brick I endeavoured to carry, every bit of cement I sieved and plastered on the wall, I was, inch by inch, breaking the shackles of poverty in this region. Every effort, every ache of the muscle was not in vain. The work became so much easier with the team work and enthusiasm from the volunteers. It was easier doing it together rather than alone, as we saw with passing the buckets along rather than carrying the load individually. Every night after dinner, we would meet together and have talks and sharing, as the idea of being everyday heroes was instilled in us.

Over the following two days, we rode in jeepneys, a local mode of transportation, and went up the mountains to see the work that GK has started amongst the native tribe known as the Mangyan tribe. Their area is the hot spot for frequent cyclones that the wooden houses they had before could not withstand.

Now with their concrete GK houses, we engrossed ourselves in painting their houses with bright colours. We also took part in giving away school and hygiene packs along with toys we collected from Australia to the Mangyan kids. Along with the GK Victoria children, we took the Mangyan kids for a day out on a Sunday both to church, as faith is central to the Filipinos, and to a fast food outlet called Jollibee that they got to have for the first time. We also got to take them around to the beach and the port, as many of them got to see what a ship and what a beach look like for the first time.

On our final night in GK Victoria, after each subgroup team had given their hearts to perform and bless the community, we got to thank our host families that we stayed with for nine days and gave them small gifts as a token of gratitude.

I was blessed to have the host family I had. Having lived a hard



Welcome Performance by the GK Victoria Youth

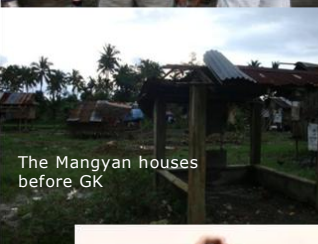


a CYD Immersion day

After digging up a septic tank with a shovel



Plastering walls & passing buckets of cement



The Mangyan houses before GK



The Mangyan houses after GK; my team after finishing the yellow paint job on this GK house



Day out with the GK Kids at Jollibee



My host family



My house family and the house I stayed in



Having breakfast with my host family and buddy, Leah Subijano



Photo with my host family on the last night



At Villa Escudero with my team

life, they told their story of how they came to receive a GK house. As GK is not a hand-out but focused on sweat equity, my host family had to help build the houses of others before they finally got to build their's. I deeply came to have affection for them. Tatay (father), was the sole breadwinner of the family and was an ice cream vendor, who earns a meager P150-300 per day (less than AUD\$10 per day). They told how they were maltreated by their relatives due to their poverty, as they lost their previous belongings to pay for the hospital bills when their children got sick. (As I got sick myself on the trip and went to the hospital for antibiotics and paid P700 for it, I got to experience how the poor in the Philippines are enslaved by the hospital bills that take up a week's worth (or more) of their salary).

Before being a recipient of a GK house, they relayed how they ended up living in slums, and built a house out of cartons and wood to survive and house the five young children they had (ranging from less than a year to 15 years old). They told how they struggled to send their children to school, with no food to take with them at times due to the lack of finance. Nanay (mother) used to be able to work, hand-washing laundry, but since she was diagnosed with a toxic goitre that is inoperable and expensive to medicate, she has been unable to work and stays at home to look after the children. She is often sick and I saw it one day when I was coming home during an afternoon break on a build day, where out of compassion, I washed the dishes that were left piled up and pumped water for stock. I am glad to know that the livelihood and health arm projects of GK Victoria are currently seeking to address these problems to enable families like my host family to break free from the cycle of poverty.

On that final night, I got a glimpse of what the beauty behind poverty looks like. My host family is one whose heart is generous and caring. They would often go the extra mile, waking up at 4:30am to cook breakfast for us, finding our dirty clothes in our rooms and washing them for us, and when I got sick, Tatay rode a bike out of the village into the market to buy me strepsils and paid for it. I insisted on paying them back despite their refusal.

And on the last night, Nanay came to my room, handed me a small and very battered prayer book (an indication it was previously frequently used), and said that since they don't own much to be able to give us something back, all that she could give me and Leah, my buddy, were her prayers... prayer for a safe journey wherever we were going....she handed the book to me since it was written in the local language and I understood it. My heart was very touched by the simple generous act. In my eyes, it was the best gift. Here was a family who had nothing yet had the heart to give and to care for someone they had only met a few days ago. If there was any question of why I was there, I found the answer by looking at my host family and sharing their dreams and their hopes for a better life! I witnessed how beautiful the heart of the poor is and they are definitely worth every cent and every effort to fly to. They were definitely worth the sacrifice and definitely worth us giving them a second chance at a life filled with hope and possibilities, free from the poverty that enslaves. It's as if I came back to Sydney, to tell you their story....

After saying our final goodbyes, we caught a ferry to Batangas and relaxed in the tranquility and beauty of Villa Escudero and had team bonding time as we played the amazing race. I have met some of the most amazing people on this trip and especially my subgroup team. Our

backgrounds in life were all different but all I know is that I was helping eradicate poverty with a group of ordinary young men and women with extraordinary hearts and a willingness to just get involved. These kinds of people are not perfect, but they are the ones that truly can change the world! Everyday heroes indeed!

Our final outreach involved visiting both a public and a private school in Quezon City and we observed how the Education system of the Philippines worked and I was told that the public system had insufficient textbooks, more student to teacher ratio, had poor ventilation in rooms and poorer quality equipment.

We also visited an orthopaedic hospital, where we got to hear the stories of the patients, sang them songs, performed for them and brought them food. Even the kids in the hospital, with their broken bones hanging up on a pulley, clapped and sang and smiled and forgot their pain, even for just the short time we were there. Although exhausted and hungry, it was all worthwhile.

We also got to enjoy a Rest and Reflection day at Subic Bay, where after a hectic schedule we got to relax and rejuvenate. On our final day we donated soccer facilities to Far Eastern University and played with the GK Paradise Heights children. GK Paradise, was previously known as "Smokey Mountain", home to the mountain of garbage the Philippines was known for, which has now seen transformation through GK.

We also drove to Bulacan GK Enchanted Farm, where the founder of GK, Tony Meloto was celebrating his granddaughter's birthday. Among us were businessmen and women from all over the world who saw the gold in GK and were prepared to invest in GK Enchanted Farm.

I was inspired by Tito Tony, as we refer to him, and I like especially how he never runs out of vision. GK Enchanted Farm is thriving. It used to be a place of war and rebellion, and now, because of what GK has done, it has turned into a place of peace and possibilities. Currently, plans are undergoing to make it into a viable economy as plans are now being developed to build a bed and breakfast business. They have also promoted a healthy drink product, which I got to taste and extremely liked, and it has found a market overseas. We also saw an overseas volunteer doing research on GK villages, an influx of professionals lending a hand to give strength to the GK model. GK Enchanted Farm is a model GK template that GK Victoria in Mindoro along with the over 1,700 GK villages standing, will soon follow suit. The best indeed is yet to unfold! With gaps addressed through the GK model and as the spirit of volunteerism and self-sacrifice from people like us continues, we are coming close to seeing a world without poverty becoming a true reality. The two week experience has definitely not just helped the poor, but has also changed me...



Q&A with the teacher and the students at a private school



Bringing good cheer at the Orthopaedic Children's ward with songs



Donated Soccer Facilities and Played a game of soccer afterwards



Tito Tony Meloto inspiring the youth at GK Enchanted Farm



Group Photo at a chapel in the Orthopaedic Hospital we visited



Open Letter: Tribute to Inspiration

By Elaine Marie Laforteza

The path leading me to join YGAT 2011 has been paved with many inspirations. I want to pay tribute to four of them. The first is my cousin, John Steve Carbonell Catilo. It has been nearly seven years since my cousin died, yet it has only been recently that I can accept the fact of his death. I continually regret that I have to think about my cousin in terms of what was and not what is. John Steve was a caring, intelligent and considerate person, so much so that he spent one of his college semester breaks as a volunteer at an orphanage in the Dominican Republic. During that time, he helped build essential resources for the orphanage and played with the kids. Looking at pictures of him there, all I can see is his big smile surrounded with children whose faces echo his happiness. His need to help carried on during his last day. He was volunteering as a coach for a U.S. high-school rowing crew. While he was doing this, he was thrown off his launch. According to the U.S. Rowing website: "He treaded water for a short period of time but disappeared before help could arrive. His body was found two days later..." Those two days were the most harrowing moments in my family's life. To not know where a loved one is...there are absolutely no words to describe this feeling. What keeps our family

strong is the fact that John Steve's legacy continues. A safety manual called the "John Steve Carbonell Catilo for T.C. Williams High School Crew and Alexandria Crew Boosters Club" has been devised to implement safety procedures which insist that PFDs (personal flotation devices) are worn when rowing. John Steve wasn't wearing a PFD at the time of his death, something that would have saved his life. Additionally, his parents, along with Orphanage Outreach, have established an education-based sponsorship program in his name.

These actions have reinforced my boyfriend, Liam Kennedy and my need to live with dignity and purpose. Liam went on a previous YGAT and worked hard to get enough money to go, as well as built up his Ilocano and Tagalog vocabulary (beyond the rude words!). Armed with mosquito spray, litres of sunscreen and all-important baby-wipes, Liam had an adventure that took his breath away. When he got back, I was surprised to see the immediate change in him. He was always a compassionate person, but this trip channeled all that good energy in such a productive and inspiring way. I asked him: "After your trip, what do you think of your life now?" He replied: "Even looking at my dog, she's like a princess. She has more opportunities and treated better than a lot of people we met. It's not right".

I also wanted to go on YGAT with Liam, but the year that Liam went was not the right one for me. I had just been hooked up to an insulin pump which is used to keep people like me with Type One diabetes alive. This is a machine that works like the pancreatic cells which secrete insulin. Basically, it is an artificial organ which I had loaned from my local hospital. A condition of the loan was that I couldn't go overseas and take away the machine, which costs over \$8,000. This was money I couldn't afford to lose, as well as a machine I literally couldn't live without. Most of the media today misrepresent diabetes and forget to specify that there are different types. Instead, reports conflate all kinds of diabetes and simply claim that this disease can be caused by unhealthy living patterns which include poor diet and lack of exercise. While this can be true for Type Two diabetes (other factors also contribute), this is not the case for other types of diabetes, such as Type One which is an auto-immune disease and usually affects children. Of course children grow up, and adults carry the weight of this disease and its implications for life. As of yet, there is no cure for diabetes in all its forms.

Prior to being attached to the insulin pump, I was giving myself injections five times a day. Two before breakfast. One before lunch. Another before dinner. The final one before going to bed. For a long time, injecting myself was the most natural thing to do and

I did it as effortlessly as if I were breathing. Other times, I enjoyed it. The knowledge that I could control the amount of insulin that goes into my body empowered me. Yet, sometimes I had nightmares about injecting myself. I would then wake up and realise that I hadn't escaped my night-time terror. It was staring me in the face. Five times a day. Every day. Moments like that got more prevalent as the realisation dawned on me: "s***, this disease is incurable". I was told this when I was first diagnosed, but at eight years old, "forever" only seemed to be about five years. Repetitive injections also marred my skin with bruises and fatty lump deposits. If Amy Winehouse's track marks and my stomach would have a competition, I would win (barely!). Such trauma to the skin made it difficult for the syringe to actually puncture my flesh, which inevitably made taking my medication hard. Yet, I am marking this time as a major inspiration as it showed me that it is not necessarily the overtly positive things that push us along. What puts life at stake are the things that show us our limitations. An important lesson in all this was the fact that limitations were there to be tested and not to just simply go beyond them, but to b****-slap them in the face (in a sensible way of course!).

So, I worked towards being healthy enough to go on YGAT and I couldn't have done it without my communal network of b****-slappers! My family and friends' support is what breathes life into my own life and makes the journey ahead possible.

Headed by my wonderful mama (Maria Eleanor), we have built a community of solidarity. This is the biggest inspiration of all and something that I found when going into YGAT. From my host family in Mindoro: my "brother" Ian wiping the dirt from my name-tag with his fingers; my "tatay" who would always greet me with a smile and who (behind my back) scrubbed my shoes clean from a day of building; my "nanay" who would wake up early to cook me and my buddy (Brooke) breakfast and even took the time to shop for sinigang ingredients because I had told her that was my favourite dish; the laughter we shared as we listened to my buddy's version of Tagalog ("el puso" for "cat!"). Also, the friendships made with other villagers and service team members from Mindoro and Bagong Silang: to the Titas and Titos who always made sure that we were fed and for those who took care of me when I got sick. To Dave, a Bagong Silang resident who took the time to show me pictures and read from his journal about his time as a "reverse GATER" who was sponsored to visit Sydney. Also, for McJoe, the cheeky, sweet young boy from Mindoro who drew pictures, picked fruit for me and didn't totally hate me when I took him for a piggy-back ride! Last, but definitely not least, other YGATers made the whole experience incomparable. We bonded over the wonders of LBM, constipation support groups, digging, painting, sweating under the harsh sun, laughing with kids from the village, trying to eat with our hands, and so much more. This is what makes the road towards YGAT a path that was worth treading, and another journey I would love to take again. Thank you GK!

Reflections on GKY GAT 2010 and 2011

By Jasmine Jongko

Attending GKY GAT for me was possibly one of the best decisions I have made in a while.

Prior to arriving in the Philippines for GKY GAT I had spent a lot of time contributing and speaking about GK back at home, and as a result, became the winner of GK Youth Ambassador WA in 2010. But only after GKY GAT did I feel like I had actually won anything. It is one thing to donate to charity from home, but I finally had the opportunity to immerse myself in the lives of the GK beneficiaries and really feel the work that GK does.

I knew GK built homes but they are involved in so much more. The visits to Smokey Mountain, the schools and the Orthopaedic hospital, really exposed us to the many struggles the people of the Philippines are going through and exactly how much help is needed there. It was so heartbreaking to see, but at the same time highlighted the beautiful spirit of the Filipinos. In their struggles I felt we were given the chance to learn about the important things in life that we often take for granted at home, the most obvious one being family.

At home I work in a role that is very sales driven and focused, and prior to GAT, most of my goals revolved around myself and achieving the things that I want and need to succeed. The chance to spend two weeks of GKY GAT, helping to build houses, putting smiles on children's faces, and simply spending time and learning from the less fortunate, was so refreshing and honestly more rewarding than any of the achievements I had made at work.

But of course the element that made YGAT the best experience it could be were the other YGATers I got to share it with. Not only was it great to get to know these other like-minded and spirited Aussies, I found it very uniting that I wasn't the only one getting thrown out of her comfort zone and re-discovering the many uses of the tabo!

I would recommend that everyone experience GKY GAT at least once in their lives. I got more out of it than I had ever expected, which I am so grateful for, and now have an even bigger passion to continue to support GK and share all of it's awesome work!



By Miguelle Concepcion

People came to the YGAT experience for all sorts of reasons, from all sorts of backgrounds and with all sorts of other life experiences.

In my case, I spent the first 15 years of my life comfortably and happily in Manila. Growing up catching glimpses of poverty from my car window, I was acutely aware of the vast gap between the rich and the poor in the Philippines. It never seemed right to me, so I joined as many charity organisations as I could. I had big dreams of one day being part of a movement that would solve the poverty problem (or at least the

education problem, which I saw as both a cause and effect of the poverty problem). However good my intentions were, though, I couldn't deny some other part of me that doubted whether things could ever change. After all, common wisdom tells us that it is time that confirms the weight of a phenomenon, and poverty had plagued the Philippines way before I was even born.

I often wish I had never moved away from home, but it has brought some good with it. Living in Australia has kept me from becoming as desensitised to poverty as many Filipinos are. The problem of poverty was never right to me, but because I was distanced from it, I would never again see it as 'normal'. I had been helping to raise money for GK for a while, but I had a strong desire to become involved in a more concrete (pun unintended) way. YGAT seemed to be the perfect opportunity to do that.

But there's more to the story than that; there always is. The Youth Great Adventure Tour of January 2011 actually happened to me at a point in my life when I was already itching for an adventure or some chance to get away. In 2010, I lost many important people either to death or even just to the merciless course of life. I remember talking to my friends about everything that happened to me that year. From their responses, it became apparent to me that most people hold true that time heals. They told me that if I waited long enough, the grief and hurt would just disappear. I decided to take their word for it. At the end of 2010, I truly believed that time could heal broken bones and hearts and spirits. Then 2011 came along and YGAT started. It was not

easy. I was thrown so far out of my comfort zone. Like everyone else, I had to forget about myself in order to make the most out of it. The more I felt like I was sacrificing, the more sure I was that I wanted to be there and nowhere else. Yet at the same time, it was so disheartening to see the extent of the deprivation and sickness that these Filipinos had to live through, and it made us wonder how people in positions of influence could ever allow such suffering to happen. If we cared to admit it, we didn't even get to build as many houses as we wanted to (and we probably didn't do as good a job as the locals would have with the houses we did build!). People on the outside looking in could easily question the impact of a short two-week build on a problem that has persisted for generations.

But little miracles happen in GK, and you don't know that until you've lived it. Within just a few minutes, all the GK villages we went to welcomed us with open arms and with huge feasts. Within a week, our host families at GK Victoria regarded us as their real children and siblings, giving us the best place in the house to sleep, washing our clothes no matter how hard we tried to hide them, and making sure we never went hungry when they had probably

By Liam King

Instead of spending all my holidays at home relaxing I decided to attend YGAT in the Philippines. It involved us living with a family who are members of a village built for the poor and also helping them with various activities, such as building and looking after the children.

Living in Australia we are blessed with so many opportunities and privileges and having the opportunity to spend two weeks with the poor in the Philippines opened my eyes to this fact.

It is sad to see that so many young people these days do not realise how privileged we are. I was guilty of being one of these people that took the privilege of having a flushing toilet, a car, a mattress to sleep on and having a shower after a long day of work as something that I had a right to have. There had been many times in the past where I had to reluctantly give up my bed when relatives had come to visit or to allow others to go before me when lining up in the shopping centres. The time I spent living with the poor, some who live on less than a few dollars per day, opened my eyes to how much I concentrated simply on the materialistic things back home.

I was lucky enough to be able to live in the house, by house I mean an area no bigger than my own bedroom, of a family who had truly experienced what it meant to be poor. They were a family of six and wholeheartedly gave up half of their house for

gone without food numerous times in their lives. Within two weeks, all 76 of us from Australia sincerely cared about one another and shared everything: food, clothes, viruses (and the medicine), inside jokes (and those painful mind games too).

What amazed me was that so many barriers were being broken in such a relatively short span of time. Witnessing love in so many forms and expressions gave me a renewed faith in life, regardless of how much pain it caused me in 2010. I thought about how my friends said it would take a while before it would all get better, but now I'd like to tell them that just two weeks is enough—if you spend it right.

The memories stay with me, and the lessons. Of the many things I learned from GKY GAT 2011, the greatest is probably this:

Time is not as powerful as we believe. Time does not break barriers, cook three meals a day for 100 strangers, give up a bed for someone else, make do with non-flushing toilets, or learn how to say "you are beautiful" in the Mangyan language. It certainly does not solve poverty or heal people. Love does.



me and one of my friends to sleep in. This meant that six people were sleeping in the area no bigger than a double bed, with no mattress in the heat and humidity. This family taught me the importance of giving and sacrifice and also the importance of family life. While they had nothing, they were willing to do anything for us and asked nothing in return. They were so humble and so kind, yet lived in conditions that people in Australia could never imagine themselves living in. They would get up before the sun would rise. The mother would prepare breakfast, do the washing and look after the house and the father would go off to work to earn money to send their children to school. They live so simply, yet they were so happy.

After returning home from my time in the Philippines, I look at the simplicities in life in a much different way. It makes me sad to see so many people, especially Christians, take their blessings for granted. We are so

caught up in who has the best phone or who has the most friends on Facebook that we often, myself included, forget to see where the real happiness is and that is in family and friendships and giving your time to help others.

One thing that struck me was that while kids in Australia are complaining that they don't have the latest computer game, the kids in the Gawad Kalinga Victoria Village in Mindoro, Philippines were playing with the empty water bottles with their friends and I have never seen kids so happy. Simple things such as this showed me that it was time for me to stop worrying about what



By Alison Canare

I couldn't imagine the conditions in which they had lived in, a slum area next to a river prone to floods. How uncertain they must've felt during that time, not knowing whether they'll get through another day. This was my host family's life before they had settled in the GK Victoria Village. As my host mum told me the story, I could not help but feel sad for them, they did not deserve to endure such harsh conditions, in fact, no one deserves to. And yet beyond the grounds of well-

By Jonathan Yunon

It was my second trip to PNG last September 2010, just 15 months after I first visited in 2009 (SFC GAT). I remember after first returning in 2009 I immediately wanted to plan my next trip back. Hence it was easy to accept the task of co-leading the 2010 PNG YGAT.

Once again the group numbered just 6, however later on I was to appreciate how solid this number was in terms of the overall YGAT.

Our first major activity was visiting Yule Island. Basically this location had been chosen last minute,

I have and to worry about the needs of others. We as youth have so many talents and I think we must use these talents for others and not just ourselves. I now believe that by learning to love others when we think we are going to receive nothing in return is when we learn what true happiness is.

Blurb about myself:

I am member of the Corpus Christi Parish Youth Mission Council and have a passion for social justice. I was part of the Gawad Kalinga Ambassador program last year as the ACT GK Ambassador and I was lucky enough to travel to the Philippines in January 2011 to experience how Gawad Kalinga works there.

established GK Villages, there are millions more who continue to live like this everyday. "They are one of the lucky ones", she tells me in Tagalog. To have been given a whole new start in life, to have a house with a toilet, a sink, and a kitchen alone, all the basic necessities of a home, even though it is not yet perfect and is not yet everything that they dream of having, to them, it was more than enough.

I remember as I stepped inside my host family's home for the first time, I thought to myself, how basic is this home? How basic are all these things they're asking for? If only we can build a home like this for every single family living in the poorest of the poorest conditions, then life wouldn't be so uncertain anymore.

I think it is remarkable to see where you can find hope in life. For the people in the GK village, they saw hope in us, in our presence, as we lived with them, ate with them, and shared stories with them. Hope in the simplest of actions. I did not think that something so simple could be greatly appreciated.

The main goal for the whole build was to give hope to these people, and how much I hoped to have given them that the whole entire time, but instead, in the end I found myself filled with hope because of them. It just goes to show how much we can learn from other people who are so far from everything we are and everything we have back at home.

however we couldn't imagine what we were about to experience. All we were told was that it was a place that lacked toilet/water facilities and it was the first part of PNG that the Catholic missionaries had visited. Little did we know we were about to experience true PNG culture and see the beautiful landscape. We basically got to see this through our assigned families who toured us around the island and showed us their way of living. I was matched up with Joe Oa and his family. Accordingly they gave me the name Jon Oa (an awesome name I thought). They lived a simple life by the beach shore in a

stilted steel house. They ate fish, had numerous vegetable trees and had a steady water supply in the hills. This place really gave me hope for the rest of PNG. Whilst Port Moresby is notorious for its high crime rate, this island, just four hours north, is known for its peaceful living and good-natured people.

Heading to the GK village I was full of excitement and curiosity. It would be the first time I would return to a previously visited GK village. I had been meaning to return to GK Nueva Ecija and GK Puerto Princessa, however PNG only has one village and hence I had the luxury of seeing the PNG GK villagers again. I was most excited to see my host family again. Uncle Alex and Auntie Asunta had been 2nd parents to me, and Emmanuel and Katherine my siblings. I was also looking forward to seeing Terrence, who had been my personal bodyguard and helper. Unfortunately it turned out he had actually moved away and started working closer to the city. A good thing I thought as he was being independent, making money and most importantly keeping away from the local gang

influences. Uncle Alex was still working hard at a local engineering company 6 days a week, whilst Auntie Asunta worked hard doing the house activities in conjunction with her senior responsibilities in the village. Emmanuel and Katherine went to school, however I tried to encourage them to go a little bit more than they did. Overall that family was an awesome example of how GK aims to set up a family and encourage them to make a living on their own and provide an education for their children.

Though we did hardly any build-work, what I found important about this particular trip was the consistency of GK Youth showing how much they care about these villagers and the belief we have in them to really make an impact on this world.

PNG YGAT really is not for the feint-hearted. It is a bit of a step-up from the Philippines GAT in that you enter a country that is really notorious for its high crime and lack of development, however it truly is an uplifting experience once you spend time with the GK villagers and learn about their story and how much their lives have been turned around by GK.



By Jessper Perez

The Cambodia YGAT of O-10 was my first YGAT and I will always remember it as one of the most meaningful experiences of my life. It has opened my eyes, mind, heart and soul in so many ways. I will try and describe it the best I can in a few paragraphs.

My eyes were opened to how similar Cambodians are to Filipinos. In appearance alone we are so similar: skin tone, facial structure, height and build. In fact most Cambodians who met me thought I was a local! Our local road rules are also very similar – they barely exist! Which is why they are termed ‘road suggestions’. Cambodians are also just as economical as Filipinos. Take for example the humble scooter, I bet you didn’t know you could use it to transport several bicycles, or two adults

and three children, or ten crates of produce, or an adult pig, or 2m long tanks of pressurised gas that read “DANGEROUS. HIGHLY FLAMMABLE”. We are also very similar in behaviour and attitude; Cambodians are a curious, humble and courteous people. Looking them in the eyes elicits a shy smile or giggle, and a respectful nod of acknowledgement, a reaction that immediately says, “Hi, how are you?” They are very kind and will go out of their way to help. I remember Frenzel once having difficulty trying to cross a busy intersection. A local kindly stopped what he was doing, took Frenzel by the arm and walked him across the road. I had a similar experience, but mine was a little more... intimate. I had just arrived at Phnom Penh and was ahead of the rest of the group by a few hours, so I asked the people who had met me if there was anywhere I could go to eat. One of them showed me a restaurant across the highway. As we were crossing, he took my hand,

interlaced his fingers through mine, and escorted me across. I felt compelled to buy him dinner and a drink, but he kindly refused (talk about mixed signals!). Cambodians and Filipinos also share the same overbearing hospitality and generosity. Walk into any of the villagers' homes at any time and you will be greeted with "Nyam bai?" which literally translates to "eat rice"? Just like in the Philippines, it doesn't matter if you've already eaten, you will nyam bai! It is always humbling to witness such willing kindness and generosity from people who have barely enough to feed themselves.

It is this willingness to give which opened my mind to the true meaning of generosity. My host brother, Theurn (teh-uhn), taught me this. Theurn is in his early 20s and is an apprentice chef at a hotel called the Cambodiana where he receives a very minimum wage. He rides his bicycle there each day, the trip taking two hours each way. One day he arrived home and told me very casually that he had been hit by a car, and had suffered an injury to his leg. Being quite shocked at what happened, I didn't know what to do except to tell him to sit down, relax, and take it easy. He wouldn't have any of it. As there was no dinner yet he said he needed to prepare and cook our meal. Despite my protests that I would take care of our meal, he said that he was the host and that it was his responsibility to look after me. So even after a long day's work, four hours of travel, and getting hit by a car, Theurn still prepared our dinner for the evening. I should also mention the fact that he had gone out of his way that day to purchase the food he prepared for us (which is probably why he got hit), and would not accept any form of reimbursement. Theurn's generosity, despite his own poverty, and dedication to being my host, despite his injury, was simply admirable. His actions were a true display of selflessness and goodwill. In my mind I thought, "How can someone so young and so inexperienced be so considerate, kind and mature?" Even though I was several years older than him, had finished high school and university, I looked up to Theurn – he was my kuya!

My experience also opened my heart to stronger feelings of love and compassion in its most basic form – a love for humanity. However I only came to this realisation after my heart had been broken. Twice. The first time was when we visited the orphanage of the Missionaries of Charity. It housed around 20 children of various ages who either could not be looked after by their parents, or were simply abandoned. We went there with the intention of donating some gifts and playing with them for an afternoon (we couldn't help but go back again the next day, even though it meant reorganising the whole day). When you walk into the orphanage you are greeted with curious little eyes, filled with eagerness and guarded emotions. Most of the children are standoffish and take a while to warm up to you, not surprising when you know that they have missed out on one of the most basic human needs – the

need to belong and be loved. One of the children however, a little girl with badly formed limbs runs/crawls up to you with a big, broad smile on her face, inviting you to play with her. When the other children see that you're there to have fun with them, they slowly let their guard down and start to play with you just like any other child: they show you their toys, they gesture for you to pick them up, they run around and put random things in their mouths, they squeal and scream and cry and laugh. The children were simply adorable, you feel genuine love for them so quickly and it is difficult to try and spend time with all of them. Their stories are all different, some have parents who want to keep them but simply cannot afford to, some have been abandoned due to illnesses or deformities, one was found in a rubbish bin, and some simply have no parents left. You listen to their stories as time flies by and before you know it you have to leave. And then you realise: once we are gone they will be left alone again, without a loving mother or father, without a permanent home, with such an uncertain future ahead of them. It is difficult to fully describe the pain that comes with this realisation, the best way I can put it is an overwhelming feeling of injustice, unfairness and despair.

The second time was on our visit to a former high school which was turned into a torture camp. The Khmer Rouge was a communist party of Cambodia headed by a man named Pol Pot. The regime has been likened to the Nazi Party of Hitler during WWII. In some ways however, it was much worse than the Nazis. Firstly, the Nazis tortured and killed people who they thought were different to them. The Khmer Rouge knowingly killed their own people, their own neighbours. Not only that, they targeted those in their society who were of high social standing such as teachers, scientists, academics, basically anyone who was educated. In fact we were told that simply wearing glasses would have sentenced you to death, because if you wore glasses it meant that you could read. Secondly, the Nazi regime happened in the 1940s, the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge only occurred in the late 1970s, with the same number of victims in a much shorter time period. And thirdly, the brutality of their deeds is almost unimaginable: babies thrown into the air and used as target practice, or smashed against tree trunks with their parents watching. To hear these stories and see pictures of the victims in the former high school is chilling. It is hard to believe that humans could do this to other humans.

After you witness these things and you stand on the very soil they happened on, you cannot help but let your heart open up to these people. You are filled with a feeling of humanitarian and social responsibility, an urge to right the wrongs of the past. In my own heart I could feel a seed deeply planted, one of genuine love, compassion and

sympathy towards the Cambodian people, but also one for people in general, especially those who live on the fringes of society. I began to realise the pain and suffering that others go through because of simple circumstance. I started to realise the countless blessings God had given me, and how I wanted to give back, and I began to understand what Jesus meant when he said God wants you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.

When I say that my Cambodia experience opened my soul, what I really mean is the Cambodian people opened their soul to me, and the sharing of our lives enriched us all. I know this sounds corny, but I can't put it any other way. To me, GAT is really about people and the relationships you make with people, and the relationships that we made in the village have given them a special place in my heart and my life – they are like family to me. I remember lying with Theurn on our mat late at night (he was one of maybe three people in the village who could speak a bit of English), telling our life stories, hearing his goals and ambitions, helping him with his English, telling him about Sydney, and just whispering sweet nothings to each other (joookes!). I remember speaking with my host mum about her life in the rubbish tips before she moved her family into the GK village. I remember her children, how happy they always are, and how sombre and serious their mood turned when I questioned them about living in the rubbish tips. I remember hearing ghost stories from various people in the village, which was all too real because the Khmer Rouge killing fields were not too far. I remember one of the first nights being dragged into one of the houses by three complete strangers

because I was sick, they laid me down and took my shirt off, then proceeded to put kerosene on my chest and rub it really, REALLY hard with a coin until it bruised the cr@p out of me – apparently it was a traditional Cambodian remedy. I remember thinking, "What on earth have I gotten myself into?!" I had no idea what was happening as we couldn't communicate with each other, plus I didn't know who they were, plus it was quite late at night and none of the other GATers had any idea that this was happening to me. The remedy didn't work; I still vomited the next day. To hear their stories and share their lives is a real privilege. And it really puts your life into perspective when you deeply reflect on how similar you all are, yet how different your lives and opportunities are.

The more I write about my experience in YGAT, the more I realise just how much it has actually changed me. It has enriched my life – mind, body and soul. There is a new connectedness that I feel for people, especially the downtrodden. The most important thing for me though, is how the experience has brought me closer to God. And the experience will be different for everyone, that is the beautiful thing about Gawad Kalinga and YGAT. You will experience so many different things, you will feel so many different emotions, you will see things you have never seen before, and your eyes will be opened anew. So do as many YGATs as you can, and if you haven't yet, DO IT!!! I guarantee you won't regret it. Not only will you be helping those you live with, but you'll also be doing something good for yourself. Ask anyone who has done it and they will all tell you that it is one of the most rewarding experiences of their life, an experience that will always be remembered, and an experience that they will always cherish.



GK Soccer - Faith and hope through a love of football

By Beverly Bucalon

It's incredible how a series of events can change you as a person to remind you that happiness can come from the simplest things.

Back in November 2009, I was invited to play a game of soccer one Sunday morning and little did I know at the time, this would lead me to the beautiful work of Gawad Kalinga. Sunday Soccer Socials brings together people from all walks of life for a friendly game of indoor soccer each weekend. It's an ecstatic atmosphere to witness, whether it's a win or loss, that 15-minutes on the court would have the ability to not only build friendships but also bring us closer together through a special camaraderie and a mutual respect for one another.

With Sunday Soccer Socials numbers growing each week, you can imagine how happy I was when I heard GK's first Ultimate Futsal Challenge would take place in February 2010. Unfortunately just as my love of the game took off, one month before the futsal competition, my ability to play soccer ended as I was struck down with a severe knee-injury. I underwent three major knee-reconstructive surgeries and was given an estimated recovery period of 12-18 months. I can't describe the feeling of pain, frustration and disappointment as my surgeon gave me the devastating news that my right-knee would never be the same again. Despite this, at 20, I learned a very valuable lesson - that every experience, every heartache and every challenge would always bring about a greater or equal benefit.

As I took a significant amount of time off from work and my studies, I was fortunate to devote more time at home with my family. I think it was truly a blessing in disguise - when you are given the gift of time, it opens up many doors for you to pursue things that you may never had done before. As a result, I kept an open mind to learning more about Gawad Kalinga through attending various GK events, particularly Tony Meloto's enlightening talk in April 2010. His talk had a profound impact on me and planted a very big seed in my mind - a desire return to the Philippines for the Youth Great Adventure Tour in January 2011. In addition, more importantly, through the rehabilitation period, the futsal competitions throughout 2010 were invaluable as it helped me still enjoy a sport that I missed so dearly.

It was unforgettable to be a spectator on the sidelines for the Ultimate Futsal Challenge, the 2010 World Cup (Indoor Soccer) Challenge and the GK One Day Sports Challenge. The first Ultimate Futsal Challenge took



place at Emerton Leisure Centre where it succeeded in raising funds for a GK village in Papua New Guinea. Next, in July 2010 The World Cup Indoor Soccer Challenge achieved significant fundraising for 2011 YGAT Philippines participants. Finally the thrilling GK One Day Sports Challenge raised funds and awareness of Gawad Kalinga on a larger scale, celebrating the first phase of the GK777/GK2024 program. Through a love for football and a worthy cause, the contributions of organisers, players, volunteers and supporters made each GK soccer event so special.

Another lesson I learnt, is that if you remain strong in your faith, some of your deepest heart's desires can come true. My ultimate goal of being a volunteer in YGAT was incredibly rewarding, having experienced a humbling journey to reach the Philippines. Of all the treasured memories across the two weeks of the tour, the final day will always be precious. A touching moment was spent with children who are part of the GK Football Academy. It was magical to see the smiles, laughter and passion shared at the soccer game between the YGATERS and children. To be a witness to how a love of football can impact a child's development is a strong reminder that the simplest things can bring happiness and restore faith and hope in a child. More importantly, the success of the Program is evident through football teaching children values formation, encouraging improvement in behaviour and strengthening the value of education.

I'm incredibly blessed that it was through soccer I met wonderful friends who shared their passion for Gawad Kalinga - their love for serving others is something I admire and respect and played a big part in my involvement with this year's 2011 YGAT Philippines. The beautiful GK CYD Football program and GK futsal competitions speak volumes to us all that our purpose in life is to share our love and time for others and as I have experienced and witnessed, it can take one simple soccer game with friends that can make all the difference.

GK LIVE SESSIONS

On Friday 15th April at Mars Hill Cafe, an event called 'GK Live Sessions' will be held in support of Gawad Kalinga (GK) Advocacy Programs which aim to target the specific needs of existing GK Australian villages through project planning and implementation.

The night will be marked by acoustic performances from solo musicians and bands spanning a variety of

genres. The event also serves as a precursor to the annual Live & Loud event to be held in May/June.

GK Live Sessions will be a guaranteed great night of music that will appropriately seal your working week and kick-start a soothing weekend.

Entry is \$15 and there are no presale tickets, so secure your attendance by getting to the Cafe early.

GK GLOBAL SUMMIT

Sydney will be the place to be this October as the harbour city plays host to GK Summit.

From 14 to 16 October, the hallowed halls of Sydney University shall be home of GK workers, volunteers and advocates alike.

The official theme of the Summit is to be confirmed however it shall focus on the transcendent nature of

GK as a model for addressing poverty. Attendees will have the opportunity to listen to a series of lectures and talks centered on the theme.

More specific details in regards to the program for the Summit shall come to light in due course but please set aside these dates in your diary now for what shall be a special and enlightening event for all GK volunteers here in Australia and abroad.

WHAT IS GKOM?

GKOM stands for **Gawad Kalinga Communications** and plays an important role within GK Youth and the whole scheme of GK as it allows for an effective means of communication between GK Youth and the wider public. It is one of the main avenues for creating more awareness of and spreading the news of GK.

For recent GKY GATers, GKOM is a fantastic way for you to continue your work for GK here in Australia in a fun and creative way!

The structure of GKOM Australia is split into 5 main teams which are all overseen by the Head of GKOM (currently Faustin Molina). The teams each have their specific functions and are as follows:

Video and Photography

The **Video and Photography** team covers GK events and creates GK videos. The main functions include documentation and photography, editing and housing the GKOM library. The library refers to the stored collection of videos, photos and other soft copy materials. The main output from the team is its created videos.

Events

The **Events** team produce and coordinate the staging of GK events. The main functions of the team surround the conceptualisation, planning and running of GK events.

News Bureau and Web

The **News Bureau** team gathers and writes articles, brochures and newsletters about GK. The team is also required to distribute and circulate these articles. Another function is to create media kits for GK events. The main output from the team is a regular quarterly newsletter, being the GK Times, content for the website and informational and promotional materials. The **Web** team updates, maintains and handles the dedicated website.

Design

The **Design** team is responsible for developing creative concepts. The main outputs of the team include designing the layout of promotional materials, designing new graphics for print materials, props and any online material.

GKOM Australia believes that "Creativity, commitment, cooperation and credibility creates commendable communications!".

If you are interested in working with any of the above teams or feel you are able to contribute to GKOM in any way, please contact GKOM by **emailing** gkom@gk-youth.org

Save the date: There is also an up and coming GKOM workshop, currently scheduled for 30 April (TBC) where you can find out more about the work of GKOM and how you can get involved. Please mark this important date in your diaries now!

KEY DATES FOR YOUR DAIRY

GK Youth Meeting: 2 April, Venue TBC

Bayani Challenge: 4-9 April

GK Live Sessions: 15 April, Mars Hill Cafe

GK Mixed Indoor Soccer Challenge: 17 April, Emerton Leisure Centre

GKOM Workshop: 30 April (TBC)

GK Basketball Competition: 22 May (TBC)

Live and Loud: Mid May, exact date TBC

SFC Oceania Conference: 29-31 July

GKY GAT PNG: mid September (exact dates TBC)

GK GLOBAL SUMMIT: 14-16 October

GKY GAT CAMBODIA: 22 October to 5 November

Please note the above dates may be subject to change but date changes and venues for the above events shall be communicated to GK Youth and the wider public if appropriate.

Thank you to all the writers and photographic contributors (Marie Reyes, Carmelle Cuanan, Elaine Marie Laforteza, Jasmine Jongko, Miguelle Concepcion, Liam King, Alison Canare, Jonathan Yunon, Jessper Perez, David A Luschwitz, Beverly Bucalon and Joe Oconer). We hope you have enjoyed this special edition of the GK Times.

Marie Oconer and Reggie Santos
GKOM News Bureau

For more information on any of the events and articles please visit:

- www.gk1world.com
- www.gkancopaustralia.org
- www.gk-youth.org
- www.gk1mb.org

