

PHILIPPINES. Ta h a n a n Sta. Luisa. Sewing Center Social Enterprise Project

Tahanan Sta. Luisa (TSL) is a crisis intervention and recovery center for abused street girls in Metro Manila. It is helping them to recover in body, mind and spirit to enhance their feelings of self-worth and dignity and enable them to reintegrate into regular community life. The United Nations Women's Guild (UNWG) has been supporting TSL since 2011. In 2018, it was awarded a special grant of \$10,000.00 for a Sewing Center Social Enterprise Project. This is 'an integral component of TSL Caring, Healing and Teaching (CHT) framework for these girls.

Caring, Teaching and Healing Rehabilitation Framework

Since 1997, TSL has been helping abused and exploited street girls using a holistic rehabilitation framework of **Caring, Teaching and Healing (CTH)**. TSL seeks to empower these girls by opening opportunities to recover, harness their potentials and skills; start anew, and be independent.

Caring provides basic needs. Healing includes psycho-social interventions, medical and dental provisions. Teaching involves non-formal and alternative basic education, life skills training, income generating projects and spiritual and values clarification.

Working with local authorities and other social services agencies, TSL has supported 600 girls to date. At the end of 2017, TSL moved into its own building, which required a great deal of adjustments, re-evaluation of its procedures and criteria for accepting girls. These resulted in



the reduction of the current girl residents from 15 to ten. Recruitment is going on to reach a maximum capacity of 24.

Sewing Center Social Enterprise Project

In November 2018, TSL received a special grant of \$10,000.00 from the UNWG. This initiated the Sewing Center Social Enterprise Project, as an integral component of the CTH framework and reactivated earlier sewing activities in Tahanan. The aim was to establish a fully functional sewing center as a social enterprise. The objective was to train the girls to create quality machine-sewn and hand-sewn items that will develop their sewing skills and creative talents, teach them good work ethic, and enable them to earn some income (earning-while-learning).

Project Implementation Results

The first step was to recondition ten used industrial sewing machines donated by Australia. A suitable sewing room was constructed and furnished.

A young sewing teacher was hired; the girls began with the sewing sessions and started production. She resigned after four months. A former sewing trainer who recovered from illness, returned after four months. From then on, the lessons and production process speeded up. The schedule for sewing sessions was organized around the girls' regular school hours. During school holidays, the sewing sessions were extended



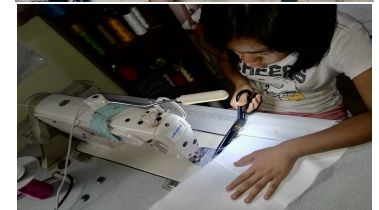
by another half hour.

The girls learned to use the industrial sewing machines and edging machines with safety precautions. They acquired additional skills such as sewing on zippers, finishing the edges by machine or by hand.

The teacher gave the girls step-by-step sewing instructions and posters to make different items. Sewing products started out with simple tote bags, coin purses, small pouches – items which were quickly bought by TSL visitors and volunteers.

Volunteer Groups, Production and Sale

Volunteer artist groups came around to give lessons on how to paint on fabric or to decorate with beads and buttons. The girls tried their hands on painting and decorating their bags. Interested donors and partners gave ideas about designs and marketing opportunities.



Social Enterprise for Personal Development

As a personal development channel, the project has been a significant contributor to the education and healing of the Tahanan girls. Their progress can be gleaned from their "report cards", set against their summary

case profiles.

Project sustainability is promising. Engaging the girls and accelerating their learning and healing are evident. Production and sales are on a clear upward curve. Partners and donors interested in supporting the project through



promotion and sales efforts are increasing in number. The project has already gained wide attention locally and internationally through the TSL website, Facebook and Instagram accounts and the Global Giving account. These are attracting more funding support for the TSL CTH framework, and generating inquiries about buying sewing products.

Constraints on Project Implementation

Hiring a sewing teacher/enterprise coordinator was an initial constraint. The current sewing teacher is still adjusting to the concept of a social enterprise project, e.g., with a production timeline and marketing scheme, and clear business objectives.

Without a business-minded Project Coordinator, inputs for product design, product line, pricing and marketing have been largely improvisational. Board members, some donors and volunteers have

suggested ideas which TSL considered and in a few instances tried, with mixed results.

The project is still in an exploratory mode, even as TSL is getting a better feel of the market and is expanding production and increasing sales.

Engaging the girls was at times difficult at the start. Each girl had to be motivated and treated differently from the others – according to each one's disposition, cognitive levels, motor skills, and emotional readiness. But with the collective efforts of the Sewing Teacher, Social Worker, Center Director, even the



encouragement of the other girls, all the girls now see themselves as contributing to the “enterprise” and liking it. Seeing their products appreciated and purchased by visitors and outside buyers have motivated them more than ever.

Recommendations

To become a viable social enterprise, more market research and product testing should be pursued for the next few months. TSL can more actively pursue arrangements with prospective partners who have already expressed wanting to support the project, e.g. studies to address queries for promotions and

purchases through Facebook, TSL website.



The project has to be guided more strictly by business rules and standards. The staff involved will have to systematize the production cycle. Proper documentation and financial systems can be better standardized.



As part of the case management of each girl, assessment of her participation should continue and be recorded. Once operations have reached break-even point, TSL should establish an earnings-savings scheme for each girl.

ADDENDUM

The project has been an appealing subject for sharing on international and national platforms. The teaching and healing results have attracted growing interest not only from prospective donors but from child protection advocates as well.

26 June 2021