

The Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006: Does it Rehabilitate?

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to record the perception of the Children-in-conflict with the Law (CICL). The services assessed the following: Physical, Moral, Spiritual, Intellectual, and Social Well-being; it further assesses the effectiveness delivered by the RRCY and whether RA 9344 rehabilitates. The methods used are qualitative through interview methods on implementing the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006 (RA 9344), as amended by RA 10630, at the Regional Rehabilitation Center for the Youth (RRCY) in Argao, Cebu. The study participants were then identified as Children-in-conflict with the law (CICL) who come from the Province of Bohol. A researcher-made semi-structured questionnaire was used to guide the face-to-face interviews conducted and supported by a focused-group discussion. It was, however, a short-term interview with the participants, limited to the perception of the CICL, their parents, and the staff while the CICL were undergoing rehabilitation thereat. The study revealed the effectiveness of the services delivered by the RRCY and the narrative of the respondents, RA 9344 rehabilitates. Thus, continuity in the services rendered by the rehabilitation center and that of the community shall be reintegrated. Therefore, a Barangay-based Reintegration Program is recommended.

Keywords: Juvenile Justice and Welfare, RA 9344, RA 10630, Qualitative Research, Purposive Sampling, Juvenile Delinquency,

Children-in-conflict with the Law (CICL), Regional Rehabilitation Center for the Youth (RRCY), Argao, Cebu, Philippines, and Barangay-based Reintegration.

INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is recognized as a member of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. This historic event in 1989 chartered the path for the Philippines to pass policies to protect and promote the best interest of its young population. The Philippines, as a signatory, has Republic Act 9344, or the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006, as amended by RA 10630.

Public perception of RA 9344, as amended by RA 10630, remains controversial. Despite the amendments, public perception of the law remains critical, especially regarding the provision(s) on the establishment of Bahay Pag-Asa by local government units. Some even point out that the law allows criminal syndicates to hire very young children below 18 years of age for their illegal activities. In the words of Senator Francis Pangilinan, author of RA 9344 at the Senate of the Philippines, "As legislators, we already did our part to address the loopholes in the law." He added that local leaders need to put their minds and hearts into the implementation of the law (Pangilinan, F. 2015).

The situation of CICL, the City of Tagbilaran, and the Province of Bohol revealed that amendments of the law did not seem to answer lapses in its implementation. The CICL from the Province of Bohol was sent to the Regional Rehabilitation Center for the Youth (RRCY) in Argao, Cebu, the latter being the only government-run rehabilitation for the youth that accepts juvenile delinquents from across Region 7. The Province of Bohol nor the City of Tagbilaran does not have a center for CICL despite the law's mandate, as amended.

Thus, the researcher wanted to study whether or not the implementation of Republic Act 9344 rehabilitates. Thus from the perspective of the rehabilitation undertaken at the RRCY. This study, therefore, zeroes in on the performance of the law, as implemented by the RRCY. The CICLs youth were undergoing rehabilitation between six (6) months to one (1) year. The study focused on the services rendered by the RRCY in the areas of the CICLs Physical, Moral, Spiritual, Intellectual, and Social Well-being.

The following theoretical bases were considered: Agnew's General Strain Theory acknowledges the impact of a person's sad or bad experience with the tendency for criminal behavior. These children may have witnessed inter-parental violence or direct parent-to-child violence. This same theory advances the reality that when an individual has goals and society cannot support him, mainly economic, the individual will resort to alternative ways. And unfortunately, to criminal behavior. Especially for very young people, wants and needs do appear to be the same. Unmet needs and wants, no matter what they seem for adults, are expected, even demanded. Thus, the young child has been led astray. (Maxwell, 2001)

Secondly, the Social Learning Theory of Bandura. This theory blames that "Crime is learned." As the adage goes, "no child is born delinquent," either the child directly experienced something or saw an event that directly or indirectly affects him. He acts and reacts the way he saw or experienced it. He is either punished or rewarded for his behavior or sees one being punished or rewarded. This theory emphasizes that any re-entry plan for juvenile delinquents must consider this learning process. The matter of coping strategies must be regarded as and emphasized, considering that behavior is learned. Both the social and psychological perspectives of a child need to be considered if genuine rehabilitation is desired. (Eamon, 2001)

Bursik (1988), on the other hand, emphasizes that social disorganization happens when there is a failure of the community to share the same morals and principles as its members. In Sociology, a person's immediate environment, the community, helps shape him. Thus, whatever one's relationship or the absence of, with those around him has a direct and indirect impact on one's behavior. Structural and cultural factors indeed help shape a person's social behavior, absent any disconnect or deviancy is developed.

Social media has influenced the hearts and minds of young people; sharing the same principles across generations would be challenging to achieve. From the legal standpoint, RA 9344 is anchored on the doctrine of "Parens Patriae," or that the state is the parent or guardian. Society has a responsibility to recover the lives of its young offenders before they become absorbed in criminality (Musiker 1995).

RA 9344 should emphasize providing juvenile delinquents, herein the Child-in-conflict with the Law (CICL), an opportunity to reform or reintegrate into the community through child-friendly means. Thus, while the CICL is

not exempt from criminal liability, the law mandates the local government provides an intervention program for youthful offenders. While jail is not an option, the provincial government must devise programs and activities that will involve the child, his family, and the government through the social welfare officers. The intervention may take individualized treatment, including education, skills training, and involvement in community service activities. The social worker's role is assigned to each case to undertake the case management process and coordinate with the child and the family.

RA 9344 also provides a mechanism to address the CICL who commits rape, murder, or other heinous crimes. In this situation, the discernment of the child is essential. The law provides that should the CICL be 15 years old and below, but the child acted without understanding, Such CICL will undergo an intervention program under the supervision of the local social welfare officer. But for those CICL who are above 15 years old but below 18 years old, and acting with discernment and the imposable penalty for the crime is more than six years of imprisonment, the child should avail of a diversion program, or the CICL may be placed under suspended sentence and subjected to rehabilitation. In no way shall the CICL be sent to jail.

Diversion Programs are the channeling of the child away from the typical justice system through alternative ways. It provides alternatives to detention and institutional care and is given only when the youthful offender voluntarily admits the offense. If the penalty for the violation is not more than 12 years' imprisonment, the court can order diversion. (RA 9344, Section 2, j.) It is recommended that this law be institutionalized.

RA 10630, on the other hand, strengthened the Juvenile Justice System in the Philippines. It emphasized the importance of giving attention to the child's best interest, particularly Children-in-conflict with the law. It focused on the children's rights and protection rather than on punitive sanctions for their acts. In that case, he shall be considered a neglected child shall be mandatorily placed in a particular facility. Such facility shall be called Bahay Pag-Asa or the Intensive Juvenile Intervention and Support Center. Moreover, children who commit crimes more than three times or repeat their offenses shall be considered neglected children and are mandated to undergo intervention programs supervised by the local social welfare office of the respective provincial governments. Finally, the law imposes a maximum penalty for those who exploit young children, such as criminal syndicates.

The law emphasizes the importance of an Intervention Program for juveniles. Intervention refers to a series of activities planned to resolve issues that may lead to the child being charged an offense. Individual treatment programs such as counseling, skills training, education, and other activities will enhance their psychological, emotional, and psycho-social well-being. If early interventions are made and succeed, young people are less likely to become delinquent nor recidivists. (Burns, 2003).

After Intervention, there should be a re-entry plan with how to manage juvenile delinquents. Considering that “crime is learned,” the learning experience of any juvenile must be considered when planning or designing a program best suited for his eventual reintegration into society. Any intervention or diversion program is not the end-all and be-all. Only a phase is needed to prevent juvenile delinquents’ stigma in the community or redeems them as eventual contributors to society. Every child, no matter what the circumstance, is a good resource. Thus, coping strategies need to consider both the child’s social (emotional support, especially from the family) and psychological needs (one’s efficacy or self-esteem) (Eamon, 2001) .

This study, therefore, aimed to assess the implementation of Republic Act 9344, or the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006, at the Regional Rehabilitation Center for the Youth (RRCY) at Argao, Cebu.

Here are the questions that the participants were asked to respond to:

1. What is the youth, the staff, and parents’ perception of the implementation of RA 9344 at the Regional Rehabilitation Center for the Youth (RRCY) in Argao, Cebu, in the following aspects?
 - 1.1 physical
 - 1.2 moral and spiritual
 - 1.3 intellectual
 - 1.4 social well-being.
2. What are the benefits of the CICL in implementing RA 9344 at RRCY insofar as the child, the parents, and the center staff are concerned?
3. What are the problems encountered in the implementation of the law at RRCY?
4. What are the life experiences of the CICL while within the RRCY?
5. Considering the preceding, does RA 9344, as implemented by RRCY, rehabilitate juvenile delinquents?

6. What enhancement program is proposed for the better implementation of RA 9344, as amended?

METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative study on the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006 (RA 9344). It is a fact-finding or exploratory study that involves adequate and accurate qualitative interpretation of findings. The method was found appropriate to this study since it aimed to describe the present situation of Children-in-conflict with the law (CICL) in Central Visayas (Region 7), more particularly at the Regional Rehabilitation Center for the Youth (RRCY) in Argao, Cebu. The instrument used was the Semi-Structured Questionnaire for the face-to-face Interview. The semi-structured questionnaire was deemed appropriate for time constraints without missing out on essential items. It also enabled the researcher to make well-founded generalizations/conclusions. The researcher opted to use this kind of research considering the desire to acquire first-hand data from the respondents in an atmosphere that allowed them to respond freely and in a more casual manner. Information that was developed by an enumeration of events and experiences that they may have shared at the RRCY, focus-group discussion(s) was conducted. The data gathered were qualitatively described, analyzed, and interpreted.

Purposive sampling aid in identifying the participants of the study; the researcher was able to capture the insights of all CICL (7 of them) at the Center at that time who come from the Province of Bohol. In the case of the parents, only two (2) parents were willing and available, one being a single father, and the other a mother of five (5) children, and still married. However, a follow-up interview on the social worker handling the cases of these CICL and an attempt to reach more parent-respondents was futile. Finally, all current staff at the RRCY at the time of the CICLs stay were available and willing to participate in the study. The study environment was of the Regional Rehabilitation Center (RRCY) for the Youth, Candabong, Argao, Cebu. The RRCY is operated by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Region 7.

Permission to conduct the study was secured from the University of Bohol Graduate School and the DSWD-Region 7 Office. The researcher visited the RRCY in Argao, Cebu. The participants were interviewed with the interview guide at hand. For the CICL, they were "coded" or assigned

letter names as they suggested. After that, all of the respondents gathered for a focus-group discussion. During the conversation, the respondents shared their experiences at the center and gave recommendations on how best RA 9344 may be implemented. It was, however, emphasized that the interview will be strictly confidential, and in no time shall their names be divulged.

The study underwent Ethics Review by the UB Research Department. After which, it was subjected to Ethics Review by the Regional Office of DSWD-7. It was required because RRCY is under the direct control and supervision of the DSWD-Regional Office 7, as was the department's protocol. For ethical considerations, respondents were given the option to identify themselves; however, the juvenile delinquents will be made to sign their conformity. All the instruments were treated with the utmost confidentiality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I. Perception of the Level of Implementation of RA 9344 at the Regional Rehabilitation Center for the Youth (RRCY) in Argao, Cebu.

A. Physical Well-being.

A.1 CICL. According to all of the participants, the center provided them with adequate meals every day. They were also given their clothes and proper sleeping quarters. They also indicated that access to medical facilities and supplies such as hygiene needs was available at all times. Provisions with adequate supplies of soap, toothpaste, and the like. Six (6) indicated that children with mental or psychological needs were also given special care. Only one (1) of them indicated not knowing about the latter. The Center provided them with what they needed to maintain their physical well-being in living space, comfort, and medical care and services. On the latter, one respondent shared with the researcher his experience when he got sick. He was immediately sent to the nearest health center in the city as he needed further medical attention. Not one of the respondents had any complaint(s) as to the provision of these basic needs.

A.2 For the Staff. When the study was conducted, there were at least three (3) social workers and a Peace Corps volunteer assigned as staff of the RRCY. Thus, there was four (4) staff available for the interview. They

were interviewed and asked to rate the availability of the services they were mandated to provide.

The Physical Well-being of the CICL, the staff, indicated all the physical requirements to be present at the RRCY, as mandated by the law. They shared the same observation with the CICL regarding providing food, clothing, medical, and hygiene needs. If they were to rate these provisions, they would have ranked them as High. A social worker shared her opinion that the center provides the CICL with rehabilitation in a community environment.

A.3 For the Parents. As only one (1) of the parent-respondents was able to visit the center and see for herself the condition thereat, this parent acknowledged the provision of the children's basic needs. She said that there was enough space for the dormitory, which the CICL shared with the others, and that clothing and food were well provided. She even gladly said that her son gained some weight compared to the first time he was admitted to the center. While she was worried about her son being away from home, she was consoled when she observed the situation at the center in her first visitation. For the second parent, he lamented that while he could not visit her son, nor any of them in the family, he knew that his son was well-taken care of the establishment. Every time they would talk over the phone, his son would assure them at home that he was well-provided for and that they need not worry about anything. He even said he has "surrendered" his son to the RRCY as he has heard many beautiful things about the center. Also, he felt it was best because his son was not welcome in their community as he was charged with murder against someone from the same community.

Overall, and as far as physical and medical care and services are concerned, RRCY would best qualify for a good and efficient rehabilitation center for the youth. The CICL thereat were well-provided with, and the center is conducive for rehabilitation.

B. Moral and Spiritual Well-being

B.1 For the CICL. In providing opportunities and activities to uplift their Moral and Spiritual needs, all of the participants indicated that activities such as Values orientation, the teaching of Filipino values, and religious activities were provided for by the center. They added that there were competent teachers. One respondent volunteered the information that charismatic services were being undertaken every Wednesday. The

activity was most welcome to him, not being a Catholic. On religious services, they noted that there were regular services for both Catholics and Non-Catholics. However, while they said the availability of these services, they found it to be only Moderately implemented because they believe there should be more and frequent services. To the respondents, a weekly ceremony such as the Holy Mass was not enough.

B.2 For the Staff. For the staff at the RRCY, the teaching of Filipino Values and Values orientation was the more significant contribution of the center to the CICL in the matter of their moral and spiritual well-being. While they shared the observation that daily masses were not being held, they believed weekly gatherings suffice. Since the center to be multi-denominational, there were charismatic services offered on Wednesdays.

B.3 For the Parents. The parents of the CICL would have to thank the Center for their children's Moral and Spiritual well-being. One parent was quick to offer the information that the first time she visited her son at the center, she was surprised to see the latter already wearing a "rosary" and carrying a book that looked like a Bible. The observed behavior was not usual and took her by surprise. That made her believe that the center was suitable for her child.

The other parent explained that they hardly had time together for prayer or conversations when his son was still home. His son was often out with friends and his girlfriend. When the unfortunate incident happened, he was out with friends late in the evening. Thus, for him, the decision to send his son to the center was a welcome move. While at the center, he would notice, through their phone conversations, that he would suddenly ask about home and that he was looking forward to rejoining them again. He shared with him the seminars they had at the center, including prayer and reflection. The observable changes in his son's behavior prompted him to conclude that the center developed the spiritual side of her son and gave him the chance to reflect on things.

C. Intellectual Well-being

C.1 For the CICL. On the intellectual aspect, the participants said that the center provided them with formal and non-formal education. They had classes akin to the Alternative Learning System (ALS) Program of the DepEd for formal education. They were familiar with the mode because most of them were enrolled in the program while still home. At the time of the study, the Don Bosco Technical Institute provided the center with skills

training. This training focused more on Masonry, Automotive mechanics, and Refrigeration services. One of the participants further informed the researcher that he was part of the workforce that did the fencing at the Center, as they were also exposed to masonry training through the institute.

C.2 For the Staff. For the staff of RRCY, the intellectual well-being of the children was well-provided. While services were quite limited, especially regarding non-formal education and skills training, they believe the center provided an excellent opportunity for mental growth. They believe there were competent teachers. One remarkable observation by the participants was that the center offered enormous school supplies. They shared the opinion of the CICL that there was a need for more and better-equipped classrooms, significantly that the population thereat was increasing.

C.3 For the Parents. Across categories, the intellectual support provided by the RRCY appeared to get the best impression on the parents of the CICL. They opined that the center offers education and training that is appropriate for their child's needs. They believe the classrooms were fully equipped and that instructors were competent. One parent even shared her observation that since her child went to the center, his son's discipline regarding schoolwork was better. Her son did not have reason to miss class as the center would always check on them. Thus, educational support was well provided for, especially as regards the motivation to attend class.

D. Social Well-being

D.1 For the CICL. On their Social Well-being, the participants indicated Other Means of Communication as having the most impact. When asked what these other means of communication referred to, they noted telephone access and radio and television access. They also stated that they were given enough time for their physical activities such as exercise and sports, particularly Basketball. They also intimated that there was no hindrance to their accepting visitors, especially from family and friends, as the center always emphasized the importance of family visitations.

The participants reported a smooth relationship; however, the same-sex relationship was starting to blossom. They opined that the latter needed to be addressed as it might cause problems between them.

One child, however, intimated to the researcher the importance of visits from the family. While he was lucky enough to visit his family almost

every month, some have never had visitors, even from family. He shared his insights that even if there were often fights at home, he still considered visits by his family very important. He even looked forward to it. Thus, he lamented how fortunate he was compared to others.

D.2 For the Staff. For the staff at the RRCY, the social well-being of the CICL is vital. That is why efforts have been made to make sure this area is prioritized. Not only was it instrumental towards the effective rehabilitation of the children, but it was also one of the reasons most CICL had a problem when still out in their community. Peer pressure, alongside economics, was very influential in their not-so-distant past, which led them to criminality. Thus, the matter had to be dealt with cautiously. Each child is unique; the center ensures that appropriate intervention is necessary to modify the child's behavior.

For the staff, it was more participation from the CICL family that they thought needed more effort. Parent participation in rehabilitation, to them, was significant. The center, they said, was going to be a temporary refuge for their children, and when they returned to their family, parents' support played a vital part.

D.3 For the Parents. Alongside the educational well-being of their children at the center, their social well-being got a good mark. Their children were given enough time for communication with other children and were allowed frequent visits from family and friends. The parents were satisfied that they were given ample time to be with their children.

II. Benefits gained by the CICL in the implementation of RA 9344 at RRCY. Apart from the facilities and services the CICL received from the center, the researcher wanted to know other benefits that the participants believe contributed to the rehabilitation of the children.

II. a. For the CICL. For the CICL, much has been gained from their stay at the center. In the perception of the implementation of RA 9344 by the RRCY, not one of the respondents complained except to say there were areas the Center could improve on. But it showed how satisfied they were with the services and facilities they were given. However, it would be worth noting that the most significant benefit they gained was transportation and classrooms. When asked what they meant, they pointed out that the center always provide transportation for field trips and the like. If they needed to be checked by medical professionals, a vehicle was always available.

The CICL lamented that they always looked forward to their classes and found the classrooms well ventilated. Supplies for classwork were also well provided. While listening to their stories, the researcher noticed how thankful they were that they had everything they needed for schoolwork, a far cry from their predicament before when their parents hardly had enough to buy school supplies. Here, they found they were well-provided. The competence of their teachers and lecturers, with fewer students per class, their learnings were well supported. Thus, they were better motivated compared to when they were home.

Another benefit that the respondents enumerated as having benefited the most from was their dormitory or sleeping quarters, the dining area, visiting room, laundry room, and counseling room in no particular order. They were pretty excited to share their experiences at such facilities. While the sleeping quarters were crowded, they expressed their appreciation for the well-maintained facilities right at their doorstep. Listening to the respondents, the researcher had the impression that they were “home.”

One child shared that the most significant for him was the dining area. Here, he was able to practice patience and started to have some sense of responsibility. Patience, because he would fall in line to await his turn at the dining table, one he did not observe while at home. And responsibility because he was sometimes assigned to help instill order in the mess hall to ensure everybody had food when it was their turn.

Other benefits gained were the dining area, a visiting area, the chapel or prayer room, a laundry room, one room for counseling, sports facilities, and legal support.

II. b. For the Staff. The staff was also asked what they perceived the CICL benefited most from at the center. They believe the CICL benefited most from the services and facilities of the Dining Area and Transportation services. They also pointed out the dormitory or sleeping quarters and the laundry room. These were the same benefits mentioned that show that they share the same perceptions. However, the staff noted the Counselling Room, the Sports facilities, and Legal services. The latter, however, are services that are on a need-to-know basis; thus, not all CICL may have availed of the same.

II. c. For the Parents. Since only one parent could visit the center, the benefits gained from this perspective were quite limited. It is worthy to note that the three participants indeed came up with consistent responses to

the question asked in this study. Parents further indicated that they could visit their sons anytime at the center.

III. The problems encountered by the respondents at the RRCY

This study also dwells on the issues faced by the CICL, the staff at RRCY, and the parent-respondent.

III. a. For the CICL. The CICL were unanimous in saying that the significant challenge while at the center was overcrowded dormitories. Considering the number of CICL at the RRCY covering the entire Region 7, and further considering the lack or absence of local rehabilitation centers in the local government units, they said that the center needed to build/establish more dormitories or rooms to accommodate those who need the center's services. They also pointed out that while they were satisfied with the activities provided by the center, they believe there need to be more and varied activities for each of the CICL's concerns. For instance, not too many are in physical sports like Basketball and Volleyball. They pointed out that other CICL's interests were in the Arts, both Visual and Performing.

III. b. For the Staff. For the staff of the RRCY, they mentioned the same observations as the CICL in the matter of crowded dormitories. They were more specific in that they said the need for more beds for the children. They lamented that the center was designed only for those CICL who are on a suspended sentence. The investigation further reveals that mainly the local government units do not have operational Bahay Pag-Asa. The center inhibits parents who volunteered for their children to be rehabilitated even when their cases were unqualified. Thus, the crowded dormitories and other facilities.

The staff also identified the shortage of social workers thereat. They intimated that while RRCY is compliant with the social worker to CICL ratio, they believe there is a shortage because they did not just work as social workers. They were also assigned other tasks like the kitchen, administrative work, and even counseling themselves. While they were willing to perform other tasks, the job of a social worker at the center entailed a lot of work and concerns.

Finally, the staff indicated that a concern they believed needed attention was the matter of aftercare. When children are sent home and to their community, the local government unit's responsibility is to take care of the children released from the center back to their home and neighborhood;

the center needed a budget. They opined that it was much their role to ensure that when the child is sent back home, the center continued to assist the child and his family in whatever form.

III. c. For the Parents. The parents disclose that budgetary support for Family Visitation is not provided. Thus, they (parents and other relatives) spend their own money to visit their children at the center. However, for Parent A, she observed that she was not given any briefing upon entering the center. Thus, she had to make her way to meet her child. She also lamented the matter of overcrowded dormitories thereat.

Finally, Parent A also pointed out the absence of any training or seminar on dealing with juvenile delinquency. She thought she would be given one before her first visit to the RRCY, a suggestion/insight that was never considered by studies. However, this was one legitimate concern as parents were never prepared for the circumstance, dealing with juvenile delinquency.

IV. Life experiences of the CICL while within the RRCY.“PURO MAN MI BOANG DIRI, SO BEHAVE KO.” So goes “MS,” 15 years old, youngest, and only boy in a family of five (5). He was in second-year high school at the time of his apprehension for drug possession and use. His parents were both unemployed at that time. Outspoken, he would easily have been elected “president” of the group of seven. These words continued to reverberate as the researcher recalled the focus-group discussion. The researcher was caught off-handed when that boy was asked about his present condition.

For “MS,” the charismatic services held every Wednesday were the most significant activity he would cherish and remember the center. It made a substantial impact on him which, to him, made him realize a lot of things about things that await him after his stay at the center. While short of giving justification to his transgression in the past, he said circumstances led him to do what he did. Their economic needs as a family prompted him to do it, although he admitted it was not the right solution.

Finally, “MS” shared that his parents never had the chance to visit him. It was the immediate relatives of his father that was based in Cebu that gave him a visit. Maybe out of economic want, “MS” did not blame his parents. He even did not find them irresponsible parents. To him, they were not as lucky as others.

According to him, he never saw himself behave the way he did at the center. He further lamented that the reason for the same was that he was with children like him at the center. In his words, “Puro man mi mga buang diri, so behave ko.” He started to learn how to obey rules, to wake up early, and to do office work, where he was assigned each day. For him, this was a different and new experience.

Another boy, CB, 18 years old, finishing only Grade 5 and suspected of drug possession and use. He shared that it was at the center that he started to learn how to wash clothes. That simple task gave him the idea that people still trust him and make him build some sense of confidence. Being away from home, he would often reminisce about when he was with his family. This simple routine of washing clothes also meant some time alone and would also bring him back to the day he was apprehended. While he had some regrets, he was always looking forward to going home and continuing with his life. Maybe with the simple tasks assigned to him at the center, he may assume duties back home. Thus, to this boy, the center will be a part of his life and that one he would treasure. In his words, “Bilib ko sa Center. “(Hats off to the Center!) It made him see what he never thought he had or was capable of doing. His only apprehension was whether his community would have forgotten what he had done.

For yet another CICL, “JA,” his stay at the center made him realize how important it was to be patient. He was already 18 when he was admitted to the center for Drug possession and Use. He said that, unlike before, he had to wait for his turn as he was not the only one around. When he was in his community, he would not wait to be recognized nor wait for his turn. With his peers, they would rush and behave without consideration of other people. But the center taught him to be more considerate and not just think of himself. It also led him to be respectful of others, especially older people.

Another story was that of “YY,” accused of Murder and finished only Grade 5. Admitted to the center at the age of 18, he was the one who gathered some CICL with him to do masonry work at the center. His father, himself a mason, inspired him, and with some experience helping his father, he volunteered along with others. The center provided skills training on masonry; thus, it came in handy and helpful to him, along with some others. He even showed the fence he helped build along with others. He finally shared that the trust the Center Head and its employees gave him made him realize he can still be helpful, despite his predicament and experience outside.

For “SD,” RRCY was an excellent decision. Apprehended for Drug possession and use, he shared how helpful RRCY was. While he was given a choice between going on community service or rehabilitation at the RRCY, the decision to avail of the services at the latter was perfect. Despite the distance from his family, the center gave him a better perspective on life. It gave him time to rediscover himself and to count his blessings. He also acknowledged how blessed he was to have his family regularly visit him at the center. With his parents’ frequent visits, especially his father, he knew they were so much a part of his rehabilitation. He also shared that the center was quite liberal with family visits, which helped a lot. However, he lamented that other children were not as blessed with regular visits from their family and friends. He intimated how vital visits from the family were. It made him feel hopeful that a family will be very willing to accept him back when he goes home and is reintegrated into the community.

Choosing to be known as “JKII,” he was charged with Murder at the age of 15. He has been in the center for the last two (2) years, the longest for the seven (7) respondents; he came from a family whose parents were separated. He appeared very evasive when asked about his family, and among the respondents, he seemed to be without remorse. A child of few words, he found his classes at the center the most influential on him. He was in high school when apprehended and appeared well-educated.

Finally, a very significant perspective that all of the CICL found at the center was the power of Prayer and Respect. Prayer was a refuge for them, and the relationship(s) they established along with other boys similarly situated made them earn and show respect for each other. They share the same sentiment that the center imposed liberal standards, with limits, one they did not see from where they come. However, despite the latter, they still long to be with their family.

CONCLUSION

Since the adoption in 2006 and the amendments of RA 9344 in 2013, the Regional Rehabilitation Center for the Youth (RRCY) in Argao, Cebu, has implemented RA 9344 very well. The 2014 UNICEF independent evaluation supported this claim. The conclusion “captures the exact moment” where the CICL participants are within the rehabilitation period. Only the CICL participants from the Province of Bohol were the subject of this investigation. However, despite this, and the RRCY being a

government facility servicing the whole of Visayas region and being the only genuinely functional one, it has appropriately implemented RA 9344.

The Center is not a permanent “haven” for these CICL. It was temporary as mandated by the law. In the Structural Functionalist Theory, the relationships between the various social institutions make up society; thus, the full intent of the law, herein RA 9344, as amended, must be enforced. The Local Government Units (LGUs) from which these CICL come from, the Barangay/Community they belong to, and most especially the families they will ultimately be sent back to, have a crucial role.

The CICL youth, staff, and the parent in the study, RA 9344, as implemented by the Regional Rehabilitation Center for the Youth (RRCY), does rehabilitate. And that a formal intervention, as provided by the RRCY, is necessary, albeit desired. Considering the outlying reasons and circumstances that led to the youth’s delinquent behavior and the surrounding environment, a formal intervention is still advised. However, for such standard rehabilitation to be sustained and effective, Aftercare is very crucial. As is the law’s intent, sustainability of the services rendered by the Center, herein the RRCY in Argao, Cebu, and that of the community must be ensured. The study of Leslie (2019) shows that the participants could not experience effective reintegration after they were released. However, they felt they had achieved some social stability by deriving internal decisions to change, maintaining a positive mindset, and successfully managing their shame with the help of family and friends. Thus, for a genuine and more sustainable rehabilitation, the Community through the Local Government Units must implement a Diversion Program with the active involvement of the private sector. After all, “it takes a village to raise a child.”

Finally, while the Philippines has passed legislation (RA 9344, as amended by RA 10630), significant gaps still exist in meeting international conventions’ rights protection standards. Full implementation of the law still wants from the other sectors of society. As emphasized in a study (Etemadi, 2005), the intervention of an NGO and private citizens can be beneficial. As an outcome, the implementation of a Barangay Reintegration Program is proposed in this study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher recommends the following:

1. RRCY should develop a more receptive program for the CICL by ensuring the children's specific and varied needs are addressed. A needs assessment that shall include psycho-social perspective, gender identity, cultural diversity, and other related concerns shall be prioritized. Every problem has its way of deriving a solution to the problem of juvenile delinquency, more particularly re-offending.
2. The evidence-based and multi-dimensional approach to deal with juvenile delinquency must be emphasized by the implementers.
3. Studies have revealed that the role of the private sector has led to the sustainability of initiatives that are not income-generating. Partnerships with them, and established non-governmental institutions, are encouraged.
4. There is a felt need to continue disseminating the wisdom of RA 9344, as amended. The law is a handy weapon to fight against giving up on children who may just have been victims of circumstance, thus are considered neglected children. Considering the same, a more intensive information and education campaign on the law is mandatory.
5. The success of a reintegration program for CICL will only be possible if the local chief executives find it in their hearts to prioritize implementing this beautiful piece of legislation. Thus, the exercise of "political will". Championing RA 9344 is therefore very crucial, all for the best interest of the child.
6. Finally, Local Government Units must prioritize the establishment of a Barangay-based Reintegration Program. While it is the researcher's opinion that the services of established rehabilitation centers are essential and will work, the barangay must at all times be ready to accept the CICL back. Thus, they must have in place a mechanism to ensure continuity. Therefore, this researcher strongly proposes establishing a Barangay-based Reintegration Program, herein referred to as "DAWAT," the budget of which is assured by the provision of RA 9344, as amended.

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