

## THE PNU SGP-PA EXPERIENCE

### Background

In 2012, the Office of Student Affairs and Student Services developed a program aimed at providing support to the transition of student-grantees into the college by providing them services and environment that promote academic achievement, successful completion of degrees, personal-social development, and career advancement. This program framework is anchored on Chinman and Linneys' Adolescent Empowerment Cycle as cited by Jennings et. al. (2006). The model is based on psychological theories of adolescent development and describes processes aimed at positive social bonding and enhancement of self-esteem. The model focuses on three dimensions: student participation in meaningful activities, opportunities for skills development and positive reinforcement and recognition from adults throughout the process.

Effective intervention programs are based on developmental approach model (Borders & Drury, 1992). A developmental program is proactive and preventive, helping students acquire the knowledge, skills, self-awareness, and attitudes necessary for successful mastery of normal developmental tasks. There is also substantial empirical evidence that these programs promote student development and academic success (Borders, 1992). The SGP-PA Program was conceptualized and developed for implementation on the basis of this idea. The student empowerment program includes the student-grantees participation in the intervention programs planned and developed for their holistic growth.

The PNU SGP-PA program comprises the four phases discussed below:

#### *Phase I – Selection, and Application Process*

Eligible applicants are high school graduates, drawn from identified and classified poor households in the 609 focus municipalities covered under the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino (4Ps) of DSWD. The student applicants from the DSWD who intend to pursue a degree in Education were forwarded to the university

*Phase II – Academic Intervention Program (AIP).* The bridging program called Academic Intervention Program (AIP) includes Reading, Language, Mathematics, Values, Civics and Personality Education. The program was handled by volunteer PNU faculty members. They also helped monitor and evaluate the performance of the student scholars. Those who passed the examination after the one semester bridging program proceeded with the 1st year first semester courses. First year second semester courses were offered to the grantees in Summer of 2013.

*Phase III – EMPOWER Program.* The assigned counselor/s and coordinators have developed a program for the SGP-PA grantees. A coordinator monitors and serves as mentor and counselor to the student-grantees in this program. It is designed to prepare the grantees to meet the demands as during college, and helping them cope with college life in PNU. Developmental and primary prevention activities that are information-based and providing social support are the strategies employed to empower the grantees gradually while in the program.

All the SGP-PA grantees were encouraged to participate in various activities of the University (PNU) including but not limited to the following: Body system b. Bridging and Supplemental classes, values formation, leadership training and other learning experiences, Student Assistantship and Outreach programs.

The various program focuses on addressing the academic, career, and personal-social development of the students. The following are the activities facilitated to them: (1) Guidance and Counseling Orientation for Student-Grantees; (2) Personal Inventory (3) Routine Interview (4) Counseling (5) Testing and (6) Guidance Sessions which focuses on Study Skills and Test Skills, Resource Management, Stress Management, Values Reinforcement and Social Graces Seminar, Pre-marital Sex Prevention Seminar, Problem-solving, Goal Setting and Decision-making.

*Phase IV – Student Teaching and LET Performance.* Upon completion of the student's third year in the PNU main campus, he/she is now ready to apply the knowledge and insights through practice teaching. Upon completion of their academic requirements, the last phase of the program is to prepare them for the Licensure Examination for Teachers.

## **The PNU SGP-PA GRANTEES' EXPERIENCES**

This paper is part of a study conducted by the OSASS, in this report importance is given in their lived experiences of the grantees as students in the university, their thoughts and feelings and their journey on how the program has shaped them as a person and their aspirations in life.

Qualitative-descriptive design was utilized in this study. Guided interviews, focus group discussions and oral histories (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003) of the research participants were used to gather data. A total of 43 student-grantees who are currently enrolled beneficiaries of the PNU Students Grants-in-Aid Program for Poverty Alleviation Program (PNU-SGP-PA) from the National Capital Region and Mindoro (Region IVA). Facilitators in the focus group discussion are professional social worker, Values Education teacher, a guidance counselors.

The researchers reviewed the coded transcripts, identified themes and contexts in which they appear. At the end of the analysis, findings and interpretations were given back to the student-grantees to check for further interpretations and explanations. The participants expressed their agreement with the findings and interpretations and contributed some further insights to some themes. These expressions were included in the manuscript.

## **Results and Discussion**

The grantees' educational experiences are characterized by series of events and changes in their life. Three themes that emerged are as follows: Personal-Social Adjustment, Academic and Non-Academic Engagement, and Career Outlook.

### **Personal-Social Adjustment**

Being in college was a big challenge for the grantees. There were issues and concerns that they have encountered as students. Some of the most remarkable experiences that they've had during their stay in the university were nervousness, adjustment and self-management.

Some of them have stopped schooling for several years, hence most of them difficulty in adjusting and coping with the demands of being a student. They have also identified lack of self-confidence, being sickly, emotionally sensitive, and reserved as their major concerns. Some have experienced difficulties relating to their classmates and some have felt pressured and overwhelmed of the sudden bulk of responsibilities as a college student. They have never imagined being in the library during their vacant period. Probably these experiences were due to their being absent for several years in school. Most of them have stopped schooling for a long time. Some of them have their work as waiter, janitor, construction worker, labandera, before they came to PNU. Some have apprehensions because they do not know what will happen to them and if they can match their classmates performance and if they can meet their parents' expectation of them.

### **Academic and Non-Academic Engagement**

The bridging program handled by volunteer PNU faculty members was one of the most memorable experiences according to the grantees. This program helped them adjust in their college life and overcome their fears related to schooling. Also, the opportunity for non-academic activities facilitated by faculty counselors was remarkable for the grantees. These activities include orientation and socialization for student-grantees, the counseling sessions which focuses on enhancing life skills such as, study and test skills, resource management, problem-solving, goal setting and decision-making. Added activities are educational trips, social graces seminar, and a night with the University President.

Most mentioned was when they their special performance at the CHED Office. They had a great time during the presentation. It was the General Assembly and the special guests were CHED Chairperson, the Secretary of DSWD and Presidents of various colleges and universities. They can never forget the time when they went to Enchanted Kingdom (amusement park) because everyone was there and it their first time to be there. It was unique and it was a very enjoyable activity. College life for the grantees is bitter sweet. College life was not easy at first because of the challenges (e.g. anxiety, transfer of residence, lost of contact with friends, building new relationships, etc.) experienced during their transition.

### **Career Outlook.**

Most of the student grantees have reported a big change on how they their future and what are the things that must be valued. Prior to being a grantee, some of them were employed in blue-collared jobs like being a waiter and construction worker. Most of them were receiving a very minimal income and have unhealthy working environment. Now that they are teachers-in-training, they see a more stable and brighter future.

They appreciated the program, accordingly it served as an eye opener on the importance of education in life and some of them begun to value future work. The program also gave hope to overcome difficulties and challenges in life. All the things that I am receiving at present are products of this poverty alleviation program according to Manuel, one of the student grantees.

In the eyes of the grantees there are opportunities that are made available for them especially after they finish college; working in public schools as professional teachers, returning in their hometowns, and being employed are some of the possibilities that they foresee in the near future.

### *Journey to Empowerment*

The grantees' journey to empowerment entails how the program helped them in creating positive changes in their outlook in life. Empowerment for the grantees mean being able to feel and be seen as a more confident individual and stronger person amidst all the trials in life. Their schooling helped them to see themselves more positively. It facilitates the important aspects of their personalities. They see this as opportunity where they learned life skills, became more responsible and exhibit personal abilities.

Most of them see the experience as a big help to build their self-confidence. They feel proud of themselves and accomplished. Also, some mentioned of having personality improvement, specifically their communication skills, status in life improved. Most significantly, little by little, their knowledge improved and were able to regulate their behavior to maintain positive relationships with others.

This experience is a means towards youth empowerment. Higher education according to Okeke and Emanalo 2008 as cited by Ekpiken and Ukpadio (2015) can be realized through teaching and providing educational experiences which help promote not only the fullest individual development but also through acquisition of knowledge, attitudes, behavior and occupational skills for lifelong living in the community. If effective learning process occurs, it will cultivate positive change or impact to the whole system.

### *Grantees' Perceived Selves of being Empowered*

When the grantees were asked to describe themselves before their university life, some of them see themselves as shy, emotional, lacking or having low self-esteem. Others have viewed their family, living away from their family and home sickness as their weaknesses. Some have expressed that they have experienced difficulties in some academic subjects specifically English and Mathematics. Few have shared that they have fears in presenting a lesson in front of class. Like, Rudolf is very shy, he cannot really speak in front class but now he even volunteers and he can speak in front very well.

Most of the grantees' perceived themselves as being undernourished, sickly, and poor. Now they feel more confident, motivated and excited for what the future will bring. They view themselves as flexible, hard working and intelligent individuals. They can also accomplish their various academic tasks like an ordinary or regular college student. They now consider being faithful, jolly, industrious and good followers as their personal strengths. According to the other grantees, some of the personal attributes that they possess include being understanding and having good interpersonal skills. They persevere and always try to be active or participative in all student activities. Some mentioned that they now have skills in lesson planning and preparing instructional materials.

Young people are ready to change their behaviors as long as they are provided with positive and creative personal space. When given the opportunity to create positive life changes, students will take their learning to higher levels. Marks of being empowered include enhanced self-esteem, being an engaged learner, and being able to contribute personal insights. Significantly, exposure to opportunities and challenges within a safe and supportive environment is a major foundation.

### Life Aspirations

When the grantees were asked about what they want to do after graduate on, some of them shared that they want to immerse themselves in the profession of teaching. Others have also shared that they like to pursue higher education like taking a Master's degree or taking another degree specifically, Architecture, Accountancy, Music, and Criminology. Majority of the student-grantees have expressed that they really intend to help their family by having a stable job. Some have personal intentions to help others when they are able to do so by returning to their hometown.

### Monitoring the Graduates

After four years of perseverance, there thirty four (34) of them graduated on time. Last September, 2016, ten (10) of them have successfully passed the 2016 Licensure Examination for Teachers namely:

	Name			Sex (F or M)			Course
	Last Name	First Name	MI		Town/City	Province	
1	CABAÑA	LEILANI	F.	F	Navotas	NCR	Bachelor of Science in Nutrition and Dietetics for Teacher
2	CO	JEAN CAROL	M.	F	Mandaluyong	NCR	Bachelor of Secondary Education - Values Education
3	CORDERO	RICHEL	S.	F	Pasay	NCR	Bachelor of Secondary Education - History
4	ESPINOCILLA	KEVIN	B.	M	Caloocan	NCR	Bachelor of Secondary Education - General Science
5	LAZARO	CHRISTIAN	P.	M	Roxas	Oriental Mindoro	Bachelor of Secondary Education - Values Education
6	MAGBULOGTOG	JENELYN	G.	F	Taguig	NCR	Bachelor of Secondary Education - Values Education
7	MELARION	SHIELA MARIE	T.	F	Quezon	NCR	Bachelor of Secondary Education - Physical Education
8	POLVOROSA	SHAIRA MAE	R.	F	Caloocan	NCR	Bachelor of Elementary Education
9	TALDE JR.	DANILO	G.	M	Mandaluyong	NCR	Bachelor of Science In Information and Communication Technology Education
10	TAMBOONG	OLIVER	M.	M	Bulalacao	Oriental Mindoro	Bachelor of Science In Information and Communication Technology Education

## **Concluding Remarks**

This study was an attempt to describe the program and voice out the student-grantees' thoughts, feelings and reactions to topics related to their being a direct beneficiary of the Philippines's poverty alleviation program. There is uniqueness in the stories shared to the researchers but there is also commonalities in the educational experiences and situations in these student-grantees' lives. For the grantees the program has the capacity to create positive changes and events in the physical, social, emotional, and creative spaces of an individual's life. A positive and supportive learning environment helps in building lifelong learning skills and positive assets (e.g. self-concept, self concept and outlook in life). For the student grantees, being empowered means trying out newly developed skills, cultivating positive self and healthy relationships, and experiencing personal success.

Findings suggest that the students-grantees have demonstrated improvement in their personal-social, career, and academic dispositions. Moreover, this study reveals that the students-grantees' aspirations include becoming educational leaders and role models who can help break the cycle of poverty and continue to become lifelong learners. Educational, career and life goals were formulated by the grantees themselves. The opportunity to study in college through the government's support was considered as a great opportunity. This premise has increased their motivation to finish school and what they have started.

Moreover, this study reveals that the students-grantees' life aspirations include alleviating the status of one's family of origin, becoming educational leaders and role models who can help break the cycle of poverty and continue to become lifelong learners. Partnering for greater coordination and sustainability of the poverty alleviation program must be highlighted.

## **Way Forward**

Youth empowerment is a necessity for sustainable development of developing communities. There is also a call for incorporating activities that can address the other needs and/or the needs that arise during the implementation of poverty alleviation and youth empowerment programs. Promotion of a variety of opportunities for youth engagement must be considered for holistic youth development.

On the other hand, giving feedback to various stakeholders as regards to the program's progress can serve as good measures of accountability and quality assurance. Raising awareness and strengthening partnerships with the government at the national and local levels about the poverty alleviation program must be continuously done. Stakeholders in exchange should encourage the youths on choices and pursuits of professional courses in higher education that will empower them to create positive life changes.

Lastly, future studies (e.g. Program Evaluation, Tracer Study, Impact Study, etc.) on poverty alleviation and youth empowerment programs must be continuously done.



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