



2015 Annual Report



Helping the poorest of the poor children to have a better life.



I. ABOUT PROJECT PEARLS

Project PEARLS is a non-stock, non-profit and non-partisan organization in the Philippines, and a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization registered with the State of California, USA.

The mission of Project PEARLS is to feed, educate, advocate, and work for the basic rights of the Filipino children living in poverty, who have no voice and almost invisible to the society. Through our scholarship grants, feeding programs, literacy projects, and health care programs, we seek to bring **Peace, Education, Aspiration, Respect, Love, and Smiles (PEARLS)** to children in poor communities.



How it All Started

Project PEARLS started in 2008 as a personal project by Melissa Villa and her daughter, Francesca. They helped the children of Melissa's deaf and mute childhood friend to go to school. Two years later, Melissa saw online a photo of a child worker in Ulingan, Tondo. The picture, which was posted by Manila-based Belgian photo journalist Sidney Snoeck, shows a child who was coated with soot and dirt from head to toe. The photo's powerful effect defied physical boundaries. Upon seeing it from her home in California, Melissa felt the urge to do something for those children. She mobilized her family and close friends to start a weekly feeding program in Ulingan. This community, which literally means "charcoal factory", is located near the breakwaters of Manila North Harbor, and is home to hundreds of families. The families, women and children alike, work here to earn a meager income of \$2 a day, while they contend with the heat, toxic smoke, stench, and flies all day. Aside from the weekly feeding program, Project PEARLS also rebuild the Preschool in the community, thus giving birth to the first batch of PEARLS scholars.

In 2013, the families in Ulingan were relocated to a village in Brgy. Batia, Bocaue, Bulacan through the help of the National Housing Authority (NHA). Up to this day, Project PEARLS continues to help the relocated families through monthly outreach activities and scholarship grants for the children.

After Ulingan was closed down, Project PEARLS adopted another community in Tondo – the Helping Land. This place sits on an active dump site where the main source of livelihood is scavenging from garbage. Due to extreme poverty, most families, especially children, fill their hunger by relying on "pagpag" - recycled food from garbage. *Pagpag* is a Filipino word which literally means "to shake off", and this refers to shaking off the dirt and spoiled parts of the food before re-cooking it to become a meal again. Yes, the left-over food we take for granted in restaurants is another family's dinner.

From the two kids whom Melissa and Francesca first sent to school, it now grew to at least 300 children being fed and taught everyday, and to more than 500 scholars from preschool to college.





II. LETTER FROM THE FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

If someone told me in 2010 that I will one day be running a non-profit organization, and helping hundreds of children to have a better life, I would probably say, "That's crazy! How will I do that?". Until now, I am still quite not sure how to answer that question.

Five years ago, all I wanted to do was to help poor children in my own little ways. It was a personal project with my daughter, brother, and close family friends. But as our humble mission started growing, so was the number of people who wanted to support our advocacy. And without the help of these real-life heroes, Project PEARLS will not be where it is right now. I am grateful and honored to have met individuals and organizations who selflessly shared with us their resources, skills, and time to make our programs possible. Because of them, we are able to give hope and love to underprivileged children through our scholarship grants, feeding programs, literacy clubs, and fun field trips! This is a testament that regardless of race, economic background, or gender, we can all do something for the betterment of our society! All because of: ONE LOVE.

The path to eradicating poverty in the Philippines is still a long and complicated process. But, at Project PEARLS, we believe that our small contributions can create ripples that will leave a positive and lasting impact in the community. If we work together, we can change the world – one child at a time!

Blessings and Peace,


Melissa Villa





THE BOARD OF ADVISORS

Melissa Villa leads the implementation of programs as the Executive Director. She lives in California, USA, but the different time zone will not stop her from overseeing the operations and from planning the projects. Aside from her passion to help children, she loves to express her creativity through cooking.

Juan Villa is known to everyone as simply, “Kuya Juan”. Being the head of the Feeding Program, he shows his love for the kids in every meal that he prepares. Aside from his selfless dedication, children and volunteers love his cheerful and positive attitude. His sense of humor is sure to make your day.

Sidney Snoeck is a Belgian freelance photographer based in Manila. He graduated as an engineer and worked in the printing and publishing business for more than twenty years. He switched to photography in 2002 to follow his passion for travel and photography. Sidney specializes in social documentary photography. He is a Project Pearls volunteer since 2010.

Peachy Abellon works in building LitClub communities through LitWorld and Project Pearls. She enjoys reading, arts and crafts. Born and raised in Manila, Peachy holds a degree in Industrial Engineering and delights in spending time with her two wonderful children. She draws life inspiration from working with girls and boys in different PEARLS Communities.

Michelle Dela Peña works as a technical support specialist for a software corporation. Despite her night-shift schedule, she still manages to find time for Project PEARLS. She loves the sea and all the creatures living underneath it. She travels for adventure and to fill her soul.



Left to right: Raymond, Lut, Peachy, Juan, Melissa, Stephanie, Luanne, Sidney, Cathy and Michelle



Left to right, upper row: Michelle, Juan, Luanne, Sidney, Melissa and Stephanie.

Lower row: Monica and Lut

Luanne Gonzales is a human resources practitioner with a degree in Computer Science. She is a people advocate during the weekday and an adventurer on the weekends. She is more interested in learning more about others than discussing herself in the third person.

Catherine “Kitcath” Baculi works as an Executive Assistant in a tertiary hospital. For her alone time, she enjoys espresso while listening to Spotify or goofing with Snapchat. But her most favorite thing to do is to devote her time as a Mom to her two lovely girls.

Lut Calupaz has been actively volunteering to give smiles to the children of Project PEARLS since 2011. She has been active behind the scenes as member of the board of advisors. Born and raised in Manila, Lut completed her graduate studies in business administration in 2007 then pursued teaching until present. She is also connected to an international organization in Manila as budget specialist.

Raymund “Mon” Dames has been with Project PEARLS from day one. He works tirelessly in the implementation of PEARLS feeding programs. He prefers working away from the spotlight, but his hard work and commitment naturally shines the light on him.

Stephanie McGuire is a native of San Francisco, California but considers the Philippines as her home for ten years now. She has a degree in Communication Studies from the University of San Francisco. When she is not busy in their business, she enjoys reading and traveling.

Education & Literacy



Nutrition & Feeding Program



Health Care Program

Bringing Love and Smiles



III. BRINGING PEARLS: OUR CORE PROGRAMS

Education & Literacy

The ultimate goal of Project PEARLS is to help poor children get out of poverty. And we believe that the best way to do this is through education. In 2010, we started the **PEARLS Scholarship Program** for around 40 Nursery students in Ulingan, Tondo. Over the years, the number of scholars slowly increased until we had more than 300 scholars from Nursery to College last 2015. These scholarship grants do not only ease the economic burden to the families, but these also inspire the children to dream bigger and to strive harder for a brighter future.

Aside from the scholarship program, we also work hard to provide supplementary learning opportunities for the kids. In partnership with **LitWorld**, an international non-profit organization advocating for global literacy, we adopted the **LitClub**, a literacy club for boys and girls. Once a week, LitClub members meet for two hours for joyful learning, creative play, and social interaction. We have LitClubs in several communities: Brgy. Batia, Bocaue, Bulacan; Helping Land, Tondo; Sibugay, Zamboanga City; and just recently, in Botolan, Zambales. Currently, we have a total of 120 LitClub members, and 15 LitMoms.

Most of the kids living in extreme poverty spend their time taking care of their siblings, or helping their family earn some money, instead of playing, socializing, or exploring new interests. In addition, they do not get enough support from their family on their academics, thus, they often lag behind their peers. To bridge this gap, Project PEARLS also conducts **After School Program** every Sunday. In this program, scholars are given lessons in Math, English, and Science. Values formation is also incorporated in the activities.

Every Saturday, we also conduct brain booster activities after the feeding program. Through simple arts and crafts, we hope to awaken creativity in a child's mind.





Nutrition & Feeding Program

The community of Helping Land in Tondo, Manila is Project PEARLS' main focus at the moment. This area sits on an active dump site where the most common livelihood is scavenging from garbage. Due to extreme poverty, most of them fill their hunger by relying on “pagpag” – leftover food from restaurants scavenged from trash. In Filipino, “pagpag” literally means “to shake-off”; and this refers to shaking the dirt, maggots, and flies off the edible portion of the leftovers. Because of this, children do not get the nutrition that they need, and they are very prone to food-borne illnesses, which, often, can be fatal. To combat hunger and to ease malnutrition, we conduct daily feeding program for around 300 kids in this community.



Health care

Health care is not among the top priorities of families living in poverty. Children are often victims of malnutrition, and when they get sick, they do not have access to free medical services. To address this, Project PEARLS gives financial assistance to children who need immediate medical attention. We also partner with different organizations to conduct free medical and dental missions in the community.





Bringing Love and Smiles



To sum up all our projects, it only points to one simple mission: to bring love and smiles to underprivileged children. Aside from the aforementioned programs, Project PEARLS also partners with individual and corporate sponsors to conduct Jollibee birthday parties, educational trips, and workshops for the children.



IV. NEW PROJECTS AND HIGHLIGHTS OF 2015

321 Scholars from Preschool to College

Through the help of corporate and individual sponsors, we were able to give scholarship grants to 92 preschool, 165 grade school, 54 high school, and 10 college students – a total of 321 scholars last 2015.

And this 2016, we are launching our first batch of scholars from Helping Land, Tondo, Manila. Two hundred more children will be given the gift of education!

Daily Soup Kitchen

In July 2015, a small boy by the name of Marco ate “*pagpag*” (recycled food from garbage) as his dinner. Little did he know that the toxins hidden in that recycled food is too much for his young body to handle. The next day, despite all the efforts by the doctors, he did not wake up to see the new day. His younger brother, Mario, was lucky enough to combat the food poisoning.

This tragic event prompted us to step up our efforts and to turn the weekly feeding program to a **Daily Soup Kitchen**. In partnership with Feeding Metro Manila (FMM), we provide daily breakfast to around 300 children to ensure that they get at least one healthy and safe meal per day. In total, we serve about 9,000 meals in a month. We hope that this will prevent another “Marco” from falling victim to the dangers of scavenged food.





Livelihood Projects: Nourish Accessories, Doormat Project, and Ang-Hortaleza Cosmetology Training

Project PEARLS does not only strive to help poor children, but we also work to bring livelihood projects in the community. We believe that by empowering families, especially women, with skills and knowledge, we also empower them to improve their lives.

In the village of Brgy. Batia, Bocaue, Bulacan, where the families from Ulingan, Tondo were relocated, we taught some of the *Nanay* (Mothers) how to make paper-beads. With the guidance of Ms. Vianca Domdom Ong, these beads are then made into beautiful bracelets and necklaces. We call them **Nourish Accessories**. (see upper right photo)



In addition, we introduced the **Doormat Project**. Women in Brgy. Batia were trained on how to make quality doormats.

We also partnered with Ang-Hortaleza Foundation to conduct a **Cosmetology Training** in Helping Land, Tondo last August 2015. Twenty women were taught different skills in cosmetology. After the 5-day training, they were given their own beauty kit to start their humble business. (see lower right photo)





Classroom in Lakas High School, Aeta Community in Botolan, Zambales

The Lakas Elementary and High School in the Aeta community of Botolan, Zambales has been one of PEARLS' beneficiaries every Christmas since 2014. This relationship has been strengthened more than ever as we joined them in unveiling a newly constructed classroom last December 2015. This project was made possible through the help of one of our most dedicated advocates, Ms. Melissa Poquiz. It brings us great pleasure to know that students will have a better learning experience in a more conducive classroom.



Bringing PEARLS across the Philippines

Christmas is the season of giving. And in December 2015, we brought PEARLS to more than a thousand children in different places in the Philippines.

Aside from our home communities in Tondo and Bulacan, we traveled across the country to share our love with the kids. We brought LEGO toys and other Christmas gifts to a school in Himamaylan City, Negros Occidental; to the Sitio Jordan Ati community; three schools in Guimaras, namely, *Paaralan ng Buhay ng Maabay*, *Paaralan ng Buhay ng Tanglad*, and *Dasal Elementary School*; to the Asilo de Molo, a shelter for the elderly; and to the Calajunan dump site, the so-called “Smokey Mountain” of Manduriao, in Iloilo City.

The hospitality from the children, teachers, and other community members who welcomed us was truly overwhelming. Our mission was to bring love and smiles, but it was them who gave it to us!



The children in Himamaylan City, Negros Occidental, excited to receive their gifts.



The children of Sitio Jordan Ati Community in Guimaras



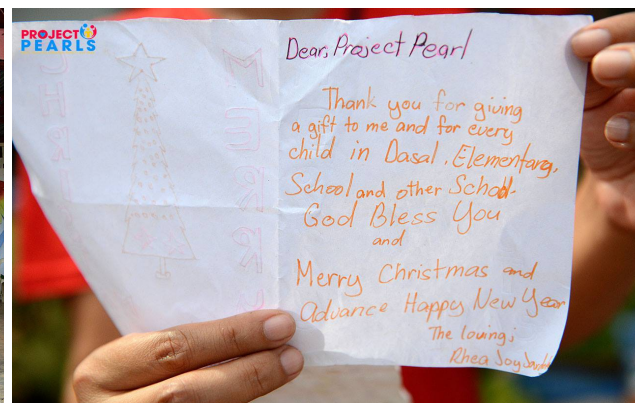
PEARLS volunteers with the children and teachers of Paaralan ng Buhay ng Maabay, Guimaras



The teachers of Paaralan ng Buhay ng Tanglad with the PEARLS volunteers



Project PEARLS at Dasal Elementary School



A heartwarming letter from a student in Dasal Elementary School.



Bringing love and smiles to the elderly of Asilo de Molo in Iloilo City.



Bringing PEARLS across the Philippines

We also joined other non-government organizations in organizing a fun-filled Christmas Party for the children of the Cancer Institute of the Philippine General Hospital.

It was a heartwarming experience to meet real-life warriors who are never short of hope and love despite their battle against cancer.





Christmas Party for 3,000 kids with LBC Foundation

We were honored to be chosen by LBC Foundation as their partner in organizing a grand Christmas party for our communities last December 2015.

Children living in poor communities do not get to enjoy a Christmas filled with new toys or clothes from “Santa Claus”. Most of them do not even have a meal to share with their family on this special day. So giving these kids simple gifts is something that they will truly treasure.

A total of 3,000 children – 1,500 in Tondo, 1,000 in Bulacan, and 500 in Botolan, Zambales – had a very memorable Christmas! We are deeply grateful to all our volunteers, and to LBC Foundation for making this happen!





Noche Buena Packs for 1,300 families

While most families are busy planning their Holiday getaways for the Christmas season, there are families living in extreme poverty who barely have a decent meal to share with each other.

To ensure that these families have a memorable Christmas dinner, we launched the “Noche Buena Campaign” to provide them with special food packs – food that is not scavenged from garbage. Through the help of sponsors and donors, we were able to give Noche Buena packs for 1,300 families in the communities of Helping Land, Tondo, and Bocaue, Bulacan! It was indeed a memorable Christmas for everyone!





Project PEARLS turns 5!

One of the most special events of 2015 is the **5th Anniversary of Project PEARLS!** From being a simple mother-daughter project, PEARLS Founder and Executive Director, Melissa Villa, still cannot believe to what this humble organization has become. Over the course of five years, the bond among volunteers has grown from being merely “org-mates” to that of *friends* and *family*. Regardless of economic background, race, culture, sex, or age, everyone is welcome. Our simple guiding principle can be summed up in two words: **ONE LOVE**. And this is why we keep on growing! This is also the reason we don't get tired of spreading PEARLS. The love that we receive from each other is then given back to the children, parents, and communities we serve! And they also shower us with love and kindness! Yes, it's a cycle of Love!

We are excited to celebrate another 5 or 50 years of Project PEARLS! But , ultimately, we are looking forward to the day when there are no more children suffering from hunger and poverty.





V. NEW MISSION PARTNERS

NBA Cares

Who would have thought that from serving children in the poorest communities in Metro Manila, we will one day be playing basketball with no less than but *the* NBA stars? Yes, last May 2015, Los Angeles Lakers guard Jordan Clarkson, Utah Jazz guard Trey Burke and NBA Legend Horace Grant visited Tondo, Manila and conducted a basketball clinic for the PEARLS kids! With the great love of Filipinos (young and old) for

basketball, the NBA stars were warmly welcomed by hundreds of residents in Tondo!

Because of the success of the event, NBA Cares partnered with us again in July 2015! This time, NBA player Alec Burks of the Utah Jazz, and Craig Brown, Director of NBA Basketball Operations for Southeast Asia, visited the relocation village of PEARLS families in Bocaue, Bulacan. Together with Philippine Basketball Association (PBA) All-Stars and Gilas Pilipinas players Ranidel De Ocampo, Beau Belga, and Jayson Castro, they conducted a free basketball clinic for the PEARLS kids.



They also helped paint murals on the walls of the Project PEARLS Learning Center. These activities were part of the NBA Fit Week in the Philippines.

We are deeply thankful to NBA Cares Asia Associate Vice President, Carlo Reyes Singson for making these amazing events possible!





FMM

FEEDING METRO MANILA

Feeding Metro Manila

Feeding Metro Manila (FMM) was one of the main reasons behind the success of our “Daily Soup Kitchen”. They were the first to respond to the need of providing healthy meals for the children of Helping Land, Tondo. Without their unwavering support, we would not be able to launch this new program.

The Generics Pharmacy

In the first few months after launching the “Daily Soup Kitchen”, we saw the need to provide multivitamins for the children to intensify our battle against malnutrition. This is also a way to give them a stronger immune system to protect them from the health hazards of living in a dump site community. **The Generics Pharmacy (TGP)** immediately responded to our request. They have been our partner-in-health ever since. We provide daily dose of multivitamins for the 200 to 300 kids who attend our feeding program.



Philippine Toy Library

In October 2015, the **Philippine Toy Library (PTL)** brought the joy of playtime to our children in Helping Land, Tondo. More than just toys, this play space aims to provide underprivileged children a

“venue for fun and free play” where they can engage in meaningful social interaction and create beautiful memories with their friends. These experiences are crucial to a child's emotional and mental development. Now, children use the toy library after attending our feeding program.

PTL also launched a toy library in the PEARLS Learning Center in Brgy. Batia, Bocaue, Bulacan, last December 2015.





Cassie's Bag of Dreams

The year 2015 has allowed us to meet new volunteers and partners who made our projects possible. But perhaps the most surprising and inspiring partner we had is a simple, 12-year old girl. Her name is **Cassie Eng**.

Every year, instead of organizing parties for her birthday, Cassie chooses to share her blessings with other people. One of her most successful projects is the “Bag of Dreams”. This year, she partnered with Project PEARLS to distribute high-quality backpacks filled with school supplies to the children of Helping Land, Tondo; Brgy. Batia, Bocaue, Bulacan; and Aeta community of Botolan, Zambales. These school bags hope to inspire poor children to dream higher and to work hard for their education.





The Dream Project PH

It is always an honor to work with inspiring organizations who work quietly and tirelessly in making a difference in the lives of Filipinos. One such organization is the **The Dream Project PH**.

Launched in the province of Negros Occidental on June 24, 2013, The Dream Project PH (TDP PHP) is a “non-profit, volunteer-based community initiative which helps build the nation by shaping the dreams of the Filipino youth through creative education, social design innovation and youth voluntraining”. With the guidance of Prim Paypon, one of TDP PH's founders, we embarked on a two-day journey last December 14 to 15, 2015 to visit the TDP PH communities in Himamaylan City, Bago City, Valladolid and Bacolod City. Twelve PEARLS volunteers flew all the way from Manila to share love and smiles to the children of these communities through our simple Christmas treats and gifts. But we were the ones

who were surprised with the overwhelming hospitality and love from the places that we visited!

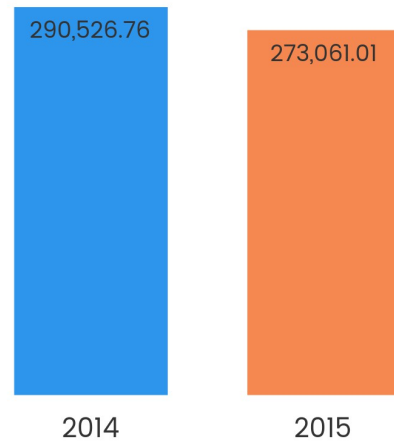
We had a first-hand learning experience from the “Bahay Kubo Learning Center” in Himamaylan City about sustainable community development. We also went to the FISH COVE community in Valladolid, Negros Occidental to learn about the unique Hablon weaving . And of course, we did not miss the chance to visit heritage landmarks, such as *The Ruins* in Talisay City; and to taste the best of Negros in organic farms and in all-time favorite restaurants.



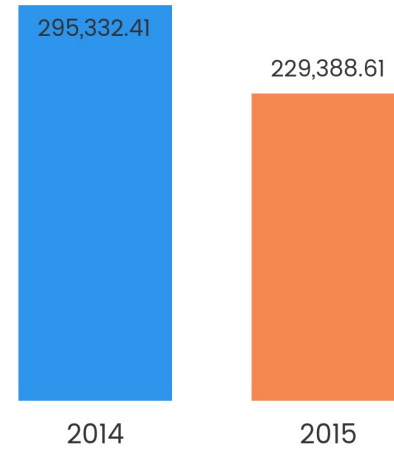


VI. 2015 FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

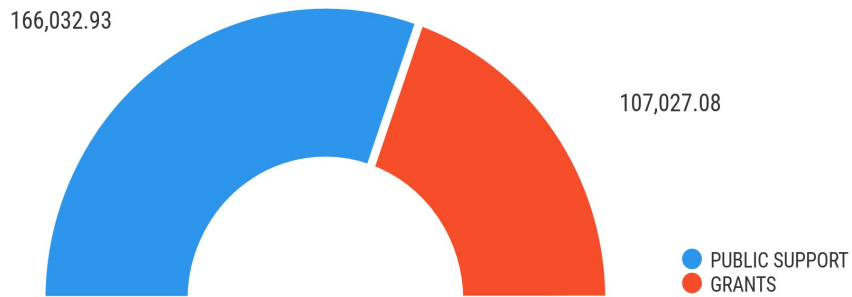
Total Donations \$



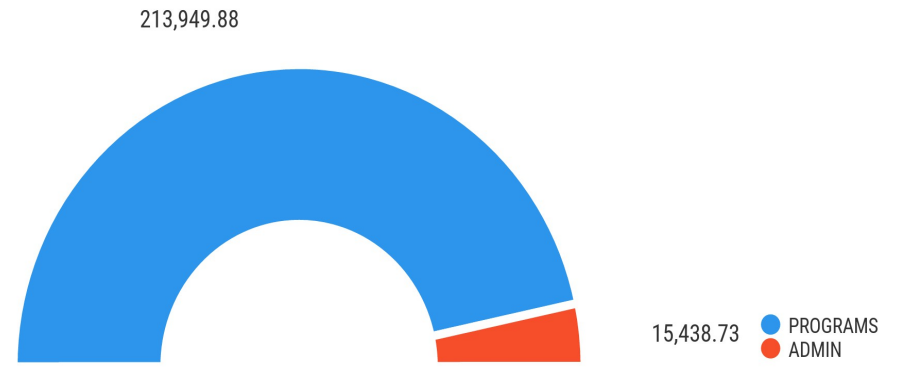
Total Expenditure \$



2015 Sources of Donations \$



2015 Expenditure Allocations \$





VII. SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS

