

MERCY, LAKE SEBU



Mercy Klatong is 37 years old and lives in Lamdalag (Tablo, Lake Sebu) in the south of the Philippines with her husband and three children.

Mercy became connected to The Salvation Army's Community Awareness and Recovery (CAR) project after she returned to the Philippines having been trafficked to Jordan. This is her story:

I used to do weaving and bead making as part of the Life of Women organisation, a group of around 70 women who make and sell products for a little income. I enjoyed doing this work. In my community we were very supportive of one another, and my family would try to help each other. Unfortunately, my husband and I were not earning enough to adequately provide for our family. I desperately wanted to give my children a good life, and pay for their school expenses.

When a friend approached me to say there was an opportunity to go abroad and earn a good amount of money, I saw it as a chance I could not pass up. I wanted a better life for my family and this seemed like a way to get it. My friend who recruited me told me that all expenses would be paid and I could travel for free.

Initially I spent a week in Manila before travelling to Jordan. I worked as a domestic servant in a home. When I had been working there for one month, I had expected to get paid. However, my employer said that my pay had been given to the recruiter to cover my fees for getting to Jordan. I complained about this. I had moved away from home so that I could send money back to my family but they weren't getting anything. After I complained, my employer started treating me badly. I was given very little food and allowed to sleep only three hours a night. This continued for two more months and I continued to complain. The more I complained, the worse I was treated. I sometimes considered taking my own life as I was so unhappy and couldn't see a way out.

I realised that the Philippines embassy in Jordan may be able to help me, so I managed to escape and reach the embassy. They helped me to return to the Philippines.

Life was difficult when I returned. My dream of working abroad and sending money home had failed. I didn't know what to do and I felt lonely.

Adelina, a volunteer from The Salvation Army's CAR project, visited the area and told me about the project. Together we talked about what I could do next. With the help of the project, I started a small retail business by my house. This provided enough daily income to pay for school fees and other expenses.

During quiet times at the shop, I continue to weave scarfs and clothes which I can also sell through the Life of Women organisation. I am also a member of the board of trustees for the organisation. In addition, I was given two goats through the CAR project. I have bred more and now have seven goats which I can raise and sell when I need to.

Life is much better now as we can worry less about earning enough money to cover our basic needs. We have enough income to provide for our children and we are happy.

I am so thankful for the CAR project, and that I have been able to be part of it. I am hopeful that other people can be supported by The Salvation Army in the way that I have been.



JENNELYN, GENERAL SANTOS



Jennelyn Crisostomo is a 39-year-old mother of five living in Calumpang, General Santos City, The Philippines, with her husband and children. She says:

Life was difficult for me. We struggled to earn enough money to provide for the family. I felt like I had a weight on me.

I was approached by a recruitment agency at a local mall, offering work. I was then taken to Saudi Arabia to work as a housemaid.

My employer and his parents were kind to me and they helped me to connect to my family online so I could keep in touch. However, my employer's wife was cruel and strict. She had the responsibility for the household when her husband was at work. She did not allow me to go online to communicate with my family and she would lock me in the house. I was not given very much food and my salary was not what I had been promised.

After working in these hard conditions for a month, I approached my employer to ask him if I could leave and he allowed me to go.

When I finally returned home, The Salvation Army helped me to start a small store by my house by providing me with seven sacks of rice to sell. I used the proceeds to buy groceries to sell and start to make payments for a fridge for the store. We were also able to buy a tricycle (a small taxi) which my husband drives to earn money for the household.

I had a caesarean section when I had my youngest son, and the hospital fees are high. So life is not easy now, we still have difficulties, but I believe we can recover.



TULON SELF- HELP GROUP

Awareness-raising is imperative in the fight against human trafficking. When a community knows the signs of trafficking and is mobilised to respond, they are better equipped to stop this horrific crime from destroying people's lives.

In Lake Sebu, on the southern island of Mindanao in the Philippines, a group of women have joined together to highlight the injustice of human trafficking. The Tulon Self-Help Group meets together at the local Salvation Army hall to make bracelets and necklaces which they then sell as an awareness-raising tool as well as income generation for group members.

The jewellery features three colours with each one serving as a reminder for the wearer: red (trafficking must be stopped), yellow (be alert to traffickers' threats) and green (go and do something).

Captain Merlinda Boone, a Salvation Army officer (minister) in the Philippines, works alongside local officers, staff and volunteers to support the project and help groups to find different ways to reach out to their communities. She said, 'I want the community to be aware that the issue of human trafficking exists not only abroad, but also locally.'

An aware and alert community is safer from the threats and false promises of traffickers, and with opportunities to work together for a decent living, the temptation to take risky offers is reduced.



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JERWIN, GENERAL SANTOS



Jerwin was keen to travel abroad for work after hearing stories of the success that could be had in other countries. He shared on Facebook that he was keen to travel for work and was approached by a recruiter who said he could get him a job as a welder in Saudi Arabia. Jerwin was told to travel to the recruitment agency offices in Manila where his documentation could be processed before travelling to Saudi Arabia.

Upon arrival in Manila, Jerwin was told that it would be a month before he could go, so he should get a construction job locally. He got a construction job but three months passed and the recruitment agency did not get in touch.

The working conditions at his construction job in Manila were very poor. Jerwin became very sick and had to go to hospital. The entire salary from Jerwin's three months of work was used to pay the hospital bill.

The agency then told Jerwin to wait two more months. But nothing happened. He was told to wait a further three months. But still nothing happened.

He continued to work in construction but did not have a place to live in Manila, so he lived in the barracks on the site. During all this time he kept hoping that the recruiters' promise would be realised, but it never was.

Out of money and realising his situation was hopeless, Jerwin contacted home and his mother sent money for his return. He travelled by bus and arrived home five days later.

As a result of support received through The Salvation Army's project, Jerwin now buys and sells pigs for people to roast on special occasions. When business is slow, he drives a tricycle (taxi) which he pays for in instalments.



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JONATHAN, GENERAL SANTOS



Jonathan and his brother John Mark were approached by a recruiter looking for men to work on a pineapple plantation a couple of hours' drive from General Santos. They were excited at the opportunity for work.

Along with a number of other men, they were taken in a van to the plantation. During the first month, they received good food, pay and were able to rest after work. However, this soon stopped. They still worked hard but received a low salary which barely covered the cost of the food that they now had to pay for. *'Only my employer benefited from my work,'* Jonathan said.

Other workers were becoming sick but no medicine or care was provided for them. *'I was afraid for my life,'* Jonathan said. *'One of the other workers died and I was so afraid this would happen to me too.'* Jonathan and his brother were desperate to escape.

People living locally were aware of the conditions on the plantation and the poor treatment of the workers, so they helped the brothers escape. They brought a tricycle to the plantation gate and the brothers used this to get away. The locals helped the whole group escape.

A government agency helped Jonathan and John Mark get back to General Santos. Other agencies and the local government promised to help them to get back on their feet with work, but nothing came of it.

'I felt guilty that I couldn't bring money for my family.'

A Salvation Army social worker heard about the brothers' story and invited them to be part of the project.

Jonathan now sells fish at the local market.

'The Salvation Army was the only organisation that followed through on its promise to help us. The recovery support was a big help because now I can provide for my family.'



CECILIA, GENERAL SANTOS



Cecilia is a retired Salvation Army officer (minister) who lives in General Santos, Philippines. Having been actively involved in previous local anti-trafficking projects, Cecilia was keen to get involved in the Community Awareness and Recovery project when it began.

Cecilia's role within the project, as well as raising awareness about the issue of human trafficking, is as a host family. Cecilia hosts survivors of trafficking for a short time before they can be repatriated to their own families.

The safe and welcoming environment she provides gives people a place of sanctuary as they recover in the immediate aftermath of their experiences.

Joharia is one of the people who stayed with Cecilia, having been picked up by law enforcement at Manila airport when she was on route to work as a housemaid in Saudi Arabia. Joharia felt supported by Cecilia, whom she affectionately refers to as 'Nana'. She said, *'I was really happy because [Cecilia] is like a second Mum to me... Nana made me feel happy, she's always there to support me.'*

Cecilia got involved in the project because she feels called by God to support and care for those who are vulnerable. Though she was nervous to host people, she said, *'I trust Jesus. I prayed to the Lord, "Help me to accommodate well." I want to help people to overcome their experiences and to impart awareness [about human trafficking].'*



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