

# NEWSLETTER



Fondazione Marista  
per la Solidarietà  
Internazionale Onlus

# FMSI

Per il Bene dei Bambini

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# Madagascar

## The Other Face of Paradise

**Maria Rita Pala**

*FMSI Project Administration Officer*



It is only possible to grasp and fully understand certain socio-environmental situations when you see them with your own eyes and can really touch them. A computer screen while allows being connected constantly with the whole world cannot provide the reality of other people's lives. Doing

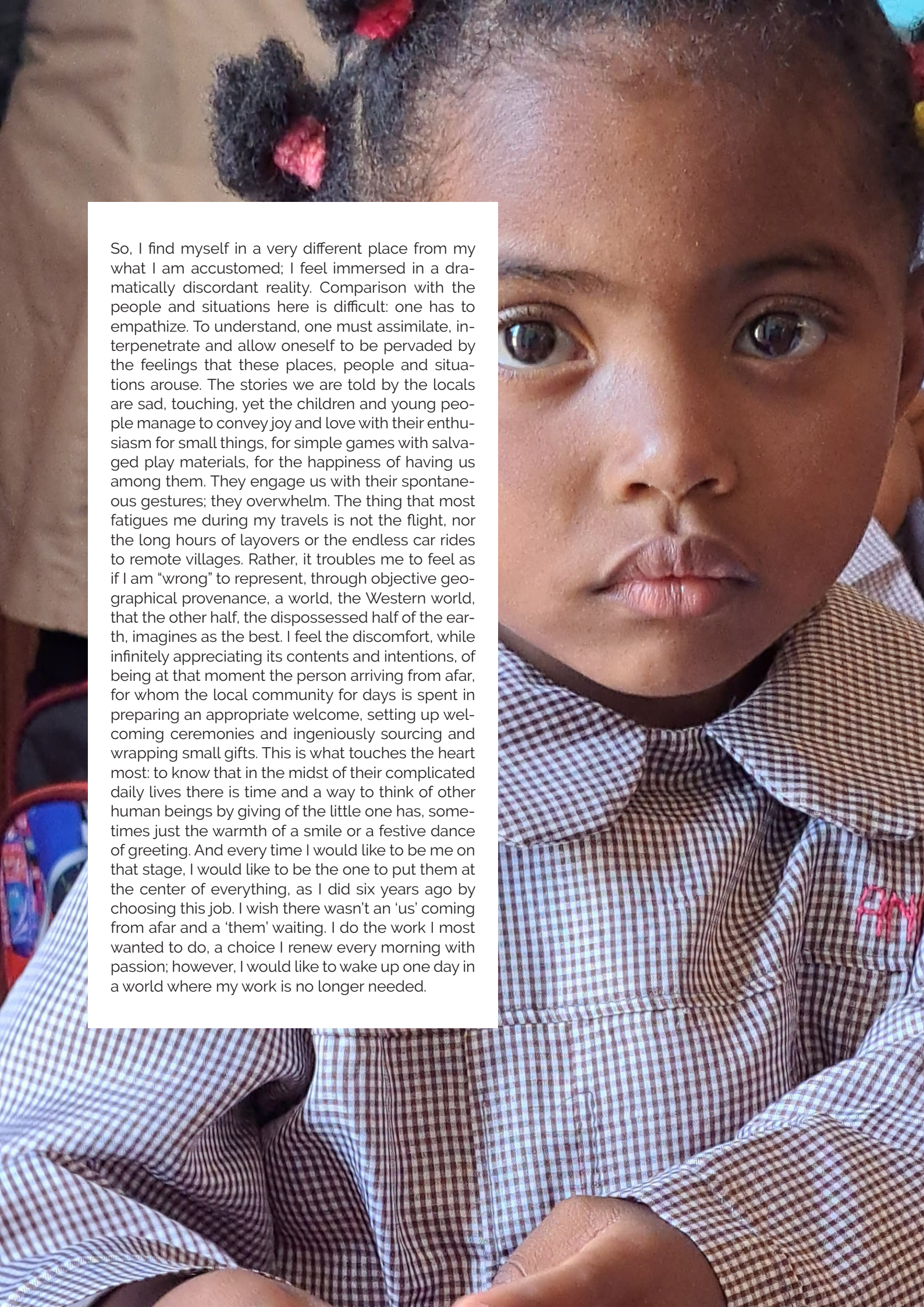
research, reading and producing data can never be equal to the real encounter with children and schools represented by those statistics. This is what I tell myself every time I get on a plane that takes me to another side of the world. That is what I was also telling myself during the flight that took me from Rome to Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar. Despite the widespread and superficial idea one has of Madagascar - expanses of sand and crystal clear waters - the real face of the country is far removed from the Western world's perception of it. Away from the tourist attractions, one becomes aware of how dissimilar this image is to the reality and experience of its inhabitants. Madagascar is in fact one of the poorest nations in the world. Despite its productive potential, the socio-economic vulnerability of its inhabitants is steadily increasing. With a GDP in free fall for years now, repeated political crises, and natural and environmental disasters, the country is retreating in terms of development and improvement of the population's living conditions. This decline is evidenced by the value of the Human Development Index, which, for 2021, stands at 0.501, a factor that places the country in the lowest category on the reference scale (173rd place out of 191 countries). Education in Madagascar is an urgent and priority need since only one in three children completes Primary education, resulting in 97 percent of children around the age of ten unable to read and understand age-appropriate text. Low enrollment and retention rates in school are due to widespread poverty, early marriages (2 out of 5 girls get married before the age of 18), child labor (47% of children between the ages of 5 and 17 are employed in forms of labor exploitation), and a student-teacher ratio of 40:1 (World Bank 2018). The low educational standard is also partly caused, and certainly exacerbated, by the low level of education of teaching staff, which comes with a 97 percent rate

of teachers without a diploma or specific professional qualifications (UNICEF data). Violence against children is tragically widespread in the country: nine out of 10 are victims of violent discipline. Extreme poverty has given rise to a widespread phenomenon throughout the country, with a clear prevalence in the South: transactional sex. It is an extremely common phenomenon: such inequitable sex-economic exchange is fostered by social structures of gender inequality; girls are still forced to earn money to pay school fees or to support their families. "Selling daughters is not just a metaphor, because in some regions "women's markets" still exist (Freedman, Rakotoarindrasata; Randrianasolorivo).

"AT WHATEVER LATITUDE,  
WE ARE PART OF THE SAME COMMUNITY.  
EVERY MAN, EVERY WOMAN,  
EVERY LITTLE ONE ON THIS PLANET,  
WHEREVER THEY ARE BORN AND LIVE,  
HAS A RIGHT TO LIFE AND DIGNITY.  
THE SAME RIGHTS THAT WE CLAIM  
FOR OURSELVES ALSO BELONG  
TO EVERYONE ELSE AND EVERYONE ELSE.  
WITHOUT EXCEPTION.  
STAY HUMAN.  
EVEN WHEN ALL AROUND  
US HUMANITY SEEMS TO BE LOST."

VITTORIO ARRIGONI





So, I find myself in a very different place from my what I am accustomed; I feel immersed in a dramatically discordant reality. Comparison with the people and situations here is difficult: one has to empathize. To understand, one must assimilate, interpenetrate and allow oneself to be pervaded by the feelings that these places, people and situations arouse. The stories we are told by the locals are sad, touching, yet the children and young people manage to convey joy and love with their enthusiasm for small things, for simple games with salvaged play materials, for the happiness of having us among them. They engage us with their spontaneous gestures; they overwhelm. The thing that most fatigues me during my travels is not the flight, nor the long hours of layovers or the endless car rides to remote villages. Rather, it troubles me to feel as if I am "wrong" to represent, through objective geographical provenance, a world, the Western world, that the other half, the dispossessed half of the earth, imagines as the best. I feel the discomfort, while infinitely appreciating its contents and intentions, of being at that moment the person arriving from afar, for whom the local community for days is spent in preparing an appropriate welcome, setting up welcoming ceremonies and ingeniously sourcing and wrapping small gifts. This is what touches the heart most: to know that in the midst of their complicated daily lives there is time and a way to think of other human beings by giving of the little one has, sometimes just the warmth of a smile or a festive dance of greeting. And every time I would like to be me on that stage, I would like to be the one to put them at the center of everything, as I did six years ago by choosing this job. I wish there wasn't an 'us' coming from afar and a 'them' waiting. I do the work I most wanted to do, a choice I renew every morning with passion; however, I would like to wake up one day in a world where my work is no longer needed.





## Safe with Kokono

### Better living conditions for children

Malawi remains one of the poorest countries in the world despite having implemented major economic and structural reforms to support its economic growth.

Among the various problems afflicting the country, there is still a high infant mortality rate due to infectious diseases (including malaria, gastrointestinal diseases and pneumonia). There are also domestic accidents due to the lack of adequate shelter for infants and frequent attacks by animals.

To address this problem, FMSI has decided to contribute by donating cradels made by KOKONO to Mtendere Community Hospital. KOKONO is a Project conceived by De-LAB - a social design centre specialised in design, consultancy, research and training in the field of Purpose Economy - to respond to a growing need for maternal and child health and safety in Sub-Saharan Africa. Such cradels provide shelter for newborns so that they can be protected both inside and outside the home. They also enable their mothers to be more autonomous and independent, having a safe place to leave their baby.

Mtendere Community Hospital is located in the western part of the Dedza district in the central region of Malawi; it is run by the Teresian Sisters and a local congregation. It has several sections, including the maternity ward, the post-natal ward, the pre-natal ward, the paediatric ward, and the outpatient department.

Due to the lack of cradles or a suitable place for the safety of newborns, mothers and their children were forced to share a bed that was too small for two people, in which it was also difficult for doctors to carry out accurate post-natal checks.

Thanks to the donation of the cradles, the hospital was able to improve conditions for children who need special care or who have to be temporarily separated from their mothers, providing them with a protected and safe place for medication, meals and care.

Last but not least, the cradles will give mothers the opportunity to rest properly. There are many challenges and difficulties that new mothers face, and the cradle certainly provides considerable support.

It should also be pointed out that a baby used to spending time in the cradle away from his or her mother from the early days will have a better chance of getting used to a new environment, different from the parents' arms, thus allowing women to continue with their work; a factor that promotes female empowerment.

KOKONO and FMSI will continue to work together to reach more and more children, especially the most vulnerable ones, in places where there is the greatest need.



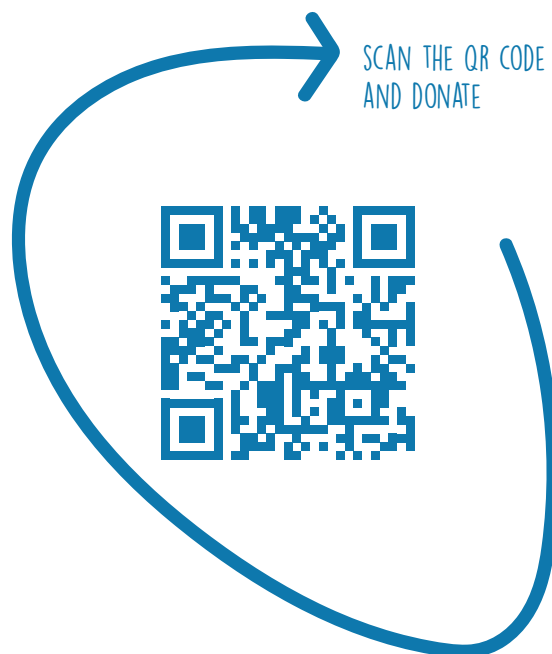


## Fundraising Campaign Solidarity Oil

The FMSI Solidarity Campaign 2022 is drawing to a close. The campaign supports the projects that FMSI implements in the world wherever the Marist Mission with its works and activities is present. The FMSI Campaign offered a nice and elegant 0.5 litre bottle of precious extra virgin olive oil for purchase. The olive oil is a genuine product of the highest quality that encompasses the flavours of selected uncontaminated Apulian lands. This is the perfect gift idea for a friend, family member or colleague as a solidarity gift. The Campaign results have gone far beyond the most optimistic FMSI expectations, and will be a concrete help for the less fortunate.

**Sincere thanks to all our supporters.**

**The Marist Foundation for International Solidarity wishes you all a Merry Christmas.**













# Protecting the Climate to Protect Children

## Ensuring a future on a liveable planet

Children's Rights Day, November 20, took place this year shortly after the conclusion of the Climate Conference, which, despite some achievements, still offered too little to guarantee the next generation a future on a liveable planet. The Climate Conference also seems to have disregarded the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that in all states the needs and requirements of children must be considered in decision-making. Among the measures mentioned by experts is the inclusion of climate change education in school curricula. According to many studies, education reduces vulnerability to climate disasters because informed communities are better prepared and, consequently, able to respond. But offering educational programmes is not enough if 37.5 million children cannot go to school each year due to climate-related weather events (TheirWorld, 2018) and one billion are currently at very high risk of negative impacts from climate crises (UNICEF, 2021). The same problems that are damaging the planet in the long term are now damaging the lives of children. Children in Colombia and Mexico are among those living the fewest number of healthy years (3.7 per 1,000 under 15 years) due to air pollution. Those in the Czech Republic, Poland, Belgium, Israel and the Netherlands (1 in 12) live more than others in areas polluted by pesticides. In the richest countries, 1 in 25 children are at risk of being exposed to lead poisoning, which is responsible for more deaths than malaria, war and terrorism. Lead poisoning affects children's body functions much more than adults because their bodies are still developing. Lead poisoning also has negative effects on attention span and memory. Pesticide pollution is, according to many studies, the cause of leukaemia and developmental delays. Meat from intensive livestock farms with high antibiotic use has effects on the immune, endocrine and reproductive systems. Noise pollution - highest in Malta, the Netherlands and Portugal - produces stress, reduced cognitive functions and low school performance in children. In addition, electromagnetic pollution and the use of digital devices in the earliest years of age creates language delays, just as early keyboarding in writing creates delays in learning to write. The lack of green spaces, listed by the World Health Organisation as one of the social determinants of health and life

satisfaction, is damaging the lives of children. Many children are alienated from play and nature which results in a lack of development of motor skills as well as severe emotion and learning difficulties. These difficulties are mainly due to environmental situations that hinder children's development. (Daniele Novara). In poorer countries, children are doubly victims of environmental damage because they are more exposed to natural disasters, lack of resources for nutrition and access to clean water, and breathe toxic air both outside and inside their homes. In all of this, we, as adults, are absent as parents of the new generations. We continue in our race to produce food through disproportionate farming, fishing and animal use. According to research, it is precisely in these sectors that human beings are the most exploited and the number of suicides among farmers and breeders is high. What can this way of treating life tell our children? There are political elites who do not want interference in their own system of values and traditions, but then sign contracts with foreign companies that will cause environmental damage to their children's health for decades. Others believe that in order to defend the new generations, it is more important to invest in the purchase of armaments, but it is as if they put their own soldiers to defend the wrong front. The new generations will not be safe from war if the fight is for raw materials and energy, in the absence of a different development policy and choices for renewable energy that everyone can access. Economic activities will be overwhelmed by natural disasters and consumers increasingly ill. Environmental impacts do not respect national borders. Children need healthy and safe environments in which to grow up. We adults at all levels, from parents to politicians, must change course. International cooperation is necessary to find global solutions, but let us not wait for others to make decisions to walk towards a different way of life. From this Christmas, at this end of the year, let us start giving priority again, as all other living beings do, to the next generation.

***"All things are connected like blood unites a family. We have not spun the web of life, we are only a thread in it."*** (Laurentino Fontes, indigenous of northern Brazil, Mawako Project, Synod for the Amazon)









## Interview to Mrs. Charlotte Margarite Byrne

### Advocacy, communications and stakeholder engagement officer of the Three2Six Program



#### Hi Charlotte, tell us about yourself.

Hello, my name is Charlotte Margerit Byrne. I am originally from France but I have been in South Africa for the last 5 years. I am 32 years old and I live in Johannesburg with my husband.

When I have free time, I love

to cook, spend time with my family and friends, and go for long walks with our energetic puppy.

#### How have you been involved in the advocacy work in Three2Six? What are your values/feelings that led you to be an integral part of the Program?

I have been involved in the Three2Six project for over 4 years now. I first joined Three2Six as project manager in which role I got to lead the advocacy efforts of the project. Later on, I moved to a new role focusing specifically on advocacy, and on communications and partnerships. As part of this, I have been advocating with the relevant state departments and stakeholders for the rights of refugee, migrant and undocumented children to be upheld (e.g. through policy submissions, advocacy campaigns, lobbying of decision-makers). This involves coalition work with other organisations and institutions working in the migration field too.

I have always very much believed in helping others, especially people who are in dire need. This has led me to pursue law studies and to later specialise in humanitarian law and refugee rights. My first two experiences in the work environment, as an

intern at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and at a local organisation in South Africa, confirmed my strong interest for refugees rights. After working in France at the Court of asylum, I moved to South Africa where I came across Three2Six. I was immediately in awe of the work accomplished by the organisation and enquired about getting involved in it. It was obvious to me that the work done by Three2Six was absolutely critical as, without it, refugee, asylum seeker, migrant and undocumented children were completely excluded from the educational system and were sitting at home missing out on their childhood. These vulnerable children are offered a safe space at Three2Six where they can be children again, learn like any other child and build a future for themselves. This is why I wanted to be a part of Three2Six, to help make a difference in the lives of these children.

#### Tell us about one or more significant experiences in Three2Six. Tell us about the child beneficiaries, their lives and experiences, some significant anecdotes.

The children that Three2Six supports come from poor backgrounds. They are from other African countries (e.g. the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Burundi) where their parents or themselves were born. They have come to South Africa to seek refuge but unfortunately face major challenges in the country such as access to basic services (e.g. documentation, education, medical), poverty and xenophobia, which limit their integration in the country. Some of the children who join Three2Six have never gone to school or have missed a few years of schooling. Some cannot



speaking a word of English. However, with the support they receive at the project, they can speak English within a few months and catch up on the other learners. What is significant to me is that some of the learners who joined Three2Six at its inception in 2008 have gone through their secondary education, have graduated from university and are now employed. Two of them are currently studying to become teachers while interning at our host schools as intern teachers. Their determination and eagerness to learn have opened doors for them in life, despite the discrimination they have faced. Several other past learners have received scholarships to complete their secondary education at our host schools. They have adapted and integrated extremely well and are excelling, despite moving from three hours of teaching a day at Three2Six to a full day at school. We are very proud of them.

### **Have you encountered any difficulties or challenges in your advocacy tasks?**

Doing advocacy work for refugees and migrants in South Africa can be challenging at times as the problems they face are also the harsh reality for many South Africans themselves. Resources and services are stretched and limited for all. The rampant xenophobia that affects the country is an additional barrier as it prevents advocacy work from having an effective and impactful effect on the lives of refugees and migrants in South Africa. The lack of political will to address the issues that they face is another impediment but we have recently had very good and promising engagements at a ministerial level to address these issues at a systemic level.

### **Over the past two years, due to the Covid - 19 emergency, the situation has been difficult, but thanks to the help of donors and volunteers, the Three2Six program has achieved great results: many children have been assisted and their living situation has improved. Would you like to tell us about some of the difficulties you have experienced and overcome?**

The pandemic caused an immediate crisis for our families. Under hard lockdown, many of our families found themselves out of work and unable to feed themselves as their source of income had disappeared. They suffered the impact of this crisis for months to come. As a response to this, the project provided regular food aid (through food parcels and food vouchers) to its families thanks to the generosity of its donors and friends. These initiatives brought our project closer to different religious and community organisations who supported Three2Six with food donations. Another immediate challenge faced by the project at the start of the COVID crisis, and something that

was seen worldwide, was the impact of the digital divide on poor communities. The project worked on alternative ways of reaching its learners during hard lockdown as they did not have laptops or access to the internet at home. Weekly classes were held on a Catholic radio station before moving to lessons and homework on Whatsapp, to accommodate all families. Both our children and teachers adapted very quickly to this new way of communication, and of teaching and learning.

The successive lockdowns which limited our teaching time spent on campus meant that we had to maximize the time that we had with our children when schools reopened. This is when we organised holiday programmes and weeks of intensive learning during the school holidays to catch up on the lost teaching time. Educational camps were also run for the children to rebuild links and relationships after the isolation felt during the various lockdowns. Through partners, we were also able to provide psychosocial support to our beneficiaries to help them deal with the stress and other mental health issues caused by the crisis.

### **What are you most proud of about the Three2Six program?**

I am proud of the impact Three2Six has on the lives of its beneficiaries. Over its 15 years of existence, the project has provided a safe and loving learning space to over 2600 children who would have otherwise not had an education at all.

But most importantly, I am proud of the children who have gone through Three2Six and of their parents who have shown so much resilience despite the challenges that they have had to face over the years as non-citizens. Our children have achieved incredible things. They have grabbed the opportunity to learn that Three2Six provided them without ever losing hope and have held on to this no matter what. As stated above, some of our oldest learners have now completed their tertiary education and have started working. Amazingly, we also have past learners who come back to the project to volunteer their time and support the current Three2Six learners. They refer to Three2Six as a home and as a family. This is the biggest achievement in my opinion.







## Interview a Ophelia Cruz Marcelino

### Passion and Challenges in Volunteerism in Marcellin Home in Philippines



**Hi Ophelia,  
tell us about yourself.**

I am Ophelia Cruz – Marcelino, an educator who served Marist School in Marikina City, Philippines for 32 years. I hailed from the historic place of Bataan and settled in Marikina City, Metro Manila when

I got married in 1975. Two of my three children are Marist School alumni and my eldest son is presently serving the school as one of the members of its management team. During these long years of service to the institution I was appointed in different leadership functions until my retirement in 2015. Though retired, I continued serving the school as part time teacher in the Senior High School for three years, and served with greater passion because of my direct connection and interactions with the students; touching lives, understanding their uniqueness and individuality and extending guidance in their formation and development prior to their moving up and stepping to the next phase of their academic life in college. At the onset of the pandemic brought about by Covid – 19 virus until this time, I am no longer engaged in teaching. This period of the pandemic at first shut myself off from the outside world, however, the absence of busyness and activity-filled days helped me to reflect deeply and re-connect with my interior self and see without horse blinders a wider perspective how else I could extend help and assistance to others while in the comfort of our home, when senior citizens were at first restricted to go out during the lockdown. This situation did not become a hindrance but opens another opportunity

to be of service to other young people who needed most a loving and caring attention. A contemplative life at this period of the pandemic, indeed, helped me to surface more creativity, resourcefulness and innovation to go through the process of viewing life in another angle, not of disappointment and frustration but shifting gears and grab whatever is on hand, the basic, essential and only those which are important and necessary. I also had more time re-connecting with nature in my personal space, my garden, where I appreciate more the plants, the presence of the bees, the butterflies, praying manties, birds and even the worms as I dig into the ground. The important things that co – exist with me, which I overlooked before, I take notice now. Gardening gives life to my life in solitude at this time of the pandemic.

Continuing my inner journey, I decided to volunteer to Marcellin Home. When Br. Edgar Ceriales, FMS, the Coordinator of the Province's Volunteer Program called for volunteers, I readily informed him of my willingness to do volunteer service specifically in Marcellin Home considering my past exposures and experiences in the field of guidance and counseling. Months before the pandemic I was able to immerse myself to the place. In my short stint living with the Brothers' community in Marcellin Home and in the company of young people, I found myself inadequate and lacks skills in understanding them better because of communication barrier. I speak English and Tagalog which the children understand very well, however, I failed to fully understand them because during our conversations most of the time they speak in their own mother tongue, Ilonggo or Cebuano. Honestly, my intention to serve them as a volunteer guidance counselor did not work and found myself not effective because of this limitation. Br. Edgar Ceriales, FMS, instead,



challenged and requested me to perform two important tasks that would directly benefit the children; first, to conduct needs assessment of the Residential Care and Services Program extended to the children and young people in Marcellin Home, and second, to formulate a Comprehensive Residential Care Program based on the results of the needs assessment conducted. These tasks prompted me to observe activities, do research, conduct interviews and meetings with the significant people in the Center. The Needs Assessment Report was submitted to the East Asia Provincial Council for further review and approval. Their approval gave way to the next phase of the assignment, which was the formulation of a Comprehensive Residential Care and Independent Living Program in Marcellin Home. As volunteer, I continued on single – handedly in the formulation of the enhanced Program in the light of the outcome of the Needs Assessment, the institution's Vision, Mission, Goals and Objectives. Unceasingly prayed the MEMORARE, and with the inspiration and intercession of our Good Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Marcellin Champagnat, the task was completely done and approved.

Officially, Marcellin Home or Marcellin Academy has an existing Residential Care Program and my contribution as volunteer is to enhance what the institution has been doing for the service of the youth under its care. The COMPREHENSIVE RESIDENTIAL CARE PROGRAM IN MARCELLIN HOME/ACADEMY is a program designed to assist the CICL, CAR and OSY in their holistic development and formation and supports their pro – social development. It is an enhanced program based on the existing services. In general, the program was designed to strengthen Marcellin Home/Academy's Residential Care Program focusing on the following components; Health Care, Psycho – Social and Spiritual Formation, Education & Technical Training, and Independent Living. The services are responsive to the needs of the students. The program design is constructive, facilitative, and positive. Child – friendly strategies and approaches are adapted in observance of the Juvenile Justice System and in adherence to the provisions of related laws in the Philippines, like, RA 9344, RA 7610, PD 603, RA 10630, and Manual on Handling Cases of CAR and CICL is ensured. The beneficiaries of this program are students in Marcellin Home/Academy, who are:

1. **CHILDREN AT RISK (CAR)** mainly from General Santos City and also from other municipalities and provinces, who are between 7 to 17 years old. This includes:

- Street children - children in the streets;
- Abandoned/Foundling children – refers to children who were left and unattended by their family for at least a continuous six (6) months;
- Physical abused/battered children – children who were inflicted with physical injury or harm

which includes but not limited to laceration, fractures, human bites, strangulations, and similar acts;

- Neglected children – children who were deprived of their basic needs for food, clothing, shelter and parental care.

## 2. **CHILDREN IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW (CICL)**

This category includes:

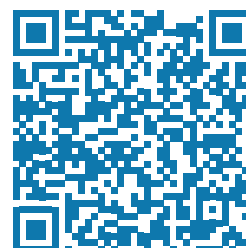
- Juvenile Delinquents below the age of 18 years;
- Children involved with the justice system as the accused.

## 3. **OUT OF SCHOOL YOUTH (OSY)**

This category includes;

- Orphaned Youth from the ages of 18 – 21 years who have set reasonably clear personal goals in life, and show the personal, study and work discipline to be beneficial influence and service to other disadvantaged children and youth.
- Promising Youth with irresponsible/impoverished parents, from the ages of 18 – 21 years, who have set reasonably clear personal goals in life, and show the personal discipline and willingness to render services in exchange for the program benefits he will enjoy. These children have been exposed to various difficult, unpleasant and challenging experiences early in life as described on the above classification. Marcellin Home under the leadership of Br. Crispin Betita, FMS, with the staff, works very closely with the different government agencies, local government units and non – government organizations in delivering the services for the welfare and best interests of the youth in Marcellin Home. As volunteer, my short – lived stay in Marcellin Home touched my heart to the core having known the difficult life that the children went through before they become residents of the institution.

This volunteer work helped me deepen my love for the children especially the most neglected, those who are not loved and difficult to love. Volunteerism is a path worth taking, it is a response to God's call, knowing that the support, help and assistance one can extend could mean a lot to others, even change their own lives for the better.













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