

Of the self and others:
The Basic Communication Skills Training
(M.A. Taboclaon)

For years, Stairway Foundation has been working with certain sectors in Philippine society to become aware of the issue of child sexual abuse, to talk about it, understand it, and find ways to address it. Various methodologies have been utilized, from traditional training/seminars, to holding theater plays and the production of animated films. However, over and beyond awareness-raising, Stairway has also recognized the importance of ensuring that safety nets are present to help children who disclose of sexual abuse.

Thus, as part of a project to create local resource centers on Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Prevention, Stairway recently conducted a five-day Basic Communication Skills (BCS) workshop for two

groups of non-government workers and local government unit representatives from Davao City, Negros Oriental and Occidental, Northern Samar, Manila, Batangas, Novaliches, and Caloocan City. These individuals have already undergone preliminary trainings aimed at preparing them to be resource persons on CSAP, and the last workshop aimed to equip them to handle disclosures and work with children who disclose of sexual abuse in their respective areas.

For the participants, both new and veterans in the field of sexual abuse, BCS served as a venue to talk about the issue vis-à-vis their own attitudes and biases. *Am I ready? What issues am I*



A participant talks about his strengths in the Introductory activity.

not comfortable with? Are there aspects of myself that I need to process first before talking with sexually abused children? These and other questions they had to grapple with during the sessions.

The discussion on the ethics of the workers and how to care for the self were also relevant for them, especially for those who have been working in the field for a long time and recognized their own need for self-care.

“Ang hirap pala maging counselor; kailangan pala kilala mo ang sarili mo at alagaan mo [It really is not easy being a counselor. One has to know and take care of oneself well],” a participant expressed.



A participant remembers her childhood during clay work...

The primary focus of the BCS was the teaching and demonstration of communication skills and strategies used in dealing with children who are sexually abused. Each participant was made to act as a

worker and later on, as a client. For most of them, it was hard to act as a client, since they had internalized their roles of workers. Back in their communities, they could not admit that they needed help too, as they wanted to maintain their image of a strong person that the people could ask help from.

However, the role-plays made them aware that for them to be more effective in caring for others, they must take care of themselves as well, and this could mean talking to a trusted person about their own issues and concerns.

At the end of that session, most participants expressed relief and gratitude for the opportunity given to them to tell their

own story. *“Sinasarili ko lang kasi ang problema, wala akong masabihan. Gumaan ang pakiramdam ko ngayon, kahit papaano may nahingahan ako [I usually keep my problems to myself as I have no one to talk to about them. I feel better now that I was able to talk to someone],”* one of them expressed to the group.

Stairway emphasizes that taking the BCS training does not automatically make the participants full-pledged counselors nor psychotherapists. Rather, the BCS will orient them about the basic skills and strategies they would need to practice, and the depth and breadth of knowledge about the issue that they would have to acquire. Most importantly, however, the Basic Communication Skills training highlights the participants’ need to continually assess, educate, and care for themselves, so that they can give the best service that they could to the children seeking their help.



...while another participant tells of her wish to make this world a better place.