



STAIRWAY FOUNDATION INC.

Brgy. Aninuan, Puerto Galera

Oriental Mindoro

Volunteer Handbook

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5. **Basic Language**

1. Welcome

Welcome to Stairway! We are grateful that you have chosen to be a part of our work with the most important yet vulnerable members of our society – the children. It is our belief that your decision to volunteer your services in our program is an answer to the sincere calling of your heart and the genuine motivation to help these children realize their potentials and become productive members of the society.

We are looking forward to a fruitful working relationship with you. Enjoy your stay!

2. What is Stairway?

2.1 Historical Background

Stairway Foundation Inc. (SFI) is a non-stock, non-profit, and non-government child caring institution located at Brgy. Aninuan, Puerto Galera, Oriental Mindoro. Stairway was established by Monica Ray and Lars Jorgensen in 1990, primarily as an alternative strategy to meet the needs of street children. Their focus was particularly on the most disadvantaged or endangered, such as beggars, drug dependents, sexually exploited children, and children with serious health problems.

Being in a natural setting like Puerto Galera, gives the children fundamental knowledge of the resources providing us with our basic needs, while inculcating in them a sense of responsibility, capability, appreciation and care for their surroundings. Involvement of performance and visual arts as a form of art therapy in the rehabilitation process offers the children a constructive and creative means of self-expression. It also creates opportunities for them to learn more income generating activities using their innate talents. Thus, Stairway Foundation Inc. is known for its pioneering work in utilizing art and nature as healing tools for a hastened rehabilitation and recovery of street children.

With 20 years of operation, SFI has developed more programs and has established partnerships with a wider range of other institutions and NGO's in the Philippines. Further, Stairway has evolved to extend its service to the local and the indigenous communities. The Community Assistance Program offers services for alternative livelihood, health, education, scholarships and financial assistance to the local schools.

Our Vision:

Through innovation, creative excellence and professional networking, we strive for universal promotion and upholding of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Our Mission:

To gain inspiration, knowledge, conviction and humility from working with the most outcast and endangered children in society, and to manifest these gains in creative expressions, which will alter general perceptions of the most marginalized groups of children around the world, and trigger mobilization of resources for change.

2.2 Children of the Streets

Millions of street children in the world constitute a silent but constantly growing minority. Some of the children are orphans but most of them are forced away from their families because of violence and various kinds of abuse in their home.

Drugs, gangs and crimes are hard to avoid on the street and it easily becomes a normal part of their daily life. This is the reason why there's an urgent need to help the growing number children exposed to the hazards of the streets, without any protection and care. For these children, Convention on the Rights of the Rights, are words without meaning!

In the long term, SFI aim on information and education to prevent the adverse effect of children's exposure to street life. It's only trough national support that we can have a lasting impact on the social and economic conditions which are the cause of massive infringement of Children's Rights.

2.3 Children at Stairway

We mostly work with kids who have serious familial problems, are in conflict with the law, have drug dependence, have health problems and/or those who are having difficulty staying in the Manila-based centers. Furthermore, most of our children are victims of physical and/or sexual abuse.

Many children from the street are inflicted by Tuberculosis or TB. This disease is caused by poverty, poor housing, poor health, poor environment, etc. Street children with TB are accommodated at Stairway to receive medical aid. The treatment program for TB lasts approximately 6 months.

2.4 Stairway's Agenda

Our main agenda is to increase our knowledge and understanding of the complex of problems street children are facing. In cooperation with both local and international partners, we try to develop new programs and methods which aim to improve the kind of services we give to street children.

Because of our experience and direct engagement, we are furthermore producing information and educational materials which can be used in working with children and youth in the Western part of the world and stimulate the solidarity and actively encourage helping across frontiers and cultures.

Our vision is to see all children realize their abilities, hopes and dreams in a society, which will protect and respect their rights as human beings and will hold equality, justice, spirituality, health, education, family, community and the environment as the guiding values and principles for their holistic development.

2.5 Stairway's Efforts

Stairway concentrates on:

- Taking care of the specific needs of the child with regards to his treatment, education and reintegration.
- Offering workshops and seminars to our partners, schools and treatment centers, on how to prevent sexual abuse of children.
- Influencing the determining cause of street children and making contributions to long-term development through creative information and advocacy.

2.6 Programs and Services

Stairway serves as a home for children who have long been on the streets. First of all, we help them recover from the abuses they've experienced and guide them in regaining control over their lives.

We have our own school which is approved by the Philippine Department of Education and offers non-formal education. Stairway offers classes in a variety of subjects such as reading, writing, arithmetic, English, Tagalog, science, geography, history, Children's Rights, art, etc. All of them are tailored to the child's specific needs. Furthermore, we hold workshops, seminars and summer camps for the children along with partner organizations. These events serve as a venue to discuss and work with topics that are highly relevant to the youth's welfare and development. Furthermore, we produce information and educational materials which initiate debate and understanding of the street children's living conditions. Besides this, we educate young people from the streets to help other street children. The youth's knowledge about life on the streets and the process they have been going through to regain their self-respect, gives them insight, which is very valuable for new street children to be motivated to fight for a better life.

These young people become living 'advocates' of children's rights. Their fight doesn't only concern themselves but millions of street children all over the world.

2.7 Geographical Location

Stairway is located in Puerto Galera, a scenic place in the province of Oriental Mindoro, and about 5 hours south from Manila. Stairway sits on 1 hectare of land, which is situated on a mountainside facing directly to the South China Sea. Across the street from Stairway, you will find beautiful white sand beaches. The natural, quiet and exotic surroundings contrast with the surroundings in which the children are used to. This is, in our opinion, the best way to begin breaking old habits and to strengthen the children mentally and physically.

2.8 Strategy and Work Methods

Creative expression runs through all of Stairways' programs. Dance, drama, music, drawing, music therapy, bracelet weaving, mask making, tie dyeing and sports are all therapeutic ingredients in the rehabilitation of street children. With the complement of psychological counseling, the children begin to rebuild their self respect and self awareness.

We utilize the arts to help children better understand themselves, their cultural heritage, and other social issues. Employing the arts in the daily activities of the children serves as a tool for education and therapy, stimulates learning, provides a constructive and creative means for self-expression, and serves as a medium for the release of pent-up tensions and emotions. The art program components are conducted for the children on an ongoing basis, to further develop their creative and artistic abilities through practice and training.

3. Volunteer Program

The volunteer program invites skilled persons from abroad and from the local community to lend a helping hand to the project. Volunteers work and play with the children, facilitate workshops, provide administrative support, and help to maintain the upkeep and natural beauty of the center. Another aspect of the program is the volunteer network. Volunteers within the network participate

in public relations work in their home countries and help to prepare future volunteers for their stay in the Philippines.

3.1 Orientation Process

All volunteers will be oriented upon arrival to the center. The orientation may include the following (depending on volunteer assignment):

- Introduction to the staff and children
- Orientation to a new culture
- Orientation to the rules and regulations and the functioning of Stairway
- Guided tour of the grounds, buildings, workshop areas, sleeping quarters, etc.
- A few days to observe workshops and activities
- Assignment of chores and other activities

3.2 Ambassador for Stairway

Since 1990, Stairway has built up a good rapport with the community, therefore visitors and volunteers are usually well respected. It is important that everyone is aware that we all are ambassadors of the project and must act and behave accordingly.

The community here is small; everybody knows everybody. When volunteers arrive, it doesn't take long for the community to know that you are here. When you leave Stairway's area, the community will notice and will talk about it. Gossip is a big part of Filipino culture. Because of this, it requires that you act in a proper way as any negative behaviors will fall back on Stairways' good name and reputation.

3.3 Behavioral Policies

A volunteer is expected to live and to work under the conditions set by Stairway and is expected to abide by the following rules and regulations:

- ❖ Sexual relationships with staff members, other volunteers, members of the community, etc., are strongly discouraged during your stay. If this does occur (depending on the context), you may be asked to leave the Volunteer Program.
- ❖ Cigarette smoking is prohibited in front of the children.
- ❖ Any use of drugs is absolutely prohibited and may result in expulsion from the center.
- ❖ Beer and other alcoholic beverages are prohibited around the children (unless you are at a work-sanctioned celebration in which alcohol is served).
- ❖ Guests are not allowed in the volunteer sleeping quarters, without permission from the staff-in-charge.
- ❖ Volunteers are discouraged from giving a personal gift directly to a child without approval from the social worker in charge. All presents must be given to the social worker for distribution to the children.

- ❖ Giving promises to a particular child—e.g., of adopting the child, bringing him outside of the country, giving a scholarship to him—is not allowed. Should the volunteer wish to make a donation or help a child in any way, he/she should coordinate with the social worker and/or executive director.
- ❖ Volunteers are not allowed to let the children use personal mobile phones or to talk to any caller without the social worker's permission.

3.3.1 Touching Rules

Because we work with a lot of children who have been victims of sexual abuse and /or different kinds of physical abuse, it is necessary to keep in mind that giving even a casual touch to the child could provoke a traumatic memory and bring on a negative reaction. This doesn't mean that you can't ever touch the children; it is just an important principle to be aware of.

3.3.2 Dress Code

Stairway is located in the mountains, and across from the beach. Clothing should be casual, comfortable, clean and appropriate (nothing too tight, short, or revealing). Wearing bikinis is not allowed when you are on the beach with the children. On these occasions, the volunteer can wear shorts and T-shirts or tank tops.

3.3.3 Culture

As a volunteer, you are a guest in a foreign culture working under the local staff. Westerners tend to be very direct with their communications. Filipinos are non-confrontational. In Filipino culture, relationships are much more important than being direct (and possibly hurting the feelings of the other). Because of this, you are likely not to get a straight answer when in a situation of conflict. In addition, many Filipinos will answer yes/no questions with a 'yes', whether they really want to answer 'no', 'maybe', or 'yes'. On the other hand, if you express a need or want to a Filipino, they will do what they can to accommodate you.

Being on time is not a priority for many Filipinos. Meetings may or may not happen on time or may or may not happen at all (with no communication about it). It is best to not have high expectations, to be patient, and to just relax and roll with it.

Filipinos are a generous and giving people. If you visit their house, you will be fed (even if you just ate). Eating is a big part of the culture. The two big components of any type of celebration are food and music. Videoake is one of the favorite activities of Filipinos. They love to sing, dance, and perform.

3.3.4 Working Hours and Vacation

The work load at Stairway tends not to follow any set schedule. It is therefore expected for you to work whenever needed. This does not mean you will not have any free time. But it does mean that you may not always have control over when you have time off. Depending on your role as a volunteer and the scheduled activities of Stairway, you may be working on and off throughout the day and evening.

During your time here, it is okay to have scheduled vacation time. The Philippines is a beautiful country with many things to do. We would hope that you would take advantage of being here. However, we expect several weeks of advance notice so we can plan for coverage in your absence as needed.