



## Australia Awards

### Looking Out for the PWDs

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I studied in Australia from June 2011 to June 2012 with the vision to help effect positive changes for the Persons with Disability (PWD) sector. I took up Masters of Entrepreneurship and Innovation from the Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne

In one of our courses, the professor told us on the first day of classes to present a complete business plan in 60 seconds. I decided to pitch in the idea for my Re-Entry Action Plan (REAP), which is work-at-home entrepreneurship for PWDs. The idea, a product of my brainstorming with the National Council for Disability Affairs (NCDA) Deputy Director Mateo Lee Jr., has always been there. But when I got to the University, that's when I learned the specifics and figured out the details on how to execute my plan.

I had the vision while the lessons from University equipped me with the tools and the skills necessary to translate the vision into action. The courses I took were all interesting but I particularly found creative marketing, opportunity evaluation, and financial and legal strategies as the most useful ones.

#### **Finding ways**

Academic life in another country was quite challenging for me, especially after the Introductory Academic Program (IAP) ended and we started formal lessons. It was quite difficult to understand the lectures using the vernacular language. It took me weeks to get used to the discussions.

I was the only Filipino in the University. Thankfully, my aunt lived nearby so it still felt like home because we ate Filipino food every day and I have family to talk to. It was great that I got to meet with Filipino scholars from other Universities as well.

When I came back to the Philippines, I didn't know where to start because I suddenly felt that the scope of my REAP was too wide. You see the merging of "work-at-home" and "entrepreneurship" is a fairly new concept for most Filipinos.

So what I did first was to immerse myself in the world of online freelance work by signing up with [freelanceblend.com](http://freelanceblend.com) and [meetup.com](http://meetup.com). I also met with people who worked freelance and online and started to build networks. All the while, I kept wondering how I would actually conduct my project.

## Learning by doing

I searched for workshop groups and, through [www.manilaworkshops.com](http://www.manilaworkshops.com), linked with Ginger Arboleda, a mom blogger. I told her about wanting to share my ideas and some of the lessons I learned in Australia. I became a workshop facilitator in 2014 and mainly talked about basic legal strategies in business.

Instead of my initially planned focus group discussions among PWDs, I instead designed these discussions into workshops where they'll present their business plans. At the end of the five-day workshops, we all realized that it could be done. They can do it!

During these workshops, PAHRODF served as panellist to help the participants refine and improve their proposals. We held the activities in Carmona, Cavite, and one in NCDA. Our participants were from the National Capital Region and from as far as Regions 1 and 4.

All these experiences served as research for my REAP. I connected with people first and then applied all that I learned so I won't forget them. This gave birth to my own online business. I really had to apply what I learned in Australia and from networking with people so I won't forget them.

I also realized that my work in REAP is already integrated into our office work. Aside from my position as the Project Development office, I am also the agency's web administrator. Together with my online business, I've put all these things together, all the learning and experiences, to help the PWD sector I am serving.

## Striving for more

One tangible output of my REAP is the 64-page handbook entitled "Work-at-home Entrepreneurship: A practical guide for Filipinos with Disabilities" published last November 2014 and launched January of 2015. It is available online at the NCDA website.

The idea is to trigger the offering of trainings from institutions like private schools and vocational schools, among others, and to make these trainings shorter and via online.

For 2015, we have lined up three trainings on online entrepreneurship for PWDs. The initial targets are those who are interested and willing to invest a small amount of money. I keep telling them that business is not for everyone so we are trying to target those who'll really go for it. If they succeed, they will be the ones to provide more employment for others.

The main challenge, however, is that people are afraid of trying out new things. Thus, these kinds of projects cannot be done overnight. But I believe I'm moving in the right direction. For this sector, the Internet can really open a lot of doors for them.

There's so much more that can be done for my REAP. Using the mantra of entrepreneurship, I will continue to "make things happen" in terms of providing livelihood opportunities for PWDs.

*Dandy Victa finished his Masters of Entrepreneurship and Innovation from Swinburne University of Technology in 2012. His REAP was all about Work-At-Home Entrepreneurship Through ICT for Persons with Disabilities*