



Making a Difference in a Child's Life

Mary Claire C. Real
Indirect Beneficiary

DEPED - Continuous Improvement
program

Ang kuku lit ng mega Bata (Kids are so rowdy)! That was how I used to feel about kids, but that was before I met seven-year-old Paulen A. Aguilar and got to spend time with her.

I was in the sixth grade when the teachers at the Betty Go-Belmonte Elementary School recruited students to act as *ates* and *kuyas* (big sisters and big brothers) to second graders who had to take remedial classes in reading. I was in the top section of my class and when the teachers asked me if I wanted to do it, I said yes. I thought kids that young were annoying, but

I figured it was a new experience worth trying because I liked reading and enjoyed extracurricular activities.

My classes then were from 6:00 A.M. until 1:00 P.M. I used to go home after class to change and come back to school at 1:30 P.M. to tutor Paulen. We would usually end at around 3:30 to 4:00 P.M. It was not easy, and I remember telling my mother once how difficult it was to be a teacher. She told me it was not difficult, and that I just needed to have patience.

When I first met Paulen, I saw a small seven-year-old with a lot of scabs and scars wearing a crumpled uniform. She was shy but followed instructions. As we spent more time together, she opened up to me and started telling me about her life. She knew about the troubled lives of her parents and would sometimes cry about this. I would listen and give her some advice, like a real *ate*. I was no longer just a tutor. She moved me, especially when she would say that she would never lose hope. I believed her because she was always eager to learn and easy to teach.

The more Paulen learned to read, the more she became confident. *Sob rang bobo* (She was very proactive)! She was so full of life! There was a time I had to handle four more second graders because the other *ates* and *kuyas* did not show up to tutor them. Paulen had already learned her lessons and so she helped me with the other kids. I taught three and she taught one. We made a great team!

I went every day because I knew Paulen and the other second graders were waiting. I would even try to get my other classmates to come back to school with me even if they were feeling lazy, tired, or said they were busy.

I spent five months with Paulen. She had learned to read in those five months, but I had learned a few things, too. I used to think that younger kids had it easy playing and having fun, that they had fewer worries because adults took care of them and teachers did not require as much from them. I was wrong. Not all of them have happy stories to tell and some of them struggle in school, too. It is harder for them because they are just starting to learn. People around them often forget that and sometimes do not have the patience to understand and

support their learning. I myself used to be annoyed because they could not understand easy words when I talked to them, but I did not realise that it was only easy for me because I already knew these terms.

I used to hear other younger kids say it was impossible to learn. However, they all learned to read only a few months after the school launched the remedial reading classes. It was inspiring to see that it was possible, and that it was also possible for me to make a difference in a younger person's life.

I am in seventh grade now and have transferred to a different school. There is no similar program here but if there were, I would still want to volunteer. I have also decided that I want to be a teacher. I do not find teaching difficult anymore and instead, I see it as a great opportunity to support children as they grow and learn.

Mary Claire C. Real is 13 years old. She is in seventh grade and has transferred to the National Teacher's College in Quipu, Manila, where she has been awarded a scholarship.