

ILOILO: A HOME FOR KIDS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Chameleon Association Restoring a child's dignity

BY MARIA ESTELLE CUSTODIO-PIENCENAVES

You're driving to a stop on a traffic light and street children swarm like bees around your car. They persistently knock on your window begging for alms.

With no food to give and a strong hesitation to give money—for fear that it will only go to racketeers—you make a typical gesture: you knock back on your window. This sends the children away and you return to your peace.

The scenario has become so mundane that it has turned many urbanites calloused—unmindful of how these children face the harsh realities in the streets.

Most of us cannot even imagine life on the streets. These children, especially girls, are not just mere beggars. Some of them are prostituted and are physically battered and psychologically abused.

FACING REALITY

In Iloilo, where an alarming number of girls bear scars of physical and sexual violence, a French woman named Laurence Ligier chose to end the apathy and make a difference.

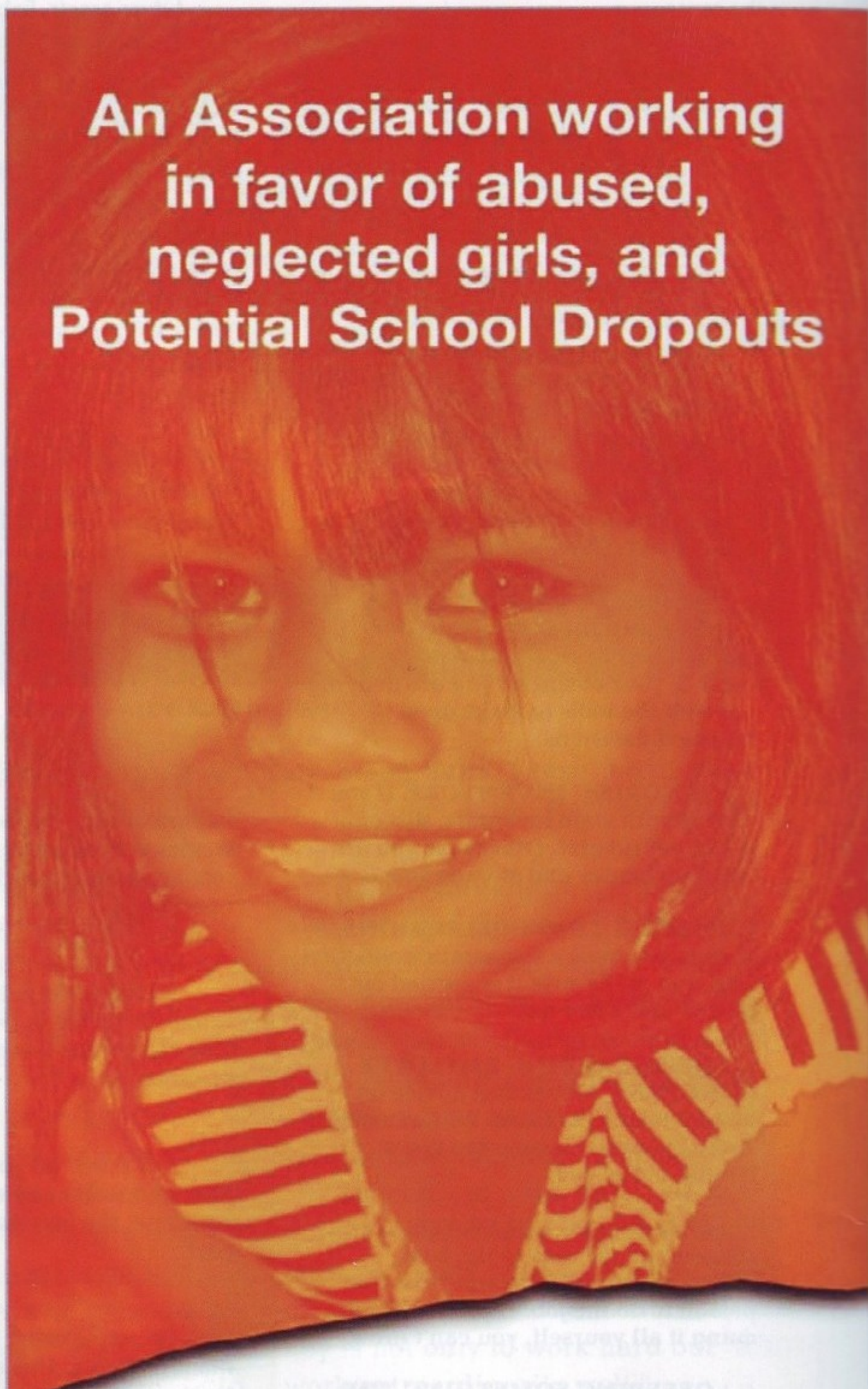
Eleven years ago, Ligier and her Filipina friend Ellen Regondon established Chameleon Association in the Philippines. From the very beginning, the founders of the association implemented a comprehensive care program for rescuing young girls from the streets or from abusive homes. Ligier's vision is to rebuild the lives of girls who have been "pushed out of their nests at a young age."

To do this, the association takes the responsibility of sheltering a number of children, helping with their emotional healing, giving medical attention, even legal assistance, providing education and continuing support even after their successful reintegration to the family and community.

The team of caregivers, social workers, psychologists and house mothers provide all necessary interventions to make the child whole again. "At Chameleon, girls are able to take pleasure in childhood—which is their right—and to realize their dreams of going to school and enjoying a dignified future."

Chameleon's shelters are located on a 6,000 square meter property in the countryside. The haven, 60 kilometers from Iloilo city, was donated by the city of Passi.

**An Association working
in favor of abused,
neglected girls, and
Potential School Dropouts**



CHAMELEON
association inc.

Chameleon is a non-stock, non-profit French/Filipino Association which protects and rehabilitates girls in difficult circumstances aged 5 to 16 coming from different places of Panay Island, and provides Educational Assistance through Sponsorship Program to the unfortunate children of Passi City, Iloilo.

CHILD EDUCATION SPONSORSHIPS

Chameleon places importance in the education of the girls under its care and even extends help to the children in surrounding communities.

Gracious sponsors from Belgium, France and other countries abroad are currently supporting the education of more than a hundred Chameleon girls from elementary up to college. Fifty-four are attending universities while ten have already completed their studies and found employment. In addition to this, another hundred children from rural villages in Passi are also receiving schooling.

The child sponsorship program also calls out to kind-hearted Filipinos. In 2007, Ligier has found a Chameleon Ambassador for the Philippines in the person of media celebrity KC Concepcion.

According to the foundation's press materials, "KC was extremely moved when she met Laurence Ligier in Paris and learned about her work. Returning to her home country (after her schooling in France), KC decided to become actively involved in Chameleon in order to help young girls."

Concepcion's prominence in Philippine media and strong influence on the youth, have helped in getting more Filipinos aware and interested in helping the foundation. Interested sponsors may get more details from their website: www.cameleon-association.org.

HIGHLIGHTS OF 2008

This year, Chameleon marks its anniversary celebration with the inauguration of a new sports complex. The artists of Zanzibar Circus—a group that has helped in the healing of many abused girls via circus acts—will again set-up the circus arts school.

Chameleon association, a humanitarian non-profit organization is not a proponent of quick fixes and temporary relief for the glaring social problems. Instead, the association focuses on long-term and lasting change. Key among the foundation's accomplishments is their fight against child abuse and its ill effects on the victims, and nurturing healthy relationships in families.

In the past years, the foundation has also envisioned a sustainable community in Passi by building revenue-generating opportunities such as a farm, butterfly sanctuary, training center and circus performances.



EMMANUEL FOUNDATION PRESIDENT JOSEPHINE A. CARAM AND SON PAOLO AT RECENT FUND RAISER FOR THE CENTER.

Emmanuel Foundation Helping children be all they can be

BY MARIA ESTELLE CUSTODIO-PIENCENAVES

The Emmanuel Foundation started in 1992 as the Emmanuel Center for Special Children, an information and intervention facility to help parents in Iloilo City to understand and cope with the needs of children with autism, cerebral palsy, downs syndrome, and those with developmental delays.

At that time, there was a growing awareness that with the right education, intervention and family support, "special children" are very much capable of development. This philosophy was a fresh wind to the social stigma accompanying "special children" and the belief that they should be confined to the home.

Having raised a "special child" herself, Plantersbank assistant vice president Josephine S. Caram, president of Emmanuel Foundation, believes that the "desire and ability for creative expression is present in all children—regular or otherwise."

It is this principle that guides the educators and parents of the Emmanuel school in their mission to help "special children to reach their full potential and be productive members of society."

Of course, the foundation also recognizes the help of all their sponsors and volunteers, who have shared their time and finances through the years, in ensuring that the "special kids" of Emmanuel Foundation will get the best education and treatment possible.

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