

SUCCESS STORIES

LGBT youth finds success in construction

USAID's support to strengthen training institutions is including marginalized youth in local growth



“At first my family was not very supportive. But I asked them not to be like that. I was trying my best to find a job. I just want to support my family. I want to see them happy.”

— Joel, 21
Former out-of-school youth

As the second largest metropolitan area in the Philippines, Cebu is a fast-growing city with international air and sea ports. The construction industry is thriving and presents many career opportunities for young people.

“At first, I really wasn't interested because the opportunity was for men. Training course slots available were on construction,” said Joel Cuyos, a 21-year-old from Cebu City. He first heard about a chance to train for free to be part of the construction industry in Cebu City through a friend. As a young man who identifies as gay, Joel initially thought a career in construction was not for him.

Overcoming misconceptions

Local academic and training institutions like the School of Knowledge for Industrial Labor, Leadership and Service (SKILLS), Inc. have to overcome misconceptions about careers in construction. With USAID's support SKILLS, Inc. is able to do this. Through a USAID grants program, local training institutions are able to open up slots specifically for marginalized Filipino youth in the Philippines.

“I was an out-of-school youth because I didn't have papers. All requirements now require some online filing and I don't have access to that,” he said. Since he couldn't afford to continue education, Joel has been working since he was 19 years old to help his family. He previously worked as a maid and then as a housekeeper. His father is a laborer, his mother is a housewife, and he has nine other siblings.

Through his friend's encouragement, who was an LGBT youth leader in his community, he was persuaded to take up a plumbing course at SKILLS, Inc. in 2021.



Banking on a strong support system

"I almost gave again," recalls Joel. "During work immersion, we had to stay-in at a construction. Somebody touched me and I was uncomfortable." As a member of the LGBT, Joel's initial concerns were valid. Studies have shown that a significant number of LGBT people have experienced some form of harassment, bullying, or discrimination at work because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

With a supportive supervisor, personnel safety procedures were upheld on site. "He stopped," said Joel about the co-worker who stepped on his boundaries. "But I also kept my distance because of it. Other workers there were very supportive and encouraging," he said. They barely had enough budget to commute weekly to work too but his friends helped him make limited finances work to finish their training. Throughout the months of training, Joel found himself thoroughly enjoying his classes. "Almost all my classmates became my friends," he said.

Young people like Joel, who are more likely to face discrimination in the workplace, can overcome challenges when they have peers that support them and workplace mentors who guide them and protect their pathway to success. Training institutions like SKILLS, Inc. is able to provide support to marginalized youth through USAID's support.



If you want to achieve something, go for it. Don't think about your sexual orientation, gender identity, or how you look.

Reaping the fruits of determination

After the work immersion, Joel and his friends were surprised to find that they passed their assessment on the first try and are set to receive national certification from the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority. "We were offered jobs right after that!" Joel proudly said.

"There are many more out-of-school youth in my community. I encouraged them to also pursue jobs in construction. I said, it isn't so bad to work in a construction site. In fact, the pay is great. Here, they don't look at your grades but at your skills and what you can do," said Joel.

USAID, through its Opportunity 2.0 program in the Philippines, is continuously strengthening local institutions to be able to serve more marginalized youth. It also bridges the needs of the private sector to the training to upskill young people so that the marginalized youth can participate in growing local economies and have better tomorrows.

Opportunity 2.0 is a five-year (2020-2025) program that aims to improve the learning and earning outcomes of out-of-school Filipino youth by working with key stakeholders in government, industry and academia to strengthen education, training, and employment systems at national and local levels.