

Beyond Compassion: Lived Experiences of Children in Conflict With the Law in a Residential Care Facility

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ABSTRACT

Law (CICL) who completed the rehabilitation program at Bahay Pag-asa Davao del Norte. It aimed to uncover their post-rehabilitation experiences, examine coping strategies used in navigating reintegration challenges, and identify insights gained from their personal journeys. Guided by Social Control Theory, Differential Association Theory, and Labeling Theory, the study employed in-depth, semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. Participants were aged 18 to 30, resided in Davao del Norte, and were observed one to fifteen years after their release from the facility. Six themes emerged regarding post-rehabilitation experiences: The Paradox of Freedom, Slow-Paced Mindset, Internal Transformation and Emotional Regulation, Reintegration and Family Dynamics, Reclaiming Identity and Social Reputation, and Resilience through Labor and Education. Three themes characterized coping strategies: Goal-Directed Motivation and Purposeful Engagement, Reliance on Faith and Spiritual Grounding, and Multi-Layered Support Systems. Five themes reflected participants' insights: Architectural View of Mistakes, Strategic Endurance and Mental Toughness, Purpose Beyond the Self, Proactive Influence Management, and Spiritual Optimism and Divine Timing. The findings highlight important implications for social work practice, particularly in strengthening the rehabilitation and reintegration of CICL. Participants' experiences demonstrate that rehabilitation extends beyond residential care and involves continuing changes in identity, relationships, emotional regulation, social participation, education, employment, and decision-making. The study concludes that rehabilitation is a transformative and ongoing process requiring sustained support, guidance, and opportunities for meaningful participation in family and community life. Strengthening long-term aftercare and outcome monitoring may help rehabilitated CICL sustain positive changes and successfully navigate reintegration challenges.

Keywords: Children in Conflict with the Law, rehabilitation, reintegration, lived experiences, phenomenology, juvenile justice

INTRODUCTION

Children in conflict with the law (CICL) represent a population whose experiences must be understood within the intersection of childhood development, family circumstances, social environments, rehabilitation, and the justice system (Aazami, 2023). Their involvement in unlawful behavior may be influenced by multiple risk factors, including adverse family experiences, social conditions, peer influences, and limited protective resources that can affect their behavioral development (Aazami, 2023). Although accountability remains an important component of the justice process, children require interventions that recognize their developmental needs and provide opportunities for rehabilitation, restoration, and positive behavioral change (Maskay, 2025). Understanding CICL therefore requires attention not only to the circumstances surrounding their offenses but also to the personal experiences, relationships, vulnerabilities, and sources of resilience that shape their lives (Narvey, 2021). A comprehensive understanding of these experiences is particularly important because resilience and protective relationships can influence how young people cope with adversity and respond to opportunities for change (Kimhi, 2023).

The experiences of CICL become particularly complex when children are placed in residential care facilities because such placement introduces them to a structured environment that may differ substantially from their previous family and community settings (Kor, 2021). Residential care can provide stability, supervision,

therapeutic support, and opportunities for rehabilitation, but it may simultaneously require young people to adjust to institutional routines, rules, relationships, and expectations (Cameron-Mathiassen, 2024). Young people living in residential care may experience feelings of uncertainty, separation, dependence, and adjustment while attempting to understand their place within the residential environment (Washington, 2023). Their experiences are consequently shaped not only by the services provided but also by how they perceive relationships with caregivers, social workers, peers, family members, and other significant individuals in their lives (Priscilla Ennals et al., 2021). Examining these experiences from the children's own perspectives is important because the meaning they attach to residential care may differ from the intentions of the professionals and institutions providing the intervention (Kor, 2021).

Residential rehabilitation should therefore extend beyond the provision of physical care and behavioral supervision because children may enter care carrying experiences of adversity, trauma, disrupted relationships, and emotional difficulties (Fathima Hasanath K. P. et al., 2024). Trauma-informed care is particularly relevant in residential settings because young people involved in correctional or justice-related environments may have histories that affect their perceptions of safety, authority, relationships, and personal identity (Nina Vaswani et al., 2021). Experiences of trauma may also influence how young people respond to institutional rules, interpersonal interactions, and rehabilitation activities within residential facilities (Gila, 2023). A trauma-informed environment can therefore help professionals understand behavioral responses within the context of children's previous experiences rather than interpreting difficult behaviors solely as defiance or noncompliance (Gila, 2023). Such an approach places greater emphasis on safety, trust, emotional understanding, participation, and appropriate support in the rehabilitation process (Nina Vaswani et al., 2021).

The psychosocial experiences of CICL further demonstrate why their voices should be incorporated into the understanding of residential rehabilitation (Fathima Hasanath K. P. et al., 2024). Children involved in the justice system may experience psychological and social difficulties that distinguish their circumstances from those of children who have not experienced conflict with the law (Fathima Hasanath K. P. et al., 2024). These difficulties may interact with previous adverse experiences, emotional development, interpersonal relationships, and behavioral responses, creating complex needs that cannot be addressed through disciplinary interventions alone (Narvey, 2021). Empathy and other interpersonal capacities may also be relevant to understanding juvenile recidivism because children's behavioral outcomes can be connected to their experiences of adversity and their ability to develop constructive relationships (Narvey, 2021). Resilience is likewise important because some young people demonstrate the ability to adapt despite difficult circumstances when protective relationships and supportive environments are available (Abdallah, 2021). The presence of supportive social connections can contribute to psychological well-being and provide individuals with a sense of belonging, security, and interpersonal support during challenging circumstances (Holt-Lunstad, 2021).

Family relationships constitute another important dimension of the experiences of CICL because family involvement can either support or complicate the rehabilitation process (Donato, 2025). Social workers working with CICL may encounter difficulties in facilitating parental involvement when families themselves are affected by conflict, limited resources, strained relationships, or other circumstances that influence the child's rehabilitation (Donato, 2025). Family circumstances should therefore not be considered solely as sources of risk because families can also become important sources of emotional support, accountability, motivation, and assistance during reintegration (Donato, 2025). The quality of relationships surrounding a child may influence how the child interprets rehabilitation and whether the child perceives the intervention as supportive, restrictive, or meaningful (Priscilla Ennals et al., 2021). Strengthening constructive relationships within and beyond the residential facility is therefore an important consideration in developing rehabilitation approaches that respond to the broader needs of CICL (Holt-Lunstad, 2021).

The residential environment itself may significantly shape children's perceptions of rehabilitation because institutional climate, staff behavior, interpersonal relationships, routines, and opportunities for participation can influence how young people experience care (Parker-Drayton, 2025). The organizational climate of residential treatment settings can affect rehabilitation processes and the conditions under which staff provide services to young people (Parker-Drayton, 2025). At the same time, young people in residential rehabilitation may have important perspectives regarding what they consider meaningful, supportive, or necessary within the services they receive (Priscilla Ennals et al., 2021). Allowing children to express these perspectives can help

professionals identify aspects of care that may not be immediately visible through institutional procedures or professional assessments (Cameron-Mathiassen, 2024). The lived experiences of young people in residential settings can therefore provide important insight into how institutional practices are actually experienced by those who are expected to benefit from them (Kor, 2021).

Rehabilitation also involves preparing CICL for eventual transition from residential care to their families and communities (Tepora, 2023). The process of reintegration may involve challenges related to family relationships, education, employment, social acceptance, personal identity, and access to supportive community resources (Harris, 2023). Young people transitioning from state care may experience uncertainty and difficulties as they adjust to greater independence and attempt to establish stable roles outside institutional environments (Washington, 2023). Similarly, young people leaving juvenile justice settings may encounter challenges in pursuing education, employment, and other forms of constructive participation in community life (Harris, 2023). These realities suggest that rehabilitation should not end with behavioral compliance within the facility but should also prepare children for meaningful participation and responsible functioning within their communities (Tepora, 2023). Effective reintegration consequently requires coordinated support involving residential facilities, social workers, families, schools, community organizations, and other relevant stakeholders (Maskay, 2025).

Social workers occupy a particularly important position in this process because they are often involved in assessing children's needs, facilitating family relationships, coordinating interventions, supporting rehabilitation, and preparing CICL for reintegration (Donato, 2025). Their responsibilities may become increasingly complex when they must respond simultaneously to the individual needs of the child, the expectations of the residential facility, family circumstances, and the requirements of the justice system (Pas-iwen, 2025). The experiences of multidisciplinary professionals working with CICL demonstrate that rehabilitation involves multiple actors whose roles and perspectives must be coordinated in addressing the complex circumstances of children in conflict with the law (Pas-iwen, 2025). Social workers therefore need to understand not only the formal requirements of rehabilitation but also how children themselves perceive the assistance, relationships, restrictions, and opportunities they encounter during residential care (Wright, 2025). Listening to children's experiences can provide social workers with practical information that can guide more responsive, individualized, participatory, and child-centered interventions (Donato, 2025).

The issue of CICL is also directly connected with the broader international commitment to peace, justice, and strong institutions reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16) (Maskay, 2025). SDG 16 promotes peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice, effective and accountable institutions, and the protection of vulnerable populations, including children affected by violence and other forms of harm (Maskay, 2025). In the context of CICL, these principles support approaches that recognize children's rights and developmental needs while maintaining appropriate accountability for their actions (Aazami, 2023). The rehabilitation of CICL can therefore be viewed as part of a broader effort to create justice systems that are protective, restorative, inclusive, and responsive to the circumstances of children (Maskay, 2025). Residential care facilities have an important role within this framework because the quality of care provided to CICL can influence their opportunities for rehabilitation, personal development, and eventual reintegration into society (Pas-iwen, 2025). Examining the lived experiences of children within these facilities can consequently contribute to efforts aimed at strengthening child-sensitive justice and rehabilitation systems consistent with the objectives of SDG 16 (Maskay, 2025).

Despite increasing attention to juvenile delinquency, rehabilitation, trauma-informed care, family involvement, residential treatment, and community reintegration, there remains a need to understand these processes from the direct perspective of CICL themselves (Aazami, 2023). Much of the available discussion surrounding CICL focuses on risk factors, intervention strategies, professional responsibilities, organizational conditions, or reintegration outcomes rather than the meanings children themselves attach to their experiences while living in residential care (Kor, 2021). The lived experiences of young people can reveal personal dimensions of rehabilitation that may remain less visible when their circumstances are examined primarily through institutional records, behavioral assessments, or professional interpretations (Cameron-Mathiassen, 2024). A phenomenological approach is therefore appropriate because it allows the researcher to explore how CICL experience, understand, and make meaning of their everyday lives within a residential care environment (Kor,

2021). Such an approach gives children an opportunity to describe their experiences in their own words and provides space for the researcher to examine the meanings, emotions, relationships, struggles, coping processes, and hopes embedded within those experiences (Priscilla Ennals et al., 2021).

The research aims to delve into the personal narratives and accounts of Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) who have undergone rehabilitation and intervention programs at Bahay Pag-asa Davao del Norte. The primary objectives of this study include uncovering the impacts and transformations these individuals have undergone as a result of the rehabilitation process. Additionally, the research seeks to pinpoint the strategies and motivations that played a role in their journey towards reformation and shed light on their unique challenges. This study also endeavors to address the following research questions: (1) What are the post-rehabilitation experiences of rehabilitated CICL?, (2) How do these rehabilitated CICL navigate and cope with the challenges they experienced?, And (3) What valuable insights have these rehabilitated CICL shared from their personal experiences?

The findings may provide social workers and residential care professionals with deeper insight into the aspects of care that children perceive as helpful, difficult, supportive, restrictive, or transformative (Donato, 2025). More importantly, the study may contribute to the improvement of social work interventions and residential rehabilitation practices by identifying areas where children's psychosocial needs, participation, relationships, family engagement, trauma-related concerns, and reintegration preparation can be more effectively addressed (Wright, 2025). In this way, understanding the lived experiences of CICL may contribute to a more responsive, humane, participatory, and justice-oriented approach to child rehabilitation that advances the principles of dignity, protection, inclusion, and SDG 16 (Maskay, 2025).

Risk Factors, Adverse Experiences, and Vulnerabilities of Children in Conflict with the Law

Children in conflict with the law often come to the justice system through a combination of individual, family, peer, and environmental circumstances rather than through a single identifiable cause (Aazami, 2023). Risk factors associated with juvenile delinquency may include adverse family conditions, problematic peer relationships, exposure to unfavorable environments, and limited access to protective resources (Aazami, 2023). Family structure and quality of family relationships may also influence children's behavioral development, particularly when children experience instability, weak supervision, or strained relationships within the household (Kroese, 2021). These circumstances suggest that the behavior of CICL should be examined within the broader context of their developmental experiences rather than interpreted solely according to the offense that resulted in their involvement with the justice system (Narvey, 2021). From a social work perspective, identifying these interconnected circumstances is important because rehabilitation becomes more meaningful when interventions address the underlying conditions that may have contributed to the child's involvement in offending behavior (Aazami, 2023).

Adverse childhood experiences may further shape the emotional and behavioral circumstances of children who become involved in the justice system (Narvey, 2021). Exposure to adversity can influence children's emotional development, interpersonal relationships, coping mechanisms, and responses to stressful situations (Narvey, 2021). Young people involved in correctional environments may also carry experiences of trauma that affect their understanding of safety, authority, masculinity, vulnerability, and relationships with others (Nina Vaswani et al., 2021). Trauma-related experiences can become particularly important in residential care because children may enter the facility already carrying unresolved emotional difficulties while simultaneously adjusting to a new institutional environment (Gila, 2023). Consequently, behavioral difficulties displayed by CICL may sometimes reflect deeper experiences of distress, insecurity, or disrupted relationships that require appropriate psychosocial attention rather than purely disciplinary responses (Fathima Hasanath K. P. et al., 2024).

The psychosocial vulnerabilities of CICL may also be reflected in their mental health and social experiences, which can distinguish them from children who have not experienced conflict with the law (Fathima Hasanath K. P. et al., 2024). Mental health concerns among CICL may intersect with previous adversity, social relationships, emotional difficulties, and other circumstances that influence their behavior and adjustment (Fathima Hasanath K. P. et al., 2024). At the same time, vulnerability should not be interpreted as an absence

of personal strengths because young people can demonstrate resilience despite difficult life circumstances (Abdallah, 2021). Resilience may develop through supportive relationships, positive coping processes, meaningful opportunities, and environments that allow young people to recover from adversity and develop a more constructive sense of themselves (Kimhi, 2023). The coexistence of vulnerability and resilience indicates that CICL should not be viewed exclusively as troubled or problematic children but as young people whose difficulties and strengths must both be recognized within rehabilitation (Abdallah, 2021).

Social relationships are another significant dimension of the vulnerabilities experienced by CICL because the presence or absence of supportive connections can influence children's psychological and social well-being (Holt-Lunstad, 2021). Family relationships, peer relationships, and connections with trusted adults may either provide protection or contribute to circumstances that increase children's vulnerability to problematic behavior (Kroese, 2021). Within residential care, relationships with social workers, caregivers, and peers may become particularly important because these individuals form part of the child's immediate social environment during rehabilitation (Priscilla Ennals et al., 2021). Young people's perspectives regarding what matters to them in residential rehabilitation indicate the importance of recognizing their experiences and allowing them to participate meaningfully in discussions concerning their care (Priscilla Ennals et al., 2021). From the researcher's analysis, this suggests that the vulnerability of CICL is not a fixed personal characteristic but a condition that may change depending on the quality of relationships, environmental support, and opportunities available to the child (Holt-Lunstad, 2021).

The interconnected nature of these risk factors and vulnerabilities highlights the need for a holistic understanding of CICL before rehabilitation interventions are designed or evaluated (Aazami, 2023). A child's involvement in offending behavior may reflect the cumulative influence of personal difficulties, family circumstances, adverse experiences, social relationships, and environmental conditions rather than one isolated factor (Aazami, 2023). This perspective is particularly relevant to residential care because the facility becomes an important setting where previous vulnerabilities can either be reinforced or addressed through supportive intervention (Gila, 2023). For social workers, recognizing these interconnected experiences provides a basis for developing interventions that address trauma, strengthen relationships, promote resilience, involve families, and prepare children for successful reintegration (Donato, 2025). Thus, understanding the risk factors and vulnerabilities of CICL is not intended to excuse unlawful behavior but to provide a more comprehensive foundation for rehabilitation that recognizes accountability alongside the child's developmental needs, capacity for change, and right to appropriate support (Maskay, 2025).

Experiences of Residential Care, Relationships, and Institutional Adjustment

Residential care represents a significant transition in the lives of children in conflict with the law because it places them within a structured environment that may differ considerably from their previous family and community settings (Kor, 2021). The transition may require children to adjust to institutional routines, schedules, rules, expectations, and relationships with unfamiliar adults and peers (Cameron-Mathiassen, 2024). Young people in residential settings may experience both supportive and challenging dimensions of care as they gradually become familiar with their new environment and attempt to understand their position within it (Kor, 2021). Extended residential care may also influence how young people understand their personal development, relationships, responsibilities, and future as they remain within the facility for an extended period (Cameron-Mathiassen, 2024). These experiences indicate that residential placement is not merely a physical transfer from one environment to another but a substantial life transition that can influence children's perceptions of themselves and their rehabilitation (Washington, 2023).

The relationships formed within residential care can significantly influence how children experience the rehabilitation process (Priscilla Ennals et al., 2021). Young people living in residential rehabilitation services may place importance on relationships with staff and other individuals who provide emotional support, guidance, and opportunities to participate in decisions concerning their lives (Priscilla Ennals et al., 2021). The quality of interactions between young people and caregivers may influence whether children perceive the facility as a safe and supportive environment or as a setting primarily characterized by control and restriction (Kor, 2021). For CICL, relationships with social workers may be particularly meaningful because social workers can become important sources of guidance, advocacy, emotional support, and assistance in navigating

rehabilitation processes (Donato, 2025). From the researcher's analysis, this means that institutional rehabilitation cannot be understood solely through programs and procedures because the everyday relationships through which those programs are delivered may determine how children actually experience care (Priscilla Ennals et al., 2021).

Institutional rules and routines may likewise create both opportunities and challenges for children adjusting to residential care (Cameron-Mathiassen, 2024). Structure can provide predictability and boundaries that support behavioral development, but highly restrictive environments may also affect children's sense of autonomy and personal control (Kor, 2021). Young people in residential settings may therefore need to negotiate the tension between institutional expectations and their desire for independence, privacy, identity, and personal choice (Cameron-Mathiassen, 2024). Participation becomes particularly important because allowing young people to express what matters to them can help residential services become more responsive to their actual needs and experiences (Priscilla Ennals et al., 2021). The researcher views this adjustment process as an important dimension of lived experience because a child's response to residential rules may reflect not simply compliance or resistance but the child's attempt to maintain a sense of identity and agency within an environment where many aspects of daily life are institutionally regulated (Kor, 2021).

The emotional experience of residential care may also be influenced by separation from family, changes in social connections, and uncertainty regarding the future (Washington, 2023). Young people transitioning through state care may encounter challenges associated with changing relationships, developing independence, and preparing to move toward life outside institutional settings (Washington, 2023). Social connection remains important during these transitions because supportive relationships can provide emotional security and contribute to psychological well-being during periods of adjustment (Holt-Lunstad, 2021). Family involvement can likewise influence rehabilitation because maintaining constructive relationships with parents and other family members may provide children with important sources of support before and after residential placement (Donato, 2025). From the researcher's perspective, children's experiences of residential care should therefore include attention to what happens beyond the facility itself because feelings of belonging, separation, acceptance, and hope may be connected to relationships that continue outside the residential environment (Holt-Lunstad, 2021).

Overall, the experience of residential care is shaped by the interaction between institutional structure, interpersonal relationships, personal adjustment, participation, and children's perceptions of support (Kor, 2021). Residential facilities can provide opportunities for safety, rehabilitation, and personal development, but the effectiveness of these opportunities depends partly on whether children experience the environment as respectful, responsive, and meaningful to their individual circumstances (Parker-Drayton, 2025). Young people's own perspectives are therefore essential in understanding whether residential interventions address the concerns that matter most to them (Priscilla Ennals et al., 2021). For social workers, these experiences highlight the need to strengthen relational practice, create opportunities for meaningful participation, communicate rules in developmentally appropriate ways, maintain constructive family connections, and support children's adjustment throughout their stay (Donato, 2025). Understanding residential care from the perspective of CICL can consequently reveal not only the difficulties associated with institutional living but also the relationships, structures, and experiences that may help children develop a stronger sense of safety, belonging, responsibility, and readiness for rehabilitation (Cameron-Mathiassen, 2024).

Trauma, Psychosocial Well-Being, and Resilience in the Rehabilitation of CICL

The rehabilitation of children in conflict with the law requires attention to their psychosocial well-being because involvement with the justice system may occur alongside experiences of adversity, emotional difficulties, disrupted relationships, and other circumstances affecting their development (Fathima Hasanath K. P. et al., 2024). CICL may experience mental health and psychosocial concerns that require professionals to look beyond their offending behavior and examine the circumstances that influence their emotional and social functioning (Fathima Hasanath K. P. et al., 2024). Previous adverse experiences may affect children's ability to regulate emotions, establish trusting relationships, respond to authority, and cope with stressful situations (Narvey, 2021). These concerns become particularly relevant in residential care because children are expected to participate in rehabilitation while simultaneously adjusting to an unfamiliar environment and the demands

associated with institutional living (Gila, 2023). A comprehensive rehabilitation approach therefore needs to recognize psychosocial well-being as a central component of recovery and development rather than treating it as a secondary concern (Nina Vaswani et al., 2021).

Trauma is an important consideration in understanding the behavior and experiences of young people involved in correctional and residential environments (Nina Vaswani et al., 2021). Children may enter residential care with histories of violence, neglect, family disruption, abuse, loss, or other adverse experiences that can influence their perceptions of safety and interpersonal relationships (Gila, 2023). Trauma may also affect how young people respond to authority and institutional structures, particularly when previous experiences have caused them to associate adults or systems of authority with fear, rejection, or lack of control (Nina Vaswani et al., 2021). Gender and social identity may further shape how young people experience trauma and rehabilitation, making sensitivity to individual backgrounds important in the provision of residential services (Gila, 2023). From the researcher's analysis, this suggests that behaviors interpreted as difficult, aggressive, withdrawn, or resistant may sometimes represent ways of coping with previous experiences rather than simply deliberate unwillingness to cooperate with rehabilitation (Nina Vaswani et al., 2021).

Trauma-informed care consequently provides an important framework for creating residential environments that recognize children's histories while promoting safety, trust, and meaningful participation (Gila, 2023). Trauma-informed approaches encourage professionals to understand behavioral responses within the context of previous experiences and to avoid practices that may unintentionally reproduce feelings of powerlessness or insecurity (Nina Vaswani et al., 2021). In residential settings, this perspective can influence how staff communicate rules, respond to difficult behaviors, establish relationships, and provide opportunities for children to participate in their rehabilitation (Gila, 2023). The importance of respectful and supportive relationships is reinforced by evidence that social connection contributes substantially to psychological and physical well-being (Holt-Lunstad, 2021). For CICL, therefore, a supportive relationship with a trusted social worker or caregiver may become an important source of emotional security and may help the child develop greater confidence in the rehabilitation process (Donato, 2025).

Resilience provides another important dimension in understanding the psychosocial experiences of CICL because children exposed to adversity are not necessarily defined by their difficulties (Abdallah, 2021). Resilience refers to the capacity to adapt and continue functioning despite challenging circumstances, and this capacity can be influenced by supportive relationships, personal resources, and environmental conditions (Kimhi, 2023). Young people in residential care may demonstrate resilience through their ability to cope with institutional adjustment, establish constructive relationships, participate in rehabilitation activities, and develop aspirations for their future (Cameron-Mathiassen, 2024). Protective relationships can become particularly significant because supportive social connections may provide children with encouragement, belonging, and opportunities to experience themselves as valued members of a social environment (Holt-Lunstad, 2021). From the researcher's perspective, recognizing resilience prevents the rehabilitation process from becoming focused exclusively on deficits because it allows professionals to identify the strengths and capacities that children can build upon during intervention (Abdallah, 2021).

The relationship between trauma, psychosocial well-being, and resilience suggests that rehabilitation should address both the difficulties children carry into residential care and the strengths they can develop while receiving support (Fathima Hasanath K. P. et al., 2024). Addressing trauma without recognizing resilience may unintentionally portray CICL as permanently damaged, while focusing only on strengths may overlook experiences that require professional intervention and support (Gila, 2023). A balanced approach therefore requires social workers and residential care professionals to recognize children's vulnerabilities while simultaneously creating opportunities for autonomy, positive relationships, emotional development, and personal growth (Donato, 2025). Such an approach can help transform residential care from a setting primarily associated with correction and control into an environment where children can process difficult experiences and develop healthier ways of responding to future challenges (Cameron-Mathiassen, 2024). Ultimately, understanding the psychosocial experiences of CICL through the interconnected lenses of trauma and resilience can help social workers develop more individualized, compassionate, and developmentally appropriate interventions that support both healing and responsible reintegration into the community (Wright, 2025).

Social Support, Family Involvement, and Relationships in the Rehabilitation of CICL

Social support is an important component of rehabilitation because children in conflict with the law do not experience their circumstances independently of the relationships and social environments surrounding them (Holt-Lunstad, 2021). Supportive relationships can contribute to psychological well-being by providing individuals with belonging, emotional security, encouragement, and opportunities to develop constructive interpersonal connections (Holt-Lunstad, 2021). For CICL, these relationships may include parents, siblings, social workers, residential caregivers, peers, teachers, and other significant individuals who influence their experiences before, during, and after residential placement (Donato, 2025). The presence of trusted individuals may help children cope with the challenges of residential care and develop greater confidence in their capacity to change (Priscilla Ennals et al., 2021). From the researcher's analysis, social support should therefore be viewed not merely as an additional service but as a relational resource that can influence how children understand rehabilitation and their own possibilities for a different future (Holt-Lunstad, 2021).

Family involvement is particularly significant because family relationships may remain influential even when a child is temporarily separated from the home environment (Donato, 2025). Social workers working with CICL may encounter complex situations involving parental participation, communication difficulties, family conflict, and differing expectations regarding the child's rehabilitation (Donato, 2025). Family circumstances may contribute to the vulnerabilities experienced by children, particularly when relationships are characterized by instability, inadequate supervision, or persistent conflict (Kroese, 2021). At the same time, family members can become important sources of emotional support, encouragement, accountability, and assistance during the child's rehabilitation and eventual return to the community (Donato, 2025). This dual role demonstrates that families should not be viewed simply as either causes of delinquency or automatic sources of support because their influence may depend on the quality and circumstances of family relationships (Kroese, 2021).

The involvement of parents and families may also affect how children perceive their connection to life outside the residential facility (Donato, 2025). Maintaining meaningful relationships can provide children with a sense of belonging and continuity while they adjust to the routines and expectations of residential care (Holt-Lunstad, 2021). Conversely, weak or conflicted family relationships may intensify feelings of isolation and uncertainty, particularly when children already experience separation from their familiar environments (Washington, 2023). Social workers therefore have an important role in facilitating appropriate family involvement while considering the safety, wishes, developmental needs, and circumstances of the child (Donato, 2025). From the researcher's perspective, effective family involvement should not be measured simply by the frequency of visits or communication but by whether family interactions provide meaningful emotional and practical support that contributes to rehabilitation (Donato, 2025).

Relationships within the residential facility are likewise important because children may rely on social workers, caregivers, and peers as part of their immediate support network (Priscilla Ennals et al., 2021). Young people living in residential rehabilitation services may value opportunities to express their concerns and participate in identifying what matters to them during their stay (Priscilla Ennals et al., 2021). Respectful relationships with professionals can contribute to trust and may encourage children to become more engaged in rehabilitation activities and discussions about their future (Kor, 2021). The relationship between social workers and CICL is particularly significant because social workers may serve simultaneously as advocates, facilitators, assessors, counselors, and coordinators of services (Wright, 2025). From the researcher's analysis, this makes the quality of professional relationships an important part of intervention because even well-designed programs may have limited meaning for children if they do not feel heard, respected, or understood by the individuals implementing them (Priscilla Ennals et al., 2021).

The literature consequently indicates that social support and family involvement should be integrated into rehabilitation rather than treated as separate concerns (Donato, 2025). Children are more likely to experience rehabilitation as meaningful when they have opportunities to develop supportive relationships, maintain appropriate family connections, participate in decisions affecting their lives, and receive consistent encouragement from trusted adults (Priscilla Ennals et al., 2021). Social workers therefore need to strengthen family-centered interventions, facilitate constructive communication between children and significant family members, establish trusting professional relationships, and identify supportive networks that can remain

available after residential placement (Donato, 2025). Strengthening these relationships may also contribute to community reintegration because children returning to their communities require social environments capable of supporting positive behavioral change and reducing isolation (Tepora, 2023). Ultimately, the rehabilitation of CICL should recognize that meaningful change occurs not only within the individual child but also through the relationships and social environments that surround the child before, during, and after residential care (Holt-Lunstad, 2021).

Rehabilitation, Reintegration, and the Role of Social Work Practice

Rehabilitation is a central component of responding to children in conflict with the law because the objective of intervention extends beyond addressing the immediate offense toward supporting behavioral development, personal growth, and the child's capacity to participate constructively in society (Aazami, 2023). Effective rehabilitation requires attention to the factors that contribute to juvenile delinquency while simultaneously strengthening protective resources that can support positive developmental pathways (Aazami, 2023). Residential care can provide structured opportunities for children to develop new skills, reflect on their experiences, establish healthier relationships, and participate in programs designed to address their individual needs (Kor, 2021). Young people's experiences of residential rehabilitation indicate that the meaning and effectiveness of these services are influenced by how children perceive their relationships, participation, and opportunities for personal development within the care environment (Priscilla Ennals et al., 2021). From the researcher's analysis, rehabilitation should therefore be understood as a continuing developmental process rather than a short-term institutional intervention focused only on correcting undesirable behavior (Cameron-Mathiassen, 2024).

The effectiveness of rehabilitation is closely connected to the quality and appropriateness of the interventions provided to children (Gila, 2023). Trauma-informed approaches can help professionals recognize the influence of previous adverse experiences on children's behavior and emotional responses while creating environments that promote safety, trust, and participation (Nina Vaswani et al., 2021). Individualized interventions are likewise important because CICL may have different backgrounds, needs, strengths, family circumstances, and experiences of adversity (Fathima Hasanath K. P. et al., 2024). Social workers therefore need to assess children's circumstances holistically rather than applying identical interventions regardless of individual differences (Donato, 2025). The researcher's interpretation is that effective rehabilitation requires a balance between structure and flexibility because children need clear expectations while also requiring opportunities to express their needs, exercise appropriate autonomy, and participate meaningfully in their own development (Priscilla Ennals et al., 2021).

Community reintegration is another essential component of rehabilitation because children eventually need to transition from residential care back into family and community environments (Tepora, 2023). Reintegration may involve challenges related to family relationships, education, employment, social acceptance, independence, and access to community resources (Harris, 2023). Young people leaving state care may experience uncertainty as they adjust to new responsibilities and attempt to establish stable identities outside institutional settings (Washington, 2023). These challenges demonstrate that successful rehabilitation cannot be determined solely by a child's behavior while inside a residential facility because the sustainability of behavioral change depends partly on the conditions encountered after leaving care (Tepora, 2023). Reintegration strategies therefore need to provide continuity of support and establish connections between residential services, families, schools, communities, and other institutions that can assist children after discharge (Maskay, 2025).

Social workers play an essential role in connecting rehabilitation within residential care to the broader process of community reintegration (Donato, 2025). Their responsibilities may include assessing individual and family needs, facilitating parental involvement, coordinating multidisciplinary services, monitoring rehabilitation progress, and assisting children in preparing for life after residential placement (Donato, 2025). The complexity of working with CICL requires social workers to collaborate with professionals and institutions because the circumstances of children in conflict with the law often involve interconnected legal, psychological, family, educational, and social concerns (Pas-iwen, 2025). Social workers in juvenile justice settings may consequently need to balance institutional requirements with the developmental needs and

individual experiences of children (Wright, 2025). From the researcher's perspective, this role requires social workers to move beyond case management toward relationship-based and child-centered practice in which children's voices are actively incorporated into assessment, planning, intervention, and transition processes (Donato, 2025).

The experiences of CICL can therefore provide important information for improving social work practice and residential rehabilitation services (Wright, 2025). Children's perceptions can help identify whether existing interventions provide meaningful support, whether relationships with professionals encourage trust, whether family involvement is effective, and whether children feel adequately prepared for reintegration (Priscilla Ennals et al., 2021). Social workers may need to strengthen trauma-informed practice, improve family engagement strategies, create more opportunities for child participation, and develop stronger transition and follow-up mechanisms for children returning to their communities (Gila, 2023). They may also need to strengthen coordination with schools, families, community organizations, and other service providers to ensure that rehabilitation continues beyond the residential facility (Tepora, 2023). Ultimately, rehabilitation should be understood as a shared and continuing process in which social workers, families, residential institutions, communities, and CICL themselves contribute to creating conditions that support positive change and responsible reintegration (Maskay, 2025).

METHOD

This section provided an outline of research methods that were used in the study. It furnished details concerning the participants and the selection criteria. The researcher presented the study's research design and the rationale behind its selection. The chosen data collection instrument, implemented procedures, and data analysis techniques were also explained. Lastly, the ethical principles adhered to throughout the process were acknowledged.

Study Participants

The participants of the study were seven (7) rehabilitated Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) who had previously undergone rehabilitation at Bahay Pag-asa Davao del Norte. The participants were purposively selected based on their ability to provide rich and relevant accounts of their lived experiences during and after rehabilitation. They were former CICL who had completed their rehabilitation program at Bahay Pag-asa Davao del Norte, were between 18 and 30 years old at the time of the study, were residing in Davao del Norte, and had been discharged from the facility for a period ranging from one (1) to fifteen (15) years. Participants could be single or married and were required to have sufficient personal experience of the phenomenon being investigated and the willingness and capacity to communicate their experiences during the interview. The selection of rehabilitated former CICL was appropriate to the phenomenological design because their experiences provided firsthand accounts of the challenges, adjustments, relationships, coping processes, and personal transformations associated with their rehabilitation journey.

Individuals were excluded from participation if they were not residing in Davao del Norte, had undergone rehabilitation in facilities other than Bahay Pag-asa Davao del Norte, were outside the specified age range, had not completed the rehabilitation program, or did not meet the other established inclusion criteria. These criteria ensured that the participants had direct and substantial experience of the specific phenomenon and setting being explored in the study. The research was conducted within Davao del Norte, a province in the Davao Region of southeastern Mindanao that consists of three cities, eight municipalities, and 223 barangays. The province provided the geographical context for identifying participants who had completed rehabilitation at Bahay Pag-asa Davao del Norte and subsequently returned to community life. By focusing on rehabilitated former CICL residing within the province, the study was able to explore not only their experiences while receiving residential rehabilitation but also their subsequent adjustment, challenges, relationships, and perceptions following their return to the community.

Materials and Instrument

The primary data-gathering instrument used in this study was a researcher-developed semi-structured interview

guide designed to elicit the lived experiences of rehabilitated Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL). The semi-structured format provided a consistent set of core questions across participants while allowing the researcher to ask appropriate follow-up and probing questions based on the participants' responses. This approach enabled the participants to freely describe their experiences, perceptions, emotions, challenges, coping processes, relationships, and personal changes in their own words while allowing the researcher to explore significant statements in greater depth. The interview guide was reviewed and approved by the research committee before its administration to ensure that the questions were appropriate to the objectives of the study and sensitive to the experiences of the participants.

The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions that focused on the participants' experiences before, during, and after their rehabilitation at Bahay Pag-asa Davao del Norte. The questions explored their experiences within the residential care facility, challenges encountered during rehabilitation, relationships with social workers and other significant individuals, coping strategies, perceived sources of support, changes in attitudes and behavior, lessons learned, skills developed, and experiences following their return to the community. Probing questions were used when necessary to clarify responses and encourage participants to provide detailed descriptions of experiences that were relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. The flexible nature of the interview guide allowed the researcher to follow meaningful responses while maintaining focus on the research questions and objectives.

The researcher also used appropriate recording and documentation materials during the interviews, subject to the participants' informed consent, to ensure accurate capture of their responses. Field notes were likewise used to document relevant observations, contextual details, and reflections encountered during the interview process. These materials supported the accurate transcription, organization, and interpretation of the participants' narratives while preserving the substance of their lived experiences. The combination of the semi-structured interview guide, audio recording when permitted, and field notes provided the researcher with sufficient qualitative material for identifying significant statements, developing meanings, and generating themes from the participants' accounts.

Design and Procedure

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore and understand the lived experiences of rehabilitated Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) who had completed their rehabilitation at Bahay Pag-asa Davao del Norte. Phenomenology was appropriate because the study focused on how participants personally experienced, interpreted, and gave meaning to their rehabilitation journey, including the challenges they encountered, the support they received, the changes they experienced, and their adjustment after returning to the community. The approach allowed the researcher to focus on the participants' firsthand accounts rather than imposing predetermined explanations on their experiences. In conducting the inquiry, the researcher practiced bracketing by consciously setting aside personal assumptions and preconceptions about CICL and residential rehabilitation to remain attentive to the meanings expressed by the participants. The researcher served as the primary interviewer and data collector and maintained a reflexive stance throughout the data-gathering and analysis processes.

Before the data collection, the researcher secured permission from the appropriate authorities of Bahay Pag-asa Davao del Norte and coordinated with the designated social worker regarding the identification of potential participants who had completed the rehabilitation program. After obtaining the necessary institutional permission, eligible former CICL were identified based on the established inclusion and exclusion criteria. Potential participants were then contacted and provided with an explanation of the study, including its purpose, procedures, expected duration, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality measures, and their rights as participants. Those who agreed to participate were asked to sign the informed consent form before the interview was conducted. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed that they could decline to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any point without penalty or negative consequences.

Data were gathered through individual semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted at an agreed-upon time and location that provided privacy and comfort for the participants. Each interview lasted approximately one

hour, although the duration varied according to the depth of the participant's responses and the natural flow of the conversation. The researcher used the approved interview guide to explore the participants' experiences during rehabilitation, challenges encountered, sources of support, relationships with significant individuals, coping strategies, lessons learned, skills developed, perceived changes, and experiences following discharge from the residential care facility. Open-ended questions and appropriate probing questions were used to encourage participants to provide detailed descriptions of their experiences while allowing them to determine which aspects of their stories were personally meaningful. With the participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded to facilitate accurate transcription, while field notes were taken to document relevant contextual observations and reflections during the interviews.

Following each interview, the recorded responses were transcribed verbatim and organized according to the participant's assigned code to protect identity and confidentiality. The researcher reviewed the transcripts against the audio recordings to verify the accuracy and completeness of the transcriptions. Where appropriate, participants were given the opportunity to review or clarify portions of their accounts to ensure that their intended meanings were properly represented. The researcher then systematically organized the interview data for subsequent phenomenological analysis, focusing on significant statements, meanings, and recurring patterns relevant to the research questions. Throughout the process, the researcher maintained confidentiality, secured the collected data, and limited access to the research materials to authorized individuals. These procedures provided a systematic process for collecting and preparing the participants' narratives for analysis while maintaining the ethical and methodological requirements of qualitative phenomenological research.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify, organize, interpret, and present meaningful patterns within the participants' narratives. The analysis focused on their lived experiences as rehabilitated Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL), including experiences during rehabilitation, challenges after discharge, relationships and sources of support, coping strategies, personal changes, lessons learned, and adjustment to community life. The researcher followed a systematic process of familiarization, coding, theme development and review, definition and naming of themes, and preparation of the final narrative. This process enabled the researcher to move from individual accounts toward broader patterns reflecting shared meanings across participants' experiences.

The analysis began with repeated reading of the interview transcripts and review of the audio recordings to gain familiarity with the participants' narratives and their contexts. Significant statements relevant to the research questions were identified and assigned initial codes. Related codes were compared and grouped into broader categories based on recurring experiences, perceptions, and meanings. Preliminary themes were then developed to capture significant patterns across the dataset. These themes were continuously compared with the original transcripts to ensure that they accurately represented the participants' accounts and remained sufficiently distinct from one another.

The themes were further reviewed, refined, defined, and named according to their central meanings and relevance to the research objectives. Both commonalities and variations in participants' experiences were considered to preserve the complexity of their narratives rather than reduce the findings to frequency counts or generalized statements. The researcher also maintained reflexivity by remaining aware of personal assumptions and interpretations that could influence the analysis. Finally, the themes were presented through a coherent narrative supported by selected participant quotations, ensuring that participants' voices remained visible while allowing for interpretation of the meanings underlying their experiences. Through this process, thematic analysis transformed individual interview accounts into an integrated interpretation of the lived experiences of rehabilitated CICL.

Ethical Considerations

The study strictly adhered to the ethical standards and requirements of the University of Mindanao Ethics and Review Committee (UMERC) and was conducted under approved Protocol No. UMER-2024-414. Prior to data collection, the researcher secured the necessary institutional permissions and authorization from the head

of Bahay Pag-asa Davao del Norte and coordinated with the designated social worker regarding the identification and recruitment of eligible participants. The study recognized the vulnerability of rehabilitated Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) and therefore adopted appropriate safeguards to protect their dignity, welfare, privacy, and rights throughout the research process. Before participation, each participant was provided with a clear explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, expected duration, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality measures, and their right to refuse participation or withdraw at any time without penalty or negative consequences. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before any interview was conducted. The researcher also ensured that participants were not subjected to deception, coercion, intimidation, or undue influence during recruitment and data collection. Given the sensitive nature of the participants' experiences, the researcher remained attentive to possible emotional discomfort during the interviews and allowed participants to decline questions, pause the interview, or discontinue participation whenever necessary. Appropriate referral or psychosocial support mechanisms were made available when emotional distress arose or when a participant required additional assistance. The researcher also ensured that the provision of any token of appreciation did not influence the voluntary nature of participation or create undue pressure to participate.

Privacy and confidentiality were maintained throughout the collection, processing, analysis, storage, and presentation of the data. Participants were assigned codes or pseudonyms instead of using their real names, and identifying information was excluded from transcripts, reports, and other research outputs. Physical research materials were kept in secure storage, while digital files, including audio recordings and transcripts, were stored using password-protected and secured systems accessible only to authorized individuals. The researcher complied with applicable data privacy requirements and used the information solely for the purposes stated in the informed consent process. Because the study involved individual interviews rather than focus group discussions, participants were not exposed to the additional confidentiality risks associated with group-based disclosure. Audio recording was conducted only after obtaining the participant's permission, and recordings were used solely to facilitate accurate transcription and analysis. The researcher also ensured that participant quotations included in the dissertation could not reasonably reveal the identity of the individuals involved. The study did not involve political, commercial, or other external interests that could influence the collection, interpretation, or presentation of the findings.

The researcher also observed the principles of research integrity throughout the conduct of the study. All information obtained from participants was recorded and analyzed as accurately as possible without fabrication, falsification, manipulation, or selective alteration of findings. The researcher maintained appropriate documentation of the research process and followed APA 7th edition standards in acknowledging the ideas and sources of other authors. Plagiarism was avoided through appropriate citation, paraphrasing, and referencing, while available academic tools such as Turnitin were used to assist in checking the originality of the manuscript. The contributions of the research adviser, panel members, and other individuals who provided legitimate academic or technical assistance were appropriately acknowledged in accordance with applicable authorship and acknowledgment standards. Any potential personal assumptions or biases that could influence the interpretation of the participants' narratives were addressed through reflexivity and bracketing throughout the research process.

To strengthen the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings, the researcher considered credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability as interconnected principles in the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was supported through prolonged engagement with the interview data, careful transcription, repeated review of the participants' narratives, and clarification of responses when necessary. Dependability was addressed by maintaining a systematic record of the procedures followed during participant selection, interviewing, transcription, coding, and thematic analysis. Confirmability was strengthened by grounding interpretations in the participants' actual narratives, maintaining reflexive awareness of researcher assumptions, and preserving an organized record of the analytical process. Transferability was supported by providing sufficient contextual and methodological description so that readers and future researchers can determine the relevance of the findings to other settings or populations with similar characteristics. These measures were undertaken to ensure that the findings represented the participants' experiences as faithfully as possible while acknowledging the interpretive nature of phenomenological research. Through the integration

of ethical safeguards and trustworthiness procedures, the researcher sought to protect the participants while producing findings that were credible, transparent, and grounded in their lived experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the essential themes that emerged from the transcripts of seven (7) rehabilitated Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) who shared their lived experiences after completing the rehabilitation program at a residential care facility. This includes their post-rehabilitation experiences upon returning to the community, the ways by which they navigated and coped with the challenges they encountered, and the valuable insights they gained from their personal journeys.

Participants Profile

The participants were the rehabilitated Children in Conflict with the Law who have completed the rehabilitation program at the Provincial Social Welfare Development Office - Bahay Pag-asa Davao del Norte. The participants were aged between 18 and 30 years old and had been discharged for at least one year up to fifteen years. They are also residing at the municipalities or cities within the province of Davao del Norte.

Table 1 *Profile of Participants*

Participant	Age	Address	Years of Discharge
P1	28	Sto. Tomas, Davao del Norte	11 Years
P2	21	Sto. Tomas, Davao del Norte	2 Years
P3	19	Panabo City, Davao del Norte	3 Years
P4	19	Sto. Tomas, Davao del Norte	3 Years
P5	23	New Corella, Davao del Norte	8 Years
P6	24	Panabo City, Davao del Norte	3 Years
P7	22	Carmen, Davao del Norte	4 Years

Post-Rehabilitation Experiences of Rehabilitated CICL

This portion delves into the post-rehabilitation experiences of seven (7) individuals who successfully completed the rehabilitation program at Bahay Pag-asa Davao del Norte. They shared their stories through in-depth interviews, providing an intimate window into the realities of reintegration the joy of returning to family, the weight of social stigma, and the ongoing work of rebuilding identity and purpose. Their narratives revealed diverse yet interconnected experiences, from the initial paradox of freedom upon release to the slow but deliberate process of reclaiming themselves within the community.

The study captured the multifaceted dimensions of life after rehabilitation, including personal transformation, family dynamics, social reputation, and the pursuit of education and livelihood. Each participant's story underscored the reality that rehabilitation does not end at the gates of the facility it continues in every interaction, every choice, and every moment of resistance against circumstances that threaten to pull them backward. The analysis of their narratives uncovered six essential themes that encapsulate their post-rehabilitation experiences: The Paradox of Freedom, Slow-Paced Mindset, Internal Transformation and Emotional Regulation, Reintegration and Family Dynamics, Reclaiming Identity and Social Reputation, and Resilience through Labor and Education, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 *Post-Rehabilitation Experiences of Rehabilitated CICL*

Essential Theme	Core Ideas
The Paradox of	Expressed gratitude and sense of completion upon release. [Participant 1, 7]

Freedom	Acknowledged the presence of temptations and struggles outside the facility. [Participant 1, 2, 3]
	Recognized that lessons learned inside the center served as a guide outside. [Participant 1, 4, 5, 7]
	Expressed that facing the accusations and going through the center was a turning point. [Participant 7]
Slow-Paced Mindset	Acknowledged gradual progress and forward movement in life after release. [Participant 1, 6]
	Experienced discouragement due to other people's judgment but continued moving forward. [Participant 7]
	Maintained a continuous connection to the values and lessons learned inside the center. [Participant 1, 3]
	Recognized a shift in perspective learning to balance competing responsibilities. [Participant 6]
Internal Transformation and Emotional Regulation	Found that adjusting to life outside was challenging but manageable. [Participant 2, 6]
	Developed the ability to carry oneself with composure and self-awareness. [Participant 2, 4]
	Learned to distance oneself from negative influences and wrong decisions. [Participant 2, 4]
	Recognized meaningful personal change in behavior and temperament. [Participant 2, 4]
	Self-control and awareness were identified as the most significant lessons carried after release. [Participant 4, 7]
Reintegration and Family Dynamics	Expressed happiness upon reuniting with family after release. [Participant 5, 7]
	Resumed regular family activities such as eating together and attending church. [Participant 2]
	Experienced grief and sadness due to the loss of a loved one upon release. [Participant 1]
	Assumed responsibility for supporting family members. [Participant 1, 6]
	Described the family unit as stable and supportive despite challenges. [Participant 6]
	Divided efforts to balance responsibilities toward multiple family members. [Participant 6]
Reclaiming Identity and Social Reputation	Experienced shame and reluctance to be seen in the community after release. [Participant 6]
	Gradually overcame fear and stepped out into the barangay without apprehension. [Participant 7]
	Successfully restored reputation and standing in the community. [Participant 7]
	Still navigated discomfort in social situations with former peers. [Participant 6]
	Identified facing people as the biggest social challenge after release. [Participant 6]
	Noted that others did not understand the circumstances behind their past. [Participant 7]
	Described family conflict and social chaos as part of the reintegration reality. [Participant 6]
Resilience through Labor and Education	Engaged in farming and agricultural work to contribute to the family. [Participant 1]
	Pursued education while simultaneously managing farm responsibilities. [Participant 1]
	Experienced forced delays in plans due to external circumstances such as the pandemic. [Participant 1]

	Made deliberate efforts to build a stable and productive life after release. [Participant 6]
	Expressed contentment and satisfaction with current work progress. [Participant 1]
	Acknowledged the presence of many struggles in the path toward stability. [Participant 1, 3]

Table 2 presents six essential themes that emerged from the narratives of the rehabilitated CICL, collectively illustrating the complex and layered reality of life after the rehabilitation program. These themes The Paradox of Freedom, Slow-Paced Mindset, Internal Transformation and Emotional Regulation, Reintegration and Family Dynamics, Reclaiming Identity and Social Reputation, and Resilience through Labor and Education demonstrate that reintegration is not a single event but an ongoing, multidimensional process that unfolds across every domain of a young person's life.

The Paradox of Freedom

The theme “The Paradox of Freedom” describes the complex transition experienced by rehabilitated Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) when they leave the structured environment of residential care and return to community life. The participants' experiences suggest that freedom was both an anticipated reward and a new responsibility because leaving the facility meant gaining greater independence while simultaneously losing the structure, supervision, and predictable routines that had guided their rehabilitation (Cameron-Mathiassen, 2024). Their release was associated with relief, gratitude, and a sense of accomplishment because completing rehabilitation represented an important personal milestone after a difficult period in their lives (Kor, 2021). At the same time, freedom introduced uncertainty because participants were required to make decisions independently and manage situations that were previously regulated within the residential environment (Washington, 2023). From the researcher's analysis, this paradox indicates that freedom after rehabilitation should not be interpreted simply as the absence of institutional restrictions but as a developmental transition in which the individual must gradually learn to exercise autonomy while maintaining the behavioral changes developed during rehabilitation (Tepora, 2023).

The participants' sense of gratitude toward the rehabilitation process indicates that the residential facility was perceived not only as a place of restriction but also as an environment that provided guidance and opportunities for personal change (Priscilla Ennals et al., 2021). Their recognition of the lessons, values, and behavioral skills acquired during rehabilitation suggests that the experience had become part of how they understood their readiness to return to society (Cameron-Mathiassen, 2024). This perception is significant because it demonstrates that institutional intervention can acquire meaning beyond compliance when young people recognize its contribution to their personal development (Kor, 2021). From the researcher's perspective, the participants' appreciation of rehabilitation reflects a shift in self-understanding from being individuals defined primarily by their involvement with the law toward individuals who recognize themselves as capable of making different choices (Abdallah, 2021). This emerging sense of personal responsibility represents an important aspect of rehabilitation because sustainable behavioral change requires the individual to internalize values and decision-making skills rather than depend permanently on external supervision (Aazami, 2023).

However, the participants' experiences also reveal that the freedom associated with release exposed them to situations that were not completely controlled by the residential facility (Aazami, 2023). Outside the institution, individuals encounter peers, environments, relationships, and circumstances that may either reinforce or challenge the behavioral changes developed during rehabilitation (Tepora, 2023). The possibility of temptation therefore becomes an important part of the meaning of freedom because autonomy allows individuals to choose their actions, but it also places greater responsibility on them to resist influences that may lead them toward previous patterns of behavior (Narvey, 2021). From the researcher's analysis, this suggests that successful rehabilitation cannot be measured only by whether a child completes the residential program because the more difficult test may occur after release, when institutional supervision is reduced and personal decision-making becomes more prominent (Harris, 2023). Freedom therefore functions as both an outcome of

rehabilitation and a continuing test of whether the lessons, coping strategies, relationships, and values developed during residential care can be applied in real-life circumstances (Tepora, 2023).

The uncertainty associated with freedom also highlights the importance of social support after discharge (Holt-Lunstad, 2021). Returning to the community may require rehabilitated CICL to rebuild relationships, regain trust, pursue education or employment, and establish a socially acceptable identity after being associated with the justice system (Harris, 2023). Supportive family relationships and positive social connections can provide encouragement and stability as young people navigate this transition, particularly when they encounter difficulties or uncertainty (Donato, 2025). Conversely, returning to environments associated with previous risks may make it more difficult to sustain behavioral changes when adequate support is absent (Kroese, 2021). The researcher therefore interprets the participants' experiences as demonstrating that freedom is relational rather than purely individual because the ability to use freedom constructively is influenced by the social environment in which the rehabilitated young person must live (Holt-Lunstad, 2021).

Ultimately, **"The Paradox of Freedom"** reveals that release from residential care represents both an achievement and a challenge for rehabilitated CICL (Washington, 2023). The participants' gratitude demonstrates that rehabilitation can provide children with knowledge, values, skills, and experiences that contribute to their readiness for community life (Priscilla Ennals et al., 2021). Yet their confrontation with temptation and uncertainty demonstrates that the transition to freedom requires continuing support rather than an abrupt conclusion to rehabilitation (Tepora, 2023). From the researcher's analysis, the central meaning of this theme is that genuine freedom is not simply the ability to leave the facility but the capacity to make responsible choices despite the absence of institutional control (Aazami, 2023). This interpretation has important implications for social work because post-release interventions should strengthen decision-making, relapse prevention, family and community support, education or employment opportunities, and continued monitoring appropriate to the individual's needs (Donato, 2025). Thus, the participants' lived experiences suggest that rehabilitation achieves greater meaning when freedom is accompanied by the resources, relationships, and personal capacities necessary for former CICL to transform independence into responsible participation in community life (Maskay, 2025).

One participant shared,

"Nalipay ko nga nakagawas ko kay at least nakatuon ko sa sulod, nakatuon ko unsa gyud ang tama ug mali. Kay naa gyud sa mga barkada nga dili maayo. Kana." [Participant 1]

I was happy that I got out because at least I was able to learn inside the center what is really right and wrong. Because there are bad influences among friends. That's it. [Participant 1]

While another affirmed,

"Okay ra ko ate, nagapasalamat gyud ko nga naabot ko sa center bitaw kay kung wala siguro ko nasulod didto, siguro wala ko kabalo asa ko karon." [Participant 1]

I'm okay actually I'm really thankful that I went through the center because if I hadn't, I honestly don't know where I'd be now. [Participant 1]

This theme is supported by the Social Control Theory of Travis Hirschi, which suggests that strong bonds to prosocial institutions such as rehabilitation facilities, family, and community reduce the likelihood of delinquent behavior. When these bonds are cultivated and internalized, they serve as internal governors that guide behavior even in the absence of direct supervision (Nickerson, 2023). The participants' accounts clearly reflect how their time at Bahay Pag-asa Davao del Norte functioned as a social anchor, instilling values and self-awareness that continued to regulate their conduct upon release. Furthermore, Manuel (2019) found that rehabilitated CICL who demonstrated internalized value change showed greater capacity to resist negative peer influence and make prosocial decisions in their daily lives.

Slow-Paced Mindset

The theme “Slow-Paced Mindset” reflects the participants’ gradual and deliberate approach to rebuilding their lives after rehabilitation. Their experiences suggest that progress was not understood as an immediate transformation but as a continuous process in which small improvements were recognized as meaningful achievements. Rather than expecting their lives to change instantly after leaving the residential facility, the participants appeared to develop an acceptance that rebuilding trust, pursuing personal goals, and establishing stability would take time. This perspective allowed them to view their current circumstances as part of a longer journey rather than as evidence that rehabilitation had failed. From the researcher’s analysis, the slow pace described by the participants should not be interpreted as passivity or lack of ambition, but as a form of realistic adjustment in which they learned to manage expectations while continuing to move toward their desired future.

The participants’ acknowledgment of setbacks further illustrates the maturity reflected in this mindset. Difficulties were not necessarily interpreted as reasons to abandon their goals, but as experiences that had to be accepted and worked through. Their willingness to continue despite disappointments suggests that rehabilitation may have contributed to a different way of responding to difficulties, particularly when compared with impulsive reactions that may have characterized earlier experiences. The important point is not that the participants no longer experienced frustration, but that frustration did not completely determine their decisions or direction. The researcher interprets this as an emerging capacity for patience and self-regulation, where participants learned that encountering obstacles does not automatically mean that they are returning to their previous way of life.

Social judgment appeared to make this process more difficult because returning to the community did not necessarily mean that the participants were immediately accepted without reservations. Being previously identified as CICL could influence how other people perceived them, creating feelings of discouragement and uncertainty as they attempted to establish themselves again. Such experiences can make progress feel slower because the participants were not only working toward personal goals but were also attempting to overcome perceptions associated with their past. The researcher views this as an important dimension of the theme because the participants’ slow-paced mindset appears to have developed partly as a response to the reality that personal transformation and social acceptance do not occur at the same speed. They could change their behavior and intentions, but they could not immediately control how other people viewed them.

The participants’ continued movement forward despite these difficulties reveals that their understanding of success had become more process-oriented. Success was not necessarily defined by achieving a major goal quickly, but by continuing to make constructive choices even when circumstances were discouraging. A small opportunity, a positive decision, an improved relationship, or another step toward stability could therefore carry significant meaning because it represented movement away from their previous circumstances. The researcher interprets this gradual orientation as an important sign of resilience because the participants demonstrated an ability to maintain direction even when their desired outcomes were not immediately visible. Their experiences suggest that rehabilitation may be meaningful not only when it produces visible behavioral change but also when it helps individuals develop the patience to sustain positive change over time.

Ultimately, “Slow-Paced Mindset” reveals that rebuilding one’s life after rehabilitation is not a race toward immediate success but a gradual process of adjustment, persistence, and personal development. The participants’ willingness to acknowledge setbacks while continuing to move forward demonstrates that progress can coexist with difficulty, uncertainty, and discouragement. Their experiences challenge the expectation that successful rehabilitation should result in an immediate and completely transformed life after discharge. Instead, the participants demonstrate that meaningful change may occur through ordinary and incremental decisions that gradually establish a different pattern of living. From the researcher’s perspective, this theme emphasizes the importance of allowing rehabilitated CICL sufficient time, encouragement, and appropriate support to develop stability without measuring their progress solely through immediate outcomes. The slow pace of their journey does not represent failure; rather, it reflects their developing ability to move forward deliberately while carrying the lessons of their past into the construction of their future.

One participant recalled,

"Lipay man ko unsa'y naabot nako ron, bisan nga layo pa sa akong pangarap at least ga proceeding ba nga misaka pa." [Participant 1]

I'm happy with where I've gotten so far, and there's still a long way ahead, but at least things are moving forward and going up. [Participant 1]

While another reflected,

"Nagpadayon ko'g eskwela, pero nadismaya ko gamay maong miundang na sad ko, kay lahi ilang side, dili ko nila masabtan bisag gipakita nako kung unsa jud ko. ." [Participant 7]

I continued school, but I got a bit discouraged and stopped for a while because of people they just don't understand where you're coming from when you try to show them who you are now. [Participant 7]

This theme aligns with findings by Deakin et al. (2020), who observed that young people labeled as 'risky' often develop internalized resistance strategies to counter stigma, transforming the experience of being labeled into a personal motivation for growth. The slow-paced mindset exhibited by the participants represents a form of this resilience—a quiet but steadfast refusal to allow external judgment to permanently define their trajectory. Additionally, Luna (2022) emphasized that the sustained behavioral change required for successful reintegration demands a gradual, supported process rather than immediate and complete transformation.

Internal Transformation and Emotional Regulation

The theme "Internal Transformation and Emotional Regulation" captures one of the most significant changes described by the participants following their rehabilitation. Their narratives indicate a shift from immediate and reactive responses toward greater awareness, restraint, and deliberate decision-making. Before rehabilitation, some participants understood themselves as individuals who were easily angered, acted without fully considering the consequences of their actions, or responded to difficult situations through impulsive behavior. After completing the rehabilitation process, however, they described becoming more capable of pausing, assessing a situation, and deciding how to respond rather than simply acting according to their immediate emotions. This change represents more than a modification in outward behavior because it suggests a developing awareness of the relationship between emotions, thoughts, decisions, and consequences. From the researcher's perspective, the participants were not merely learning to "behave properly" because they were also developing an internal capacity to regulate themselves even when external supervision was no longer present.

A particularly important aspect of this transformation was the participants' increased ability to recognize their own emotional states before those emotions resulted in harmful actions. Their experiences suggest that emotional regulation gradually became a form of self-monitoring in which they became more conscious of anger, frustration, irritation, or other emotions that could previously lead to impulsive behavior. The ability to recognize these emotions created a space between feeling and acting, allowing participants to consider alternative responses. This distinction is significant because rehabilitation becomes more meaningful when behavioral control is no longer dependent entirely on rules, supervision, or fear of punishment. The participants' narratives suggest that some of the lessons practiced within the facility had gradually become part of their personal decision-making process. The researcher interprets this development as an important indicator of internalized change because the participants were beginning to regulate themselves based on their own understanding rather than relying solely on external authority.

The participants also described learning to distance themselves from negative influences, which demonstrates that emotional regulation extended beyond managing emotions in isolation. Their transformation involved becoming more selective about the people, situations, and environments they allowed to influence their behavior. This suggests that the participants had developed a greater awareness of the circumstances that could place them at risk of returning to previous behaviors. Distancing themselves from negative influences can therefore be understood as a form of preventive self-regulation because it involves recognizing potentially

harmful situations before they escalate into behavioral problems. From the researcher's analysis, this is particularly important because life after rehabilitation provides individuals with greater freedom and exposure to choices that cannot always be controlled by the residential facility. The ability to identify and avoid situations that may compromise their progress demonstrates that the participants were beginning to apply rehabilitation lessons independently in their everyday lives.

The transformation described by the participants was not presented as an instant change but as a gradual process that developed through repeated experiences, reflection, and practice. Their accounts suggest that the rehabilitation process gave them opportunities to encounter rules, guidance, consequences, and situations that encouraged them to reconsider how they responded to problems. Over time, these experiences appear to have contributed to the development of a different understanding of themselves and their behavior. The significance of this gradual transformation lies in the fact that the participants did not simply describe themselves as people who had stopped committing problematic acts; they described themselves as people who had learned to think differently before acting. The researcher therefore views this change as an internal reconstruction of identity, where participants began moving away from an understanding of themselves as reactive individuals toward an identity characterized by greater control, reflection, and responsibility.

Ultimately, "Internal Transformation and Emotional Regulation" demonstrates that one of the deepest outcomes of rehabilitation was the participants' changing relationship with themselves. The most meaningful change was not simply that they behaved differently in the presence of others, but that they developed greater awareness of their emotions, choices, influences, and potential consequences even when no one was supervising them. Their ability to pause, reflect, exercise restraint, and distance themselves from negative influences suggests that rehabilitation had gradually moved from an external system of rules into an internal process of self-management. From the researcher's perspective, this internalization represents an important marker of meaningful rehabilitation because sustainable change requires the individual to carry the lessons of the residential facility into situations where institutional guidance is no longer immediately available. The participants' experiences therefore suggest that successful rehabilitation is not merely about correcting past behavior but about developing a new way of responding to emotions, relationships, challenges, and personal choices. One participant shared,

"Wala ko ka kuwan ba nga mausab akoang kaugalingon didto ha. Kay dali jud mu init akong ulo nila. Pag gawas nako kabalo na ko mo-control. Nya, dili na pud dali mainit ang ulo." [Participant 2]

I wasn't able to change myself back there. Because I had a really hot temper. When I got out, I already knew how to control myself. And it's not that easy to get angry anymore. [Participant 2]

Another similarly affirmed,

"Ang leksyon nga gidala-dala jud nako kuan te nga self-control og self-awareness. Mao man jud naingon nga butang sa akong kuan nga sa kinahanglan na sa dili kaya nga situation." [Participant 7]

The lessons I really carried with me were self-control and self-awareness. Those are the things I realized I needed especially in situations that feel out of control. [Participant 7]

This theme is consistent with the Labeling Theory, which posits that identity transformation is possible when individuals are provided with alternative, prosocial labels and environments that support a new self-concept (Saxby, 2021). The rehabilitation facility functioned as such an environment replacing the label of 'offender' with that of a capable, self-regulating individual. Moreover, Ingle (2021) highlights that behavioral change in youth is not solely determined by inherent traits but is shaped significantly by the environments in which they are placed. The Bahay Pag-asa program, by fostering emotional regulation skills, directly contributed to the participants' capacity for sustained behavioral change.

Reintegration and Family Dynamics

The theme "Reintegration and Family Dynamics" highlights the family as one of the most influential environments in the participants' lives after rehabilitation. For many participants, returning home represented

more than simply leaving the residential facility because it meant reconnecting with people who had remained connected to their lives throughout their rehabilitation journey. The return was accompanied by feelings of relief, happiness, and emotional significance, particularly when participants perceived that they were once again accepted as members of their families. At the same time, returning home also meant that participants had to assume responsibilities that may have been temporarily interrupted by their placement in residential care. From the researcher's perspective, this shows that reintegration is not simply a physical movement from the facility back to the household but a process of rebuilding one's place within the family and demonstrating through everyday actions that personal change can be sustained.

The participants' accounts also suggest that family became an important source of motivation for maintaining the changes they had developed during rehabilitation. Their desire to make their families proud, avoid causing additional pain, and build a more stable future appeared to influence their determination to continue making positive choices. In this sense, family functioned not only as a source of emotional support but also as a reason for the participants to protect the progress they had achieved. The researcher interprets this motivation as particularly meaningful because it demonstrates that rehabilitation was connected to relationships that extended beyond the individual participant. Their desire to change was partly connected to how they understood their responsibilities toward people who mattered to them. Thus, family became part of the participants' emerging sense of accountability, where personal improvement was understood as something that could also benefit those around them.

However, the experience of returning to the family was not uniformly positive or uncomplicated. Some participants encountered circumstances that had changed while they were away, including the loss of family members, changes in household arrangements, altered relationships, or unresolved interpersonal conflicts. These circumstances demonstrate that rehabilitation does not occur in isolation from the continuing experiences of family members. While the participant was undergoing rehabilitation and personal transformation, the family was also experiencing its own changes, difficulties, and emotional processes. Consequently, returning home did not necessarily mean returning to the same family environment that existed before residential placement. The researcher views this as an important dimension of reintegration because participants had to adjust not only to life outside the facility but also to a family that may have changed during their absence.

Interpersonal conflict further complicated the participants' attempts to reintegrate. The transition back into family life could bring expectations regarding behavior, responsibilities, trust, and accountability, particularly when previous experiences had affected relationships between the participant and family members. The participants therefore had to demonstrate that their changes were genuine while simultaneously dealing with the possibility that family members might remain cautious or uncertain about them. From the researcher's analysis, this creates a reciprocal process of adjustment: the rehabilitated participant must adapt to family expectations, while family members may also need time to recognize and accept the participant's transformation. Reconciliation and rebuilding trust cannot necessarily be achieved through a single conversation or an immediate return to normal family relationships because trust is often reconstructed through consistent behavior over time.

The family dynamics described by the participants therefore reveal that reintegration is both an emotional and relational process. Returning home can provide a strong foundation for recovery and personal growth, but it can also expose participants to unresolved relationships, changed family circumstances, and responsibilities that require continued adjustment. The researcher interprets the participants' experiences as demonstrating that successful reintegration should not be measured simply by whether a former CICL has returned to the family home. A more meaningful measure involves whether the participant is able to establish a constructive role within the family, rebuild relationships, manage conflicts, fulfill responsibilities, and experience a sense of belonging. This understanding emphasizes that family should remain part of the rehabilitation process even after formal residential intervention has ended. For the participants in this study, family was simultaneously a **place of return, a source of motivation, a responsibility, and sometimes a source of difficulty**, making family dynamics an essential part of understanding their journey from rehabilitation toward sustained reintegration.

One participant expressed the joy of reunion, sharing,

"Malipayon kay nagawas nako, makauban pamilya. Ug kuan, nangandam nami para sa bag-ong kinabuhi." [Participant 5]

Happy, because I was able to get out and be with my family again. And, you know, we were also preparing for a new life. [Participant 5]

While another shared the pain that accompanied their release,

"Sad gyud ko ato kay katong dayon gawas nako ate wala gyud ko'y mama ato. Mao'y pagkuha ni kuya sa ako kay nagsakit man akong mama ato." [Participant 1]

I was sad when I got out right when I left, I had no mama. That was what hit me hard because my mama had gotten sick at that time. [Participant 1]

These experiences reflect the core propositions of Hirschi's Social Control Theory, which identifies the family bond as a primary protective factor against delinquency and a foundational support structure for reintegration (Nickerson, 2023). The quality and stability of family relationships significantly shaped the participants' adjustment, with stronger family connections correlating with greater emotional stability and forward momentum. Abot (2018) further emphasizes that successful reintegration programs must account for the family environment, as the home setting is the primary arena in which the rehabilitated youth must apply newly developed values and behaviors.

Reclaiming Identity and Social Reputation

The theme "Reclaiming Identity and Social Reputation" reflects the participants' struggle to redefine themselves after rehabilitation while living in communities where their past involvement with the law was already known. Their return to society was therefore not simply a physical transition from the residential facility to the community but also a social process of confronting how other people remembered and perceived them. Several participants described feelings of shame, hesitation, and discomfort when encountering former classmates, neighbors, and other community members who knew about their past. This suggests that rehabilitation changed the participants internally, but the way others perceived them did not necessarily change at the same pace. From the researcher's perspective, this created a significant tension between who the participants believed they had become and who they feared others still believed them to be.

The feelings of shame described by the participants appear to have influenced their willingness to participate in ordinary social activities. Avoiding former classmates, neighbors, or community members can be understood as a protective response because distancing themselves temporarily reduced the possibility of judgment, questioning, rejection, or embarrassment. However, avoidance also created a barrier to full reintegration because rebuilding a sense of belonging requires opportunities to interact with other people. The researcher interprets this behavior as evidence that social stigma can continue affecting an individual even after the formal rehabilitation process has been completed. In other words, the participants had already completed one form of rehabilitation within the residential setting, yet they still had to undergo another form of adjustment in the community, where they had to confront the social meaning attached to their past.

An important aspect of the participants' experiences was the distinction between personal rehabilitation and social rehabilitation. Internally, participants could recognize that they had changed, learned from their experiences, and developed greater control over their behavior. Socially, however, they could not immediately control whether other people accepted that change. This created a situation in which the participants had to demonstrate their transformation through continued behavior rather than through words alone. From the researcher's analysis, this explains why reclaiming identity was a gradual process. A rehabilitated CICL cannot simply declare that they are a different person because acceptance from others may require repeated evidence of responsible behavior, constructive relationships, and consistent participation in community life. Their new identity therefore had to be built through everyday experiences after release.

The movement from avoidance toward engagement represents a particularly meaningful aspect of the participants' transformation. Their gradual willingness to interact with other people suggests that confidence began to replace some of the shame that initially characterized their return to the community. This does not necessarily mean that the participants completely stopped caring about how others viewed them. Rather, they appeared to develop a greater capacity to continue living their lives despite the possibility of being judged. The researcher interprets this development as a form of personal empowerment because the participants gradually shifted from allowing their past to determine their social behavior toward making conscious decisions about how they wanted to participate in their communities. Their growing confidence therefore represents more than improved social interaction; it reflects a developing ability to separate their present identity from the actions that previously defined them.

Ultimately, "Reclaiming Identity and Social Reputation" reveals that rehabilitation does not end when a participant leaves the residential facility. For the participants, another important stage began when they returned to communities that already possessed an understanding, and sometimes a judgment, of their past. Their journey involved reconstructing not only their behavior but also their sense of dignity, belonging, and identity. The researcher views the gradual movement from shame and avoidance toward cautious confidence and engagement as evidence that identity reconstruction takes place through sustained interaction and lived experience. Their experiences demonstrate that former CICL need opportunities to be recognized for who they are becoming rather than being permanently defined by what they previously did. Consequently, meaningful reintegration requires communities, families, and social workers to create conditions where rehabilitated CICL can demonstrate positive change, rebuild relationships, participate without humiliation, and gradually establish a social identity that is no longer dominated by their past involvement with the law.

One participant described this journey,

"Maulaw bitaw ko. Nga nagatago-tago gyud ko nga maulaw ko. Pero madugay kay nagasugod naman ko kanang nanay feeling nga mo-uban sa laag balik." [Participant 6]

I was ashamed. I was hiding because I was ashamed. But over time, I kind of got used to it and started wanting to go out and hang around again. [Participant 6]

While another shared a more affirming outcome,

"Siguro ang kuan ng mabalik imong moralidad sa community. Naging kumpleto ko sa sarili bitaw nga mag gawas sa among Barangay na wala koy kahadlok tungod kay ako man giatubang ilang pasangil sa akua." [Participant 7]

Maybe just being able to get your reputation back in the community. I felt complete in myself I was able to go out in our barangay without fear, because I had already faced the accusations against me. [Participant 7]

This theme is deeply connected to the Labeling Theory, which argues that a deviant label once applied can become a persistent social identity that limits an individual's opportunities for reintegration (Saxby, 2021). The participants' experiences confirm that the stigma attached to being a former CICL does not dissolve upon release but must be actively resisted and overcome through consistent prosocial behavior and community engagement. Deakin et al. (2020) similarly found that stigmatized youth who resisted negative labels and pursued visible, constructive activities gradually altered the perceptions of those around them, eventually reclaiming a more positive social identity.

Resilience through Labor and Education

The theme "Resilience through Labor and Education" reflects the participants' efforts to rebuild their lives through productive activities after completing rehabilitation. Their experiences show that returning to the community did not automatically provide them with stable opportunities, yet they continued to look for ways

to work, study, contribute to their families, and establish a more secure future. Whether through managing family farms, pursuing education, or accepting available work, the participants demonstrated a willingness to remain productive despite limitations and uncertainty. From the researcher's perspective, these activities represented more than ways of earning income or obtaining qualifications because they provided the participants with tangible ways of demonstrating that they were capable of taking responsibility for their lives.

Work appeared to give participants a renewed sense of usefulness and responsibility. Engaging in farming, odd jobs, or other forms of livelihood allowed them to contribute to household needs and experience themselves as productive members of their families and communities. This is significant because the participants were attempting to reconstruct their lives after having experienced a period in which their freedom and ordinary responsibilities had been interrupted. Through work, they were able to establish routines, occupy their time constructively, and pursue goals that were connected to their families and personal aspirations. The researcher interprets this as a practical expression of rehabilitation because the changes developed within the residential facility were being translated into everyday responsibilities outside the institution. Productivity therefore became part of how the participants demonstrated their readiness to live independently and responsibly.

Education carried an even deeper meaning for some participants because it represented an opportunity to pursue a future that was different from the circumstances associated with their past. Returning to school or continuing one's education required commitment, patience, and the willingness to overcome possible embarrassment, financial limitations, academic difficulties, or interruptions in schooling. For participants who had previously experienced involvement with the law, educational participation could also represent a personal declaration that their future remained open despite their past. The researcher sees education in this context as more than an academic pursuit because it became a means through which participants could reconstruct their self-image and develop confidence in their own potential. Their educational aspirations suggest that they were beginning to view themselves not through the limitations of their previous circumstances but through the possibilities available to them moving forward.

The pursuit of work and education also appears to have helped participants establish a new identity within their communities. Being engaged in school or productive work provided visible evidence that they were doing something constructive with their lives. This is particularly meaningful in light of their earlier experiences of stigma and social judgment. When participants became workers, students, or contributors to their households, these roles provided alternative identities that could gradually become more prominent than their previous identity as CICL. From the researcher's analysis, this demonstrates the connection between economic or educational participation and social reintegration. The participants were not simply trying to become productive for personal benefit; they were also creating opportunities to be recognized by others according to what they were currently doing rather than solely according to what they had done in the past.

Nevertheless, the participants' resilience should not be interpreted as evidence that their transition was easy. Their willingness to work or study occurred despite obstacles, and their determination itself reveals the effort required to move forward after rehabilitation. Some may have had to accept opportunities that were less than ideal, adjust to financial limitations, or continue their education under circumstances that required additional sacrifice. What becomes significant, therefore, is not the absence of difficulty but their decision to continue pursuing meaningful activities despite those difficulties. The researcher interprets this persistence as a form of resilience grounded in action: the participants demonstrated resilience not simply by enduring challenging circumstances but by actively seeking ways to improve their situation.

Ultimately, "Resilience through Labor and Education" demonstrates that the participants' rebuilding process was closely connected to their ability to create meaningful roles for themselves after rehabilitation. Work provided opportunities for responsibility, contribution, and independence, while education offered possibilities for personal development, achievement, and future mobility. Both became pathways through which participants could demonstrate to themselves and to their communities that their past involvement with the law did not determine the limits of their future. From the researcher's perspective, these experiences emphasize that successful rehabilitation should include opportunities for education, vocational development, livelihood, and meaningful community participation. Rehabilitation becomes more sustainable when former CICL are not only taught how to change their behavior but are also given realistic opportunities to do something meaningful

with that change. Their stories show that resilience is strengthened when individuals are given opportunities to work toward a future in which they can contribute, achieve, and be recognized for who they are becoming rather than permanently defined by who they once were.

One participant shared,

"Nag eskwela pud ko ato ate. Plano nako humanon nako na ron kay third year naman ko. BS Criminology ug nagtrabaho pud ko. Pero sa balay kay sabay-sabay pud ko sa akong papa nga gatabang sa bukid." [Participant 1]

I went to school after that. I'm planning to finish it now because I'm already in my third year. BS Criminology, and I'm working at the same time. But also at home helping out my papa with the farm. [Participant 1]

Another affirmed the importance of persistent effort,

"Ako naningkamot ko sa akoang sarili pud. Dili na sa akong kaugalingon ang paningkamot ron. Gitungaa na ko, para sad sa amoa tanan." [Participant 6]

I'm really trying now and working hard, trying to build something for myself. My efforts now aren't just for me anymore. I've divided my efforts to make sure everyone's taken care of. [Participant 6]

This theme reflects the principles embedded in Republic Act No. 9344, which mandates that rehabilitation programs must include education and skills development components to support the successful reintegration of CICL into productive society (Abot, 2018). Furthermore, Manuel (2019) found that rehabilitated youth who engaged in structured activities particularly education and livelihood demonstrated significantly lower rates of recidivism and higher levels of psychosocial well-being. The participants' commitment to labor and learning thus represents both the practical and symbolic dimensions of resilience: building a future while simultaneously rejecting the limitations of the past.

Navigation and Coping Mechanisms with the Challenges of the Rehabilitated CICL

Rehabilitated CICL encountered various challenges during their reintegration into the community. As shown in Table 3, the coping mechanisms employed by the participants to navigate these challenges are the following: (1) Internalized Moral Shielding, (2) Stoic Endurance and Emotional Regulation, (3) Anchors of Motivation and Responsibility, and (4) Multi-Layered Support Systems.

Table 3 *Navigation and Coping Mechanisms with the Challenges of the Rehabilitated CICL*

Essential Theme	Core Ideas
Internalized Moral Shielding	Drew upon an inner moral foundation to resist temptation and survive challenges. [Participant 1, 4, 7]
	Prioritized the well-being of family as the primary motivating force for staying on the right path. [Participant 1, 6]
Stoic Endurance and Emotional Regulation	Gradually adapted to hardships over time through patience and persistence. [Participant 6]
	Maintained emotional wholeness by refusing to return to past negative behaviors. [Participant 1]
	Resisted the pull of old habits and social circles upon release. [Participant 1, 2]
	Slowly overcame social discomfort by re-engaging with the community at one's own pace. [Participant 6]
Anchors of Motivation and Responsibility	Pursued schooling immediately after release as a concrete step toward the future. [Participant 1, 3, 7]
	Acknowledged the presence of temptations but consciously chose not to act on

	them. [Participant 1, 4]
	Engaged in recreational activities such as basketball, music, and socializing as healthy outlets. [Participant 3]
Multi-Layered Support Systems	Internalized the sacrifices made by support figures as a personal obligation to do right. [Participant 2]
	Maintained friendships with prosocial peers who reinforced the path toward good conduct. [Participant 1]
	Relied on family reminders and moral guidance as a consistent behavioral check. [Participant 4]
	Received scholarship support from the government as a practical form of assistance. [Participant 1]
	Benefited from institutional guidance and support within the school setting. [Participant 3, 7]

Table 3 presents four essential themes that describe how rehabilitated CICL navigated and managed the challenges they encountered upon reintegration. These themes Internalized Moral Shielding, Stoic Endurance and Emotional Regulation, Anchors of Motivation and Responsibility, and Multi-Layered Support Systems collectively illustrate that effective coping among these young individuals was not a product of a single strategy but rather a convergence of internal resolve, purposeful action, and external support.

Internalized Moral Shielding

The theme “Internalized Moral Shielding” reflects the development of an internal system of values that helped participants regulate their behavior after leaving residential rehabilitation. Unlike external controls that depend on rules, supervision, or the presence of authority figures, the participants described a growing ability to make decisions based on principles they had personally accepted. Their experiences suggest that the lessons encountered during rehabilitation gradually became part of how they evaluated situations, considered consequences, and determined what actions were appropriate. From the researcher’s perspective, this represents an important transition in rehabilitation because the participants were no longer dependent solely on the structure of the facility to guide their behavior. Instead, they were beginning to carry the principles learned during rehabilitation into environments where they had greater freedom and where external supervision was considerably reduced.

The participants’ ability to resist temptation demonstrates that behavioral change had developed into a form of internal decision-making. Temptations and negative influences did not necessarily disappear after release, but the participants appeared to approach these situations differently. Rather than automatically responding to external pressure, they described becoming more conscious of the possible consequences of their choices and more deliberate about deciding whether to participate. This distinction is important because it suggests that rehabilitation was not simply about removing participants from harmful environments for a period of time. Its deeper value was found in helping them develop the capacity to respond differently when they eventually encountered similar pressures outside the facility. The researcher interprets this as a movement from **external discipline to internal discipline**, where responsible behavior increasingly came from personal conviction rather than fear of punishment.

Family emerged as a particularly powerful component of this internal moral shield. Participants appeared to connect their decisions with the potential impact those decisions could have on their parents, siblings, children, or other significant family members. Their desire to avoid disappointing or hurting their families provided an emotionally meaningful reason to reject behaviors that could jeopardize their progress. This is significant because moral values become more powerful when they are connected to relationships and experiences that hold personal meaning. From the researcher’s analysis, family functioned not simply as a support system but as an internal reference point that participants could draw upon when making difficult decisions. Thinking about their family appeared to transform abstract lessons about right and wrong into concrete considerations about responsibility, trust, and the kind of person they wanted to become.

The internalization of these values also suggests that the participants had begun developing a new understanding of themselves. During their time in rehabilitation, they may have initially followed rules because those rules were imposed by the institution, but their post-release experiences indicate that some of these principles had gradually become personally meaningful. This distinction is important because compliance and internalization are not the same. Compliance occurs when a person follows expectations because an authority figure is present, whereas internalization occurs when the person continues to follow those principles even when external monitoring is absent. The researcher interprets the participants' experiences as evidence of this gradual movement toward internalization because they described using their own judgment to distance themselves from negative influences and make choices consistent with the person they wanted to become.

The concept of a "moral shield" therefore represents more than simply having good values. It describes the participants' developing capacity to use those values as a protective mechanism when confronted with situations that could threaten their progress. Their moral convictions provided a psychological and emotional barrier between external pressure and personal action. However, the researcher also recognizes that such shielding should not be understood as permanent or invulnerable. Participants continue to encounter challenges, and the strength of their internal values may be tested by difficult circumstances, peer influence, family problems, financial pressures, or other forms of adversity. For this reason, the internal moral shield should be viewed as something that requires continuous reinforcement rather than as an outcome that is permanently completed at the end of rehabilitation.

Ultimately, "Internalized Moral Shielding" reveals one of the deepest dimensions of the participants' post-rehabilitation experiences: they were gradually learning to protect their own progress from within. The residential facility provided structure, guidance, and behavioral expectations, but the participants' continued development depended on whether those lessons could eventually function without constant institutional supervision. Their reliance on family values, personal convictions, reflection, and awareness of consequences suggests that rehabilitation had contributed to the development of an internal source of behavioral control. From the researcher's perspective, this is a significant indication of sustainable change because the participants were not merely avoiding negative behavior while under supervision; they were developing personal reasons for choosing differently when faced with temptation. The theme therefore demonstrates that the most enduring form of rehabilitation may occur when external rules become internal values, and when those values provide former CICL with the personal strength to protect the future they are trying to build.

One participant affirmed,

"At least naa sa akong pud didto nga at least naka survive ko. Ate at least naka buo gyud akong kasing-kasing ba nga kana nga butang dili gyud ko ana nga dili nako maibalik kana nga past." [Participant 1]

At least there was something in me that helped me survive. At least I was able to keep my heart whole that I was not going back to that past anymore. [Participant 1]

Another shared,

"Pamilya jud te. Pamilya gyud gihapon. Ang pamilya man gyud te kay okay mis akong pamilya. Nagatabang sad sila sa ako te." [Participant 6]

It's always family. Family really. My family and I are okay they are the ones helping me. [Participant 6]

This theme is strongly supported by Hirschi's Social Control Theory, which posits that an individual's attachment to significant others particularly family serves as a primary bond that inhibits deviant behavior. When this bond is strong and emotionally meaningful, it becomes an internal deterrent against actions that could jeopardize those relationships (Nickerson, 2023). Furthermore, Levesque et al. (2020) found that youth who internalized prosocial values during structured intervention programs demonstrated greater resistance to peer pressure and negative environmental influences, even in high-risk post-release settings.

Stoic Endurance and Emotional Regulation

The theme “Stoic Endurance and Emotional Regulation” captures the quiet strength demonstrated by the participants as they navigated difficulties after rehabilitation. Their resilience was not always expressed through dramatic actions or visible displays of struggle but through their ability to remain composed while dealing with situations that could have easily triggered anger, frustration, or discouragement. Participants encountered social rejection, family tensions, uncertainty, and moments when progress did not happen as quickly as they hoped. Yet, rather than allowing these experiences to completely overwhelm them, they described learning to control their reactions and continue with their lives. From the researcher’s perspective, this form of endurance is significant because it demonstrates that resilience can occur silently, through the repeated decision to remain emotionally regulated even when circumstances are difficult.

The participants’ experiences suggest that emotional regulation became an important way of coping with situations that could not always be changed. Social rejection, for example, could not necessarily be resolved simply by explaining that they had already changed, because other people were entitled to their own perceptions and judgments. Similarly, family tensions could not always be immediately resolved, particularly when relationships had been affected by previous experiences. Instead of responding impulsively to these difficulties, participants appeared to develop the ability to tolerate discomfort while deciding how they would respond. The researcher interprets this as a shift from reacting to experiencing: rather than allowing difficult emotions to immediately determine their behavior, participants learned to acknowledge those emotions and continue functioning despite them.

This ability to endure was particularly meaningful when participants experienced slow progress. Rebuilding their lives after rehabilitation involved processes that could not be completed immediately, including restoring relationships, gaining acceptance, pursuing education or work, and establishing stability. The absence of immediate results could understandably produce frustration, especially when participants expected their efforts to lead to quick improvements. However, their willingness to continue despite delays demonstrates a developing capacity for patience. From the researcher’s analysis, this patience should not be mistaken for passive acceptance. The participants were still pursuing their goals, but they were learning to tolerate the distance between where they were and where they wanted to be. Their endurance therefore involved continuing to act constructively even when the desired outcome was not yet visible.

The connection between rehabilitation and emotional regulation is particularly evident in the participants’ descriptions of how they responded to difficult situations. The lessons and practices they encountered during rehabilitation appeared to give them a framework for understanding their emotions and controlling their responses. What may have previously resulted in immediate anger, confrontation, or impulsive action could now be approached with greater consideration. This suggests that emotional regulation had moved beyond something practiced within the residential facility and had become a practical coping resource in everyday life. The researcher views this as an important indicator of internalized rehabilitation because the participants were applying a learned skill in situations that occurred outside the controlled environment where that skill was initially developed.

At the same time, the researcher recognizes that stoic endurance should not be interpreted as the absence of emotional pain. The participants’ ability to remain composed does not mean that social rejection, family difficulties, disappointment, or uncertainty no longer affected them. Rather, their strength appeared in their ability to experience these emotions without allowing them to completely dictate their behavior. This distinction is important because genuine emotional regulation does not require a person to suppress every negative feeling. Instead, it involves recognizing difficult emotions while finding constructive ways to respond to them. The participants’ experiences therefore suggest that their rehabilitation helped them move toward a healthier relationship with emotional difficulty, where hardship could be experienced without automatically becoming a reason for destructive behavior.

Ultimately, “Stoic Endurance and Emotional Regulation” reveals that one of the participants’ most important strengths after rehabilitation was their capacity to remain steady while facing circumstances that could not always be controlled or immediately resolved. Their resilience was expressed through patience, restraint,

emotional awareness, and the willingness to continue moving forward despite frustration. From the researcher's perspective, this quiet endurance represents a meaningful form of transformation because it shows that rehabilitation had influenced not only what participants did but also how they responded internally to difficult experiences. Their ability to regulate emotions became a protective resource that supported their relationships, decision-making, and continued progress after release. Thus, the participants' stories demonstrate that resilience does not always appear as dramatic achievement; sometimes, it is found in the simple but difficult act of remaining composed, choosing not to return to destructive patterns, and continuing to move forward despite circumstances that remain challenging.

One participant reflected,

"Kadugayan naanad ra sad ko, gipatibay ra jud nako akua heart. Dili na jud ko mubalik sa una. Nagasugod na sad ko ug gawas balik ug laag. [Participant 6]

Over time, I kind of got used to it. I kept my heart whole. I won't go back to that past anymore. I started wanting to go out and hang around again. [Participant 6]

Another described managing internal pain without showing it,

"Daghan gyud problema te pero ma-kuan man. Dili lang makita sa ako te, sige ra gyud ko'g hilak te. Pero dili lang ko magpakita." [Participant 6]

There are a lot of problems now, but it can be managed. You just can't tell from looking at me I keep crying. But I don't show it. [Participant 6]

This theme is consistent with findings by Deakin et al. (2020), who observed that criminalized youth who successfully navigated post-release challenges frequently employed internalized emotional management strategies that allowed them to function despite ongoing stigma and adversity. Additionally, Manuel (2019) noted that emotional resilience characterized by the capacity to endure difficulty without reverting to delinquent coping mechanisms was among the strongest predictors of long-term successful reintegration among rehabilitated Filipino youth.

Anchors of Motivation and Responsibility

The theme "Anchors of Motivation and Responsibility" reflects how the participants maintained their progress after rehabilitation by attaching their efforts to concrete goals and responsibilities. Their motivation was not described as a vague desire to "be better" but was connected to specific things they wanted to accomplish, such as finishing their education, maintaining employment, supporting their families, and avoiding situations that could return them to conflict with the law. These goals gave participants something tangible to work toward and helped them organize their choices around a desired future. From the researcher's perspective, this indicates that sustained rehabilitation becomes more meaningful when individuals have a clear reason to continue changing. A goal provides direction, while responsibility gives that goal personal significance.

Education and employment emerged as particularly important anchors because they provided participants with activities that occupied their time while simultaneously contributing to their future aspirations. Going to school, looking for work, performing one's duties, or helping with family livelihood required participants to follow routines and make decisions that were consistent with their responsibilities. These activities therefore served a purpose beyond their immediate practical benefits. They helped participants establish a daily structure in which productive behavior became part of their normal lives. The researcher interprets this structure as an important protective element because having meaningful activities can reduce periods of idleness and provide participants with constructive alternatives when faced with negative influences or situations that could potentially undermine their rehabilitation.

Family responsibility further strengthened the participants' motivation. Their desire to support their families and avoid causing additional difficulties appeared to influence the choices they made after release.

Responsibility toward family transformed personal goals into commitments that affected people beyond themselves. A participant's decision to remain employed, continue studying, or avoid problematic situations could therefore be understood not only as a personal decision but also as an expression of concern for the people who depended on or believed in them. From the researcher's analysis, this demonstrates that responsibility became an important component of the participants' developing identity. They were no longer viewing themselves only in terms of what they wanted for themselves but were increasingly considering what their actions meant for their families and their future roles within the household.

The participants' goals also appeared to function as behavioral guides during moments of temptation and discouragement. When confronted with negative influences or difficult circumstances, having something important to lose or protect gave them an additional reason to reconsider their choices. Their goals created a connection between present behavior and future consequences. Choosing a particular action was no longer simply about what felt good or convenient at the moment; it could affect their education, employment, family relationships, or broader aspirations. The researcher views this as a significant development in decision-making because it suggests that the participants were becoming more future-oriented. Their choices were increasingly evaluated according to whether those choices would bring them closer to or farther away from the life they wanted to establish.

At the same time, the presence of clear goals did not eliminate difficulties. The participants still experienced frustration, setbacks, social judgment, and uncertainty, but their responsibilities gave them reasons to continue despite these challenges. This reveals an important distinction between motivation and constant enthusiasm. Motivation in the participants' experiences was not necessarily an emotional feeling that remained strong every day. Rather, it was reflected in their continued commitment to responsibilities even when they experienced discouragement. The researcher interprets this persistence as a more mature form of motivation because it does not depend entirely on whether circumstances are favorable. Participants continued working, studying, helping their families, or avoiding trouble because these commitments had become important enough to influence their behavior even during difficult periods.

Ultimately, "Anchors of Motivation and Responsibility" demonstrates that the participants' continued progress after rehabilitation was sustained by meaningful goals and responsibilities that connected their present choices to their desired future. Education, employment, family obligations, and the determination to remain away from trouble provided them with direction when circumstances became uncertain. From the researcher's perspective, these anchors represent an important bridge between rehabilitation and long-term reintegration because they give former CICL practical reasons to maintain the changes they developed within the residential facility. Rehabilitation may teach individuals how to change, but meaningful goals and responsibilities help answer the more difficult question of why they should continue changing after they are released. The participants' experiences suggest that when a person has something meaningful to work toward, responsibility becomes more than an obligation; it becomes a source of direction, identity, and motivation to protect the future they are gradually building.

One participant described returning to school as a deliberate and immediate priority,

"Nagpadayon jud ko'g eskwela kay daghan pod koy mga pangarap gusto pod makab-ot te ba bisag nakaagi tag mga ingato pero dili man ta mawad-ag pag asa." [Participant 4]

I just keep going in school because I have a lot of dreams I want to reach. Even after going through something like this, we shouldn't lose hope. [Participant 4]

Another participant described healthy recreational activities as a coping strategy,

"Kung ginakuan sa kay basketball nya tan-aw TV, mao na lang. Maminaw sounds nya. Nga kuan lang, maglaag ingana, magpalagsa." [Participant 3]

If I needed something basketball, watching TV, that's about it. Listening to music. Just going out, hanging around, relaxing. [Participant 3]

These findings align with the principles of the Differential Association Theory, which recognizes that prosocial behavior is reinforced through engagement with positive environments and activities (Trappen, 2019). When rehabilitated CICL redirect their time and energy toward constructive goals whether academic, vocational, or recreational they reduce their exposure to delinquent influences and strengthen their commitment to a law-abiding lifestyle. Luna (2022) further supports this by noting that structured and purposeful engagement post-release is one of the most effective strategies for preventing recidivism among juvenile offenders in the Philippine context.

Multi-Layered Support Systems

The theme “Multi-Layered Support Systems” captures the participants’ experiences of relying on different sources of support as they adjusted to life after rehabilitation. Their narratives suggest that no single person or institution was solely responsible for helping them maintain their progress. Instead, support came from several directions, including family members, peers, government institutions, and religious faith. Each source appeared to address different aspects of the participants’ lives, from emotional encouragement and practical assistance to guidance, opportunities, and spiritual strength. From the researcher’s perspective, this demonstrates that reintegration is a complex process that cannot be sustained through one intervention alone. The participants needed different forms of support because the challenges they faced after release were also different in nature.

Family appeared to be the most immediate and emotionally significant layer of support. Participants relied on family members for acceptance, encouragement, practical assistance, and motivation to continue moving forward. The presence of family provided a sense of belonging at a time when participants were attempting to rebuild their identities and establish themselves again within the community. For some participants, knowing that family members believed in their capacity to change appeared to strengthen their determination to avoid previous behaviors. The researcher interprets this support as particularly important because family offered something that formal rehabilitation programs could not completely provide: a continuing relationship that remained present in the participants’ everyday lives after institutional supervision had ended. However, family support was not always uncomplicated, as some participants also experienced family conflict, loss, or changed household circumstances, demonstrating that the family could function as both a source of strength and a source of emotional difficulty.

Peers and other people within the participants’ social environments formed another layer of support. Positive relationships gave participants opportunities to interact with people who could encourage productive behavior and provide a sense of normalcy after rehabilitation. These relationships were especially meaningful because participants were simultaneously trying to move away from negative influences that could threaten their progress. The researcher therefore views peer relationships as having a dual potential: peers can either reinforce positive transformation or create pressure toward previous patterns of behavior. What becomes significant in the participants’ experiences is their increasing ability to distinguish between relationships that support their goals and those that may compromise them. This suggests that successful reintegration involves not only having people around the individual but also developing the judgment necessary to recognize which relationships contribute positively to one's growth.

Government institutions and formal support systems provided another dimension of assistance. Unlike family and peers, these institutions could offer structured programs, services, opportunities, and professional interventions that participants might not be able to obtain through their personal relationships alone. Their involvement demonstrates that rehabilitation does not completely end when a participant leaves residential care because institutional support may remain necessary during the transition toward independence. From the researcher’s analysis, the effectiveness of these formal systems depends partly on their ability to connect with the actual needs of rehabilitated CICL. Assistance becomes more meaningful when it responds to practical realities such as education, employment, livelihood, family concerns, and continued behavioral development rather than treating reintegration as a single event that ends upon discharge.

Religious faith also emerged as a distinct source of support for participants who drew strength, guidance, and encouragement from their spiritual beliefs. Faith appeared to provide a framework through which some

participants could interpret their past experiences, cope with difficulties, and develop hope for the future. The researcher interprets this dimension as a source of internal and emotional support because it gave participants another basis for understanding responsibility, change, forgiveness, and personal direction. Unlike formal services that may operate according to scheduled interventions, faith could accompany participants in their everyday lives and provide a continuing source of meaning during moments of discouragement. Its presence within the participants' narratives suggests that reintegration can involve not only social and practical adjustment but also the reconstruction of personal meaning and hope.

Ultimately, "Multi-Layered Support Systems" demonstrates that the participants' ability to move forward after rehabilitation was supported by an interconnected network rather than by a single source of assistance. Family provided belonging and emotional connection, positive peers provided social encouragement, government institutions provided formal assistance and opportunities, while religious faith provided meaning and inner strength. From the researcher's perspective, the importance of this theme lies in its demonstration that sustainable reintegration is an ecosystem of care rather than a one-time intervention. If one layer becomes unavailable, other sources of support may help compensate for the resulting gap. This suggests that social workers should not focus exclusively on the individual CICL but should actively identify, strengthen, and coordinate the different support systems surrounding the child or young person. The participants' experiences ultimately show that rehabilitation becomes more sustainable when individuals do not have to rebuild their lives alone, but instead have a network of people, institutions, and sources of meaning that collectively support their continued growth.

One participant described the significance of parental sacrifice as a motivating force,

"Katong nagpundo ka sa imong ginikanan nga nag-atubang pauli. Naa sila sa gate nagpa-ano, nakita na nimo sila, ato na iklipay ato nga time. Told myself their efforts for me would be wasted if I didn't do right in there." [Participant 5]

When I arrived at my parents' place they were there at the gate waiting. Seeing them, that was the happy moment. I told myself their efforts for me would be wasted if I didn't do right in there. [Participant 5]

Another highlighted the importance of positive peer influence,

"Sa mga barkada at least sila man pud ang nagtabang sa akong mga tarong nga barkada pud nga tarong." [Participant 1]

My friends at least the good ones helped me stay on the right path. They are good ones, they helped me. [Participant 1]

This theme is strongly supported by Hirschi's Social Control Theory, which identifies social bonds including attachment to family, commitment to conventional goals, involvement in legitimate activities, and belief in shared moral values as the foundational elements that prevent delinquent behavior (Nickerson, 2023). The presence of multi-layered support structures essentially reinforces all four of these social bond elements simultaneously. Furthermore, the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006 (R.A. 9344) explicitly recognizes the role of community and family in the aftercare and reintegration of CICL, mandating coordinated support from government agencies, civil society, and families to ensure sustainable rehabilitation outcomes (Luna, 2022).

Insights Shared by the Rehabilitated CICL

Rehabilitated CICL, having navigated the complexities of reintegration, emerged from their experiences carrying valuable insights that extend beyond their personal journeys. This section presents the lessons and reflections that participants offered not only as testimony to their own transformation but as guidance for those who are still within the walls of the rehabilitation facility and for the broader community that receives

them upon release. Through reflecting on what they endured and what they overcame, the participants identified five essential themes of insight: Architectural View of Mistakes, Strategic Endurance and Mental Toughness, Purpose Beyond the Self, Proactive Influence Management, and Spiritual Optimism and Divine Timing, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 *Insights Shared by the Rehabilitated CICL*

Essential Theme	Core Ideas
Architectural View of Mistakes	Developed the capacity to recognize wrong actions in others and in oneself. [Participant 2, 7]
	Affirmed that mistakes are opportunities for renovation, rehabilitation, and renewal. [Participant 3]
	Recognized the importance of not dwelling on past mistakes but using them as a foundation. [Participant 7]
	Expressed conviction that genuine and lasting personal change is both necessary and possible. [Participant 2]
	Maintained hope that one can still aspire to become someone despite a difficult past. [Participant 4]
Strategic Endurance and Mental Toughness	Emphasized the value of enthusiasm and genuine commitment in following rules inside the center. [Participant 5]
	Warned against rushing to get out of the facility before one is truly ready. [Participant 4, 7]
	Stressed the importance of following the rules and regulations inside the facility. [Participant 5, 6]
	Emphasized having authentic self-control, not merely performing compliance. [Participant 5]
	Advocated for a positive mindset and firm resolve rather than simply trying harder. [Participant 5]
Purpose Beyond the Self	Identified youth itself as the greatest temptation that must be actively resisted. [Participant 3]
	Encouraged continued pursuit of personal dreams despite past circumstances. [Participant 4]
	Urged sustained self-trust as a foundation for moving forward. [Participant 4, 7]
	Affirmed that the center inspires continued growth and a sense of possibility. [Participant 2]
	Reminded that there is still a long way ahead, and one must stay positive. [Participant 1, 4]
	Emphasized equality inside the facility as a leveling and humanizing experience. [Participant 3]
Proactive Influence Management	Urged careful and deliberate selection of the people and influences in one's environment. [Participant 3]
	Advised against impatience regarding release, reminding that freedom will come for everyone. [Participant 7]
	Encouraged the management of problems through enjoyment and healthy perspective. [Participant 5]
	Stressed ongoing self-control as a daily, lived practice beyond the facility. [Participant 2, 4]
	Affirmed that lessons from inside the center are practically applicable in life outside. [Participant 6]
Spiritual Optimism and Divine Timing	Encouraged drawing closer to God as a source of genuine reward and direction. [Participant 1]

	Urged placing God first in difficult situations as the primary source of strength. [Participant 1]
	Advised seeking positive alternatives and maintaining an optimistic outlook. [Participant 5]
	Affirmed that staying positive makes hardship more bearable. [Participant 5]
	Recognized humility as a core lesson imparted by the rehabilitation center. [Participant 1]

Table 4 presents five essential themes that reflect the insights of rehabilitated CICL drawn from their lived experiences. These themes Architectural View of Mistakes, Strategic Endurance and Mental Toughness, Purpose Beyond the Self, Proactive Influence Management, and Spiritual Optimism and Divine Timing collectively emphasize that the value of rehabilitation is not confined to behavioral correction but extends to the cultivation of wisdom, agency, and a forward-looking sense of self.

Architectural View of Mistakes

The theme “Architectural View of Mistakes” reflects the participants’ changing understanding of their past mistakes and how those experiences contributed to the people they were becoming. Rather than viewing their previous offenses only as evidence of failure or as experiences that permanently defined them, participants appeared to recognize them as painful experiences from which they could learn. Their past remained part of their personal history, but it no longer had to determine the direction of their future. The architectural metaphor is therefore meaningful because construction requires existing materials to be examined, reshaped, and incorporated into something new. In the same way, participants appeared to take experiences that could have remained sources of shame and use them as foundations for reflection, responsibility, and personal change.

This reframing represents an important shift in how participants understood themselves. Earlier experiences of shame and social judgment suggested that their past could become an identity imposed upon them by others. However, their narratives indicate a gradual movement toward seeing themselves as individuals who had made mistakes rather than individuals who were permanently defined by those mistakes. The distinction is significant because acknowledging responsibility does not necessarily require remaining trapped in a negative identity. From the researcher’s perspective, the participants were beginning to separate accountability from permanent self-condemnation. They could recognize that their actions had consequences while simultaneously believing that they possessed the capacity to make different choices and construct a different future.

The participants’ understanding of mistakes also suggests that rehabilitation involved a process of meaning-making. The difficult experiences they encountered were not simply forgotten after release; instead, they became reference points that influenced how participants approached their present decisions. Past mistakes served as reminders of consequences and helped participants recognize situations or behaviors they no longer wanted to repeat. The researcher interprets this as a form of reflective learning because the value of the past was not found in the mistake itself but in what participants were able to understand from it. Their experiences became meaningful when they could transform painful memories into lessons that informed their current behavior.

This perspective also changes the meaning of rehabilitation itself. If rehabilitation were understood only as correcting undesirable behavior, then the participant’s past would primarily represent something that needed to be erased or controlled. The participants’ narratives suggest something deeper: rehabilitation also involved reconstructing how they understood their own life story. Their past experiences became part of a larger narrative that included failure, consequence, learning, change, and hope. From the researcher’s analysis, this reconstruction of personal narrative is significant because people are more capable of moving forward when they can acknowledge their past without allowing it to completely determine their identity. The participants were therefore not attempting to pretend that their past never happened; they were learning how to carry that past differently.

The architectural metaphor further suggests that personal transformation is an ongoing process rather than a finished product. A building is constructed gradually, with different materials serving different purposes, and personal development can similarly involve repeated adjustments, corrections, and rebuilding. The participants' experiences demonstrate that rehabilitation did not eliminate every difficulty they would encounter after release. Instead, it gave them experiences and lessons that they could continue using as they faced new challenges. The researcher therefore views their mistakes as part of the foundation upon which later changes were built, while recognizing that the construction of a stable identity requires continued effort beyond the residential facility.

Ultimately, "Architectural View of Mistakes" reveals one of the most transformative aspects of the participants' rehabilitation journey: their ability to give new meaning to experiences that once represented failure. Their mistakes remained part of their history, but those mistakes were gradually transformed from sources of shame into sources of knowledge, caution, and motivation. From the researcher's perspective, the central meaning of this theme is not that mistakes were somehow necessary or desirable, but that painful experiences can acquire constructive meaning when individuals are given opportunities to reflect, take responsibility, learn, and change. The participants were effectively rebuilding their identities from the materials of their past, demonstrating that rehabilitation does not require a person to erase where they came from. Rather, it can help them use what they have experienced as a foundation upon which a different and more purposeful life can be constructed.

One participant offered a particularly striking articulation of this view,

"Ang mga sayop maoy makapausab, makapabangon, ug makapabago sa usa ka tao. Ayaw lang gyud kapoy og padayon ug paningkamot kay kana nga mga experience maoy makapabuhi ug makapalig-on sa imong performance." [Participant 3]

Mistakes make one renovated, rehabilitated and renewed. Don't get tired of following the rules, because your tiredness can actually affect your performance inside. [Participant 3]

Another participant shared their reflection on the possibility of transformation,

"Makab-ot gihapon nato ang atong mga pangandoy ug mahimong usa ka maayong tao. Ayaw lang gyud kawad-i og paglaom. Padayon lang, dili kinahanglan magdali o mag-unhanay kay ang tinuod nga kagawasan sa sulod moabot ra gyud sa tanan." [Participant 4]

We can still get there and be someone. We shouldn't lose hope. Just keep going and don't get ahead of yourself, because freedom will come for everyone eventually. [Participant 4]

This theme resonates with the foundational premise of restorative justice, which is embedded within Republic Act No. 9344, recognizing that every CICL inherently possesses human dignity and the capacity for growth and reformation (Luna, 2022). The participants' architectural view of mistakes reflects the restorative philosophy that the goal of juvenile justice is not punishment but transformation. Furthermore, Zitterkopf (2019) found that youth who were helped to reframe their past offenses as learnable moments rather than fixed identities demonstrated significantly more positive post-release trajectories.

Strategic Endurance and Mental Toughness

The theme "Strategic Endurance and Mental Toughness" reflects the participants' retrospective understanding of what it takes to meaningfully undergo rehabilitation. Having already completed the process, they were able to look back on the difficulties of residential care and recognize that simply waiting for discharge was not enough to produce meaningful change. Their advice to current residents emphasized patience, genuine participation, and willingness to learn from the rehabilitation experience. From the researcher's perspective, this demonstrates that participants had developed a more mature understanding of rehabilitation because they no longer viewed it merely as a period that had to be endured before returning home. Instead, they recognized it as a period that could be used for personal development if they actively engaged with what was being taught.

The distinction between strategic endurance and passive endurance is particularly important in understanding the participants' experiences. Passive endurance involves simply tolerating the restrictions of residential care while waiting for the period of confinement to end. Strategic endurance, in contrast, involves understanding that the difficulties of the present can serve a purpose when approached with patience and intentionality. The participants' reflections suggest that they eventually recognized the value of using their time inside the facility to examine their behavior, learn new ways of responding to problems, and prepare themselves for life after release. The researcher interprets this as a significant shift in perspective because the meaning of rehabilitation changed from something being done *to* the participants into something they could actively participate *in*.

The participants' warnings about impatience and restlessness further reveal their understanding of the psychological challenges associated with residential rehabilitation. Being separated from familiar surroundings, family, friends, and ordinary routines can create frustration and a strong desire to return to community life. These feelings are understandable, but participants recognized that allowing impatience to dominate the rehabilitation experience could prevent individuals from benefiting fully from the program. From the researcher's analysis, this demonstrates that emotional readiness is an important component of rehabilitation. A person may physically complete a program, but meaningful change requires the willingness to remain engaged even when the process feels repetitive, difficult, or slow. Patience therefore becomes more than simply waiting; it becomes a deliberate decision to continue learning despite discomfort.

The participants also emphasized the difference between genuine change and performative compliance. Their experiences suggest that some individuals may be tempted to follow rules and participate in activities primarily because they want to satisfy institutional expectations or secure an earlier return to the community. However, outward compliance does not necessarily indicate internal transformation. The participants' advice implies that the real value of rehabilitation emerges when lessons are understood, practiced, and eventually incorporated into everyday decision-making. The researcher considers this distinction central to the findings because it connects directly with the participants' later experiences of emotional regulation, responsible decision-making, and resistance to negative influences after release. What they eventually carried into community life was not simply a record of having completed a program but the lessons they had personally internalized.

The retrospective nature of the participants' advice also reveals that their understanding of rehabilitation had evolved over time. Some lessons that may have seemed restrictive or difficult while they were inside the facility acquired greater significance after they experienced the realities of life outside. This suggests that the meaning of rehabilitation can become clearer through lived experience because individuals are able to recognize the practical value of lessons only when they encounter situations that require them. The researcher interprets this as evidence that rehabilitation should encourage reflection rather than mere compliance. Participants need opportunities to understand *why* certain behaviors, values, and coping strategies matter so that these lessons can remain useful when institutional supervision is no longer present.

Ultimately, "Strategic Endurance and Mental Toughness" reveals that the participants came to understand rehabilitation as a process that requires active participation, patience, and genuine personal commitment. Their message to current residents is not simply to endure the difficulties of residential care but to use that period intentionally by absorbing the lessons, reflecting on personal behavior, and preparing for the responsibilities that come with release. From the researcher's perspective, mental toughness in this context does not mean suppressing emotions or pretending that rehabilitation is easy. Rather, it means developing the determination to remain engaged with the process even when it is uncomfortable or frustrating. The participants' experiences therefore suggest that the most valuable outcome of residential rehabilitation occurs when individuals stop viewing the facility merely as a place they need to leave and begin viewing it as a place where they can acquire the understanding, discipline, and personal capacity necessary to live differently once they do leave.

One participant offered a direct warning,

"Dili mag dali dali gawas kay kabalo na kaayo ng uban niya kanang mag dali dali gawas gani te kanang gusto nila nga makagawas dayon sila pero pag abot sa gawas murag kanang dili pa sila ma kuan ba." [Participant 4]

Don't be in a rush to get out, because a lot of them already want to leave right away, but when they get out it's like they're not yet ready so they end up doing bad things again. [Participant 4]

Another stressed the importance of authentic commitment,

"Kung unsa'y mga patakaran, rules nga gina-pakuwan dira sa center kuan gyud na na, pugson gyud ninyo dapat nagkuan, sunod. Kay daghan ang pugos dili ninyo na makuwan na na-apply na ninyo sa inyong kaugalingon ba nga dugay." [Participant 6]

Whatever rules and regulations they put in place at the center just follow them. Because you won't even realize that it's already being applied in your own life later on. [Participant 6]

This theme is grounded in the principles of the Differential Association Theory, which emphasizes that sustained behavioral change requires deep and repeated engagement with prosocial values, norms, and models not superficial compliance (Trappen, 2019). Mental toughness, in this context, is the capacity to remain genuinely committed to the rehabilitation process even when the immediate desire is to leave. Mehra and Amber (2022) similarly noted that premature exits from juvenile justice programs driven by impatience rather than readiness are among the most significant predictors of recidivism, underscoring the critical importance of the endurance the participants advocated.

Purpose Beyond the Self

The theme "Purpose Beyond the Self" reflects the participants' realization that their rehabilitation was not only about improving their own lives but also about influencing the people and communities connected to them. Their experiences led them to recognize that the changes they made could affect their families, serve as encouragement to current CICL residents, and contribute to how they were perceived within the broader community. This outward-looking perspective represents an important development in their understanding of rehabilitation. From the researcher's perspective, the participants were gradually moving from a primarily self-focused concern with survival and personal change toward an awareness of responsibility, influence, and contribution. Their transformation acquired greater meaning when they began to see that what they learned could potentially benefit others.

The participants' families appeared to be one of the most immediate beneficiaries of this transformation. Their desire to become more responsible, provide support, and avoid repeating previous mistakes was connected to their understanding of the family's role in their lives. The participants recognized that their actions could either create additional difficulties for their families or contribute to greater stability and peace within the household. This realization gave their personal goals a broader meaning because success was no longer measured only by individual achievement. From the researcher's analysis, this demonstrates the development of relational responsibility, wherein participants began to understand that personal decisions have consequences for people who share their lives. Their growth therefore became meaningful not only because they were improving themselves but because they were becoming more capable of contributing positively to those around them.

The participants also expressed concern for current CICL residents, particularly through the advice and encouragement they offered based on their own experiences. Having experienced rehabilitation themselves, they were able to identify struggles that may be difficult for current residents to understand while they are still inside the facility. Their messages encouraged patience, genuine participation, self-control, and openness to the lessons provided during rehabilitation. The researcher interprets this as an important transformation in perspective because participants were no longer speaking only as recipients of intervention. They had become individuals capable of reflecting on their experiences and using those experiences to guide others. Their past difficulties therefore became a potential source of encouragement rather than remaining solely a source of personal hardship.

This outward orientation also demonstrates a shift in the participants' relationship with their own past. Earlier experiences of shame and social judgment could have encouraged them to distance themselves completely from anything associated with their former identity as CICL. Instead, their willingness to speak to or encourage others still undergoing rehabilitation suggests that they had reached a point where they could

acknowledge their past without being controlled by it. The researcher views this as a significant form of identity reconstruction. Their previous experiences became part of the knowledge they could share with others, giving those experiences a constructive purpose. In this sense, the participants were not erasing their past; they were transforming its meaning by using what they had learned to potentially prevent others from making similar choices or to encourage those already experiencing the consequences of those choices.

The broader community also forms part of this outward dimension of purpose. By pursuing education, employment, responsible family roles, and constructive social relationships, the participants were contributing to a different understanding of what rehabilitated CICL can become. Their continued progress challenged the idea that involvement with the law permanently determines a person's character or future. From the researcher's perspective, this is particularly important because social reintegration involves more than the participant's personal adjustment. It also involves the community's willingness to recognize change and provide opportunities for individuals to demonstrate that change. Every positive action performed by a rehabilitated CICL can therefore contribute to rebuilding trust and challenging stereotypes associated with their past.

Ultimately, "Purpose Beyond the Self" reveals the participants' movement from simply seeking personal recovery toward recognizing the wider significance of their transformation. Their experiences became connected to their responsibilities toward family, their desire to encourage current CICL residents, and their potential contribution to the community. The researcher interprets this as one of the deeper indicators of rehabilitation because genuine transformation can eventually extend beyond self-preservation and become a source of contribution to others. The participants' stories suggest that rehabilitation reaches a more meaningful stage when individuals begin asking not only "How can I change my life?" but also "What can I do with the change I have experienced?" In this sense, their past became more than something to overcome. It became a source of wisdom, responsibility, and purpose that could create positive effects beyond the boundaries of their individual lives.

One participant expressed this expansive vision,

"Padayon lang sa eskwela kay daghan pod koy mga pangarap. Bisag nakaagi tag mga ingato pero dili man ta mawad-ag pag asa nga kanang mo kuan gihapon te ba kanang salig lang gihapon sa kaugalingon." [Participant 4]

Just keep going in school because I have a lot of dreams. Even after going through something like this, we shouldn't lose hope we can still be someone, just keep trusting yourself. [Participant 4]

Another captured the equalizing and humanizing power of the rehabilitation experience,

"Sa sulod sa center, i-equal jud ka, dili ka magpataka ug kuan kay pareha ra pareha ra man didto ha. Dapat iplatar jud nimo kung diri sa gawas." [Participant 3]

When you're inside, everyone is equal you have to know how to act right. And out here, you also have to apply that. [Participant 3]

The articulation of purpose beyond the self reflects key principles of the Social Control Theory, wherein a sense of meaning and commitment to others functions as one of the most powerful deterrents against delinquency (Nickerson, 2023). When individuals perceive that their actions have consequences for people they care about, the social bond is deepened and the cost of delinquency increases. Abot (2018) supports this by noting that CICL who develop a sense of social responsibility the awareness that their choices affect not only themselves but their families and communities are significantly more likely to sustain prosocial behavior after release.

Proactive Influence Management

The theme "Proactive Influence Management" reflects the participants' deliberate efforts to take greater control over the social environments in which they placed themselves after rehabilitation. Their experiences

led them to recognize that behavior is influenced not only by personal decisions but also by the people, places, and situations surrounding an individual. Having experienced the consequences of negative peer associations, participants became more cautious about the relationships they maintained and the environments they entered. From the researcher's perspective, this represents an important development in personal responsibility because the participants were no longer simply reacting to negative influences after encountering them. Instead, they were beginning to anticipate possible risks and make choices intended to protect the progress they had already achieved.

The participants' selectiveness regarding friendships appeared to be rooted in their awareness of how easily social pressure can affect decision-making. Their experiences taught them that not every relationship is beneficial and that returning to certain social circles could potentially expose them to behaviors they were attempting to leave behind. Consequently, distancing themselves from negative influences became a form of self-protection rather than simply an act of rejection toward others. The researcher interprets this behavior as evidence of increased self-awareness because participants were learning to recognize situations that could challenge their values before becoming deeply involved in them. This reflects a shift from responding to consequences toward preventing consequences.

Importantly, proactive influence management should not be understood as complete social withdrawal. The participants did not necessarily reject social interaction itself; rather, they became more intentional about determining which relationships and environments were compatible with their goals. This distinction is significant because healthy reintegration requires connection with other people, not isolation from society. From the researcher's analysis, the participants were learning to establish boundaries while still maintaining meaningful relationships and participating in community life. Their selectiveness therefore represented a form of social maturity, wherein they could distinguish between maintaining healthy connections and exposing themselves unnecessarily to influences that could undermine their rehabilitation.

The participants' awareness of places and situations also demonstrates the broader nature of influence management. Negative behavior is not always connected to a particular person; certain environments, activities, or circumstances can also create opportunities for harmful decisions. The participants therefore appeared to develop a more comprehensive understanding of risk by considering not only *who* they were with but also *where* they were going and *what* they were doing. The researcher views this as an important component of their developing decision-making skills because it shows that participants were beginning to consider the conditions surrounding a choice before acting. Such awareness allows individuals to avoid situations that may place unnecessary pressure on their self-control.

This proactive approach also reflects the internalization of lessons acquired during rehabilitation. While the facility could provide structure and limit exposure to certain influences, life after release required participants to make these decisions independently. There was no longer an institution continuously determining where they could go or whom they could interact with. The responsibility therefore shifted toward the participants themselves. From the researcher's perspective, their ability to manage social influences after release indicates that rehabilitation had progressed beyond external supervision and toward self-directed behavioral management. Their choices demonstrated that they were beginning to become active protectors of their own progress rather than relying entirely on others to protect them from negative situations.

Ultimately, "Proactive Influence Management" demonstrates that the participants learned to view their social environment as something that required conscious navigation. Their experiences with negative influences contributed to greater caution, but that caution did not necessarily lead to isolation. Instead, participants developed a more intentional approach to relationships, places, and situations, choosing environments that were more consistent with the lives they wanted to build. The researcher interprets this as a significant marker of maturity and sustained rehabilitation because participants were no longer simply avoiding wrongdoing; they were actively creating conditions that made positive behavior easier to maintain. Their experiences suggest that successful reintegration requires not only the ability to resist negative influence when it appears but also the wisdom to recognize potential risks early and make deliberate choices about who to keep close, where to go, and what situations are worth entering.

One participant offered direct advice,

"Dili pud nila idip tong mistake nila kay mao jud ni kung kami sa kabatan-onan kana gyud ang tentasyon jud ang palabasan nimo. Ingat jud sa pagpili ug mga impluwensiya nimu." [Participant 3]

Don't dwell on your mistakes because for us young people, that's really the biggest temptation you have to fight. Be careful in choosing the influences around you. [Participant 3]

Another stressed that the skills developed inside the facility were directly transferable to managing life outside,

"Kung unsa'y tama nga gipangtudlo sa inyoha sa ilaha, kuwan lang, gisulod lang jud nila sa ilang huna-huna. Puhon magamit kay pud na diri sa gawas." [Participant 2]

Whatever is right that they're being taught in there take it in and put it in your heart. Because one day you'll be able to use those out here. [Participant 2]

This theme is directly grounded in the Differential Association Theory, which holds that delinquency is a learned behavior arising from associations with individuals who model and reinforce deviant values and conduct (Trappen, 2019). Conversely, when young people learn to proactively manage their social environment choosing prosocial peers and avoiding delinquent associations they effectively interrupt the cycle of learned deviance. Ignacio (n.d.) similarly found that CICL who developed social discernment skills during their rehabilitation program were better equipped to resist negative peer pressure and maintain positive behavioral trajectories in the community.

Spiritual Optimism and Divine Timing

The theme "Spiritual Optimism and Divine Timing" reveals the important role that faith played in how participants understood their rehabilitation, struggles, and hopes for the future. For these participants, spirituality was not simply a source of temporary comfort during difficult moments. It became a framework through which they interpreted their experiences and maintained hope when circumstances remained uncertain. Their belief in God provided them with a sense of direction and reassurance, particularly when they encountered difficulties that were beyond their immediate control. From the researcher's perspective, this demonstrates that the participants' coping processes extended beyond practical strategies such as employment, education, family support, and emotional regulation. Their faith provided an additional layer of meaning that helped them understand why they needed to continue moving forward despite experiences that could not be immediately resolved.

The participants' reliance on God also appeared to provide a sense of stability during periods of uncertainty. After rehabilitation, many aspects of their lives remained unpredictable, including employment opportunities, relationships, social acceptance, and personal progress. In situations where participants could not determine the outcome through their own efforts, faith appeared to provide reassurance that their circumstances could eventually improve. The researcher interprets this as a form of psychological anchoring because faith gave participants something consistent to hold on to when external conditions were changing. Rather than allowing uncertainty to automatically produce hopelessness, they were able to maintain the belief that their current difficulties did not represent the final direction of their lives.

The concept of divine timing was particularly meaningful in understanding how participants developed patience. Participants appeared to recognize that the goals they desired, whether related to education, employment, family stability, or personal success, might not happen immediately. Instead of interpreting delays as evidence that their efforts were failing, they viewed them as part of a process that would eventually lead to something better at the appropriate time. From the researcher's analysis, this perspective helped participants manage the frustration associated with slow progress. It provided an alternative to impatience because they could continue working toward their goals while accepting that outcomes might not occur according to their preferred schedule. Divine timing therefore functioned not as an excuse for inactivity but as a source of patience while participants continued doing what they could.

This perspective is important because the participants' faith did not appear to replace personal responsibility. Their narratives showed that they continued to pursue education, work, family responsibilities, and positive relationships while maintaining their belief in God. The researcher therefore understands their spirituality as complementary to action rather than a substitute for it. Participants could work toward their goals while simultaneously accepting that not everything could be controlled. This combination of effort and surrender appeared to help them maintain emotional balance. They were able to recognize their responsibility to make good decisions while also accepting that some outcomes required time, circumstances, and factors beyond their immediate control.

Spirituality also appeared to contribute to the participants' ability to reinterpret their past. Rather than seeing their previous involvement with the law as the end of their story, faith allowed some participants to view their experiences as part of a larger journey toward change and personal development. Their belief that their lives still had purpose helped prevent their past mistakes from becoming permanent sources of hopelessness. The researcher interprets this as an important connection between spirituality and identity reconstruction. When participants believed that their future remained meaningful despite their past, they were better positioned to approach rehabilitation as a beginning rather than simply as a consequence of wrongdoing. Their faith therefore supported the possibility of hope, forgiveness, growth, and renewal.

At the same time, the researcher recognizes that spiritual optimism does not mean that participants were free from doubt, disappointment, or emotional difficulty. Faith did not eliminate the problems they encountered after rehabilitation, nor did it guarantee immediate solutions. Its significance was found in the participants' ability to continue hoping while experiencing uncertainty. This distinction is important because genuine optimism does not require the absence of hardship. Instead, it involves maintaining the belief that hardship can be endured and that better possibilities remain even when they cannot yet be seen. The participants' belief in divine timing appeared to provide precisely this kind of endurance, allowing them to remain hopeful without demanding immediate results.

Ultimately, "Spiritual Optimism and Divine Timing" demonstrates that faith became a meaningful source of strength, patience, and hope in the participants' post-rehabilitation lives. Their belief in God helped them interpret difficulties, maintain optimism, and accept that personal progress may occur gradually rather than according to an immediate timetable. From the researcher's perspective, the significance of this theme lies in showing that rehabilitation is experienced not only through behavioral, social, and economic dimensions but also through the personal beliefs that individuals use to make sense of their lives. For participants who relied on spirituality, faith became an internal source of stability that supported their other coping mechanisms and encouraged them to continue pursuing meaningful goals. Their experiences ultimately suggest that hope can become a form of resilience when it is combined with patience, responsibility, and continued effort, allowing individuals to face an uncertain future without surrendering their belief that a better one remains possible.

One participant shared a deeply personal reflection,

"Kung after all sa imong mga experiences, kung nagpaduol gyud ka sa Ginoo ate naa gyu'y kapalit ate. Kung naa gyu'y kapalit bisan unsa imong pangayoon dili mo siya ingon nga muhatag dayon pero in the right time naa gyud siya mugawas." [Participant 1]

After all your experiences — if you truly draw closer to God, there is really a reward. Whatever you ask for, He won't just give it right away, but in the right time it will come. [Participant 1]

Another affirmed the centrality of faith in navigating daily challenges,

"Nagpasalamat ko nga nagduol ko sa akong kaugalingon sa Ginoo. Number one gyud ang Ginoo ate mao gyud ang nag kuwan sa akoo ate." [Participant 1]

I'm grateful that I drew closer to God. The Lord is really number one for me He is the one who really guided me. [Participant 1]

This theme is consistent with the findings of De Leon and Unterrainer (2020), who documented that spiritual grounding and faith-based perspectives significantly enhance resilience among individuals recovering from antisocial behavioral patterns, providing a transcendent framework of meaning that sustains hope and moral commitment over time. Furthermore, within the Philippine cultural context, faith and religious practice are deeply interwoven with community life and family values making spirituality not merely an individual resource but a social and relational one that reinforces the participant's connection to family, community, and prosocial norms (Abot, 2018).

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

These findings suggest that rehabilitation for Children in Conflict with the Law is not a finite intervention but a transformative and ongoing process that extends well beyond the walls of the residential care facility. The participants' stories reveal both the depth of personal change made possible through rehabilitation and the continuing challenges that accompany reintegration from social stigma and family grief to the daily navigation of temptation and identity reconstruction. Their experiences highlight the need for sustained aftercare support, deeper community engagement, and a more comprehensive understanding of what successful reintegration truly requires. Based on these insights, the next section presents the study's implications and concluding reflections.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study provide important insights into the post-rehabilitation experiences of Children in

Conflict with the Law (CICL) and offer practical recommendations for practitioners, institutions, families, communities, and policymakers involved in juvenile justice and child welfare. The participants' experiences demonstrate that rehabilitation does not end upon discharge but continues through the process of returning to family, education, employment, and community life.

Strengthen structured aftercare services.

Bahay Pag-asa facilities, in coordination with local government social welfare offices, should establish a structured aftercare plan for every CICL before discharge. The plan should identify individual goals, family circumstances, educational or employment needs, psychosocial concerns, potential risks, and available support systems. The plan should be completed during the final month before discharge, with follow-up interventions conducted at 1, 3, 6, and 12 months after discharge. The assigned social worker should serve as the primary case coordinator, while the receiving LGU social welfare office should facilitate community-based monitoring and referrals. Cases requiring additional intervention should be reviewed immediately rather than waiting for the next scheduled follow-up.

Strengthen family participation and support.

Families should be formally involved in the rehabilitation and reintegration process beginning at least one month before discharge. Social workers should conduct family counseling, preparation sessions, and family goal-setting activities addressing communication, trust-building, conflict management, realistic expectations, and support for positive behavioral changes. During the first six months after discharge, family functioning should be monitored through scheduled home visits or other appropriate follow-up mechanisms. The social worker and family members should jointly identify concerns and agree on practical strategies for maintaining a supportive home environment. Where family support is insufficient, the social worker should coordinate with barangay officials and community organizations to identify alternative sources of support.

Establish community-based anti-stigma and reintegration initiatives.

Within the first three months following discharge, social workers should coordinate with barangay officials, schools, youth organizations, and community stakeholders to provide rehabilitated CICL with opportunities for constructive participation. These may include youth activities, skills development, educational support,

livelihood activities, sports, and community service. Community awareness activities should promote understanding of rehabilitation and reintegration without publicly identifying individual CICL or exposing their histories. Barangay officials and community organizations should provide inclusive opportunities, while social workers should support participants in managing stigma, rejection, and difficult social encounters.

Improve access to education, livelihood, and vocational opportunities.

Educational and employment planning should begin before discharge and be implemented within the first three months after release whenever possible. Social workers should identify appropriate scholarships, Alternative Learning System opportunities, vocational training, livelihood assistance, employment referrals, and skills-development programs based on each CICL's goals and circumstances. LGU social welfare offices should coordinate with education, labor, livelihood, and skills-training agencies, while schools and training institutions should facilitate appropriate enrollment and participation. Progress in education, training, or employment should be reviewed during the 3-, 6-, and 12-month follow-ups.

Strengthen psychosocial and coping interventions.

Social workers should integrate emotional regulation, problem-solving, anger management, decision-making, and relapse-prevention strategies throughout rehabilitation and aftercare. During the first six months after discharge, follow-up sessions should assess participants' ability to manage emotional difficulties, family conflict, peer pressure, rejection, and other reintegration challenges. Each participant should develop an individualized coping and risk-management plan before discharge. The assigned social worker should monitor the plan, while families and other identified support persons may assist in recognizing early warning signs and encouraging constructive coping strategies.

Strengthen peer and environmental risk management.

Before discharge, social workers should assist CICL in identifying negative peer influences, high-risk situations, environmental triggers, and constructive alternatives. During follow-up, particularly at 1, 3, and 6 months, social workers should review whether participants are successfully managing these risks and developing positive peer relationships. Schools, barangays, youth organizations, and community groups should provide safe recreational and developmental activities that encourage positive peer networks. Where appropriate, peer mentoring may be introduced to provide positive models of educational, occupational, and community-oriented behavior.

Establish interagency coordination mechanisms.

Within three months, Bahay Pag-asa facilities and partner LGUs should develop or strengthen a referral and coordination mechanism covering social welfare, education, employment, livelihood, health, psychosocial, and community services. Each agency should identify a focal person responsible for receiving referrals and coordinating services. A quarterly coordination meeting may be conducted to review service gaps, unresolved cases, and emerging reintegration needs. This mechanism should help prevent the abrupt loss of support when CICL transition from residential care to community-based services.

Programme Evaluation and Outcome Monitoring

To determine whether rehabilitation and aftercare interventions are producing sustainable outcomes, Bahay Pag-asa facilities and partner LGUs should establish a programme evaluation and outcome-monitoring system. A baseline assessment should be completed before discharge and should cover family functioning, education or employment status, psychosocial well-being, peer relationships, community participation, personal goals, and identified risks. Follow-up assessments should then be conducted at 1, 3, 6, and 12 months after discharge.

Programme monitoring should examine both process and outcome indicators. Process indicators may include the percentage of CICL with completed aftercare plans, number of family sessions conducted, referrals completed, follow-up contacts made, and participants enrolled in education, training, or livelihood programs.

Outcome indicators may include sustained school or employment participation, improved family relationships, increased community participation, improved coping and decision-making, strengthened support networks, and reduced exposure to identified risk factors. Recidivism or reoffending may be monitored where appropriate, but it should not be treated as the sole indicator of successful rehabilitation.

An annual programme review should be conducted by Bahay Pag-asa administrators, social workers, LGU representatives, and relevant partner agencies. Findings should be used to identify effective interventions, service gaps, and areas requiring programme modification. Feedback from rehabilitated CICL and their families should also be incorporated to ensure that services remain responsive to actual reintegration experiences.

Contribution to Juvenile Justice Policy in the Philippines

This study contributes to juvenile justice policy in the Philippines by highlighting the need to view rehabilitation as a continuum extending beyond residential intervention and discharge. The participants' experiences suggest that effective reintegration requires sustained family support, psychosocial assistance, education and livelihood opportunities, positive peer and community relationships, and coordinated aftercare. These findings can inform the strengthening of implementation mechanisms for existing child-sensitive and restorative approaches to juvenile justice by emphasizing continuity of care and community-based reintegration.

The study also highlights the importance of moving beyond institutional measures of rehabilitation toward broader indicators of successful reintegration, including improved relationships, emotional regulation, education or employment, personal responsibility, community participation, and access to supportive networks. Policymakers and implementing agencies may consider incorporating these dimensions into programme planning, monitoring, and evaluation. At the local level, LGUs and juvenile justice stakeholders may use such findings to strengthen aftercare protocols, referral systems, family interventions, and community-based support for rehabilitated CICL.

Overall, the findings support a continuous, strengths-based, family-centered, and community-integrated approach to juvenile rehabilitation. Sustainable reintegration requires shared responsibility among social workers, Bahay Pag-asa facilities, families, LGUs, schools, livelihood and employment agencies, community organizations, and other stakeholders. Establishing clear responsibilities, timelines, referral mechanisms, and outcome-monitoring procedures can help ensure that the gains achieved during rehabilitation are sustained after discharge and that rehabilitated CICL are provided meaningful opportunities to rebuild their lives and contribute positively to their families and communities.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future studies may extend this research through longitudinal investigations that track the experiences of rehabilitated CICL over a longer period and examine how their reintegration trajectories evolve after release. Comparative studies across different Bahay Pag-asa facilities and provinces may also provide insights into regional variations in rehabilitation practices and post-release outcomes.

Future research should also include female CICL to examine how gender influences rehabilitation, reintegration challenges, coping strategies, support systems, and post-release experiences. Since the present study focused exclusively on male participants, incorporating female perspectives would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the gendered dimensions of reintegration. Expanding the inquiry to participants from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds within Mindanao may further enrich existing knowledge.

Moreover, future studies could incorporate the perspectives of social workers, family members, community members, and other relevant stakeholders. Examining these perspectives alongside the experiences of rehabilitated CICL would provide a more holistic understanding of the factors that facilitate or hinder

successful reintegration. Future researchers may also explore the role of faith and spirituality in strengthening resilience and supporting positive adjustment among rehabilitated Filipino youth.

Concluding Remarks

Exploring the lived experiences of rehabilitated Children in Conflict with the Law at Bahay Pag-asa Davao del Norte has been both revealing and deeply humbling. This study has brought to light the complex, courageous, and deeply human journeys of seven young individuals who, despite the weight of their past, chose to move forward with resolve, faith, and an enduring commitment to growth.

Their stories affirm that rehabilitation, when genuinely experienced and internalized, has the power to transform not only behavior but identity itself. The rehabilitated CICL in this study are not merely individuals who completed a program—they are young people who engaged in the demanding work of becoming: becoming more self-aware, more responsible, more connected to family and faith, and more purposeful in their vision of the future.

The findings underscore the profound importance of sustained support, compassionate communities, and responsive institutions in making this transformation durable. Rehabilitation cannot succeed in isolation—it requires the collective commitment of families, communities, government agencies, and civil society to create the conditions in which young people can truly begin again.

In conclusion, this study calls for a reimagining of how society views and responds to Children in Conflict with the Law—not as burdens to be managed, but as individuals with potential to be cultivated. With coordinated support, genuine empathy, and policies grounded in restorative justice and human dignity, the Philippines can build a juvenile welfare system in which every child in conflict with the law is truly given the opportunity to go beyond the circumstances of their past and step into the fullness of their humanity.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of the study have important implications for social work practice, particularly in strengthening the rehabilitation and reintegration of Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL). The participants' lived experiences demonstrate that rehabilitation does not end when a young person completes a residential program. Instead, the transition back to family and community life introduces new challenges involving identity reconstruction, social stigma, emotional regulation, employment, education, peer influence, family relationships, and personal responsibility. The findings therefore suggest that social workers need to move beyond a primarily facility-based approach and strengthen continuity of care after discharge. Social workers should develop individualized aftercare plans that identify the participant's specific goals, risks, strengths, family situation, educational or employment needs, and available support systems. Regular follow-up should be conducted after discharge to determine whether the rehabilitated CICL is adjusting successfully, experiencing renewed negative influences, encountering family conflict, or requiring additional psychosocial assistance. The transition from residential care to community life should consequently be treated as an extended process rather than a single discharge event.

The findings particularly highlight the need for social workers to strengthen family-centered interventions. Family emerged as a major source of motivation, responsibility, belonging, and emotional support, but the participants also experienced family conflict, loss, and changes in household circumstances. Social workers therefore need to improve family preparation before discharge and provide continuing family interventions after the participant returns home. Family members should be guided on how to communicate effectively, rebuild trust, establish realistic expectations, manage conflict, and recognize positive behavioral changes without constantly defining the young person according to past offenses. Family counseling, structured family meetings, parenting guidance, and family-based goal setting may be incorporated into the rehabilitation and aftercare process. Social workers should also assess whether the family environment is genuinely supportive because returning to the family should not automatically be assumed to guarantee successful reintegration. Where family support is limited, alternative supportive relationships and community resources should be identified.

The participants' experiences of shame, social judgment, and reluctance to interact with former classmates and community members also indicate the need for social workers to strengthen anti-stigma and community reintegration interventions. Social workers should work with barangay officials, schools, community organizations, youth groups, and other relevant stakeholders to promote more constructive understanding of rehabilitation and reintegration. The goal should not be to publicly identify former CICL or expose their histories, but to create community environments where rehabilitated young people are given opportunities to participate without being permanently labeled by their past. Community-based activities, skills development, educational opportunities, livelihood programs, and structured youth engagement may provide participants with constructive spaces where they can demonstrate their abilities and rebuild social relationships. Social workers should also help participants develop practical strategies for responding to stigma, rejection, and uncomfortable encounters rather than simply advising them to ignore negative perceptions.

The findings further indicate that social workers need to improve emotional regulation and coping interventions. Participants described how patience, self-control, reflection, and emotional restraint became important resources when dealing with rejection, family tensions, temptation, and slow progress. These capacities should therefore be intentionally strengthened throughout rehabilitation rather than treated as secondary outcomes. Social workers may incorporate individualized sessions, psychosocial activities, emotional regulation exercises, problem-solving activities, anger management strategies, and relapse-prevention planning into intervention programs. Importantly, participants should be encouraged not merely to suppress difficult emotions but to recognize, understand, communicate, and manage them constructively. The goal should be to help them develop coping strategies that remain useful even when professional supervision is no longer immediately available.

The theme on proactive influence management also suggests that social workers should strengthen interventions related to peer relationships and environmental risk management. Participants learned to become selective about the people, places, and situations they encountered because they recognized how negative influences could threaten their progress. Social workers should therefore help CICL develop individualized risk-management plans that identify potential triggers, high-risk environments, negative peer associations, and constructive alternatives. Instead of simply instructing participants to "avoid bad friends," social workers should help them develop practical decision-making skills, establish healthy peer networks, practice boundary setting, and identify safe recreational and community activities. Positive peer mentoring may also be considered when appropriate, particularly when rehabilitated young people can interact with peers who demonstrate constructive educational, occupational, and community-oriented behaviors.

The findings on multi-layered support systems further imply that social workers need to improve interagency coordination. Participants relied on family, peers, government institutions, religious faith, and other sources of assistance, demonstrating that reintegration cannot be effectively managed by a single professional or institution. Social workers should therefore strengthen referral networks and establish clearer coordination mechanisms among residential care facilities, local government units, schools, employment and livelihood agencies, health and psychosocial service providers, families, and community organizations. A coordinated support system can reduce the possibility that a rehabilitated CICL will experience a sudden loss of services after discharge. Social workers should serve not only as direct service providers but also as case coordinators and advocates, ensuring that participants are connected to the appropriate resources based on their individual circumstances.

The findings concerning internalized moral shielding, strategic endurance, and mental toughness also suggest that social workers should improve the way rehabilitation programs encourage personal ownership of change. Participants emphasized that genuine rehabilitation requires more than following institutional rules simply to obtain release. Social workers should therefore create interventions that encourage reflection, personal accountability, goal setting, and internal motivation rather than relying solely on external discipline. Participants should be helped to understand why particular behaviors and values are important and how these principles can guide their decisions after leaving the facility. Reflective conversations, individual goal plans, values clarification, decision-making activities, and preparation for real-life situations may help transform institutional lessons into personally meaningful principles.

The participants' spiritual optimism and belief in divine timing also suggest that social workers should recognize spirituality as a potential source of strength when it is consistent with the participant's own beliefs and freely expressed. Social workers should not impose religious practices or assume that all participants share the same spiritual orientation. However, when participants identify faith as an important coping resource, social workers may respectfully incorporate this strength into individualized intervention and support planning, including appropriate coordination with trusted faith-based organizations when desired by the participant. Spirituality may complement psychosocial interventions by helping participants develop hope, meaning, patience, and a future-oriented perspective.

Finally, the findings imply that social workers need to strengthen long-term aftercare and outcome monitoring for rehabilitated CICL. The participants' experiences show that meaningful rehabilitation can involve gradual changes in identity, relationships, emotional regulation, social participation, education, employment, and decision-making. These outcomes may not be fully visible at the point of discharge. Social workers should therefore establish structured follow-up schedules and assess participants across multiple dimensions of reintegration rather than relying solely on the absence of reoffending as an indicator of success. Monitoring should consider family functioning, educational or employment participation, social relationships, emotional well-being, community participation, personal goals, and access to support. Such an approach would allow social workers to identify emerging difficulties early and provide timely intervention before setbacks become more serious.

Overall, the findings suggest that social workers need to shift from a rehabilitation model centered primarily on correction toward a more continuous, strengths-based, family-centered, and community-integrated approach. The participants demonstrated that sustainable change was supported by meaningful goals, supportive relationships, emotional regulation, personal responsibility, productive opportunities, spiritual or personal sources of hope, and the ability to manage social influences. Consequently, social workers should strengthen individualized aftercare, family interventions, educational and livelihood linkages, stigma-reduction efforts, peer and environmental risk management, psychosocial support, interagency coordination, and long-term follow-up. Most importantly, rehabilitated CICL should be viewed not merely as recipients of intervention but as individuals with capacities, aspirations, responsibilities, and the potential to contribute positively to their families and communities. This perspective can help ensure that rehabilitation becomes not simply a process of correcting past behavior, but a sustained process of rebuilding identity, restoring relationships, developing responsibility, and creating meaningful opportunities for a productive future.

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