

Roadworks Ahead:

Valenzuela City and its journey to PWD Empowerment

Maricris delos Santos & Lourdes Villar-Santos





Located at the northern part of the National Capital Region (NCR), Valenzuela City serves as Metro Manila’s gateway to the north and home to a number of industries. In the past two decades, the rise of the city as a center of good practice in terms of governance and provision of services for over 600,000 residents has made it a destination for other LGUs to emulate. This attention not stopped the city from continuously finding ways to improve its services for different sectors – especially in light of the growing importance of inclusivity wherein ‘no one should be left behind.’

The rising concern for the Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in the City of Valenzuela became a start of a number of initiatives and attempts to address this sector of the vulnerable population. These initiatives involved a number of offices in the city government, trying to address the concerns related to their respective sectors. With the implementation of RA 10070, the city has also subscribed to the need to establish an office dedicated to the provision of services of PWDs. However, this institutionalization also required a great deal of work in terms of getting basis for more of the actions it wanted to take on and during the process. The story of Valenzuela will be discussing more in detail how it was able to anchor on partnership and respond to the needs of the said population while making its move to be a ‘more independent office’.

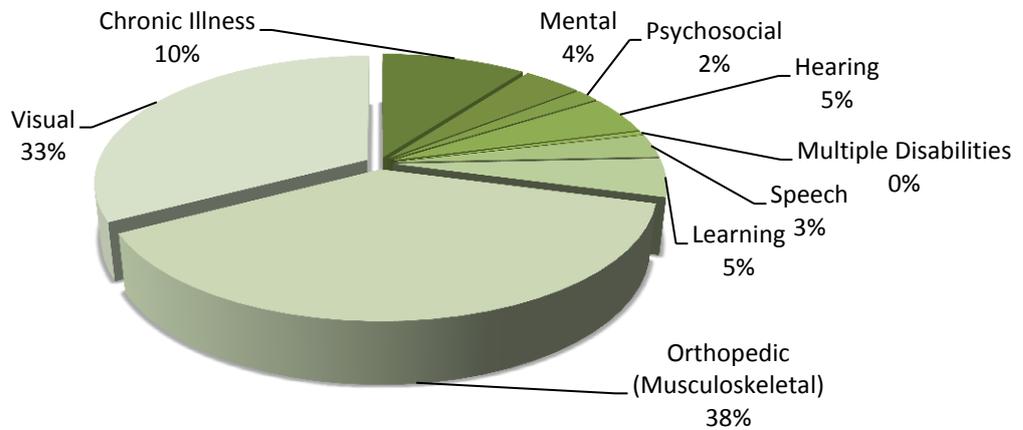
i. The Disabled in the City of Valenzuela

Valenzuela City is home to around 20,731 PWDs (VC SWDO, 2017) comprising around 3.3% of its population, which is way above the national average of 1.57% in 2010. Figure 1 provides the percentages of Valenzuela’s PWD population by disability in 2017. As shown, the highest percentage of PWDs has orthopedic deficiencies, followed by visual impairment. These were either acquired by birth, or by accident. Most of the disabled persons are female (53%), ranging from 46 to 60 years old, with the highest concentration of more than 3,000 at Brgy. Marulas, the largest barangay in terms of population.

Given this profile, the services expected by the clientele include the provision of assistive devices (esp. wheelchairs, eye care) and medical care, as well as accessibility of different government buildings due to mobility problems. While gender wise, male and female have almost the same population, their age have a lot to say about the need to properly track those who are below and above 60, since this is an area of distinction on the provision of services for two offices: the Persons with Disability Affairs Office (PDAO) and the Office for Senior Citizens’ Affairs (OSCA).

Delos Santos, M. & Villar-Santos, L. (2018). Roadworks ahead: Valenzuela City and its journey to PWD empowerment. In *Enabling the Disabled: Assessment of local mechanisms for programs and services for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) – Focus on the Persons with Disabilities Affairs Offices (PDAO)*. Study prepared for the Coalitions for Change Program, Australian Embassy – The Asia Foundation, and the U.P. Center for Local and Regional Governance.

Figure 1. PWD Population Valenzuela City (Oct. 2017)



Source: Valenzuela City Persons with Disabilities Office (PDAO)

The Valenzuela Persons with Disabilities Federation, Inc. (VPDFI) was established in 2006 to give the PWDs a venue to voice out their needs. The federation was created through the assistance of then city councilor Corazon Cortez. As the current president, Dr. Andro Escobar got the post in 2014, the federation made sure that there are PWD representatives from all 33 barangays of Valenzuela City. Each barangay also has its own set of officers which serve as networks and news-bearers on current developments and projects for the welfare of PWDs. The federation works on tapping the different government agencies as well as private institutions that can contribute and provide opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Given the large population of PWDs in Valenzuela City, aside from keeping track of the developments and movement of the clientele, it also calls for the LGU to put together its efforts in serving this sector. PWD needs cut across a number of sectors – whether it involves social welfare, health needs for the assessment of their need for assistive devices, accessibility concerns with regard to city structures, getting employment for them to be able to be empowered, getting education despite difference in adaptation and learning skills, and prioritizing them should there be emergencies. All of these efforts by the city are done in line with the national initiatives for the welfare of PWDs, such as the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons of 1992 (RA 7277) and RA 10070 of 2010.

ii. The Path to PDAO’s Creation

The beginnings of initiatives to address the needs of PWDs started from different sources within the city government. Based on the interviews, known actions for the welfare of this sector started as early as 1998 as an advocacy of one of the City Council members. Councilor Corazon Cortez, on her second three-year term in the local council of then newly-created Valenzuela City, gave her attention to disabled persons in the city through gift-giving events to attend to their special needs.

VALENZUELA CITY

Roadworks ahead: Valenzuela City and its journey to PWD empowerment

PROJECT: Assessment of Local Mechanisms for Programs and Services for PWDs – Focus on Persons with Disabilities Affairs Office

Disclaimer: This endeavor is produced by the Coalitions for Change Program with support from the Australian Embassy – The Asia Foundation Partnership in the Philippines. The views contained herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government or The Asia Foundation.

While the PWDs at that time were not yet fully organized or even aware for that matter, it was part of the Councilor Cortez’s projects to gather them once or twice a year, especially during Christmas time. As Ms. Snooky Cortez, PDAO OIC mentioned, *“Hindi pa ganon ka-established dahil ang mga PWD that time, hindi naman sila g anun ka expose. Yung awareness nila regarding sa kanilang privileges, hindi pa ganun, way back 1995 pa”*. Together with their families, they were able to voice out their needs to the City Government.

To also involve other offices in addressing the needs of the PWDs, the Disabled Persons Affairs Committee (DPAC) was established in the City Council, which includes major concerned offices such as the City Social Welfare and Development Office (CSWDO), Health Office and the Mayor’s Office. In coordination with the CSWDO, more attention was then given to the PWDs in the city, and was included in the plans of the said office. Since Coun. Cortez also took up advocating for the needs of Senior Citizens in 2001, the CSWDO played a bigger role in providing services for the disabled persons. The City Health Office was also tapped to take part in the provision of medical services to PWDs, especially check-up, and prescribing assistive devices.

It was also during this time (2000) that since the CSWDO decided to put up a ‘PWD Unit’ wherein there was at least one staff who would attend to requests from the PWD community such as financial and medical aid. Pursuant to RA 9442, which amended the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons (RA 7277), the municipal and city mayors were required to issue identification cards for PWDs, and this expanded the task of the said unit in the CSWDO. From 2006 until 2016, it was through this unit that the City of Valenzuela was able to provide financial, technical and health assistance to PWDs. Likewise, it also worked closely with VPDFI, which officially gathers PWD leaders in the city to determine the immediate and long-term needs of the community.

In 2013, as authored by three councilors led by Coun. Corazon Cortez, Ordinance No. 79 was passed, creating the Office of Person with Disability Affairs (OPDA) under the CSWDO. The office was mandated to *“coordinate all activities and implement plans, programs, including but not limited to providing assistance to the problems, concerns and issues of Person with Disabilities, gathering of data of PWDs, including the directory of Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs), People’s Organization (POs) and the likes and projects formulated and approved by the City Council for the welfare of Disabled Persons.”* In essence, it was the PWD Unit which served as OPDA from 2013-2016, until Ordinance no. 299 amended Ordinance no. 79 to rename it as the Valenzuela City Persons with Disability Affairs Office (VC PDAO) as an effect of RA 10070. As a result, starting July 1, 2016, PDAO operated under the Office of the Mayor while it is still in its infancy as a separate office from the CSWDO.

The Office of the City Mayor of Valenzuela City also has its own initiatives for persons with disabilities, starting with the term of former Mayor and Congressman, and now Senator Sherwin Gatchalian. During his term as mayor, he prioritized education for all citizens of Valenzuela City and stressed importance on inclusivity, naming this long-term program as the 360 Degrees Education Investment Program. Thus he brought his attention in providing assistance for PWDs to be included in this endeavor, as well as the move to create better education institutions for the youth. This program was continued by the current Mayor, Rexlon Gatchalian, and led to the construction of the

Valenzuela City Special Education Center (VALSPED) which caters to the needs of special children, mostly with mental and learning disabilities.

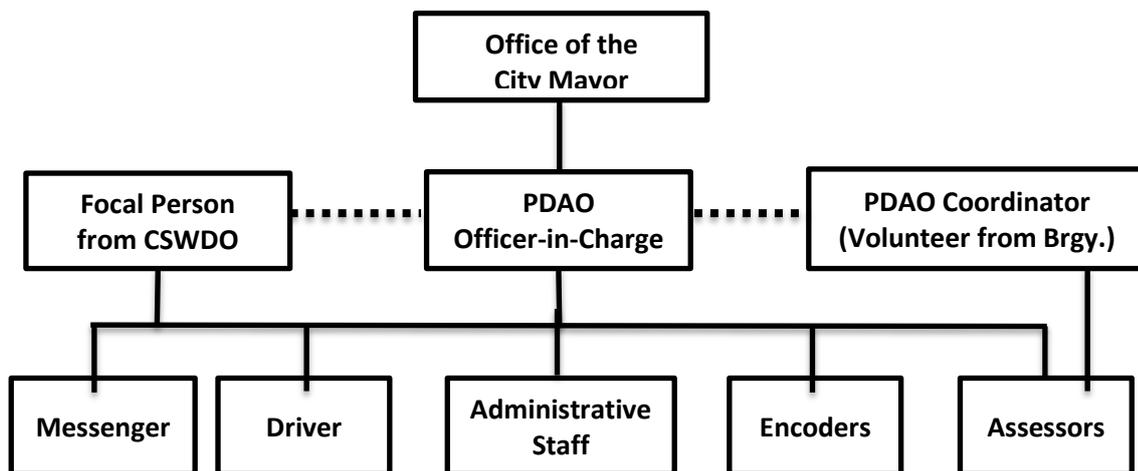
iii. The Valenzuela City PDAO

Based on the interviews with the various city department heads, the current LGU leadership ensures that all services and sectors are part of its priority and none of it are left behind. If we are to look at the budget to determine priorities, the proposed budget for 2018 indicates that the top three offices that get most of the city’s funds are (1) City Employment and Services Office (CESO) with 403M, (2) Mayor’s Office with 401M, and (3) the General Services Office (GSO) with 386 M.

Being under the Mayor’s Office, Valenzuela City PDAO currently runs under the slogan “emPoWered, Our Dreams are Mighty.” Its office’s location is situated at the Ground Floor of the City Hall Complex, within the City Social Welfare and Development Office. As of April 2018, Valenzuela City’s PDAO team is composed of thirty-two (32) individuals, equally divided with male and female members, ranging from 21-52 years old, and six (6) of them are PWDs with speech, visual and orthopedic disabilities.

Currently, the PDAO operates under the Office of the Mayor and does not have an official organizational structure. In Ordinance no. 79 (2013), there were only provisions for two posts – the PWD affairs officer and personnel, and no succeeding document has clarified the structure. However, based on the functions described by the PDAO OIC and staff, the author visualizes the structure shown in Figure 2 .

Fig. 2. Organizational Structure of Valenzuela City PDAO as perceived by the author



Reconstructing the PWD Database – The ‘Roadworks’

When PDAO was established, the first major change that was prioritized by the LGU leadership was to reconstruct/ clean the existing PWD database. While this was formerly handled by the CSWDO, the need to harmonize, revalidate and easily update data on the PWD population of the city made this the primary activity of the office from 2016, and will hopefully be finished by July 2018. This

Delos Santos, M. & Villar-Santos, L. (2018). Roadworks ahead: Valenzuela City and its journey to PWD empowerment. In *Enabling the Disabled: Assessment of local mechanisms for programs and services for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) – Focus on the Persons with Disabilities Affairs Offices (PDAO)*. Study prepared for the Coalitions for Change Program, Australian Embassy – The Asia Foundation, and the U.P. Center for Local and Regional Governance.

database will serve as the basis of PDAO in prioritizing and planning its programs and activities. Thus, the perceived organizational structure was as such due to the needs of the office at the moment, which is mostly focused on data gathering and verification at the household level, encoding and processing of information, together with the issuance of identification cards for PWDs.

The PDAO OIC. During the time that there was a PWD Unit within CSWDO, there were three focal persons who handled the PWD affairs from 2000-2016- all of which are personnel from the said office. These were Ma. Christina “Tines” Ramos, who is now with the Child Protection Center another unit under the CSWDO; Ken Sabangan, a PWD who is now with the Health Office, and Jamine Corpuz, who has already resigned from her services in Valenzuela City Government.

Upon the creation of PDAO on July 1, 2016, Mayor Rexlon Gatchalian appointed Ms. Snooky Cortez as its Officer-in-Charge. Prior to this appointment, her career geared towards helping the PWD community started when she served as the Chief-of-Staff of former city councilor Corazon Cortez, who championed the cause of PWDs in Valenzuela City. Ms. Cortez finished a Bachelor’s Degree in Commerce, with a Major in Marketing and has served the city for twenty-two (22) years. To also make herself updated and to further learn about handling issues regarding PWDs, as the OIC, she attended a number of seminars, mostly by the invitation of the NCD, to be able to perform her functions. Currently, Ms. Cortez is employed as Administrative Aide V (SG-5) on a casual basis, and has not yet secured a Civil Service Eligibility.

There was no selection process that took place. As shared by the Human Resource Management Officer of Valenzuela City, *“the Head is a position of trust and confidence. Definitely, discretion/prerogative ng Mayor kung sino ang pipiliin. Hindi pwedeng, kalimutan muna natin ang personalities, it’s always based on trust and confidence.”* Ms. Cortez gained the trust and confidence of the Mayor by serving for more than a decade as the Chief of Staff of the legislator who championed the cause of PWDs.

For Ms. Snooky Cortez, the mere situation of the ‘differently abled’ seen on the streets of the city was enough motivation and rationale to support PWDs, and as such, as special as PWDs are, she strongly supports the need for PWDs to be prioritized by having their own lanes for services, and envisions Valenzuela City PDAO to provide a one- stop-shop for PWDs. While not a PWD herself, she believes that a non-PWD head can deliver services and able to do more for the said population -

BOX 1.
The Re-assessment of PWD Data

On its creation in 2016, the PDAO started the effort of conducting a ‘census’ of the PWD population of Valenzuela City. This includes a full inventory and updating of data based on the movement of the PWDs, whether they have reached senior citizen age, deceased, or literally have moved locations. The team doing the process is composed of twenty (20) assessors hired by the city government who go down to the barangays. The project costs millions of pesos, which was not disclosed by the interviewees.

Before PDAO, PWD data was generated thru two channels: data gathering from the CSWDO, and the surveys conducted by the CPreF, Inc., a non-government organization who advocates for the welfare of the handicapped. In order to make sure that the data is not duplicated and is verified, the newly instituted PDAO team took on the challenge of checking all the people and households in the previous system one-by-one, with over 21,000 records to be recreated and verified.

With the deadline to complete this data cleaning endeavor nearing its end in July, PDAO is hopeful that this step will contribute largely to their planning and implementation for project proposals and activities they have on the pipeline.

VALENZUELA CITY

Roadworks ahead: Valenzuela City and its journey to PWD empowerment

PROJECT: Assessment of Local Mechanisms for Programs and Services for PWDs – Focus on Persons with Disabilities Affairs Office

Disclaimer: This endeavor is produced by the Coalitions for Change Program with support from the Australian Embassy – The Asia Foundation Partnership in the Philippines. The views contained herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government or The Asia Foundation.

“mas makakagawa pala ako ng tulong for them. Parang ako yung magiging boses.” Currently, Ms. Cortez shared that about 80% of her work as OIC involved counselling and handling issues with regard to PWD request processing and complaints, such as establishments not honoring their IDs, family issues or experiencing discrimination from other members of the society.

Apart from her vision to have a one-stop-shop for PWDs, she also sees the need for training for their clientele and their families, which hopefully, their office can provide. For PWDs as individuals, there is a need to promote education, work/livelihood which can help sustain their needs. On the other hand, the intervention should also focus on the immediate support group of PWDs – their families, especially those who discourage their disabled family members from doing more because of the latter’s (mostly physical) conditions.

The PDAO Team. Apart from the OIC, two other individuals share leadership in the operations. One is a volunteer barangay councilor from Barangay Karuhatan, Coun. Niña Lopez, who helps out in organizing the data gathering for PWDs in the one of the two districts of Valenzuela (the other district managed by the OIC). This role is also a part of her work as the President of the Rotary Club of Valenzuela, which also provides assistance to the PWDs. With barely two years in existence PDAO still collaborates with the CSWDO who handles majority of the programs and projects for PWDs. Thus, the CSWDO also placed one of their social workers, Mr. Nelson Valencia, as focal person in PDAO to bridge the needs of PWDs between the two offices since 2017; especially that PDAO is still working on cleaning the PWD database. The CSWDO focal person and the PDAO OIC also have shared responsibility when it comes to the approval of the issuance of IDs for the PWDs. Their current internal arrangement is to have walk-ins, new applicants and renewal of PWD IDs be approved by the CSWDO Focal Person, while the PDAO OIC and the PDAO Coordinator approves those who apply at the barangay, and checks the data of those who are being re-assessed during rounds of data gathering.

“ako ang sa walk-in; Si Ma’am Nina at si Ma’am Snooky ang naga-apruba sa barangay katulong ang doctor namin. Tapos yung for re-assessment, double-check sina Ma’am Snooky at Ma’am Nina na. Yung sa walk-in, yung mga bagong applicant, renewal sa akin. Kasi sila ang inaapruba nila yung may mga existing ID na yan. Check na lang nila kung qualified ba talaga na magkaroon. Nasaan na ba yung nagkaroon ng ID? Baka naging senior na? Lumipat na sa ibang lugar?” – CSWDO-PDAO Focal Person

There are also seven (7) individuals who stay at the PDAO office to perform on a multi-tasking basis encoding and provision of frontline services for PWDs, logistical assistance for the federation, and liaison and transportation services (especially for PWDs with mobility problems). All of them serve under a Contract of Service. There are three full-time encoders, who literally put up all the information gathered in an electronic database, two full-time assessors who scan and check the requirements submitted for the issuance of a PWD ID, there are two more staff who perform both encoding and assessment, a driver/messenger/liaison officer. While all of the staff applied for their respective posts, some of them came from the previous office of Coun. Cortez, and some applied through the Coun. Nina Lopez. These office staff generally has background on behavioral sciences and basic medical knowledge that will be crucial in their assessment of applications for PWD IDs.

VALENZUELA CITY

Roadworks ahead: Valenzuela City and its journey to PWD empowerment

PROJECT: Assessment of Local Mechanisms for Programs and Services for PWDs – Focus on Persons with Disabilities Affairs Office

Disclaimer: This endeavor is produced by the Coalitions for Change Program with support from the Australian Embassy – The Asia Foundation Partnership in the Philippines. The views contained herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government or The Asia Foundation.

For the data gathering function of PDAO, they have twenty (20) assessors who go to the 33 barangays to collect information on PWDs in households, and also to monitor their needs. The staff currently does not have security of tenure since all of them are either on a casual or contractual status under the ‘database cleaning’ or PWD Data Re-assessment project funded by the Office of the Mayor. All of the PDAO staff, including the OIC started their work from July 1, 2016 onwards.

iv. PDAO at Work

Being a newly created office in July 1, 2016, PDAO is currently coping with the challenges of transition from being under CSWDO to an independent unit. However, with the headstart of cleaning the database, the office has yet to encounter implementing projects and programs on its own as it needs to establish the basis for planning and budgeting. As such, it had no budget of its own in 2016, and was only given half a million pesos for 2017 and same for 2018 for maintenance and operating expenditures. Salaries of the personnel are under the Office of the Mayor. Bulk of its work at the moment is the assessment and issuance of the PWD ID. Most of its activities, however, are done through partnership and it functions mainly as a coordinative unit.

The activities of the city’s PDAO are also mainly for awareness purposes, general assemblies for various groups, job fairs and provision of assistive devices, in conjunction with the dates set for PWD awareness and dedication. For instance, some of the flag ceremonies of the local government are dedicated to raising consciousness about autism (February), cerebral palsy (September), and other conditions of the PWDs. They are also providing wheelchairs, hearing aid, and assessing PWDs who are in need of them. Aside from the PWDs themselves, they also make sure that there are activities available for their family members such as seminars on coping with PWD family members and making them understand their need for family support.

BOX 2.
The Valenzuela City Special Education Center

The VALSped is the first local government-operated SPED facility in the country. As part of the Education 360 Degrees Investment Program of the City, it was established in 2016 and cost around Php 38 million.

With the help of DepEd, the school was able to start off with five (5) special education teachers, catering to children with special needs, with hopes of helping them to be mainstreamed and not left behind by society.

A four-storey building located in Barangay Malinta, VALSPED is equipped with fourteen (14) specialized facilitation rooms, including therapy rooms, assessment room, early intervention, conference area, computer laboratory room, restaurant/café, laundry area, arts and crafts room.

The facility offers a number of services such as occupation therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy, and general SPED services, including skills enhancement. These skills include painting, cooking, managing a canteen, and handmade crafts, among others. It also conducts seminars for the families, parents and guardians of the children with special needs.

VALSPED is exclusive to citizens of Valenzuela City, 4 years old and above, and with developmental disability. As of 2017, it caters to almost 700 students, attended to by 25 staff composed of occupational, physical and speech therapists and SPED teachers, mostly hired by the LGU.

Source: PDAO, 2017

VALENZUELA CITY

Roadworks ahead: Valenzuela City and its journey to PWD empowerment

In terms of priority, it cannot be concluded at this point on whether the concerns and projects for the PWDs are given more attention compared to others. However, as previously mentioned, the Gatchalian brothers' administration included prioritizing inclusive education for all. The completion of the VALSPED in 2016 and ongoing operations is also a part of service provision for the PWDs. However, this was initiated primarily by the Office of then Congressman Sherwin Gatchalian, in partnership with the City Government and the Department of Education (DepEd) (see Box Discussion 2).

Anchoring on Partnership. While Valenzuela City PDAO is focused on renewing and updating the PWD database, it simultaneously takes on the requests of their clientele with the help of other city offices. With the varying needs, ranging from financial assistance to employment, PDAO generally acts as a conduit or on a referral mechanism to ensure that PWDs get the right services. Some of its collaborations are with the following offices:

City Social Welfare and Development Office. Being the 'mother' office of PDAO, most of the services are still housed by the CSWDO. One of its major projects is the conduct of home visits for some PWDs suffering from cerebral palsy and other disadvantaged individuals. It also provides financial assistance and assistive devices.

Office of the Mayor. PDAO's current major project, the revamping of the PWD database is funded by the Mayor's Office. Likewise, any other activity or project that PDAO will be conducting is under the approval of the Office of the Mayor and is directly discussed with the LCE. The operation of the VALSPED is also with the office, however, it is not directly linked with the operations of the PDAO.

Public Employment Service Office (PESO). Clients who are in search of livelihood and job opportunities are immediately referred by PDAO to PESO. The Office also conducts interviews and consultations to find the right fit for the PWD clients. It also facilitates the conduct of Job Fairs exclusive for PWDs (usually in the month of June), or in the case of regular job fairs, PDAO coordinates with PESO to ensure that PWD lanes are set-up and accessible for physically challenged clients. Through the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), PESO selected PWD recipients, awarding them with equipment/livelihood showcases worth PHP 10,000 under the TULAY (Tulong, Alay sa Taong may Kapansanan) Program, such as food processing, ready-to-wear (RTW) clothing business, sari-sari stores, computer units, etc. The PESO is also providing feedback to PDAO whether the PWDs they referred were able to get jobs. Data from the 2016 and 2017 June PWD Job Fairs show that PWDs got employed as factory workers, but have low 'hired on the spot' rates of 17.5% or 7 out of 40 applicants (2016) and 17.24% or 5 out of 29 applicants in 2017.

City Health Office. The medical needs of PWDs are taken care of by the health office – check-up, vaccination, and also dental care. Along with the CSWDO, it also provides assistive devices such as wheelchairs, hearing aid, eyeglasses, and canes as prescribed by local government doctors. It also certifies the disabilities of the PWDs, a requirement for the issuance of the PWD ID. It also has a program called "Dalaw Team" wherein they visit old people and PWDs in their houses with a team composed of a doctor, a dentist, a physical therapist and a nurse assessing the health condition of the clients. This initiative is done with the cluster team of the health office, CSWDO and PDAO.

VALENZUELA CITY

Roadworks ahead: Valenzuela City and its journey to PWD empowerment

PROJECT: Assessment of Local Mechanisms for Programs and Services for PWDs – Focus on Persons with Disabilities Affairs Office

Disclaimer: This endeavor is produced by the Coalitions for Change Program with support from the Australian Embassy – The Asia Foundation Partnership in the Philippines. The views contained herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government or The Asia Foundation.

‘Even before wala pa yung PDAO. Kasi before ginagawa na yan. Sabi ko nga, we are in close coordination with CSWD. Maganda yung aming working relationship when it comes to social services’. – Dr. Exconde, CHO

Office of the Senior Citizens’ Affairs (OSCA). There is some collaboration between OSCA and PDAO as they clarified their service provision to avoid duplication of benefits. Both sectors have their privilege identification cards, but PDAO prioritizes those who are below 60 years old. Some senior citizens also have the privilege of availing home care, under the CSWDO.

City Engineering Office. To comply with the standards set for the accessibility of buildings and other infrastructure, the Engineering Office consults the PDAO on whether the plans meet the standards to have PWD-friendly facilities. Complaints from PWDs are also deliberated upon by both offices to go through the proper course of action. It also performs monitoring for both government and private buildings on whether they are able to comply with the standards for PWD accessibility.

Disaster and Risk Reduction Management Office (DRRMO). Given the vulnerability of PWDs, PDAO and the DRRMO ensure that the disabled are prioritized when it comes to emergency evacuation and rescue operations. Among the current collaborations of the two offices is the initiative to put up signages at households with PWD member. Also, when the PWD database is fully verified and updated, these signages can also be used for tagging (Box 3) where the PWDs can be located for easy tracking, especially during times of disaster.

Local Special Bodies. The presence of PDAO in LSBs is issue-based rather than having one body permanently having its membership. Basically, when the issue of PWDs is raised, the PDAO OIC is invited to the meeting to participate in the discussion.

Interagency Engagements. At the national level, VC PDAO coordinates with the National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA). Mostly, these coordinative work includes updating, reporting, and invitations especially if there are seminars, meetings and capacity-building programs being conducted by the agency. The NCDA also provides updates on the amended laws related to persons with disability.

For other agencies such as DOLE, DOH and DSWD, most engagements are done through the city level offices related to each department. However, it should also be noted that aside from the PDAO, the VPDFI also coordinates directly with the DOLE, in particular, in order to secure slots from programs or projects related to employment for PWDs. In terms of compliance with the Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG), the Valenzuela City DILG ensures that the LGU is updated on memoranda

**BOX 3.
 House Tagging and DRRM Alert App**

As part of the ongoing initiatives of PDAO and the DRRM, the city is currently producing red signages for households with PWD members with the PDAO logo in it. This is to recognize the need for the PWDs to be considered during rescue operations in times of disaster, telling that a PWD is in the house.

Similarly, the DRRMO is also about to launch a new button on its app for PWDs. The Valenzuela ALERT Button, which is being used by citizens of the city to get help, currently has three main categories of emergency: crime-related, health-related and fire/disaster related. The PWD concerns are currently under the health-related emergencies.

related to implementation of programs from the national level. At times, it also provides technical assistance and provides endorsement at the barangay level.

At the barangay level, PDAO also makes sure that it starts working with the barangay level by first performing the data gathering and updating for very barangay. Through the PDAO Coordinator, Brgy. Councilor Nina Lopez, regular visits to every barangay are made not only to do the census but also to inform them about programs and projects for PWDs. A barangay PWD Desk was also required in every barangay. Ordinance no. 241, s. 2015 was passed by the city council to provide desks, both for senior citizens and persons with disabilities. These desks are manned by PWD officers of the associations within the barangays, but arrangements in terms of honoraria and who can man it may also vary from one barangay to another.

The PDAO also collaborates with partners outside the LGU, such as private sector companies and NGOs. In particular, it has established a strong partnership with Rotary Club International in terms of the provision of assistive devices and other gift-giving projects. It also sits in the monthly meetings of the Federation, in order to work closely with the stakeholders, and given this, it is also the one taking care of the logistical arrangements for the meetings.

Feedback on PDAO. Despite its current priority of focusing on the PWD data assessment, VC PDAO has been able to fulfill its function through the help of other city government offices and other agencies it has partnered with. Feedback on the current PDAO operations are quite scarce, especially when it comes to the awareness about the office. For the city hall employees, they believe that the creation of PDAO was crucial to be have a better grasp and attention given to help out in the plight of PWDs. *“Mas okay ngayon. Yung office ma-identify mo kung saan talaga. Tapos kapag may project ang DOLE para sa PWD, alam na naming kung saan i-refer.” –PESO OIC.* On the other hand, members of the VPDFI felt that services seemed to be slower compared to how these were handled before by the PWD Unit of the CSWDO.

The services of the office are more outward oriented, meaning, it prioritizes the needs of the Valenzuela City citizens compared to what it delivers to the PWD employees who are within the LGU workforce. Thus, the clientele composed of ordinary citizens and those at the barangay level were the ones who mostly get the benefit of the city’s PWD services.

The data gathering team was able to interview some of the project recipients of PDAO. They have a very positive feedback on the livelihood assistance they were provided. However, upon tracing the source of the assistance, it turned out that the project is from DOLE, and it is a result of partnership with PESO and PDAO who generally refers PWDs who want to get jobs.

In terms of accessibility, the city hall is compliant as far as mobility is concerned as it has facilities that the PWDs will not have any trouble navigating with. It has lifts, ramps, and toilet cubicles dedicated to PWDs. However, there are still some government buildings that need to be worked on in this matter, especially at the barangay level, where the city intends to build on structures for its 3S (Sentro ng Sama-samang Serbisyo) Program to make its services more accessible to the people.

v. Insights and Recommendations

Over the years, Valenzuela City made efforts to uphold the interest of the PWDs. While there have been a number of initiatives existing even before it was ‘formalized’ by the implementation of RA 10070, the city made baby steps – whether it was through the efforts of its champion, Coun. Cora Cortez, or the PWD Unit of CSWDO, or the VPDFI, for that matter, or even the Office of the Mayor who each had their own contribution in making the cities’ services inclusive for the sector. This can be deemed as a good indicator because the efforts come from a number of directions, and at least in the awareness level, there are a number of offices that work on the issues. VC PDAO has also highlighted that the accomplishment of office for the past two years was that it was able to raise awareness about PWDs.

On the other hand, it could be considered that the case of Valenzuela City is one of the most politically challenging to write – especially when it comes to limitations in collecting information on the programs and initiatives prior to 2016, financial data, and the selection process for the personnel who are to occupy posts in PDAO. The need to look back on the efforts in place before PDAO was created may prove to be valuable as these were part of the office’s journey in service provision. Further, the activities seemed to have taken a halt due to the ‘roadworks’ being set-up upon PDAO’s creation in 2016 in the form of re-assessing and re-constructing the data.

Based on the experience of Valenzuela city, there are a number of things that may need to be considered, and at the same time, are notable for good practice.

Policy Insights. While Valenzuela City had early actions for PWD welfare, the re-assessment of the PWD data has clearly made an impact when it comes to the willingness of the LGU to use evidence in its policies, plans and programs for the PWDs. Very few of the programs are spearheaded by PDAO at this point, but the completion of the database can bring it to a definite direction to identify the right kinds of programs and projects by knowing its targets and setting its priorities based on the data gathered about the needs of PWDs.

In terms of policy and institutionalization, the establishment of PDAO and its activities have directions based on the ordinances passed by the city council. However, amendments are needed, especially in terms of clarifying the roles and functions, especially the organizational structure of PDAO. As for reference to the national laws such as RA 10070. The PDAO OIC of Valenzuela City believes that it should not be a requirement for the head of office to be a PWD, nor for the staff. However, the office believes that it should be required to have a member who can empathize with

BOX 4.
The PIC Validity Extension Ordinance

As provided by law, RA 9442 gives the disabled persons their rights, privileges and entitlement to a three-year valid personal identification card (PIC) which they have to present in every establishment to get their benefits. The City of Valenzuela, based on how they assessed their PWDs’ needs, passed an ordinance that extends the validity of the ID card to five (5) years.

Ordinance no. 427 of 2017 specifies redesigning the PICs and the need for the Valenzuela PWD citizens to have 5-year validity for PIC primarily to “ease the burden of PWDs with specific mobility problems in the renewal of their PICs.” The city council also considered the cost of making PVC cards, into the policy.

Currently, there have been exchanges between the city and the NCPAG with regard to this matter, which was seen not to be aligned with the current rules as depicted in the statute.

VALENZUELA CITY

Roadworks ahead: Valenzuela City and its journey to PWD empowerment

PROJECT: Assessment of Local Mechanisms for Programs and Services for PWDs – Focus on Persons with Disabilities Affairs Office

Disclaimer: This endeavor is produced by the Coalitions for Change Program with support from the Australian Embassy – The Asia Foundation Partnership in the Philippines. The views contained herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government or The Asia Foundation.

the PWD community, especially one who can communicate through sign language to bridge the communication gap with the Deaf and mute. When it comes to qualification standards, the PDAO OIC finds it quite high due to the eligibility requirement but she suggested that the PDAO OIC should have college degree, but most of all, a PDAO officer should have the passion to help PWDs, has love for work and is able to empathize.

Structure. This case presented an unofficial organizational structure, based on how the author understood the current dynamics of the VC PDAO. In its current capacity, the office still depends on the help of other city government offices, and even if it is under the Office of the Mayor, it still operates closely with its ‘mother’ office, the CSWDO. With less than two years of operation, it has yet to gain permanency in terms of people within it, working on a casual basis or on a contract of service, especially now that the personnel which serve as its backbone have yet to gain more stable places within the city government organization.

In essence and based on feedback, the organization also shows that there is lack of clarity in terms of the functions and authority of three positions – the PDAO OIC, the CSWDO Focal Person and the PDAO Coordinator. In the long run, it is important to establish a clear structure and hierarchy to move towards a common direction in the implementation of programs and projects of the office.

The city’s staff complement is quite large compared to other LGUs, but with its current bulk of work, everybody’s cup is full. According to the PDAO OIC, it is ideal that database updating should be done once every two years – and this may have implications on the need for staff on the ground as it is now, but with short-term employment and activity. The office aims to have it automatically updated after the current database re-assessment and upgrading. Likewise, in its role as implementor, coordinator and monitoring body – depending on how it plans out the programs and projects to be done in the next couple of years, it is important to reconsider the functions and responsibilities of each one of the staff. Then again, these people may also need to get security of tenure to sustain their current efforts for the office and the city. It is also at this point that PDAO office members should also be made aware of what they should be monitoring in compliance with the laws mandating its functions, and knowing is the first step.

Organizational Climate. There are a couple of limitations in the study in terms of documentary evidence on the prioritization of the city administration to PWDs, but based on the feedback of various interviewees within the city government, PDAO comes with positivity and acceptance. Other offices have also come to recognize the need for a separate office to attend to disability affairs, especially for some employees who themselves are part of the population. External stakeholders such as the VPDFI view it as a welcome development, but have yet to see PDAO to fully function as an office.

Currently, being housed with the CSWDO helps PDAO to maintain its connection to the office that previously handled its services, to facilitate the transfer of responsibilities. Having a focal person from CSWD that attends to the needs of PWDs within PDAO is also an addition to this close connection. In terms of awareness, both the clientele and some LGU office staff still have the perception that the office is under social welfare due to the nature of its work. Then again, this particular attachment is welcomed by PDAO but may need to undergo more changes leading to

VALENZUELA CITY

Roadworks ahead: Valenzuela City and its journey to PWD empowerment

clearer distinction of functions between the two offices as the database updating reaches its completion. PDAO's zeal to generate reliable and correct information on the PWD population is commendable. In almost two years of database reconstruction, PWDs are referred to other offices for services, largely accommodated by SWDO. This contributes to the misperception that PDAO is part of SWDO.

In terms of advocacy, the PDAO may need to re-market itself to its clientele when it becomes 'fully operational' with its plans and programs laid out. VC PDAO relatively had open communication with all offices of the LGU, NEDA and the DILG, but it may have to take action and further assist the Valenzuela City PWD Federation, to add up to the long list of programs and projects they have to plan. Same with the barangays, wherein PDAO may also consider shifting the role of enumerators into something that can help PWDs at household level, aside from the PWD Desk, which may not be that accessible especially to those with mobility problems.

Dealing with Debates and the Need for Visibility and Proper Prioritization. For Valenzuela City's case, the crossroads may also need to lead into certainty for some areas of concern for PDAO. One is to try undergoing the process of selection prescribed by RA 10070 to be able to create examples that can help out with the development of the current selection policy. Secondly, the debate on whether the PDAO head should be a PWD or non-PWD may affect the operations of the office, but it is important to note that the bottomline of the debate should be on how to properly prioritize and be able to deliver services efficiently, effectively and promptly. Third, the PDAO has to be proactive in involving and encouraging visibility of local PWD associations to better target and assess the magnitude of the PWD issues in the city. For a start, the VPDFI already have their line-up of proposed projects, however, these are put into a halt, as raised by VPDFI President Andro Escobar, *"Meron kaming mga projects or proposed activities na binibigay kay PDAO. Nira-raise naming informally, kasi ganun ang naging systema naming. Then kapag okay sa kanila, saka gagawa into writing. Sa pag raise pa lang sa kanila, sasabihin pa lang namin, negative na yung sagot nila kasi naka-concentrate sila sa project na binaba ni Mayor na yung updating ng database."*

There are also a number of activities that keep popping up through the 'wishlist' of the PDAO Office members, as well as with the federation. Among these is to have capacity-building activities for the PDAO staff and the federation in terms of deeper awareness and care for PWDs, and the 'family approach' in doing so to bring in the role of families in the picture. This is taken from the common frustration of the PDAO staff that the PWDs tend not to have the proper attention and care they deserve from their families, thus creating a negative attitude towards opportunities to empower themselves such as through finding work and education.

Lessons in Transition. While the case did not explicitly provide detail on the transition process from 2006-2016, the need to document the transition process and being able to get lessons from these experiences are crucial in making more solid and grounded plans for establishing the office. This transition plan may also detail steps needed for the move, primarily by determining priorities such as whether there is a need to update data, clarification of what programs will be carried over to the new office from the old one, and a clear structure and the roles of personnel involved. Recognizing people with institutional memory on the functions of a PWD Unit can also prove helpful in dealing with this.

VALENZUELA CITY

Roadworks ahead: Valenzuela City and its journey to PWD empowerment

PROJECT: Assessment of Local Mechanisms for Programs and Services for PWDs - Focus on Persons with Disabilities Affairs Office

Disclaimer: This endeavor is produced by the Coalitions for Change Program with support from the Australian Embassy - The Asia Foundation Partnership in the Philippines. The views contained herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government or The Asia Foundation.

vi. Conclusion

The city government of Valenzuela has a number of good PWD-relevant programs, but these are mostly not initiated nor led by PDAO. The VALSPED and Barangay PWD Desks are some of the noteworthy initiatives that took place even before PDAO came in 2016, and the DRRM alert button for PWDs and house signs are projects on the pipeline. On the other hand, as PDAO currently focuses on database reconstruction and issuance of IDs for PWDs, its actions are limited on a referral basis in terms of other services needed by the PWD community, mostly with the CSWDO, creating the confusion that it is still under the said office.

There were a couple of missing pieces in the story of transition, and number of complications in terms of the structure of leadership, delineation of roles, as well as qualification of the personnel performing their functions under the office. The office may be partially operational as it is now, but the need to gain insights based on these pieces may prove to be helpful in planning a smooth transition.

The larger things that VC PDAO has in store for its clientele will ultimately be decided once it has finished its re-assessment of the PWD database. As such, it is within passing through roadworks where a number of things are still being put into place. However, how this data will be used to craft the master plan for addressing PWD concerns remains a mystery, and hopefully it will bear fruit by July 2018 being the target completion month.

More conclusive statements may be given as to the performance of the office once it has stood its ground as a separate office, with a clear plan and performance basis in place. Much needs to be done to pick the right path to rightfully include PWDs in the process. There may be presence of programs, but are they making the desired impact to the PWD community? As far as inclusivity is concerned, PDAOs may need to reach out to make the PWDs access the opportunities they deserve in order to be capacitated and empowered.

References

Press Reader. 13 April 2016. "Children with Special Needs find home in Valenzuela SPED Center." <https://www.pressreader.com/philippines/philippine-daily-inquirer/20160413/281582354791702>

Valenzuela City Persons with Disability Affairs Office (PDAO).

VALENZUELA CITY

Roadworks ahead: Valenzuela City and its journey to PWD empowerment

PROJECT: Assessment of Local Mechanisms for Programs and Services for PWDs – Focus on Persons with Disabilities Affairs Office

Disclaimer: This endeavor is produced by the Coalitions for Change Program with support from the Australian Embassy – The Asia Foundation Partnership in the Philippines. The views contained herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government or The Asia Foundation.

Valenzuela City Government. www.valenzuela.gov.ph

List of Interviewees

Date	Office
14, 15, 19 March	Valenzuela City Persons with Disability Affairs Office (PDAO)
17 April 2018	
14 March 2018	Valenzuela City Planning Office Valenzuela City Public Employment and Services Office (PESO) DILG OIC City Director Valenzuela City Legal Office Valenzuela City Human Resources Management Office (HRMO) Valenzuela City Health Office
15 March	Interview with Valenzuela City PWD Employees
19 March	Focus Group Discussion with Valenzuela Disabled Persons Federation
16 April 2018	Interviews with Program Recipients
17 April 2018	Valenzuela City Office of Senior Citizens' Affairs

Delos Santos, M. & Villar-Santos, L. (2018). Roadworks ahead: Valenzuela City and its journey to PWD empowerment. In *Enabling the Disabled: Assessment of local mechanisms for programs and services for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) – Focus on the Persons with Disabilities Affairs Offices (PDAO)*. Study prepared for the Coalitions for Change Program, Australian Embassy – The Asia Foundation, and the U.P. Center for Local and Regional Governance.