

GOOD NEIGHBOR

Jenny Delos Santos

Despite the holiday season being a difficult time for Jenny Delos Santos, she still finds ways to give back to the community.

As a domestic violence survivor and mental health advocate, the Honolulu Aloha Pono Lions Club member delivered gifts to mothers and keiki at a Domestic Violence Action Center shelter.

Delos Santos and fellow club members recently presented gifts to more than 40 kids and \$25 Walmart gift cards to each mother at the shelter. Previously, she had also led efforts to send treats for Halloween and canned goods for Thanksgiving, too.

“My goal is to help people, especially in domestic violence because I went through so much,” Delos Santos says, explaining how her ex-husband threatened to hurt her and her two children for three months before she escaped to a DVAC shelter.

“I know what they (domestic violence victims) went through,” she adds. “I know how hard it is to leave the situation ... (and) try to rebuild your life again. It was really, really hard.”

Due to her traumatic experience, Delos Santos will have post-traumatic stress, dissociative features (loss of connection between thoughts, memories, feelings, surroundings, behavior and identity) and bipolar depression for the rest of her life. Her children, Charles and Christina, suffered from schizophrenia before dying separately of heart attacks around the holidays in 2019. Following their deaths, Delos Santos says she attempted to take her own life.

However, after two and a half years in The Queen’s Medical Center’s outpatient treatment program, and with help from dialectical

behavior therapy and National Alliance on Mental Illness support groups, she was able to regain stability in her life.

Since then, as a member of a crisis intervention team, Delos Santos has given speeches on her experiences to hundreds of people at schools, police academies and even the FBI.

She credits her eight years in a Toastmasters International club — a program aimed at building better communicators and leaders — for boosting her confidence in public speaking.

“I feel like it’s my purpose in life that I give back to the community because so many people helped me get to where I am today, so I want to help others so that they can benefit from my story,” she says.

She is also a member of the Zonta Club of O’ahu, which helps those dealing with domestic violence.

Writing has also been a key part of her life, reflected in her 17 years as an editorial clerk for the *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* and the former *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*.

Besides keeping minutes as assistant secretary and writing press releases for Aloha Pono Lions, in 2018, she published a book on her life and experiences called *Falling Perfectly Without Trying*. She wrote it especially for those experiencing domestic violence, mental illness and cancer.

A revised edition includes a section about Charles and Christina, and will be released soon, according to Delos Santos.

This year, she published *Mark Takai’s Legacy*, which highlights the life of the late congressman who represented Hawai’i in the U.S. House of Representatives. She says writing it gave her a goal to focus on during her darker days.

And, just as she was helped by the Hawai’i CARES team through



Photo courtesy Jenny Delos Santos

her mental health crises, she will do the same as a peer specialist for the state. She says she will be helping those who were in a similar situation to her — having lost everything and considering taking their life.

As she says in her speeches, she believes a person who struggles with psychiatric problems is capable of “living a regular life” with the help of daily medication, a nutritious diet, good sleep, exercise and a support group.

“It’s important because I don’t have money to help anybody, but I can write, I can speak, I can tell people about my stories that may inspire other people to ... just think that what I went through, maybe they can ... have the same goal, the same purpose in life to get out of the situation because a lot of people are dying in domestic violence situations,” Delos Santos says. “I want the girls or the women to get out of domestic violence situations and inspire them, that if I can do it, they can do it too.”

Learn more about Delos Santos at jennydelossantos.com. For resources on domestic violence in Hawai’i, visit hscadv.org.

— Allyson Pang

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