

Empowering PWD-learners through Project I.W.A.V.E.S.: A Community-based Action Research

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ABSTRACT

The College of Hospitality and Tourism Management of Gordon College offered its community extension program to PWDs as an intervention for the marginalized part of the community. Training sessions were scheduled every Saturday of the week, which started last March 2025 until May 2025. Originally, the Project iWAVES has 15 enrolled trainees - 5 learners with intellectual disability, 5 learners who are deaf, one with ADHD, and four learners with autism. Nine of ten PWD learners passed the NCII for Housekeeping Services. One PWD learner struggled with the butler service competencies. The study recommends to assist the PWD-learners for their future employment, offer a new training program for new set of learners, and widen the reach of the project across region.

INTRODUCTION

In addition to being hubs for scholarly research and instruction, higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines also actively involve the community through extension initiatives. In addition to teaching and research, community extension is one of the trifocal functions of Philippine universities and colleges as required by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) (Chidiebere et al., 2025). In accordance with CHED Memorandum Order 52, series of 2016, the commission began working to redirect extension activities. For the "provision of space to discover practical, evidence- and science-based answers that can address real-world social, economic, and environmental challenges of partner citizens and communities," the policy offers certain criteria for HEI community extension initiatives. The new extension strategy asserts that HEIs, as knowledge producers or innovation hubs, are in a unique position to collaborate with communities, businesses, and industry to facilitate the transfer of knowledge or technology in certain developing sectors (Llenares & Deocarís, 2018). As a key part of social progress, higher education institutions have a social responsibility to help communities grow and change lives by sharing information and technology through training, workshops, seminars, and professional advisory services (Esteban, 2024).

On a global scale, individuals with disabilities (PWD) encounter substantial obstacles in their pursuit of sustainable and respectable employment (Camuli & Guohui, 2019). Approximately 16 percent of the world's population, or 1.3 billion individuals, are thought to be significantly disabled at the moment. The aging of the population and the rise in the prevalence of non-communicable diseases are contributing factors to this number (World Health Organization, 2025). In the Philippines alone, National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA) reported that 2,322,649 persons with disabilities are registered on their system. In the Central Luzon region, it was reported to have a current count of 315,230 PWDs (NCDA, 2025). Through the global sustainability agenda, the United Nations has drawn attention to the employability and empowerment of PWDs. Goals 4, 8, 10, 11, and 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals indicator directly address impairments, with Goals 8 and 10 pertaining to employment for people with disabilities (United Nations, n.d.).

Despite these developments, there are now major barriers to equal competitiveness in the labor market for people with disabilities, which results in violations of their right to work and a lower employment rate than the general population. This may start a trend of gradual exclusion from the workforce, which would raise unemployment rates and make poverty worse (Paimash, 2024). Because there are so few work prospects, it is also clear that persons with disabilities are not treated equally when applying for jobs. Additionally, employers now have negative opinions about PWDs (Omar et al., 2024). Prior to this study, employability skills that are valued by employers and educators for both people with and without disabilities were the focus of intervention programs to reskill and upskill PWDs. Previous research has also tried to look at the differences that exist in employment markets. For instance, in order to identify patterns in the current working climate, Ab Halim et al., (2019) looked at

the employability skills of students with impairments. Key findings from the study showed that students with disabilities lack critical thinking, computing, and technology skills. This emphasizes the value of the present workforce, whose abilities are essential because of new technologies and market competition brought about by digitalization (IMD, 2020).

The College of Hospitality and Tourism Management of Gordon College offered its community extension program to PWDs as an intervention for numerous challenges faces by these marginalized part of the community. The goal of Project iWAVES (Inclusivity Workforce Advancement Via Education and Skills), a free skills training program for PWDs and a community extension program of the CHTM, is to close the gap between the hospitality and tourism industry and individuals, enabling them to secure fulfilling employment and support the diversity and inclusivity of the sector (De La Cruz et al., 2025).

IMPLEMENTATION AND METHODS

This paper reviews the final phase of the implementation of Project I.W.A.V.E.S and reflect on the output of the said project. Through the efforts of the trainers from Gordon College – College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, together with the sponsors of the project – City Budget Office, Persons with Disabilities Affairs Office, and City Tourism Office of the Olongapo City, the project was able to cater PWDs who were willing to undergo series of trainings, immersion, and assessment. Training sessions were scheduled every Saturday of the week, which started last March 2025 until May 2025. After the series of training, the learners were endorsed for immersion at a hotel in Subic Bay Freeport Zone where they learned about the actual operations of a hotel focusing on housekeeping services. The learners then processed their assessment for National Certificate II for Housekeeping Services by TESDA.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The training session was spearheaded by instructors of College of Hospitality and Tourism Management (CHTM), which started on March 01, 2025 with a total of 15 PWD learners. The table 1 shows the attendance monitoring throughout the schedule of trainings. Originally, the Project iWAVES has 15 enrolled trainees – 5 learners with intellectual disability, 5 learners who are deaf, one with ADHD, and four learners with autism.

One student with intellectual disability officially dropped during the 3rd week of training because school commitments. Another one with intellectual disability officially dropped during the 8th week of the training because no one could accompany her during the schedule of trainings. Reasons for absences include financial issues, spontaneous tantrums, and the absence of a parent or guardian who will accompany them during trainings.

Table 1. Attendance Monitoring for PWD learners

Date	Present	Absent
March 1, 2025	15	0
March 8, 2025	15	0
March 15, 2025	14	1
March 22, 2025	14	1
March 29, 2025	14	1
April 12, 2025	13	2
April 26, 2025	13	2
May 10, 2025	11	4
May 17, 2025	10	5
May 24, 2025	13	2
May 31, 2025 (Hotel Immersion)	13	2

Before the training ended, the organizers and implementers of the project discussed the details of the on-the-job training in a meeting (See picture 1). The faculty members from CHTM explained the process of application for the NCII in Housekeeping Services. It was agreed during the meeting that it is essential for PWD learners to undergo first the OJT before taking the assessment by TESDA. The City Budget Office provided the food and transportation allowance of the learners during the period of their OJT. Monitoring of the learners were done by the City Tourism Office and the CHTM faculty members. A total of 150 hours OJT for the PWD must be completed.



Figure 1. Documentation During the May 20, 2025 Meeting with CHTM Faculty Members, City Budget Office, Persons with Disabilities Affairs Office, and City Tourism Office

Figure 2 displays the documentation during the meeting spearheaded by the City Tourism Office. The main agenda of the meeting was to coordinate with target industry partners where learners could be deployed for OJT. Three out of 4 hotels were willing to accept PWD learners for the OJT program. It was mentioned during the meeting that a memorandum of agreement with the industry partners would be created in order to formalize the partnership and ensure that the learning objectives targeted for the OJT will be achieved.



Figure 2. Documentation During the June 03, 2025 Meeting Spearheaded by the City Tourism Office (Photo Courtesy: College of Hospitality and Tourism Management Student Council Facebook page)

Table 2 displays the schedule assigned to PWD learners during their on-the-job training. Out of thirteen students, only ten PWD learners proceed with their OJT. Three students did not participate in the OJT since they had issues including financial challenges, conflict of schedule with their school classes, and no support from guardian/parent.

Table 2. Distribution of learners for OJT

Hotel	No. of Trainees	Disability	Schedule
Hotel A	5	1 Autism and 4 Deaf	Saturday and Sunday
Hotel B	5	2 Autism and 3 Intellectual Disability	Monday-Friday

During their first day of orientation at the hotel (see figure 3), an interpreter provided by the PDAO accompanied the PWD learners. This helped the learners understand what they need to expect during the OJT period. However, during the actual OJT, the interpreter was not available. This was considered as one of the challenges during their immersion. The hotel assigned one housekeeping staff for every two PWD learners and they taught them how to clean the room properly, bed making, cleaning of public areas, and simple linen and laundry tasks.



Figure 3. Documentation During PWD Learners' Orientation at the Hotel (Photo Courtesy: College of Hospitality and Tourism Management Student Council Facebook Page)

While the OJT program of the learners are still ongoing, the institution determined which of the thirteen PWD students are prepared to take the National Certificate II for Housekeeping Services exam. Ten learners were considered prepared to take the assessment. During the assessment day, the translator assisted them in understanding the procedure and communicating with the TESDA assessor.

Table 3 demonstrates that nine of ten PWD learners passed the NCII for Housekeeping Services. One PWD learner struggled with the butler service competencies. As a result, the student was not qualified to pass the NCII for Housekeeping Services. The assessor stated that the student will only retake the competency assessment for butler service. As a result, the student only earned five NCII certificates of competency for housekeeping services. The rest of the nine learners have received their certificate for Housekeeping NCII.

According to Adarkwah and Islam (2025), people with disabilities pursue technical and vocational education as a response to limited career prospects in the society. As a result, the nine students who passed the NCII in Housekeeping Services can use their credentials to gain jobs at various hotels that accommodate people with disabilities. The most prevalent reason for hiring PWD personnel were to promote social responsibility and attract loyal customers (Toga, 2025).

Table 3. Result of NCII Housekeeping Services NCII

Disability	No. of PWD Learners	Result
Deaf	4	Passed
Autism	2	Passed
Intellectual Disability	3	Passed
	1	COC (except butler service)

Table 4 demonstrates the evaluation of the Project iWAVES in terms of its implementation. PWD-learners have a very high concordance ($M = 3.59$) when it comes to the implementation of the project as they deemed it to be organized and they have experienced a safe and respectful learning environment. The results on the table below implies that the training provided to the PWD-learners was tailored to their actual needs and capacities. The program content of Project iWAVES matches the aspirations of the learners, making them engaged and motivated to participate.

Rashid et al. (2025) did a study on community awareness for inclusive education. It was emphasized in their study the importance of inclusive teaching and learning approaches for people with disabilities, as well as the establishment of long-term volunteer programs for inclusion. Thus, the implementation of Project iWAVES meets the call for global inclusive education goals and SDGs.

Table 4. Evaluation of Project Iwaves in Terms of Implementation

Project Implementation	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
The project was well-organized from start to finish.	3.70	Very High Concordance
The training schedule was convenient and manageable.	3.60	Very High Concordance
The venue used was accessible to PWD learners.	3.50	Very High Concordance
The trainers were knowledgeable and well-prepared.	3.30	Very High Concordance
The trainers effectively accommodated different types of disabilities.	3.80	Very High Concordance
Assistance and support (e.g. interpreters, food, aide, etc.) are adequate.	3.50	Very High Concordance
The project provided a safe and respectful learning environment.	3.70	Very High Concordance
Composite Mean	3.59	Very High Concordance

The outcome and impact of the Project iWAVES was evaluated with a very high concordance ($M = 3.50$), as seen on table 5. The PWD-learners believed that the project would help them improve their quality of life. Being provided a free training and a lifetime opportunity to upskill in hospitality industry, specifically in housekeeping skills, this would help them become employed and independently support themselves. The results implies that there is high concordance in terms of outcome and impact because the project successfully delivered what it promised providing PWD learners with marketable hospitality skills, boosting their confidence and employability, and creating consistent, meaningful change in their lives.

Table 5. Evaluation of Project iWAVES in Terms of Outcome and Impact

PROJECT OUTCOME AND IMPACT	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
The training helped me gain new knowledge or skills.	3.50	Very High Concordance
I feel more confident after completing the training.	3.40	Very High Concordance
I can apply what I learned in real-life situations or work.	3.50	Very High Concordance
The training increased my motivation to continue learning.	3.50	Very High Concordance
I believe this program will help improve the quality of life for PWDs.	3.60	Very High Concordance
Composite Mean	3.50	Very High Concordance

Table 6 displays the satisfaction of PWD-learners towards the Project iWAVES. Based on the results, the learners had a high degree of satisfaction ($M = 3.50$) considering that their expectations were met all throughout the program. The learners expected practical, accessible training that could genuinely help them in the hospitality industry.

The results also demonstrated that they are willing to participate if there would be another program to be offered by the college. A high degree of satisfaction among PWD learners demonstrates that the training achieved a high concordance between its goals, delivery, and learner experiences. It means the program was not only effective in skill-building but also meaningful, inclusive, and empowering leading participants to feel that their time and effort were well invested.

Table 6. Evaluation of Project iWAVES in Terms of Satisfaction

PROJECT SATISFACTION	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
I am satisfied with the overall quality of the program.	3.40	High degree of satisfaction
The program was inclusive and respectful of all participants.	3.40	High degree of satisfaction
My expectations for the program were met.	3.70	High degree of satisfaction
I would recommend this program to other PWDs.	3.40	High degree of satisfaction
I would participate in another program offered by the college.	3.60	High degree of satisfaction
Composite Mean	3.50	High degree of satisfaction

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With nearly 5 months of Project I.W.A.V.E.S. implementation, the organizers and implementers have provided 10 trainings for PWD-learners in order to prepare them for the housekeeping evaluation. The project began with fifteen PWD learners, but was reduced to 13 owing to various issues such as financial, family, and behavioral incapacities. The immersion was viewed as a critical component of the endeavor. This enabled PWD-learners to apply what they had learned throughout the training sessions. They have proved competence and readiness for the NCII assessment by performing housekeeping tasks on a continual and consistent manner.

Currently, nine out of ten PWD learners have passed the NCII for Housekeeping Services. Meanwhile, the last PWD-learner has been qualified for all five COCs, with the recommendation to only re-evaluate the COC for butler service. As a result, the project was deemed effective because it enabled PWD trainees to develop themselves and prepare for future work. This was evident on the result of the evaluation where the project implementation (mean = and project output and impact attained very high concordance. While, in terms of project satisfaction, the PWD-learners had given the project a high degree of satisfaction.

In lieu of the findings of this study, the researchers recommend the following:

1. Continue assisting and monitoring the PWD-learners by helping them land a job aligned with NCII for Housekeeping.
2. Provide training for another group of competent PWD learners, and the project's proponents may explore offering additional trainings such as bread and pastries.
3. Continue collaborating with different stakeholders, which would help the implementation of the project.
4. Extend services not only inside Olongapo City, but across Region 3.

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