



SM Cares supports Autism Society Philippines in the celebration of Philippine National Autism Consciousness Week

Through its corporate social responsibility arm SM Cares, SM Supermalls has joined the nationwide observation of the 25th Philippine National Autism Consciousness Week with a focus on highlighting the uniqueness of persons living with Autism Spectrum Disorder and promoting safer environments where they can feel valued.

For this year's celebration, SM Cares continues to support long-time partner Autism Society Philippines (ASP), a non-profit organization dedicated to the well-being of persons on the autism spectrum disorder. Established in 1987 by eleven mothers of children with ASD, the organization envisions a future where every person with ASD is empowered to become self-reliant, productive, and socially accepted members of an autism-supportive Philippines.

This year's theme is "*Pilipinong May Autismo: Kakaiba, Kasali, Konektado.*" It will revolve around furthering societal awareness of Filipinos' uniqueness who live with autism and pushing for more inclusive development in human rights, education, employment, media representation, individual self-awareness, self-expression, and feeling belonging to a compassionate society.

"As we celebrate Philippine National Autism Consciousness Week, now is a great time to think of how we can help one another in promoting the welfare and development of individuals who are living with ASD," said Engr. Bien Mateo, SVP Supermalls, and Program Head of SM Cares Program on PWDs. *"We are very proud to have been doing this with ASP throughout the years, and we hope we can inspire even more people into working together to create this inclusive society that we envision."*

"SM Cares and the Autism Society Philippines are calibrated in our commitment to serve and support the autism community," said Mona Magno-Veluz, National President of Autism Society Philippines. "Despite lockdowns, we were successfully able to translate advocacy initiatives to the digital realm. As this year's commemoration of the National Autism Consciousness Week is all online, we have been challenged in ways to innovate and to evolve – staying responsive and relevant to the many families we serve."

First celebrated in 1996 pursuant to Proclamation No. 711 of that year by then-President Fidel V. Ramos, the annual observation has been held nationwide every third week of January as the Philippine government's way of "providing greater attention and assistance to the plight of people with autism" and "mobilizing its various agencies and departments to look into how they can support community-based approaches" toward improving the overall quality of life for these people with special needs.

The observation of the 25th Philippine National Autism Consciousness Week is just one of SM Cares's several initiatives in line with its programs on persons with disabilities, including those with special needs. Other programs include the annual observation of Down Syndrome Consciousness Week, regular sensitivity training of its mall front liners for customers with special needs, emergency preparedness activities for PWDs and Senior Citizens, to name a few.

These initiatives support the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 10, *"Reduced Inequalities,"* which aims to ensure the equal and fair treatment of every individual, including those with disabilities, and SDG 11, *"Sustainable cities and communities,"* which aims to make cities not only safe, resilient, and sustainable, but also inclusive.

The Autism Society Philippines (ASP) is a national, non-profit organization working towards an environment that empowers persons on the autism spectrum to become the best of their potentials – self-reliant, independent, productive, and socially-accepted members of an Autism-OK Philippines. ASP labors to establish institutional mechanisms to support neurodiverse persons and their families. Established in 1989, the organization – composed of 13,000 members spread over 100 chapters – has been at the forefront of providing services to families and individuals on the autism spectrum.

SM Cares is the Corporate Social Responsibility arm of SM Supermalls, with programs to support communities and promote social inclusion and care for the environment. Its CSR advocacies include Programs for the Environment, Persons with Disabilities, Women & Breastfeeding Mothers, Children & Youth, Senior Citizens, and the creation of bike-friendly SM Malls across the country.

To know more about SM Cares, you may visit <https://www.smsupermalls.com/smcares/> and <https://www.facebook.com/OfficialSMCares/>.