

# STORIES OF MARGINALIZED YOUTH

## (Amid COVID19)

JUNE 2020

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E-Net Philippines





JUNE 2020

This anthology emanated from the Youth Action Research (YAR) on the impact of COVID19 pandemic to the young people. In particular, YAR examined the situation of marginalized youth in most afflicted areas. Conducted by the youth themselves, the study assessed the impact of the pandemic on the livelihood, education and learning of marginalized youth as well as their recommended response to COVID19 pandemic.

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# Summary



In the midst of the COVID19 pandemic many young people especially in marginalized communities face adverse conditions. With face-to-face education indefinitely suspended, they still are not able to access alternative forms such as online learning. Marginalized youth cannot keep up with online education due to lack of gadgets and internet access. COVID crisis aggravated their impoverishment with their family's livelihood source being greatly affected.

Without family savings and some being children of single parents, both parent and child become partners in finding ways to cope with hunger and meet basic needs. Most of them are hoping for help from the government because jobs have been cut and many families, usually daily wage earners have been affected by the "no-work-no-pay" scheme.

Most of them say they are deeply concerned about their own health and the well-being of friends and relatives. The COVID19 pandemic is also causing them psychological, mental and emotional stress. Poverty is rampant in these communities thus, many young people had no choice but to drop out of school and work even before the lockdown. These working young people ended up jobless upon the implementation of the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ), significantly reducing the family's income.

Despite the heightened difficulty under lockdown, many young people especially those organized under the community youth organizations, responded positively to their predicament. For them it has become natural to help with household chores to relieve them of boredom and frustrations, making way for them to be productive everyday. Others contribute to the families' income, however small, like selling food stuff. They also engaged in self-help activities like reading books, using facebook, playing games with their cell phones, watching TV, listening to the radio and reading through social media to get important information and updates on the situation of the country in the middle of COVID-19.

Although they find ways to be productive, many of them still experience boredom and anxiety. The situation prohibits them from doing the usual things like visiting friends and relatives, socializing with neighbors and traveling. Without the play and other physical activities they regularly engaged in, some of them suffer from physical weakness. Walking indoors is not even possible due to the smallness of their houses. Some feel weak; others say that the pandemic graced them with positive outlook. They learned to better care for their body and health as they became more aware of physical hygiene and right practices such as eating right at the right time. This includes eating fruits and vegetables that are available in the community. Before the pandemic, eating breakfast is a challenge as they need to rush to school.

They deem the youth organizations as important because they serve as vehicle to spread awareness on the current situation. This includes providing simple information on keeping themselves safe and on preventing the spread of virus to larger population. Organizational learning can also be a conduit for expanding knowledge of issues and taking appropriate action in situations facing the youth. Organizational activities in this time like giving assistance to the community such as food relief and helping in decontamination activities provide a venue for the youth to be of service to the community.

Among the demands of youth interviewees are: government's continuous financial support; food assistance especially to poor families who have endured a lot due to loss of income sources; provision of hygiene kits and medical assistance; and distribution of free reading materials for their studies.

Youth respondents also suggested that the government be proactive in preparing for the implementation of virtual classes. This means provision of computers or gadgets and ensuring connectivity to make this new learning experience possible. This would require the government to plan thoroughly starting from identifying the number of students from poor communities and assess their needs.

**Interviewees:**

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Education Level</b>
1	Raiza May L. Alicante	13	F	Bagbag	Grade 8
2	Reymark Alicante	17	M	Bagbag	Grade 9
3	Janeth Villamac	15	F	Bagbag	Grade 10
4	Jessica Villamac	14	F	Bagbag	Grade 9
5	Anthony Tomes	22	M	Bagbag	College Graduate
6	Patria May-I Maluping	27	F	Bagbag	College Undergrad
7	Earl Joshua Santos	15	M	Holy Spirit	Grade 9
8	Joniel Martin Bebedor	17	M	Holy Spirit	Grade 12
9	Joyce Thalia Bebedor	19	F	Holy Spirit	Grade 11
10	Maricris Buboy	21	F	Holy Spirit	Grade 11
11	Rosario Sanipa Cajandab	19	F	Capul, N. Samar	Grade 12
12	Neriza Cajandab	24	F	Capul, N. Samar	ALS
13	Jerwin Largo Cascano	28	M	Capul, N. Samar	HS Graduate
14	Mary Joyce Galosmo Castillo	31	F	Capul, N. Samar	ALS

# Raiza May, 13

I am Raiza May L. Alicante, 13 years old, living at Abbey Road, Bagbag, Quezon City, Grade 8. Since my father passed away, my mother raised us five siblings on her own. The only source of our livelihood is retail selling which our mother does. I help my mother by selling rice cakes cooked by our neighbor. I use my income to buy food and materials needed in school. This way I won't have to ask my mother for money.

The pandemic hit us hard especially when the lockdown was implemented. Due to restrictions in movement, my mother had to stop selling. I helped with the household chores to help my mother as well as to keep myself busy. I also make sure to keep myself abreast with the COVID19 updates from TV.

Having to stay indoors for extended period of time has taken toll on my health. I feel physically weak for lack of exercise. Our house is crowded and it is perched near a river that serves as host to domestic rubbish.

Our present situation has also affected me mentally, being anxious of the future as the virus continue to spread to communities. Many small businesses and livelihoods are affected including selling which is our family's only source of income. Early closure of schools due to lockdown also reduced what we were supposed to learn in school. Schools were forced to close as we are about to hold our 4<sup>th</sup> grading period exams. Now, because my thoughts are pre-occupied with fears and anxieties on the pandemic, I am somehow forgetting my previous studies.

My life will surely continue to change. I have to accept the new normal - that includes having to wear mask and observing social distancing every time I leave the house to avoid the possible spread of the virus.

As young people belonging to an organization, I believe that we have the potential to help our fellow youth. I take part in our organization's activities so that I can contribute meaningfully. We conduct poetry writing, drawing, and advising young people on how to deal with the pandemic and how to protect oneself from being infected.

I hope the government will continue to support poor families in this pandemic and also give financial assistance for our education so I can finish my studies. And if online classes will be implemented, I suggest that the government will help those who don't have gadgets and internet so we can continue with our lessons.



# Reymark, 17

I am Reymark Alicante, 17 years old, living in Bagbag, Quezon City, Grade 9. We are six in the family – my mother, myself and my four siblings. Our father has passed away. It is only my mother who provides for our whole family. She sells LPG tanks (liquefied petroleum gas used for cooking) and she gets a percentage from the amount she sells. My mother's income is not enough for the family. I had to stop schooling for several years because our income could not afford my education; thus, I am only at Grade 9 presently.



This Pandemic has made the poverty situation worse. My mother's sales declined and there are times when we find it difficult even to buy enough food for our family. Presently, I cannot do anything to add to our income, I just try to help my mother by assisting in the delivery of gas tanks. Somehow, this helps me deal with the challenges of this pandemic because I have something to keep my mind busy instead of just thinking about the pandemic and the possibility of getting sick.

There are many concerns that this pandemic has caused. Not being able to go out often makes me weak. I cannot do exercises at home because our house is so small. I hope that this COVID pandemic will end soon because it is causing stress to all of us and especially to my mother as our livelihood is affected greatly. Our classes were forced to end early so we're stuck at home. I think I am already forgetting the lessons taught in school. Watching TV news is my only source of information on Pandemic events.

I would like to ask our government to continue with its food relief assistance because I fear that our present family income will not be enough to sustain even our basic food needs. In the government's plan of implementing online class, we have requested and suggested (thru our organization) that we be provided with gadgets and internet for use in the online classes and also financial assistance so we can continue with our studies. We have no capacity to buy these gadgets and get good internet connection.

I am glad to be part of the youth organization in our community. Our activities keep our minds away from the worries of this pandemic. We are also able to contribute to the efforts of helping the community by sharing what we learnt in education activities like the rights of the youth.



# Janeth, 15

I'm Janeth Villamac, 15 years old, living in Bagbag, Quezon City, in 10th grade. Even before the COVID 19 pandemic, we already experience hardships in our family. Our father's low wage as a factory worker is not enough to meet our needs. He is the only one working. Our mother takes care of us, her seven children.

The challenge I face in this time of pandemic is food shortage due to poverty and lack of government-provided assistance. Moreover, my brother who already has a family occasionally asks for financial support from our father. These concerns affect my (mental) thinking - what would be our future in this state during this pandemic and until this is over? My study was stopped, as schools were declared to close early to prevent the transmission of the virus. We were not even finished with the 4<sup>th</sup> grading period. If we return to school, will they still teach us what we missed? I think, it will have a great impact on our learning and learning skills. I also feel weak physically due to the inability to exercise because the lockdown has forced me to stay in our tiny house.



I get information by watching news and TV and on social media to see what is going on and what to do at this time. However, the news sometimes add up to my anxieties especially now that fake news are spreading.

Fortunately, I am involved in an organization, the Youth for Nationalism and Democracy (YND). This gives me a sense of relief knowing that my organization helps us deal with the challenges and that we have the opportunity to do good to others. The organization makes us aware of realities instead of fake news and we share our learning to the community especially to young people like us. This helps us focus our attention on helping others who learn and get entertained through indoor activities such as drawing, poetry, and the like. These activities address our anxieties and sharpen our thinking. We also share among the YND members our personal learning.

I want to finish my studies despite the difficulties, but according to the news, the online class will be implemented. We don't have the capacity to buy gadgets needed for this type of learning and we don't have internet connections to keep up with this kind of learning. Now, I worry more for my education.

Our appeal to the government is to help us. In addition to providing financial assistance and food, I hope the government provides us with free gadgets, internet connection and other educational needs for our young students especially for the poor like me so we can continue with our education and for a brighter future for us.



# Jessica, 14



I'm Jessica Villamac, 14 years old, Grade 8, living in Brgy. Bagbag, Quezon City. I am the fourth of seven (7) siblings. Only my father works for our family. He is a factory worker with low wage. Our mother stays at home and cares for us.

Prior to COVID19 pandemic which led to the declaration of the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ), we are already deprived of a good life. Our relatively large family composed of nine with only one person earning minimum wage, our basic needs are hardly met - food, education, water, and electric bills. At times, we also need money for medical expenses when we get sick. Sometimes, our relatives help us get through. This situation has resulted for our family to be buried in financial debt.

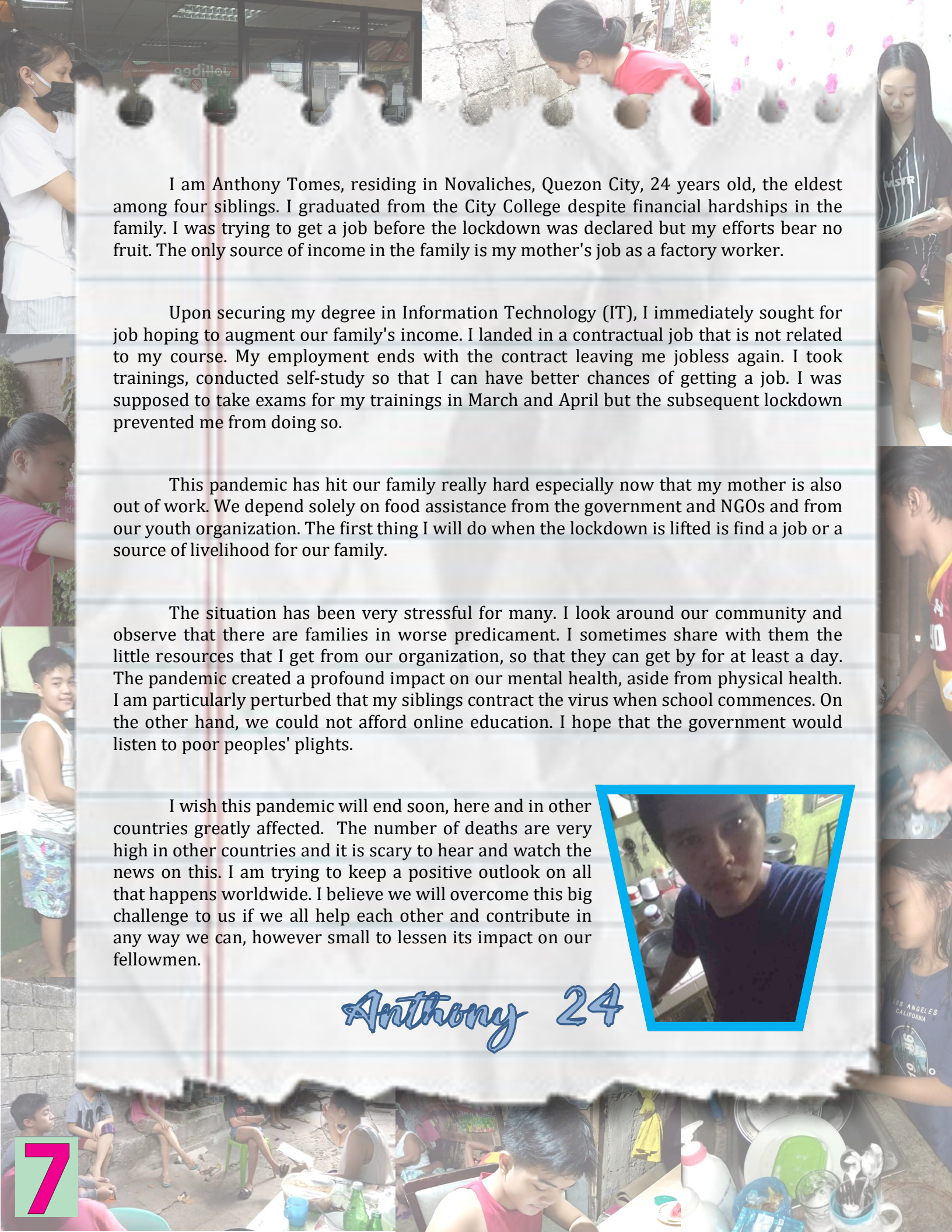
Because of the lockdown (ECQ), my father was forced to stop going to work. No work, no pay. This further plunged us to indebtedness as we need to borrow money to provide for our basic needs. Sadly, even the food assistance from the government is very limited and very slow to reach our community. There are times when we experienced hunger and this has been a major challenge for me and my siblings. I have to keep myself busy with household chores so I can get my mind off this pandemic concerns. I also help in taking care of my younger siblings so that our parents could focus on finding ways to feed us everyday. I also pray that we can overcome this problem.



These problems and worries are taking its toll on our health. Because we are not able to move and exercise, our bodies feel weak. I also feel bored because I cannot socialize with my friends. There aren't much to do inside our crowded small house. We keep track of events and information by watching TV news, and social media thru cellphone. To help myself overcome worries and be productive with other things, I take part in our organization's awareness raising so that other young people will be aware also on the prevention of COVID. We also share what we learn from YND to other youth on the prevention of COVID, as well as informing them on new updates. We do poetry writing sessions to somehow keep our minds working positively instead of just thinking about COVID. We make poems related to our experience with this pandemic. I also help in relief efforts of our organization. This is a good initiative especially because the government's support comes in trickles. And this also helps with our food needs in the family.

I am concerned how our lives will be affected after this Pandemic because there is certainly a need for us to pay off debts, and bills not paid during COVID19. It will undoubtedly create more poverty in our family. I especially missed the opportunity to get an education. Even before the pandemic, I had to stop schooling because the meager salary of my father is not enough to send all of us children to school. Now that I learned that the classes will shift to online, I worry that I will miss school again because we don't have the capacity to this kind of classes. We have no particular ability to own or buy gadgets and have internet connection to use in this study and I have no idea if the government will provide us with these tools for free.

We ask the government to support us with our financial needs and food assistance. And to make sure we get educated, that free gadgets, internet connection and other tools are provided for our study if this will be the new normal in learning.



I am Anthony Tomes, residing in Novaliches, Quezon City, 24 years old, the eldest among four siblings. I graduated from the City College despite financial hardships in the family. I was trying to get a job before the lockdown was declared but my efforts bear no fruit. The only source of income in the family is my mother's job as a factory worker.

Upon securing my degree in Information Technology (IT), I immediately sought for job hoping to augment our family's income. I landed in a contractual job that is not related to my course. My employment ends with the contract leaving me jobless again. I took trainings, conducted self-study so that I can have better chances of getting a job. I was supposed to take exams for my trainings in March and April but the subsequent lockdown prevented me from doing so.

This pandemic has hit our family really hard especially now that my mother is also out of work. We depend solely on food assistance from the government and NGOs and from our youth organization. The first thing I will do when the lockdown is lifted is find a job or a source of livelihood for our family.

The situation has been very stressful for many. I look around our community and observe that there are families in worse predicament. I sometimes share with them the little resources that I get from our organization, so that they can get by for at least a day. The pandemic created a profound impact on our mental health, aside from physical health. I am particularly perturbed that my siblings contract the virus when school commences. On the other hand, we could not afford online education. I hope that the government would listen to poor peoples' plights.

I wish this pandemic will end soon, here and in other countries greatly affected. The number of deaths are very high in other countries and it is scary to hear and watch the news on this. I am trying to keep a positive outlook on all that happens worldwide. I believe we will overcome this big challenge to us if we all help each other and contribute in any way we can, however small to lessen its impact on our fellowmen.



*Anthony 24*



## Earl, 15

I am 15 years old, and my name is Earl Joshua Santos, a resident of Besang Pass Street, Brgy. Holy Spirit, Quezon City. I'm in Grade 9. My mother is a solo parent, and has no job. We live with our grandmother and are dependent on her support. Aside from our family, our grandmother also takes care of her other grandchildren who were abandoned by their mother who already has another family and whose father is in prison. We live in a crowded house. We also share the household with the families of my grandmother's two children. They have jobs that maintain our whole household and help us to survive. I am only able to study because of the support of relatives.

This pandemic time is very challenging for us youth because we cannot socialize with other friends, even neighbors. This affects me more because my friends keep me company especially when I have problems. I miss their company and sharing stories with them about our everyday lives. I also miss being a server in church. Because gatherings are not allowed, churches are not allowed to hold masses.

To help me overcome these challenges, I find ways to get in touch with my friends. I still talk with them by chat, call, video chat by using our mobile phones. I watch online mass every week too. As a server in the church, my faith in the Lord deepened because of the pandemic, knowing that I do not own this life, that I never even know when my life will end and be restored.

I also keep myself busy by drawing portraits. I try to give time to my passion for drawing to further develop my talent and be productive somehow. I also try to watch the news every night, and sometimes on social media and listen to the radio to get information and updates on the pandemic.



This pandemic has affected me greatly. In terms of physical, I feel weakening of my muscles because our movement has been limited. Mentally, it is stressful. Though I find it very hard to just stay home, I try not to get out of the house because I am also worried that I would be infected with the COVID virus outside. The news on the number of positive case and deaths are very scary. I see in the news people anguished not only for the demise of their loved ones but also for not getting proper burial rites. The bereaved did not get the chance to see and embrace the departed for the last time.

Financially, it is very difficult today because of work termination. Even our relatives who sustain the needs of our household have been affected. This is very worrying for us because there are several small children in our household. In education, they are suggesting online classes which is also difficult for us as there is no interaction with your classmates and teachers.

Through all these worries, I am grateful that I belong to an organization. Our youth organization YND helps by campaigning even on-line, giving awareness to people and young people to stay indoors so as not to add to the COVID 19 case and to prevent the spread of the disease. We can also share with our organizations our worries and requests and YND tries to deliver these requests to concerned agencies.

One major concern among youth is the shift to online classes. The little money that we get will not suffice to spend for gadgets and internet connection. We need help to access the resources necessary for online learning, lest we drop out of school. I still prefer face-to-face education because I understand more when teachers explain the lessons. We can immediately discuss questions and confusion on the subject matter. We also ask that food assistance be continued while we are on lockdown, and while we try to get back up after it is lifted.

# Thalia, 19



I'm Joyce Thalia Samson, 19 year old, female, living in Brgy. Holy Spirit, Quezon City, Grade 11. My four siblings and I were raised by my grandmother whose only source of livelihood is a small retail store. My father who is a family driver is not living with us. He sends money but only periodically. This financial difficulty is the reason why I am only at grade 11 at my age. I had to stop for several years because our grandmother cannot send us all to school at the same time. I am a member of the youth organizations YND and People's Theater (Teatrong Bayan) which have chapters in our community.

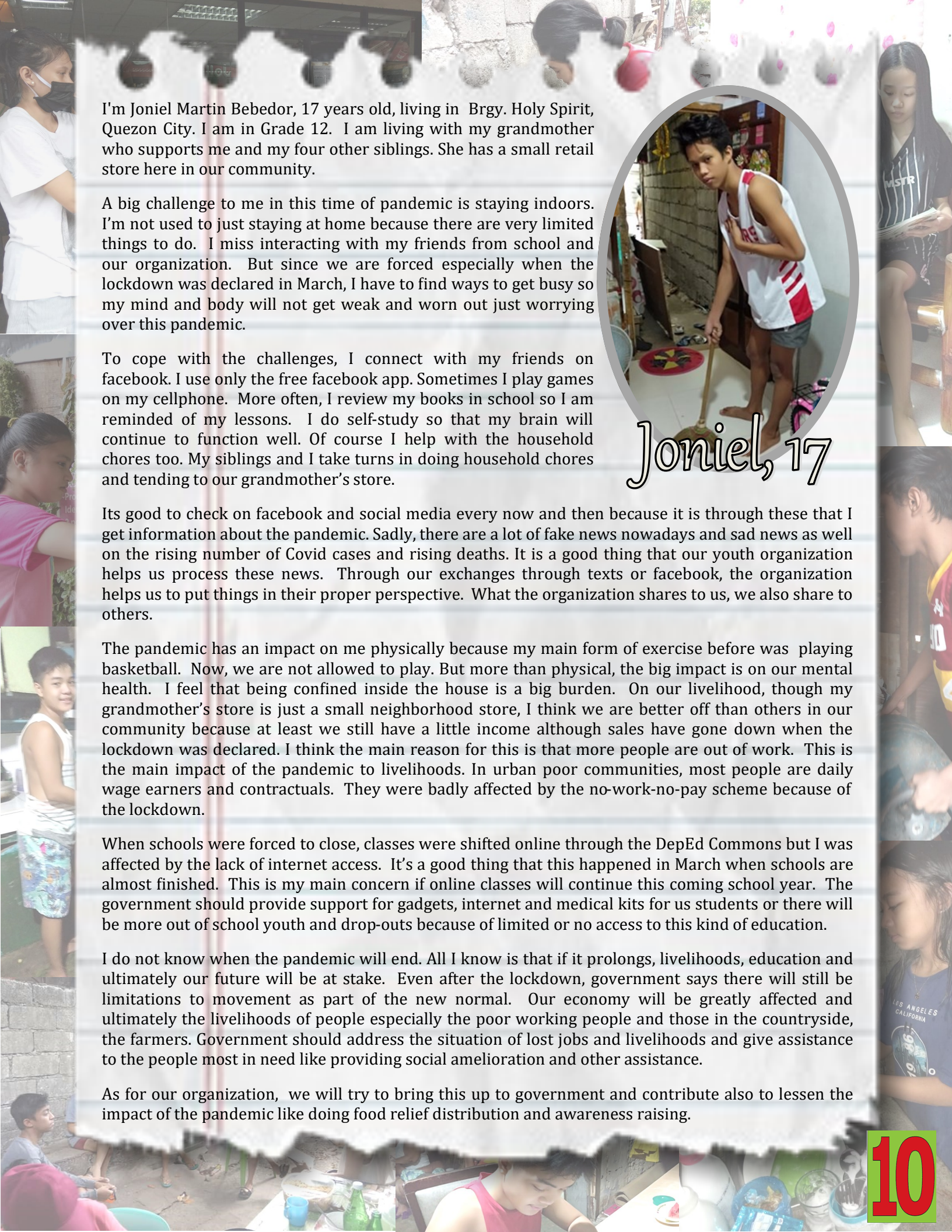
There are many challenges that this pandemic has brought us, not only to myself but to most youth. We are used to seeing our friends and peers regularly but because of this pandemic and the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) being implemented, we all have to stay at home.

My siblings and I easily get bored inside the house. To overcome this boredom, I watch television and I use my cellphone to chat with my friends on facebook and messenger although this has a limit because we have to load every time. Sometimes, I play games on my mobile phone. I also read and do household chores.

It was at first good to watch television and social media updates on the pandemic but it gets frustrating after some time because all I see is the increasing number of infected and people dying from the disease. Fake news also abound in social media that disturb the mind and affects young people like me mentally. Fortunately, our organization conducts awareness raising and helps us deal with these challenges.

Unlike some of my peers, I do not feel physically weak as a result of staying at home. In fact, I feel healthier now that I don't skip breakfast because I do not have to rush to school. Mentally, I am having anxieties because I think about my classmates, friends and relatives - whether they are in good condition, safe, and having three meals a day. I worry for them because I learned in the news that not all, even poor families receive assistance and social amelioration to get by during this pandemic and lockdown situation. We are a little better off than others because of our grandmother's small retail store. But nowadays, because people are quarantined and a lot lost their jobs, there are almost no buyers. Our father is also not able to send money to us because even the money transfer centers are closed.

I also see in the news and social media the extent of poverty that other sectors are experiencing especially in this pandemic. I feel sad for the farmers and the workers who have lost their livelihoods. Before the pandemic, the farmers situation was already getting worse as they are not being supported enough by government. Now, I worry not only for myself, our community but for our country's economy. How can we get up easily after the pandemic when the main source of livelihood of the country, which is supposed to be agriculture is in a very poor condition. With regards education, I have doubts about doing it online. I believe that we learn better with interaction between students, teachers and the whole class. It is a challenge as well to use the mobile phones and sustain daily load for online set up. Hopefully, the government will provide for the gadgets, internet connection and cellphone loads if online classes will be implemented. I am sure many will be out of school, including myself and my siblings if there will be no support from government. The government should do a census and house-to-house to really find out the capacities of families and what the students will need so we can be supported appropriately.



I'm Joniel Martin Bebedor, 17 years old, living in Brgy. Holy Spirit, Quezon City. I am in Grade 12. I am living with my grandmother who supports me and my four other siblings. She has a small retail store here in our community.

A big challenge to me in this time of pandemic is staying indoors. I'm not used to just staying at home because there are very limited things to do. I miss interacting with my friends from school and our organization. But since we are forced especially when the lockdown was declared in March, I have to find ways to get busy so my mind and body will not get weak and worn out just worrying over this pandemic.

To cope with the challenges, I connect with my friends on facebook. I use only the free facebook app. Sometimes I play games on my cellphone. More often, I review my books in school so I am reminded of my lessons. I do self-study so that my brain will continue to function well. Of course I help with the household chores too. My siblings and I take turns in doing household chores and tending to our grandmother's store.



Joniel, 17

Its good to check on facebook and social media every now and then because it is through these that I get information about the pandemic. Sadly, there are a lot of fake news nowadays and sad news as well on the rising number of Covid cases and rising deaths. It is a good thing that our youth organization helps us process these news. Through our exchanges through texts or facebook, the organization helps us to put things in their proper perspective. What the organization shares to us, we also share to others.

The pandemic has an impact on me physically because my main form of exercise before was playing basketball. Now, we are not allowed to play. But more than physical, the big impact is on our mental health. I feel that being confined inside the house is a big burden. On our livelihood, though my grandmother's store is just a small neighborhood store, I think we are better off than others in our community because at least we still have a little income although sales have gone down when the lockdown was declared. I think the main reason for this is that more people are out of work. This is the main impact of the pandemic to livelihoods. In urban poor communities, most people are daily wage earners and contractuels. They were badly affected by the no-work-no-pay scheme because of the lockdown.

When schools were forced to close, classes were shifted online through the DepEd Commons but I was affected by the lack of internet access. It's a good thing that this happened in March when schools are almost finished. This is my main concern if online classes will continue this coming school year. The government should provide support for gadgets, internet and medical kits for us students or there will be more out of school youth and drop-outs because of limited or no access to this kind of education.

I do not know when the pandemic will end. All I know is that if it prolongs, livelihoods, education and ultimately our future will be at stake. Even after the lockdown, government says there will still be limitations to movement as part of the new normal. Our economy will be greatly affected and ultimately the livelihoods of people especially the poor working people and those in the countryside, the farmers. Government should address the situation of lost jobs and livelihoods and give assistance to the people most in need like providing social amelioration and other assistance.

As for our organization, we will try to bring this up to government and contribute also to lessen the impact of the pandemic like doing food relief distribution and awareness raising.



## Maricris, 21

I'm Maricris Buboy, 21-years old from Barangay Holy Spirit, Quezon City. Despite my age, I was only able to reach Grade 11. The biggest factor that affected my education and also that of my other five siblings is the poverty of our family. Our father is a tricycle driver and this is the only source of our family's income. He cannot find a good paying job anymore since he is of old age and has health limitations too.

I actually like to study and be in school and have hopes of finishing also at least basic education (Grade 12). I took a job as a baby-sitter so I can spend for my schooling. Even if our school is a public school, there are still costs like transportation, food and projects in school. Because of my physical weakness, I was not able to sustain schooling and working at the same time. I had to stop schooling and thought I should work first so I can earn and go to school after a year or so. I also tried other possible sources of income, such as being a household helper and selling. But because I also need to help my parents support our family, day to day, I was not able to save and was not able to continue my schooling.

This pandemic is a big burden to our family especially when the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) was declared. Even tricycles were not allowed to ply so it affected our family's main source of livelihood. My siblings and I also cannot find alternative source of income for us, however small because movement is restricted and everyone is obliged to stay home or we will be apprehended. We are relying on government-provided food packs which is also very limited and slow to come. Because we need to at least have an income so we can buy food, my older brother tried to drive the tricycle and get passengers, he was caught and detained for several days. He was only released because our parents and our organization YND helped in putting up the money to pay for his bail. Our organization also reported what happened to the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) and a CHR representative helped to negotiate for his release, but only if we pay the bail. The situation is very frustrating because instead of earning and saving so we can buy food, we ended up shelling out money not for food. Instead of helping the people to cope up with this crisis, the government policies being implemented are making situations worse for the people.

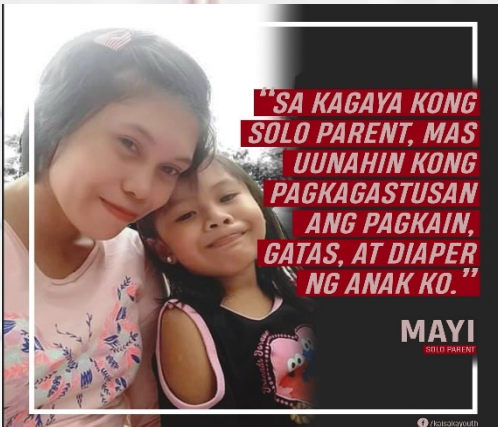
Also stressful to me is the inability to do normal and routine things like exercise, traveling and going out with friends, relatives and acquaintances. I just spend the day not being bored and still be productive beyond this Pandemic by helping with household chores, reading books and the reading materials provided by our organization, YND. Reading these materials make me more knowledgeable on many things happening in society and gives me the proper tools for critical thinking. Sometimes, I listen to radio, watch TV and scroll the facebook. However, heaps of sad and fake news discourage me to stay long on facebook. I only check the social media for updates on the pandemic and I choose what to read.

I know that this pandemic will result to a new normal like no going out without mask, not being able to go out for reasons such as not wearing of face mask, non-essential activities, and absence of quarantine pass, among others. I am accepting these changes because these are measures to prevent getting infected with COVID until there is a cure to it.

I wish and propose that our government provide more aid and livelihood to poor families, ensure free education for young people especially with the planned online education. Government needs to consider the predicament of poor students - no gadget, no internet access. I would like to request for books and other learning materials that young people like me can read while in quarantine. This can be coursed through our organization and be shared to the youth in our community.



# Mai, 27



*"Now that I am a young solo parent, taking care of the needs of my daughter (food, milk, diapers) comes first."*

I'm Patria May-I Vibora , 27-years old. I live in Barangay Bagbag, in one of the urban poor communities in Quezon City. I am a young solo parent of a 5-year-old girl. I did not graduate from college. I stopped when I was in 3rd year because I got pregnant and gave birth. I wish I could finish my college education to have better chances of getting a good life for me and my child. The fact that I am a solo parent, however, prevents me from continuing with my studies. I am active in YND and the KaisaKa Young Solo Parents Association. The Young Solo Parents Association is an outcome of a Youth Action Research (YAR) project we've undertaken in our community. These organizations help me and other youth in the community learn many issues in society.

Before this pandemic, I was able to get a job as an area supervisor for the Listahanan project of DSWD (Department of Social Welfare and Development). I am already thinking of going back to school to finish college so I can land in a better job and provide better for my child Alexa. It is hard to find a permanent job with a good compensation if you are not a college graduate. I also miss going to school. I used to be a diligent student and I believe I can still excel and get good grades. While I work as an area supervisor, I still continue with my organizing work in our community. I help organize the youth and young solo parents like me to capacitate and empower ourselves to assert for our rights.

When the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) was declared to prevent the spread of COVID19, everything seemed to stop. Our organizational activities had to stop and worse, I was out of work. I am one of those affected by the no-work-no-pay scheme as a result of the lockdown.

The lockdown and its repercussion is a huge challenge and a burden to many poor families like me who have no savings, and are now jobless and no earnings. I cannot afford to stock up food but I have to find ways because I have a child. Though limited and slow to come, government food relief packs help us get by. But the packs are not healthy for children. A usual food pack contains rice, canned sardines, noodles. My daughter suffers from allergies from processed food. I have to put extra effort so I can provide nutritious food at least for her. We made an effort too in our organization to solicit for nutritious food. The Office of the Vice President responded with food assistance of rice, vegetables and fruits that gave us relief for several days. We also connected with the local church for provisions of food, milk and medicines for lactating mothers who are members of our organization, KaisaKa Young Solo Parents Association.

# Mai, 27

I developed urinary tract infection illness because of eating too much sardines and noodles. Getting sick in this time of pandemic worried me greatly, still I had to see a doctor because I was getting weak. I initially went to a public hospital but they did not admit me because COVID cases were piling up. I ended up in a private clinic and was admitted for several hours so they can administer intravenous medicine. What little money I have that time and I am saving for food for Alexa went to medical expenses. Alexa got sick also and of course, I had to get her to see a doctor and provide for her medicines as well. Presently, this kind of things pre-occupies my mind – how to get through this pandemic despite the challenges. My plans of returning to school seem to be falling apart again.

I worry also for the education of Alexa because she'll be in kindergarten this coming school year and I learned that online classes will be implemented for them. I only have a cellphone and we have no internet connection except for the mobile data. Also, how can I assist her in her online classes? I have to get back to work so we can survive. Worse, our community is threatened with demolition. These are my dilemmas.

Presently, we have resumed organizational activities while observing physical distancing. Organizational discussions, sharings in meetings and service activities like relief distribution and awareness campaign help us clear our minds and address our worries us well. We are grateful for the support and responses of government – national and local and other institutions to our appeal for assistance. It helped sustain us in the lockdown period. Now, we appeal for our right to education. Given support, I believe we can still pass with flying colors even with our situation as young solo parents. But government and institutions need to clearly understand our situation and what kind of education and delivery will be appropriate for us. Having community youth organizations have positive outcomes for us. Maybe, community-based education and learning through community learning centers can work for us as well.





# Rosario, 19

I'm Rosario Sanipa Cajandab, 19 years old, living in Brgy 1, Capul, Northern Samar. I'm now in Grade 12 but unfortunately our classes were halted due to COVID. Our family is very simple, my father works as a crew man on a motorboat that traverse in and out of Capul. I have epilepsy. There are times when I experience seizures in school. My condition made me refrain from participating in strenuous school activities. Now I'm taking maintenance medicine.

When lockdown was enforced in the island, the motorboat where my father works ceased operation. That means that for one month my father was jobless. The movement control has made us impossible to buy my maintenance medicine since it's only available in the mainland Allen and Catarman. We don't have enough money to buy for a month-long maintenance medicine. That's why I experienced seizure more frequently during the quarantine period.



Also, I'm member of the parish choir but the pandemic limits religious gatherings. I was compelled to stay at home. My health condition made me prone to getting sick. When COVID came, I developed anxiety more which sometimes lead to my seizure. Simple cough and fever are misconstrued as COVID. People around became paranoid. Even in our house, we became more health-conscious. Watching TV and reading books became my habits during home-stay. I also help in household chores at home. Since internet connection is available in the Poblacion, most of the information I get are accessed on social media thru my mobile phone and TV. COVID updates are always the headliners in social media. For youth, there should be a solidarity amongst us to help each other. During this quarantine there was an "Abaknon Online Singing Idol". The youth found a way to entertain themselves even when they are at home. Sanggunian Kabataan (SK) could have done this kind of initiatives more and other recreational and educational activities.

My family received cash assistance from the Social Amelioration Program (SAP) of the government. It was a great help for us who were left without means of income during this lockdown. I hope that the 2nd tranche will be released so that it can help in the financial needs of poor families like us.

Furthermore, social media can be used by the government to promote education from a distance learning concept. For my case, I could have been a freshman college this school year but I decided not to pursue my plan anymore. My health and the growing fear of getting infected by COVID made me worrisome. Once online class will be available, that's the only alternative that I have. But the government should have the machinery to provide gadgets to all so that the method will be inclusive to other impoverished families who can't afford to buy for themselves. Hoping that when the DepEd will shift to this learning approach, it will ensure students and Filipino people that online class is accessible to all.

## Neriza, 24



I'm Neriza Cajandab, 24 years old and a resident of Brgy. 1 Capul, Northern Samar. I grew up together with my eight (8) siblings in an impoverished family. My father earns a living as a low-income earner merchant and my mother as a full-time housewife. Life for me became harder when my father died when I was still young. My mother was forced to look for menial jobs like doing a hire-for-laundry and house-help among others just to feed nine hungry stomachs every day.

During my teenage year, I became a member of the church choir. There I developed my talent in singing and built self-confidence. Unfortunately, because of poverty I was forced to quit my schooling and failed to finish my secondary education. The reason stirred from the fact that all the small income that my mother brings into our household is used to feed us. Education became a least priority, food on the table for everyday survival became our main focus.

There I made a decision to look for job opportunities in Manila. At a very young age, I braved the city life and was employed as a house helper. My moving out from my island life was never easy, the nostalgia of homesickness had made my life even more difficult. I look for comforts from my newly-found friends. Along the way, I got pregnant by my beau in Manila. Then I decided to come back to Capul. There are times that I cry silently pitying my situation. I remember what my mother has gone through just to raise us all. I realized that motherhood is not a walk-in-a-park responsibility.

When SPPI came to Capul with project in Youth Education way back 2017, I never hesitated to be a part of the endeavor, there I realized the significant value of education to one's life. The influence of that project has contributed to my decision to finish my secondary education through the DepEd's Alternative Learning System (ALS) Program.

This COVID pandemic is making our life harder than I imagined. Income opportunities became limited because of its economic impact. Since I'm the laundry errand of the Rural Health Unit (RHU) of Capul I consider myself at prone to this disease. Also, the past Typhoon Tisoy and Ambo have added more affliction to the currently formidable situation that we are in where a portion of our house was destroyed.

To cope up financially and subsist, I'm helping my mother together with my other siblings collect seashells and fishing and sell them in the neighborhood. While my other sibling sells "Balut" at night. I always watch TV in order to make myself up-to-date with this pandemic. I believe that right and timely information is imperative in this trying time.

This pandemic has affected me physically and mentally. Since there is a movement restriction in the island, I am forced to stay at home together with my kid and the rest of the household members unless otherwise there is an important matter to do outside. We are 10 in the family including my child stuck in a small house dreading to be outside because of COVID. My personal space is invaded. I became more conscious with my health. Also, the quarantine imposition is putting my ALS program longer to finish than what I expected.

I believe that if only there's an established youth organization in the Island, it could have helped other youth who are financially, morally, spiritually and psychologically weary at this moment. Furthermore, during relief distribution, the youth sector could be a partner of the Local Government Unit as an auxiliary in logistics.

Cash Assurances in form of 4Ps and Social Amelioration Program (SAP) and relief goods by LGU somehow are helping marginalized households like ours to survive this pandemic. I hope there is a continued support from the local and national government's end. The education sector also shouldn't be left behind, learning opportunities should be accessible to all through modular and online approach. Doing online method means that the government needs to allocate bigger chip of national budget to boost its program amid COVID by providing gadgets and means to online class.



# Jerwin, 28

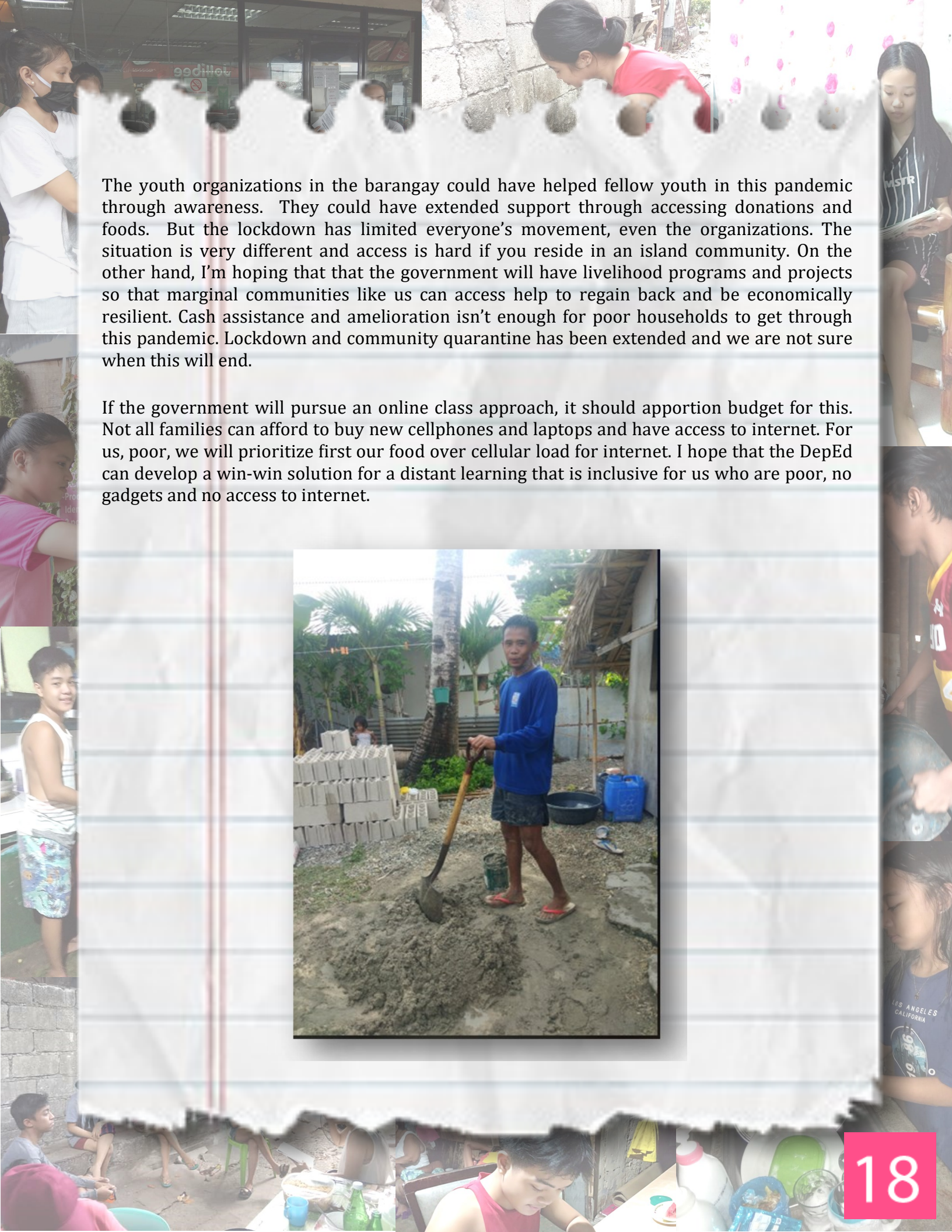
I'm Jerwin Largo Cascano, 28 years old and a resident of Brgy. San Luis Capul, Northern Samar. My father earns a living as a fisherman while my mother does the care-works at home. At a young age I started doing menial jobs to help my family financially. I only finished my secondary education and never entered college despite of my willingness because of poverty and the absence of a tertiary education in the island. College education is costly for us islanders.

After finishing my high school, I decided to go to Manila and tried my luck. There, I was hired as a factory worker. Years passed by and I met my wife and started to build a family of my own. Surviving the city became tough for us. We decided to come back to Capul. Now I'm working as baggage boy, construction worker and sometimes go on fishing to sustain my family.

This COVID pandemic is making our island life even harder for us. Before this pandemic has blown up as a global concern, we were greatly affected by Typhoon Tisoy. Houses and livelihoods were damaged. Typhoon Ambo in mid-May of 2020 left the same story. Now lockdowns are imposed as a nationwide policy to contain the virus. Transportation to and out of the island were halted. My source of income has been limited since I'm a baggage boy. My work in construction has been stopped. I was left with fishing just to have something to feed my family.

In our household, we learned how to be thrifty in everything especially on food. The relief goods given by the local government unit were budgeted and stretched to days until another relief will be given to us. I always watched TV on the news about COVID especially local updates over the radio and "bandillo". Despite being an island, it bothers me thinking that someone might have returned to the island without following proper protocols. Until one day, a Locally Stranded Individual (LSI) who returned to San Luis got positive from the rapid test. People in Capul were all in panic. When we go to the Poblacion, we were discriminated by the locals. They were afraid to go near us because they became paranoid that we too might be positive of COVID. Good thing the polymerase chain reaction test turned out negative. Today, I feel unease hearing the escalating number of positive cases in the country and even now in our region. I realized that COVID has changed most of our life's common aspects. Social distancing is widely observed. People became health conscious. As a father, and the breadwinner of the family, I worry about my health because I still have small kids to raise.





The youth organizations in the barangay could have helped fellow youth in this pandemic through awareness. They could have extended support through accessing donations and foods. But the lockdown has limited everyone's movement, even the organizations. The situation is very different and access is hard if you reside in an island community. On the other hand, I'm hoping that the government will have livelihood programs and projects so that marginal communities like us can access help to regain back and be economically resilient. Cash assistance and amelioration isn't enough for poor households to get through this pandemic. Lockdown and community quarantine has been extended and we are not sure when this will end.

If the government will pursue an online class approach, it should apportion budget for this. Not all families can afford to buy new cellphones and laptops and have access to internet. For us, poor, we will prioritize first our food over cellular load for internet. I hope that the DepEd can develop a win-win solution for a distant learning that is inclusive for us who are poor, no gadgets and no access to internet.





## Mary Joyce, 31



My name is Mary Joyce Galosmo Castillo, 31 years old and a resident of Brgy, Aguin, Capul, Northern Samar. I'm a mother of three. I was an out-of-school-youth (OSY) before but now I am pursuing my studies again. Unfortunately, COVID-19 pandemic came. Our classes were stopped as part of the quarantine measures. My school developed an online class mechanism. Even if we are at home, I am still learning our lessons, I'm thankful to the modern technology. It brings and bridges school to the community. But net connection is only available in the Poblacion barangays. It means that I need to travel 11kms just to access internet. During home quarantine, social media and watching TV became the trend where information and learning can be accessed. Personally, my children have benefited from this by watching educational shows on TV.

Island life is very tough because of limited opportunities in all of life's aspects e.g, economic, social and educational among others. Before COVID-19 became a global pandemic, the island was severely hit by Typhoon Tisoy last December 2019, leaving numerous numbers of damaged houses including ours and the agricultural industry was damaged so badly. Coconut farming is our main source of income that has been crippled by Tisoy and followed by Ambo in mid-May 2020. My husband and I decided to sell our cow in order to repair our damaged house. The community quarantine as per national directive has limited our access to income opportunities. "Stay At home" became the word of the mouth as the basic quarantine measure. Since most of the time, we are at home, we decided to make our own backyard garden for local vegetables and raise hogs for food sustainability in the future.

Amid this pandemic, social media plays a vital role in information dissemination. I always keep an eye to news and updates in television about the progress of COVID-19. It's important to be informed always.

As per local directives, the quarantine has been extended twice and this means prolonged house-stay. Sometimes I feel so bored at home after doing all the chores. Home quarantine became so dragging. It's summer time and during noon time it's very hot. I always pity my kids during hot days when we we have no choice but to stay at home. We were not even allowed to go the beach side. This contributed to my growing anxiety in this time of pandemic.



If only there is a youth organization and our youth learning center was sustained in our community, that could help the youth sector by providing learning alternatives despite of the lockdown, things would have been different. Staying at home would have been more productive. I imagine myself reading many books to get by in this quarantine period. Unfortunately there is none. As for education, alternative mechanism should be developed by the government so that unconventional learning can be accessible for all.

I always pray hard at night that the vaccine for this virus will be discovered so that things will be back to normalcy. The government both local and national should continue its support to us, poor households, in order to survive in this pandemic. This COVID thing has made our marginal island life even worse. Despite all these, I'm looking forward that things will get better in time.

