

## CASE STORY

# OSY trains as radio broadcaster, advocates for mental health

MAY 2021 | ISABELA CITY, BASILAN

For 21-year-old Nor-Anie Abdullah, attending trainings was one way to cope with the challenges brought about by COVID-19.

*"[This] pandemic... parang hindi naging productive ang year ko, [kaya] naging interested ako na mag-explore..."* says Nor-Anie. (In this pandemic... It's like my year wasn't productive. So, I was really interested to explore). She recalls how her graduation from the Alternative Learning System (ALS) of the Department of Education was postponed this year due to the pandemic.

Nor-Anie, who lives in Isabela City, Basilan in southern Philippines is one of the many young people who struggled to adjust to new learning modalities, her interaction with friends and fellow learners limited, and her progress hampered due to COVID-19.

With the encouragement of her ALS teacher, she joined a four-day training about youth empowerment and mental health in March 2021. Here, she and other young people in her community were taught about the importance of radio as a tool for learning and maintaining mental wellbeing. In a time when everyone seems to have mobile gadgets and access to the internet, many Filipinos still do not. In areas where mobile signal remains intermittent and power fluctuates, radio is king.

The training was organized by Nagdilaab Foundation, Inc., a local non-profit, after having won a grant through the USAID Opportunity 2.0 Program.

Nor-Anie was excited looking back at activities she took part in since joining the project. "My favorite lesson was about mental health. People used to treat mental health so lightly and then I learned that anxiety and depression are not something you joke about," she said, adding that she also learned about youth empowerment and gender-based violence as part of the training.

Among these activities, however, Nor-Anie seemed to have enjoyed radio broadcasting the most. "Though it was nerve-wracking at first, I still enjoyed every bit of it, and I learned a lot – from the dos and don'ts of a radio broadcast to the things to say in the broadcast," she said.

She initially had difficulty writing scripts and being comfortable with public speaking. But, with support from anchors and with the rehearsals, she feels she's much better now.



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*"97.5 Nutriskwela Radyokomunidad: Basta radio, DXNO, informed ka!"*

exclaims Nor-Anie with the ease of a seasoned broadcaster. In the weekly radio program which airs every Monday, lessons they learned on mental health are featured.

Best practices on information dissemination are embedded in the broadcasting activity, with the guidance of the local Philippine Information Agency – Isabela Infodesk. The weekly radio program, which targets ALS learners in the area, broadcasts about coping with mental health disorders and aims to help young people by amplifying the youth's own voice through youth radio broadcasters.

"These days, I think the youth are going through mental issues because of the sudden change of the way they live. And I think this program helped them to be aware of this so that they can properly address [these issues] ...," Nor-Anie said. "As we deliver the messages to our fellow youth, I think this helps them gain trust that we understand them as well," she added.



Because of the youth empowerment and mental health training, Nor-Anie has built up confidence, gained new skills and new friends. She has become even more driven to join more training, not just on broadcasting but also youth leadership as well as responsible use of social media.

She said she is now even more determined to pursue a professional career in either teaching, medicine, or social work. Nor-Anie said she has always wanted to become a teacher, and her experience in anchoring has given her more confidence to be one.

"Focus on your goals," she appeals to other young people like her. "If you focus on your goals, you will overcome these changes and challenges. Rest if you need it, and don't push yourself too hard so that you can take care of your mental health."

Nagdilaab Foundation, Inc. is a non-profit organization based in Isabela City, Basilan that works on peace and development with communities.

Through the USAID Opportunity 2.0 grant, they have capacitated out-of-school youth on psychosocial first aid training and broadcasting skills, enabling them to advocate for mental health wellness through radio in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Opportunity 2.0 is a five-year (2020-2025) initiative that will improve the learning and earning outcomes of out-of-school Filipino youth by working with key stakeholders from government, industry and academia to strengthen the education, training and employment systems at the national and local level. These include DepEd's enhanced Alternative Learning Systems program, TESDA's skills training programs, and local government programs for youth.