

CASE STORY

Tech-Voc training goes online, restores hope to vulnerable youth

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Sixteen-year-old Jhon Vert Oponda from Zamboanga City dropped out of school when the lockdown was imposed in the Philippines at the onset of COVID-19. The new arrangements for online classes followed shortly and, like many, Jhon found it difficult to adjust.

Before the lockdown, he was in Grade 11 (Senior High School) and was among the honor students in his class.

He had thought that the situation would soon get back to normal, but as the lockdown went on, his mother encouraged him to enroll in a course offered by the Philippine Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA).

Jhon learned about the Youth Access to TESDA Online Programs (TOPs), and was among the first 20 out-of-school youth who took part in the program in Zamboanga. Forty more young people enrolled from the cities of Isabela and Cotabato in the southern Philippines.

Youth Access to TESDA Online Programs is part of USAID Opportunity 2.0, a five-year project launched by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in 2020, aiming to support the education, employment, and livelihood needs of at least 180,000 out-of-school youth across the Philippines.

Youth Access to TOPs helps out-of-school gain employable skills through TESDA's distance learning platform also known as TOPs (<https://www.e-tesda.gov.ph/>). TOPs was just the program for TESDA to ensure education and training continues for vulnerable, out-of-school youth even in the time of a pandemic.

Through USAID Opportunity 2.0, TOPs learners like Jhon were loaned learning equipment and underwent a thorough online orientation. Community-based facilitators were also engaged so that adult support is there throughout the process, ready to respond to issues learners may have along the way.

Originally, Jhon Vert wanted to take up an agriculture course on TOPs, but since he resides in a city, he opted for one that he thought was more practical, which is the "Preparing Hot Meals" course. It has five modules on preparing meat and seafood dishes; stocks, sauces, and soup; egg vegetable and farinaceous dishes; and preparing poultry and game dishes.



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He started the three-month course in October last year. Near the end of the course, he was able to go on an on-the-job training at a local restaurant following COVID-19 prevention protocols in the city. The program values practical exposure just as much as desk and lecture-type learning, a key feature why local businesses find completers competitive.

The restaurant has offered John a post already. He looks forward to start working in February 2021, right after graduation. In the photo below, Jhon takes orders during his work immersion.



"I am very thankful dahil malaking tulong na po ito (TOP). Makakapag-ipon po ako bago magsimula ulit ang school year," Jhon says. ("I am very thankful because this is such a great help. I get to save up money before the next school year starts.")

In joining Youth Access to TOPs, Jhon Vert realized that he wanted to take up Business Management in college. Through the program, he also made new friends from different districts in his city. When asked about his future plans, he shares his excitement in going back to school, and pursuing the Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM) academic track.

For Jhon, the program was an eye opener. He hopes that Zamboanga City would implement more similar programs, especially in rural areas, since not all youth get the opportunity to study and they might be left out. His message to his fellow youth: "Grab every opportunity! Work hard. Failure is part of the process. Always try your best."

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.