



BP children pose for the Christmas picture 2020.

KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE AMID COVID19 PANDEMIC

Accomplishment Report
Year 2020
Batang Pinangga Foundaion, Inc.

KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE AMID COVID19 PANDEMIC

We look back to the year 2020 in great disbelief. Nothing has rendered us so confused, constricted, fearing for the unknown, and fearing for our own survival. As the lockdown dragged for months, as we saw the reports of the horrors of the disease, and as people lose their jobs and businesses shut down, we are in for the long haul for what we thought was temporary.

On February 2, 2020, the first death of the coronavirus outside China, where it was said to have originated, was reported in our country.¹ The World Health Organization (WHO) declared on March 11, 2020, the coronavirus, named as Sars-Cov-2, a pandemic, acknowledging that the virus will spread to all countries on the globe, and not just a public health crisis, but a crisis that will touch every sector.²

There was no telling how a country, like the Philippines, would react, much alone cope, with a disease that later on would paralyze the whole world. When the Philippine government declared the first lockdown on March 16, 2020³, President Duterte said that “we are at war against a vicious and invisible enemy”.

A year since then, and we remained stoned and have grappled with the impact of COVID19 in our lives.

The economic crisis is very real.

In our own households, we complained that a kilo of the humble squash more than doubled, and prices of the basic commodities, without the price control in some places, are rising.

Staying home had become staycation for those who have the means.

But for the struggling workers and small income-earners, and those surviving daily, the street dwellers and the informal settlers, the pandemic, without even getting the infection, has been a slow death, with the reported record hunger in the country.⁴

We do not know for how long this would continue.

We feel most vulnerable in Batang Pinangga, where we perpetually are dependent on donations, local and foreign. We have been grateful that our friends here and abroad did worry about us.

That there were individuals, despite and until this time, came forward to check on us and the children.



In December, local donors came like this; children are not allowed to get near. In the right photo, they practice wearing masks.

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As nations have raced aggressively towards vaccination and immunity, may the rich nations do not left behind the poor countries, that they may realize the greatest lesson there is with the corona virus pandemic, that in a global scale, *the real antidote is not segregation but in cooperation*, words from the famous historian and author, Yuval Noah Harari. When asked about what concerns him most how the world is changing with the pandemic, he replied, "I'm afraid that people are reacting to this crisis not with global solidarity, but with hatred, blaming other countries, blaming ethnic and religious minorities. But I hope that we will be able to develop our compassion, and not our hatred, to react with global solidarity, which will develop our generosity to help people in need."⁵

And so here we are in the tiny piece of place in Batang Pinangga, hoping that the pandemic brings people together, in solidarity and cooperation.

That has always been the way for us, to be able to provide for the children.

With that, we will thrive.



Solidarity and cooperation. Junior Chamber International (JCI) did fund-raising selling tote bags to benefit Batang Pinangga. The group made the commitment that this would be a continuing cooperation.

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Notes from the Executive Director

I was visiting my family in Negros Island in the first days of March; the news of the virus was just news. When President Duterte declared the quarantine status, I was thinking soon it would be over; maybe, after two weeks. The maybes went on, and sadly, in the coming months, going back to Cebu was becoming harder. Just in the next town, 18 kilometers away was Fr. Pete, our Board Chair, who was experiencing the same. We were not able to meet due to strict border controls in between towns, not until December.

Up on our head was Batang Pinangga.

From where we were there was good internet connection and that really was a great help, because otherwise in our place in BP, we were isolated; telephone reception is bad enough.

We did the immediate contacts with our friends, donors, partners, among each other with the Board of Trustees. In the first days of the lockdown, getting money from the bank in Cebu City was not even possible. The foundation needed to stock-up with supplies, but the market was closed.

There was some sort of panic and urgency.

In these times of confusion, we were grateful to those who reached out and helped us, our partners and friends, and to our own frontliners.

Edwin, our driver, who was the one moving around, without him we were crippled;

Benot, our maintenance staff, who stayed put all throughout, who used to hold only hammer and saw, yet learned to make good pictures and videos;

Our housemothers and support staff, *Linda, Nora, Siding, Maritess, Myrna, Era, Flor*, who took care of the suddenly out of school, bored and anxious children; *Maymay*, who managed the tight budget and coordinated internal communications;

Bing, despite working from home, kept children safe and protected;

Ruel, working from home, yet went to fix water supply, electrical connections and made vehicles running;

Benben, who took care of the gardens so that we have vegetables in the kitchen; *Tina*, who took care of the modules, and who made sure children returning home remained safe;

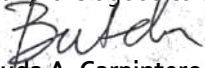
Cecil, who engaged the children to learn at home;

Ann, for being always there for the required reports and documents of any kind; To our partners who worried about us, Jochen and Kathi Range of Aktion Wasserbueffel, e.V.; Geertjan Berman of Stichting Batang Pinangga NL and the Youth Ambassadors; to the Dutch couple Koen and Astrid van Vliet, pioneering sponsors; our dear friend Armi Labitan in the U.S.; to Fr. Pete, for his personal contact in the U.S.; Chris Koppel for sending in emergency funds; for our local contacts who reached out immediately during the lockdown months: family of Jenggay and Rodel Parañaque, Karen and Junjun Guanzon.

To our children, who kept praying for better days.

The lockdown months gave us something precious, time. May we have made valuable use of it; I'm sure we all did in different ways.

Finally it felt good to be in BP after 11 months.

• 
Juda A. Carpintero

The way we meet. (Top photo), clockwise, with BOT: Butch, Belinda, Berlina, Fr. Pete. (Below) with personnel: Butch, Ann, Tina, Bing, Benot, Siding, Maritess, Cecil, Nora, Maymay, Ruel.



THE RESIDENTIAL CARE PROGRAM (RCP)

There were 31 children by end of 2020; there were no new additions during the year.

However, there were four children who returned to their own families, one in October, and three in December.

At the start of the lockdown in March, the high school students residing in the Half-Way House in Pit-os returned to BP main. (Only one college student remained at the house in Pit-os, schooling online since August 2020.)

The school year abruptly ended during the lockdown, fortunately the final exams were done. All children passed the school year.

For the first time, children spent the longest break from school, from half of March until end of September. The new school year resumed on October 5, 2020, but learning has been called distance or blended learning modalities done at home, in the absence of face-to-face classes.

During this time, daily schedules were organized to distinguish house times and learning times.



Learning at home. With the help of a home-based teacher, the children were back to school only it remained inside the compound. Learning was more focused and flexible, and although children missed their classmates, being together was already a crowd.

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Stuck together in one place for a longest time required a good measure of perseverance. Luckily Batang Pinangga has a good enough space to give a bit of corner for all children. Still management was not easy. The following measures were implemented:

- a. Conduct of house meetings with the children, to discuss about the situation of the corona virus, and the reason to stay home;
- b. Inclusion of physical activities in the daily schedules, such as participation of children in gardening, and sports;
- c. Inclusion of learning times for house chores, such as doing cooking, hand-crafts, and housekeeping;
- d. Inclusion of organized play times and leisure times, such as movie nights;
- e. Paired learning, where older children helped the younger ones to read;
- f. Before the start of the school year in October, home-based learning was already implemented in June, to help the children prepare.



Training, training. Older children helped out a lot in the house, still is the best way to learn.

Some challenges experienced in this time

1. The children experienced massive viral infection caused by chicken pox in the months of June and July.
2. Due to restricted movements, some engaged personnel reported for extended days, and underwent one-week quarantine before entering the children's houses.
3. There was a problem of boredom and anxiety, particularly with the older children who needed to get back to familiar connections with friends, which resulted to conflicts in the house, between houseparents and teenagers, and between the children.

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4. Engaged houseparents had to struggle with their own personal troubles at home, where husbands lose their jobs, and the burden to care for the children who are learning at home;
5. The anxiety caused by the new way of learning. Printed modules were not all understandable and activities were too many to comply with. Those attending college could not catch up with the online way of learning, exacerbated by an unstable internet connection.

Still the residential homes have remained safe and daily activities were carried over despite fear and anxiety. The whole foundation was infection-free throughout this time.



Learning by doing. Keeping children engaged and busy is time well-spent. Here the older boys helped in repainting jobs; building repairs were made to comply with structural safety requirements in the renewal of the license with DSWD.

THE COMMUNITY REINTEGRATION PROGRAM (CRP)

During the summer break, after the close of the school year, it was customary for the children to go out and visit their own families whenever possible. This was not happening. Even visits of the children's parents were suspended.

This affected the mood of the expectant children.

However, when borders were easing, there were four children who were processed to return home and their final turn-over to happen in early 2021.

There were factors contributing to the decision of the child to return home:

- a. Becoming a young teenager. Understandably, the shelter of Batang Pinangga fit the needs of a much younger child; grown-ups needed more flexibility and freedom, which cannot be at all times provided for due to risks control measures;
- b. Resolution of the reason of separation from the family. Without timely case review, there are situations that children overstay. This can be addressed by case follow-up and timely monitoring.
- c. It remains that the main determining factor for the child's reintegration to their own family is the presence of an able parent to ensure safety of the returning child.

Case review was not fully done in 2020 when the case management team members were unable to regroup due to border restrictions.

Klowie (right), 11, came to BP at the age of six. His family was displaced due to the demolition works for the SRP project in Cebu City, living among those stilt houses along the shore. He became a street child. After five years, the family resettled in 2018, in Sitio Alumnos, Cebu City, in the lot awarded for the original settlers. In October 2020, Klowie returned to the custody of his father, yet later on the child wandered around in his familiar neighborhood. He has chosen to live in the house few blocks away from theirs-and the family in return accepted the child, for they knew him from the time that his mother left. An inter-agency meeting was facilitated by Batang Pinangga to come up with an agreement for child's care and monitoring, with the Salvatorian Sisters running a children's program in the locality, and with the local government. His older half-brother committed to provide for Klowie, the youngest of the 10 siblings in all from his father's three partners.





Veness, 11, was a victim of sexual abuse, with a pending court case and awaiting trial. She was admitted in 2017 for safekeeping. In November 2020, her mother, who was jailed due to an estafa case, visited her child and wanted to take back custody, furious at the child's father who failed to protect their daughter and caused her situation. The incident of sexual abuse happened during her incarceration. After home visit and capability assessment, Veness's return to her mother was recommended. She spent her Christmas holidays with her parent, and towards final turn-over in early 2021.



Michael, 16, went back to his family in Danao City in December 2020. He was with BP at the age of nine, together with four other siblings. Coming from a large family of 12 children, the boy knew how hard it was to survive, where he at a young age sold scraps for a living, and was not able even to complete first grade, where his father began using drugs and was arrested for it, and when his mother became the sole breadwinner. He looked back to his family and realized that now grown-up, he can be of help, especially this time of the pandemic. BP supports his schooling and other needs; he joins youth workshops and meetings, and visits his siblings in BP, saying he is glad to have two families to go home to.



Mariel, 17, lived back with her mother and two other brothers. They lived separately now in a small rented house, unlike before in the common house with grandma. Her mother was jailed for possession of illegal drugs; now she works as a househelp. Mariel lived in BP at the age of nine, very sick. She was suffering from extra-pulmonary tuberculosis, her lymph nodes bursting. Today only the scar has remained-a reminder of the bitter illness that almost took her life; she consciously hides them under her hair. BP supports her schooling and other needs, but she is happy to bond and connect with her growing siblings and mother.

THE INDEPENDENT-LIVING PROGRAM (ILP)

To review, as a policy, training for social and life skills started already upon admission of children in Batang Pinangga. The categories of self-care, health and safety, home management were repeatedly experienced, and as the young child is growing, grown-up skills are also introduced such as money management, relationships, time management, and career planning.

In 2020, a Skills Assessment Tool (SAT) was formulated, to help the young adult measure their level of skills gained under the independent-living program, and areas to catch-up by both the young adult and by the mentor.

The tool shall be administered as baseline at the age of 15 but was put-off at the start of 2021.

At the end of the year, there were seven young adults age 15 to 20 who will be tested.

At the age of 20, Batang Pinangga expected from its young adult, those who remain under the independent-living program, to satisfactorily pass all categories and be declared to have completed the ILP.



At home with many possibilities. Helping the young ones read, or doing some crafts like sewing, or with the very basic that is cooking and purchasing essentials keep the young adults engaged in.

ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

Priority changes during the pandemic

The pandemic has caused priority changes and adjustments in the working and living environment of the Foundation.

1. Healthy and safe from the virus
During the early period of lockdown, from March to August 2020, Batang Pinangga was on skeletal management. It was ensured, however, that provision for operational needs was timely and adequate.

The following measures were put into place:

- a. Implementation of health protocols
 - One person was designated to move around, do bank transactions, purchase food supplies, and pick-up donations
 - Set-up of wash area, for clean-up and shower and changing before entering the children's houses for every reporting personnel
 - Wearing of masks at all times when going out of the compound
 - Placement of sanitizers and soap in designated wash areas
- b. Suspension of visits by donors, sponsors, volunteers, parent and families of the children. In December, local donors can come to bring in/drop off some donations but still unable to meet-up close with the children. BP's spacious compound enabled a controlled visit and a safe distance from the children residents.
- c. Mandatory seven-day quarantine for caregivers coming from outside the barangay
- d. Work from home arrangements for personnel living in Cebu City, and those who are immune-compromised.

2. Setting-up of an internet connection

Connection was possible but immensely frustrating to get a stable service due to the remote location of the Foundation.

Nevertheless it enabled connectivity with the children and between personnel who were working from home.

Concerns and immediate needs of the children and all residents were looked into and management was always updated.

For the first time, being online has become very essential, and improvement from the telecom service was an expectation.



Wash/Clean up kiosk prior to entry to the children's homes.

Cancellation of fund-raising campaign

Batang Pinangga mainly relied on fund-raising. The annual fund campaign of the youth ambassadors of Batang Pinangga in the country the Netherlands was halted, except for very few online activities. The motivation of the youth to participate in the fund-raising was the yearly Philippine/Cebu trip to visit the children's home, which was no longer happening. Regular partners of the Foundation were able to provide for the immediate relief to sustain the operations. A reduction in the fund sources was noted as compared to previous year, but correspondingly operational expenses also reduced due to suspension of travel and schooling, and community activities.

Fortunately the pandemic has encouraged a number of charitable individuals to keep helping; local donations for food picked-up in the month of December for the Christmas holidays.

Renewal of the license and registration with the DSWD

Amid lockdown restrictions, the foundation processed its application to operate in May 2020. Compliance for structural safety was being worked out, implementing immediate repairs in the pinpointed areas upon inspection.

Other compliance procedures took time, due to the lockdown constraints, and to the hybrid online and offline transacting with the government offices, such as with the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Bureau of Internal Revenue. The new license was granted in October 2020, valid for another three years.

Engagement in vegetable gardening

Batang Pinangga has always the space for its gardens and there was no better time than this time to engage more in gardening.

A US-based charity agency, Together we can Change the World, sponsored a small amount to augment the vegetable gardens. The children fully participated in planting and caring for the gardens, and daily there were fresh greens served on meal times.

Doing how tos. Children learn proper plant care, such as watering, and propagation, like marcotting.



PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED AND MEASURES UNDERTAKEN IN THE FACE OF THE PARTICULAR EXPERIENCE WITH THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC

During the first months of the lockdown, the main concern of the shelter was the provision for all children residents, as well as the mobility of its caregivers and engaged personnel.

The threat of the corona was paralyzing.

As the problem dragged on, the real impact on the sources of operation funds has been felt. To worry about sustainability of operations, for foundations perpetually dependent on donations, and for much smaller agencies like Batang Pinangga, was to say the least.

However, during the year, the contacts of Batang Pinangga came to help, with an immediate relief, responding in the environment of a disaster. It was quick and charitable.

The following were noted:

- a. The BP children have lived in a remote location-therefore not very accessible to bring in support.
The use of money transfer services, instead of the bank solved this matter, and appointment of a to-go-person all throughout safely.
- b. Lack of stable internet connection hindered distant learning. As this was entirely a telco issue, arrangement with concerned school helped.
- c. Separation of key personnel during the months of lockdown. Appointment of skeletal management and work from home arrangement were done, and shifts of operations to organized children's activities. Physically separated management persons took charge of online communications and updates with sponsors, and other administrative operational functions.

Overall, the children and all engaged personnel remained safe.

The remote location of Batang Pinangga and its own wide spaces after all, provided for the safety net at this very crucial time.

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The impact of COVID19 pandemic is reported to last for many years to come.

Everyone reported being hard-up. No exception; maybe for those who have really stable jobs in businesses that thrive through, but the recovery of the economy is uncertain.

The corona virus has remained a threat; we just have survived the first year.

No one came prepared to face this pandemic. Whatever the future holds, we take it slowly each day. What we can do at the moment is to stay healthy, think of what to contribute to better the situation.

On our part in Batang Pinangga, the responsibility remains. We take care of lives.

Living in Batang Pinangga: The beginning of a happy story

Let's imagine a poor mother having to raise her children, caught up in a relationship one after the other, believing she can find the right one to help her from the burden. It did not happen. The children were changing places so often, in poor, unsafe situations that affected their well-being. The older children had to work for the neighbors to earn their keep. Then we can imagine how sad the children must be.

But this is a happy story.

Batang Pinangga rescued five unhappy children. Two younger children came at first, six and eight year olds. The older ones were "working student", the mother said. One day the older children came to visit, only for a short vacation, to Batang Pinangga, because they said, they were doing fine in their present

accommodation. After three days, these children happily declared that they would no longer go back to where they came from-they love it here. They will stay.

And so our social worker had to work fast to get these five children enroll in school: the older children, age 12 to 14, were still in 4th grade, because they said Mama was always moving, and they had to quit school every time.

Now, the five siblings are schooling without interruptions. The little boy-named Gino- is happy when it rains, because by then he can wear his raincoat to school, and he showed his big pencil and crayons. And we see the other four girls take time to fix their hair nicely, like they have not done it before.

The same story is shared by the many children living in Batang Pinangga. Not easy for all of them who have to face the trauma of an unhappy, disturbing childhood. But leaving behind the past, it is possible for a happy beginning.



Happy together. Siblings (clockwise) Grevelyn, 15, Joyce, 12, Gracelyn, 14, Gino, 7, Gracel, 9)

With the support of many, children rescued by Batang Pinangga have a better chance of starting a new life: there was this child who cannot even talk properly at age seven, but now about to finish secondary school; or about this girl, who almost died of tuberculosis and without medical care, now a budding teenager who excels in her classes; or this angry child who often got trouble in school, now is about to present his thesis in painting; or these sickly twin brothers who were living on the streets, who never got to know their parents, and

now entering University; or this child scavenger, who did not go to school until he is 10 years old, but able to graduate elementary school as top in his class; or about a boy, who suffered maltreatment by own parent, who lived outdoors in the bushes to escape, angry and wild, but got his first award in school for good behavior.

The troubles and pain of many or by some of us may not measure up to the tremendous amount of trauma that these children have endured in their very young lives. We cannot undo their past, but we can help them do their present and future. For all of us who do care, let us wear our hearts for these children with love, pride, and joy.●



Taking responsibility. (L-R) Michael, 16, Thomas, 13, Niño, 10, Love, 11. Michael forgone schooling before and became a young scavenger so that he could help feed his younger siblings.



Twin brothers Jerry (left) and Jason ready for university.

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