

# INSPIRE

STORIES OF HOPE

**PANTAWID PAMILYANG PILIPINO PROGRAM**  
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- 2 INSPIRE ESGP-PA EDITION
- 4 GIVING BACK
- 6 A VICTOR RISES FROM STRUGGLES
- 8 THE WAIT IS OVER
- 10 NEVER GIVING UP
- 12 COLLEGE AT 30
- 14 TURNING NEGATIVITY INTO SUCCESS
- 16 THE SWEET SUCCESS OF AN ESGP-PA GRANTEE
- 18 SACADA'S SON GRADUATES CUM LAUDE
- 20 ESGP-PA GIVES HOPE TO POOR STUDENTS
- 22 THE POWER OF EDUCATION
- 24 FROM BABYSITTING TO TEACHING
- 26 CHOOSING HAPPINESS, CHOOSING DREAMS
- 28 NATUTO AKONG MANGARAP DAHIL SA PANTAWID
- 29 THE GIRL WHO DIDN'T WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL



## INSPIRE

INSPIRE is a collection of heartwarming stories of Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program beneficiaries and workers. It hopes to inspire and motivate everyone to rise above life's challenges.

INSPIRE is produced by the Social Marketing Division of Pantawid Pamilya.

Pantawid Pamilya is a human development program of the national government implemented through DSWD. It invests in human capital by ensuring the health and education of poor children aged 0-18.

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### INSPIRE: The ESGP-PA Edition


The Expanded Students Grant-in-Aid Program for Poverty Alleviation (ESGP-PA) contributes to the national government's thrusts in addressing poverty by increasing the number of graduates in higher education from poor households. It is a joint program of the Department of Social Welfare and Development, Commission on Higher Education, Philippine State Universities and Colleges, and Department of Labor and Employment.

The grantees, who are from Pantawid Pamilya households are given financial assistance and relevant interventions or support to complete their college education. Per school year, a grantee is entitled to a financial assistance up to sixty-thousand pesos.

This edition of INSPIRE tells the story of some ESGP-PA graduates. They are from the first batch of ESGP-PA graduates whose challenges, perseverance, and triumph inspire other students and beneficiaries of Pantawid Pamilya and DSWD.







**"(ESGP-PA) gave me  
the opportunity  
to achieve more and  
to never stop dreaming."**

## GIVING BACK

by Ryan Malbas Tapayan

"Being an outstanding student does not necessarily mean being academically excellent," claimed Jerry Lelis Bual, one of the 61 graduating ESGP-PA scholars of Caraga Region.

"One can be outstanding if he or she is able to touch lives and inspire others by works and eventually leave a legacy," he added.

Jerry comes from a broken family. His father left home when Jerry was only five years old. His mother then became the breadwinner of the family. At a young age, Jerry knew the burden that his mother was experiencing to make a living for him, his grandmother, and his sister. This is why he always helped her sell vegetables and *kakanin* during his free time in school.

The hardships in his life made Jerry strive in his studies and conquer his fears. He was granted a scholarship sponsored by the World Vision Philippines since elementary up to high school. He had always been a dedicated student who was active in school activities and ready to help others.

When he was in college, Jerry became a grantee of ESGP-PA of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program and Commission on Higher Education. It was truly a blessing for someone like him who is poor and had never imagined that a college education was possible.

"I really thought that I would not make it to college. I was hopeless then that my dream to finish a degree will not be realized because I know that my mother could not financially support my college education," said Jerry.

ESGP-PA did not only give Jerry the chance to go to college but also encouraged him to do his best.

"I was so fortunate to be selected as one of the lucky grantees of the ESGP-PA and I am more inspired to continue doing my best. It also gave me the opportunity to achieve more and to never stop dreaming and never underestimate my potentials," shared Jerry.

Aside from being good in the academics, Jerry has also developed his leadership skills by attending various trainings. He also joined activities where he was able to showcase his skills and talents. He attended the National Children's Congress sponsored by the World Vision Philippines. He was the president of the Caraga State University (CSU) Debate Squad, a national extemporaneous speaker for the 7th PASUC literary and cultural festival, an interschool debate competition champion, and CSU student council senate president.

On his graduation day, he received numerous awards including the University Literary Award, College Leadership Award and the University Most Outstanding Student. These made him one of the 10 outstanding Students in Caraga awardees of Rotary Club Butuan.

His efforts and hard work did pay off. These inspired him to dream more for himself and for his family as well. Jerry wishes to take a degree in medicine and hopes to take specialization in dermatology.



## A VICTOR RISES FROM STRUGGLES

by Jaesem Ryan A. Gaces

With her guiding principles, Philippians 3:14 "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" Melody Baided always has the courage to fight and overcome the challenges along her road to education.

"When I lift everything to God, I am confident that I can make things happen," said ESGP-PA grantee that has a strong faith guided her to overcome her struggles and gradually achieve her dream to be a college graduate.

### Road to triumph

According to Melody, graduating cum laude is a treasure that no one can take away from her. It will be her weapon in winning her family's battle against poverty. Her father Jeffrey, 43, fishes at the Paoay Lake and her mother, Rosemarie, 45, dries and sells them. This has been the way how they earn their living since she was in elementary. Jeffrey is a high school graduate while Rosemarie finished elementary.



"This pride is for my family who inspires me to fight all the way."

Melody topped her class in high school and graduated as class salutatorian in elementary. She strived to excel in her studies to have better academic opportunities despite her family's limited resources.

"I did not want my parents to be frustrated when I entered college, so I exerted extra effort to my academic record," she said.

She did not mind taking 30-minute jeepney and tricycle rides every day from Brgy. Suba, Paoay, Ilocos Norte to her school, Mariano Marcos State University-College of Teacher

Education in Laoag City, where she studied college.

### A breadwinner's vision

As a future licensed elementary teacher in a public school and a master's degree holder, Melody wants to inculcate in the minds of her would-be students the values of faith in God and love for parents because she believes that these helped her in achieving her dreams.

"Everything follows when you trust in God and obey your parents," she humbly said.

As the new breadwinner of the family, she promised to take responsibility of sending her two siblings Jerome, 18, and Charise, 7, to school. Jerome will continue his schooling because he stopped when Melody went to college.

Her persistence made her a college scholar during her first year and a university scholar on her second and third years. An her fourth year, she became on ESGP-PA grantee.

They are always with me in every battle," said Melody.

"God granted my prayer to have a scholarship with greater financial assistance through ESGP-PA. It was a great blessing!"

Her mother prays for the success of Melody in taking her licensure examination.

"I am proud of my daughter's achievement! Not only me but also our relatives and her grandparents are proud because among the grandchildren, Melody is the first to graduate from college," she said.

Melody likened ESGP-PA to a candle which lights the way and kindles hope to every students who strives hard to make his/her dreams come true.





## THE WAIT IS OVER

by Maricel B. Asejo

*"Walang salita ang makakapaglarawan sa hindi matumbasang saya na nararamdaman ko ngayon (There are no words to describe this unparalleled joy that I feel),"* Aurora said beaming with joy and excitement.

Aurora Dumapis, 24, from Ambaguio, Nueva Vizcaya, is in cloud nine right now for finishing college at the top of her class. She was awarded cum laude in her course Bachelor of Agricultural Technology at Nueva Vizcaya State University (NVSU) - Bayombong.

*"Narating ko ang yugto na ito dahil sa tulong ng ESGP-PA. Kaya nais ko ring magpasalamat sa mga taong nasa likod ng programa ito. Ang aking pagtatapos ay ang pagsisimula ng pagbibigay katuparan sa aling mga pangarap, at ito ay ang mabigyan ng magandang buhay ang aking pamilya (I've reached this phase because of the help of ESGP-PA. I'd like to thank the people behind this program. My graduation is the start of making my dreams a reality and giving my family a better life),"* she shared.

At this time, her story may be all about the triumphs and victories, but just like any other success story, Aurora had her share of hardships and frustrations.

Aurora is a loving daughter to Camelo and Herminia who earn a living through vegetable gardening and selling. As the sixth among the brood of twelve, she knows the financial challenges that her family faces.

Although her family manages to survive every day's demand, Aurora strongly felt the choking grasp of poverty when she finished high school.

Because she really wanted to finish a college degree and help her parents at the same time, she worked as a helper and as a saleslady for three years. During this time, she fell prey to inferiority thinking that she will not graduate from college.

Aurora saw no blue but grey skies until one day, the sun suddenly flashed a smile at her. In 2012, Aurora was chosen as one of the grantees for ESGP-PA.

*"Nang malaman ko sa aming Municipal Link na napasama ako bilang scholar ng ESGP-PA, talagang nabuhayan ako ng loob dahil ibig sabihin makakapag-aral na ako sa kolehiyo at ni piso ay walang poproblemahin ang aking mga magulang (I was so happy when I learned from our Municipal Link that I became an ESGP-PA scholar and because I would go to college and my parents won't have to think about my school expenses),"* Aurora exclaimed.

On her first day at school, she promised to herself that she would finish the said course and would reap grades with flying colors. She had her family an inspiration to study well.

*"Naniniwala ako na pag ako ay nakapagtapos, mas maraming magagandang oportunidad ang kakatok sa aking pintuan (I believe that there will be more good opportunities for me if I'm a college graduate),"* she said.

Aurora knew that the road that led to where she is right now was not easy, but her enthusiasm to get a college degree and uplift her family's condition ignited her not to succumb to any hindrances. Thus, she emerged victorious, and she has this advice to her fellow grantees:

*"Kapag dumating ang pagkakataon, ingatan natin ito at magsikap tayo ng mabuti. Ilang taon man ang inabot bago tayo makapagtuloy, ang mahalaga ay itinuloy natin ang laban ng buhay. Lahat ng ating paghihirap ay magbubunga (When an opportunity arrives, let's take advantage of it and work hard. It took us several years to continue our education, but the important thing is we continued fighting. Our endeavor will pay off)."*





## NEVER GIVING UP

by Andyleen C. Feje

*"As expected hindi ko na iniisip na makakapag-aral dahil si Kuya ay hindi naman na rin nakatungtong ng kolehiyo (As expected I am not thinking that I can still pursue higher education because my elder brother was not able to do so),"* said Alejandro Balsa III, 20, as he reminisced their living condition before he and his family became beneficiaries of Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program in Tarlac.

Alejandro is the second child among the three children of Marites Balsa, a house wife, and Alejandro Balsa, Jr., a carpenter. He was a bright kid with big ambitions, but the effects brought about by poverty got the best of him. He was a high school valedictorian. He had a college scholarship but lost it on his second year.

He shared, *"Dati ang dami kong iniisip kung may baon pa ba ako bukas, kung anong kakainin namin. Naapektuhan ang pag-aaral ko (I was thinking about so many things - if I still had allowance for tomorrow; what we were going to eat. My studies were affected)."*

To cope with financial struggles, he was doing his classmates' home works and projects and even carried

their bags in exchange of money that he could use for school and meal expenses. He also worked as a tutor. He borrowed money from a lot of people. He was called "money borrower" by some of his classmates and neighbors.

To get home, he would walk to get home instead of riding on tricycle as there was no more money left in his pocket came every afternoon. He would always get home late and tired for any studying.

Things started to change when his family became Pantawid Pamilya beneficiaries and he became a grantee of ESGP-PA.

*"Minsan iniisip ko bakit kaya ganito ang buhay namin. Pero naniniwala naman akong may purpose si God at hindi niya kami pababayaan. Kaya naman nang masali kami sa Pantawid, at lalo nang makuha ako sa ESGP-PA ay napakalaking ginhawa. Mas nakapag-concentrate na ako sa aking pag-aaral ng wala nang masyadong iniisip (Sometimes I would think why our life was like that. But I believe that God has His purpose and that He will not abandon us. Being a beneficiary of Pantawid and most especially my being a beneficiary of ESGP-PA gave*

us a relief. I got to concentrate on my studies)," shared Alejandro.

He enrolled in Tarlac College of Agriculture and took up a bachelor's degree in Secondary Education major in Technology and Livelihood Education. Without having so many things to worry about, Alejandro focused on his studies and performed well in every class. His perseverance paid off as he graduated cum laude and was a candidate for Best Practice Teacher.

And as a future teacher he wishes to share to his future students his philosophy in life: poverty is not a hindrance to success and that one can reach his/her dream through climbing the ladder of perseverance.

Alejandro's dream now is to send his siblings to tertiary school and establish a business so his family will have a stable source of income.





## COLLEGE AT 30

by Noemee Jane Mayor

Maritess Villa still cannot control being emotional every time she thinks about her four children. As a mother, it breaks her heart to leave them in their tribal community in Brgy. Laiban, Tanay in Rizal Province under her husband's care so she could pursue her dream.

But with every tear she sheds, Maritess believes that she is one step closer to giving them the best possible future she can provide for them.

Maritess, a 34-year-old Dumagat mother, is a graduate of Bachelor of Science in Agriculture Entrepreneurship in Cavite State University in Indang, Cavite Province.

Despite her age, she takes the challenge to finish her college education—an opportunity provided to her when her family became a beneficiary of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program in 2010. Maritess' family is one of the more than 327,000 household-beneficiaries of the said program in the CALABARZON Region.

### A chance at college

As a daughter of a Dumagat family in a far-flung rural area in Tanay town, Maritess shares that she already lost hope about getting an education.

*"Sa hirap ng buhay, hindi ko naman mapilit ang mga magulang ko na pag-aralin ako dahil siyam kaming magkakapatid. Tumigil ako noong second year high school ako at nagsimula magkaroon ng sariling pamilya,"* she shared.

For her, starting a family at the age of 18 has ended her dreams of a better life.

*"Kapag wala kaming bigas, kadalasan kamoteng kahoy ang niluluto ko para sa mga anak ko. Iba't ibang luto na lang ang ginagawa ko para hindi sila magsawa,"* Maritess shared.

In 2006, she took the Alternative Learning Systems (ALS) and passed the Accreditation and Equivalency Test where she got a high school diploma.

As a young mother, Maritess can only hope to give a better life for her children. Despite her age, she understood that it is through education that she can break this cycle of poverty in lives of Dumagat children. But since it is their children's needs that are always prioritized, pursuing a college education became impossible still.

However, in 2010, when she became a beneficiary of Pantawid Pamilya, new doors opened for her. Besides receiving financial assistance from the program to support most of the needs of their children

in school, Maritess was selected to be an ESGP-PA grantee.

### Within reach

Now in her last semester in college, Maritess can finally see the light.

*"Itong pagtatapos ko ng college napakalaking bagay nito. Gusto kong mahanap ng maayos na trabahao para lahat ng pangangailangan ng mga anak ko ay maibibigay ko na,"* said a teary-eyed Maritess.

In the university where she spent her last four years, Maritess does not mind being older than the rest of the students.

*"Napakaswerte ko at isa ako sa napiling benepisyaryo ng ESGP-PA. Nagkaroon ako ng bagong pag-asa, lalong lalo na para sa mga anak ko. Kahit malungkot na malayo ako sa pamilya ko, tinitis ko talaga dahil para sa amin naman ang lahat ng ito,"* Maritess said.

She has been determined to focus on getting the diploma, which she believes will be their ticket to a better life.

*"Napakalaking bagay sa isang ina na katulad ko na masuportahan ang mga pangarap ng mga anak ko para 'yung hirap na dinanas ko noon ay hindi na nila maranasan,"* she shared in tears.

With her graduation, Maritess' tears when she misses her children are no longer of pain and sadness. Her tears now speak of her happiness and satisfaction that finally, she'll be able to achieve her dream and make her children's dream happen.



## TURNING NEGATIVITY INTO SUCCESS

Fourth among 10 siblings, Lyka Ruiz, says that their family gets by with only what they have. They are from the island of Bangkal in San Jose, Occidental Mindoro. Her Tatay Roy, works by ferrying people from their island to the proper of the municipality. Her Nanay Nancy, sells whatever product is in season.

Twenty-one-year-old Lyka thought that her parents were not supportive of her studies because they were not enthusiastic when she and her siblings receive awards in their respective classes. But later on she realized that they were probably just shy to be on the spotlight because they felt inferior to other people. After all, they just lived on an island.

*"Pero super thankful po ako kasi kahit hindi kami ganon kasayang pamilya, buo kami, kumpleto at nandyan pa rin po ang pamilya ko. Hindi nila ako pinapabayaan; sumusuporta, gumagabay sila sa amin at nararamdaman ko na po yung pagbabago sa ugali nila. Ngayon nakapagtapos na kami, parang proud na sila (But I am thankful because even if we were like that, we are happy, intact, and complete.)"*



My parents are always there to support and guide me. I can feel the changes in their attitude. Now that I have graduated I think they are proud of me)," says Lyka.

The Ruiz family became part of Pantawid Pamilya in 2013. It has helped them with their expenses and in improving their relationship as a family.

Attending the Family Development Sessions (FDS) might have contributed in Lyka's parents' outlook in life.

FDS covers discussions and activities meant to strengthen family relationships, improve home management, and educate parents on the rights of children and responsible parenting.

It was how the people on their island look at things that needs to be changed, Lyka thought. She recalls that their neighbors used to say negative things to her and her sisters like they would probably get pregnant before graduating or marry at an early age.

But Lyka did not let these negativities put her down.

### Not an easy road

After high school, Lyka wasn't able to pursue college right away. She stopped for a year as her other siblings were still studying. Her father could not provide for them all at the same time.

Instead of staying at home, she used her time to earn money. She worked as a part-time preschool teacher in Bangkal Elementary School and as a waitress in an eatery. She worked at night for four months.

She soon enrolled in college, and on her sophomore year her family became part of Pantawid Pamilya. On her third year, she became a grantee of ESGP-PA and took up Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education.

### An answered prayer

*"Noong una po talaga, hindi ako makapaniwala kasi libre tuition tapos may allowance pa. Parang 'di po ako makapaniwala na may ganito palang programa sa gobyerno pero noong natanggap ko na po, ayun naniwala na po ako. Totoo pala. (At first I couldn't believe the free tuition and allowance. I couldn't believe the government has a program like this, but when I received the grant I thought 'Oh, it's real!'),"* says Lyka.

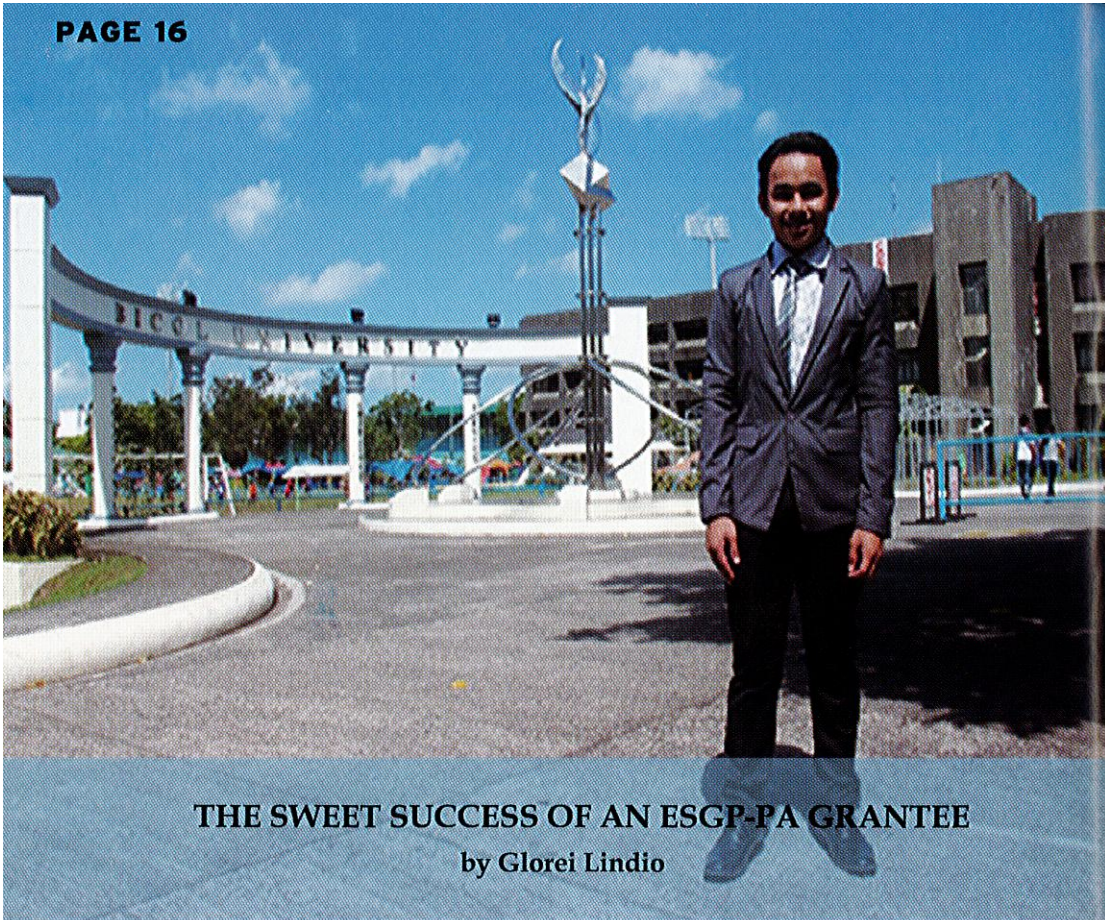
With the grant she received she proved not only to the people around them but also to herself that she can make her way to achieve her dreams. She used this a determination to push further and study hard.

Lyka graduated with honors and said that she was able to do so because of three things: hard work, perseverance, and determination. She has also become an inspiration to her neighbors in their island who hope that their children could be part of the grant program.

*"Huwag pong susuko kasi kahit isipin mong gusto mong mag-give up wala naman pong mangyayari. Yung pangarap lang po yung ipagpatuloy (Don't give up because will happen if you keep on thinking of quitting. Pursue your dream),"* Lyka shares.







## THE SWEET SUCCESS OF AN ESGP-PA GRANTEE

by Glorei Lindio

A son of a poor *kamote* farmer just wanted to graduate in college so he could help his parents earn a living and send his siblings to school. Jay Ar Bien of San Miguel Island, Tabaco City, Albay, did not only bring home a college diploma but also fame and honor to his parents after graduating cum laude from Bicol University where he took up Bachelor of Science in Entrepreneurship last March 2016.

Jay Ar is the first child to earn a college degree. It was not an easy feat when his parents were only earning P600.00 whenever they harvest rootcrops they

planted. Jay Ar knew the hardships of his parents so he helps them the best way he can.

*"Tumutulong ako sa magulang ko na maglako ng kamote para may pangkain kami at pangastos sa aming magkakapatid, (I help my mother sell sweet potatoes so that we have something to eat and finance us),"* Jay Ar says.

Jay-Ar understands the kind of life his family has. He said poverty inspires him to pursue and excel in his studies all the time.

"We find fulfillment and appreciate the value of our struggle if we work hard to achieve our dreams," he shares.

### Overcoming challenges

Jay-Ar recalls how his struggles brought him to where he is now. He remembers the moment when his parents would fight over finances which often became physical.

*"Kapag walang kita, madalas nag-aaway sila Ma. Nakulong si Pa ng tatlong buwan sa pananakit kay Ma (When there was no money, they fought. Pa was sent to jail for three months for beating up Ma),"* he recalled.

During his second year in college, Jay-Ar was saddened when his mother told him that his parents could no longer finance his education.

*"Naiiyak ako nun. Sinabihan ko yung professor ko na hihinto na ako. Suwerte sinabihan niya ako na ipagpatuloy ko. Binigyan niya ako ng room para hindi na ako magbayad ng apartment at pagkain araw-araw. Marami na po kami na natulungan niya (I was crying that time. I told my professor that I would stop. He told me to pursue my studies. He provided me a room where I could stay so that I would no longer pay for my apartment and food every day. He helped many people like me),"* Arjay said.

Although he got help from his professor, he still struggled paying for his projects and daily expenses.

He helped his classmates doing their projects to earn money. But sometimes it was not enough.

There were times when he did not attend school recognitions because he did not have a new set of clothes while his classmates were well-dressed.

These experiences, however, did not him down but turned him into a stronger person.

*"Pinangako ko sa sarili ko na magtatapos ako ng kolehiyo para makatulong sa magulang ko balang araw (I promised to myself that I will finish college to help my parents in the future),"* he said.

### The turning point

Jay-Ar's life was changed when he became a grantee of ESGP-PA. Finally, he did not have to worry about his school expenses.

He did not expect to graduate cum laude, but shared that he enjoyed getting good grades and doing well in his classes. He feels blessed for all the help he received.

*"Sakripisyo, tiyaga, at patuloy na pangarap po ang kinapitan ko, kaya po salamat sa lahat ng taong tumutulong sa akin (I hold on to making sacrifices, persevering, and dreaming. I thank all the people who helped me),"* he said.



## SACADA'S SON GRADUATES CUM LAUDE

by Montesa G. Caoyanan

He was once a child laborer.

At the age of 10, Johnny Lutrago started working as a sacada or a sugarcane plantation laborer like his parents. He lives in Negros Occidental, the "sugar capital" or "sugar bowl" of the Philippines.

Johnny is the second child among the eight siblings. Being the eldest son, he wanted to help his parents by working at the sugar plantation so he could have *baon* in school. He would wake up early morning and start filing the cut sugarcane ready to be picked up by the trucks that will carry them to the sugar central.

Johnny should be done working before 7:00 a.m. to prepare for school. After his 5:00 p.m. class, he would go back to the plantation to finish the remaining work he has left in the morning. He was paid P50 per day.

Johnny was in this daily routine until he finished high school. Despite his full schedule, he maintained high grades and became one of the top graduates of his batch.

As much as he wanted to continue his studies, Johnny, just like his eldest sister skipped college because their parents could no longer afford the expenses. He worked in Cavite and later on in Manila.

By the help of his uncle, Johnny was able to work as stay-in cargo carrier of an *ukay-ukay* shop. For almost a year he was earning P3,000 monthly.

There were times that he thought what the rest of his life would be. But one day, his mother Helen called him up and informed him about ESGP-PA implemented by the Commission on Higher Education and DSWD for Pantawid Pamilya households. Johnny's family has been Pantawid beneficiaries since 2010.

Johnny went home to take an entrance examination and later enrolled in West Visayas State University- Lambunao campus in Iloilo to take up Bachelor of Science in Agruculture.

After four years, he reaped the fruit of his hardwork.

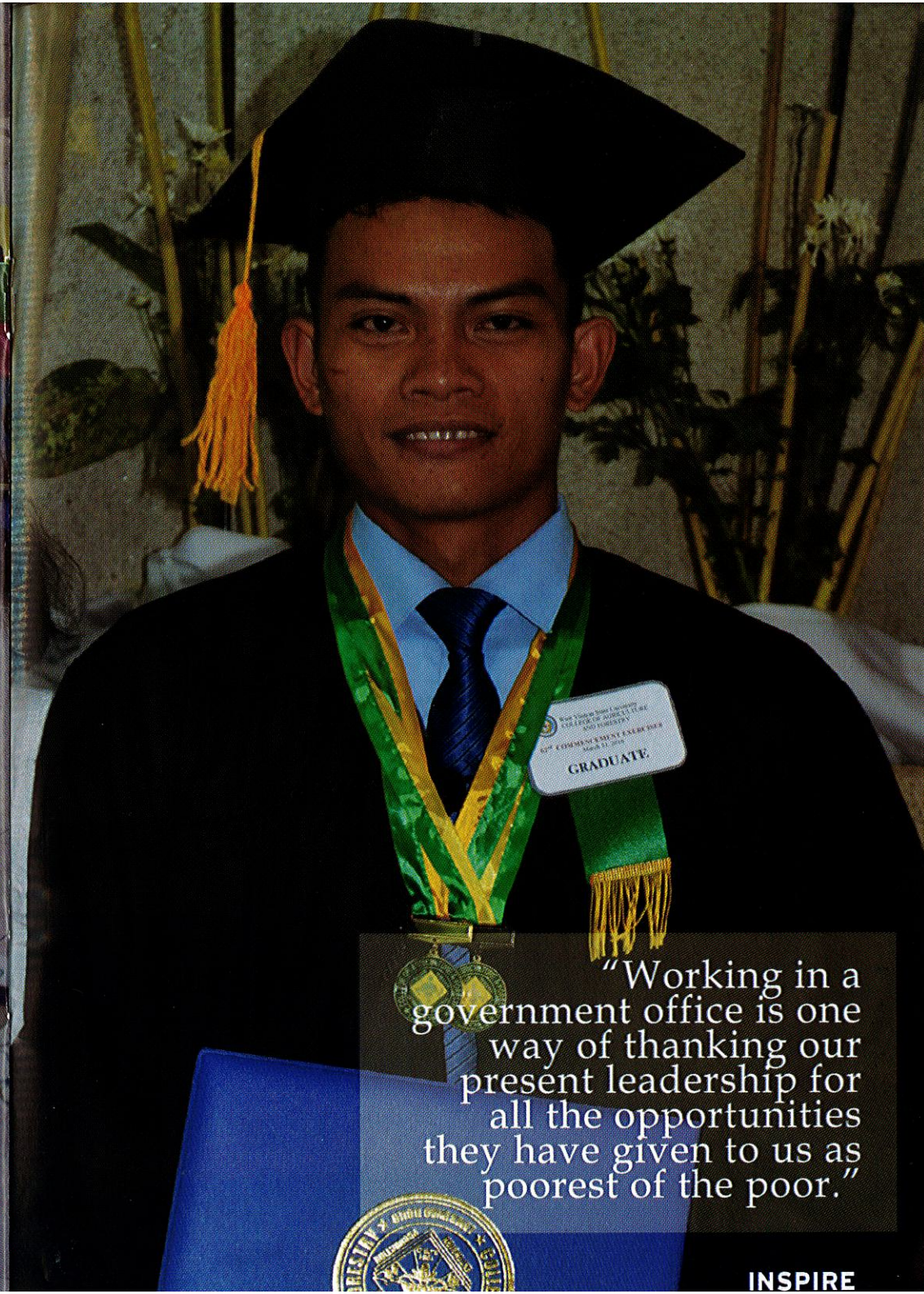
Johnny graduated cum laude and received other special awards such as Best Researcher, Outstanding Student in Agriculture, and Outstanding Researcher of the Year.

Johnny said after graduation he will prepare again for another battle, to take the board examination.

He said he wants to work in any government office to do public service.

"Working in a government office is one way of thanking our present leadership for all the opportunities they have given to us as poorest of the poor."

Johnny also cites his family's support which helped him become a better person.



"Working in a government office is one way of thanking our present leadership for all the opportunities they have given to us as poorest of the poor."





## ESGP-PA GIVES HOPE TO POOR STUDENTS

When you grew up in a poor community far from school and with limited transportation access, graduating high school is already a big deal. But this accomplishment was not enough for Gresil Alberto-Tampus who graduated with honors at Cebu Normal University (CNU) with a degree in Elementary Education Major in Special Education. She knew she could do and achieve more.

Gresil comes from barangay Buto, Jimalalud, Negros Oriental and is among the first batch of ESGP-PA graduates.

"I had always wanted to enroll in college and graduate so that I can look for a good-paying job," she said.

Gresil, 23, was delayed in college for two years because her farmer-parents could not afford to send her in a university due to the family's low financial status.

She has five siblings, and her parent's income is only enough for their food consumption.

Eager to enroll in college Gresil did everything she could to pursue her goal.

She worked as a house help for a family who promised her college education and then apply for a part-time job. She also worked as a food crew.

She added that it was the toughest moment of her young life but it didn't stop her from continuing her studies. Although, there were instances that she felt like giving up.

Then sometime in 2012, she received a call from her mother Leny telling her that she will be an ESGP-PA student grantee. More than 2,000 students are currently benefiting from the program in Central Visayas. 194 students graduated in 2016.

"At first, I was in doubt because it was too good to be true. I didn't imagine that the time will come where I can go to school without working so hard," she said.

Upon her enrollment in ESGP-PA, Gresil transferred from University of Cebu to CNU, her dream school.

"It was a dream come true for me, studying in CNU for free," she cited.

A consistent honor student since elementary, Gresil doubled her efforts in studying to get a college degree and eventually graduating as cum laude.

"I'm offering this achievement to the taxpayers. I am a product of your generosity and to the government agencies that made this program a continuing success. I am forever grateful. I hope more will benefit from this," she said.

Gresil married her true love Ronald last year and is a mother to a 10-month old baby boy named Rence Greynard.



## THE POWER OF EDUCATION

by Michelle Calzado

"Pantawid Pamilya and the ESGP-PA are blessings to us."

These were the words of Rona Idlisan, one of the ESGP-PA graduate grantees from Eastern Visayas Leyte Normal University. She took up Bachelor in Secondary Education (Major in Biological Science) and graduated cum laude.

Rona is the second of the eight children of Vilma, a housewife, and Romeo, a farmer and laborer.

She shared that at first, being in school was a struggle. Despite feeling embarrassed of their situation, she

strived hard to prove that being poor is not a hinder to doing well in school.

Rona said, "*Nakikita ko nga nag-hihimakuri hira mama ngan papa salit gusto ko makatapos pag-eskwela, makatrabaho ngan, makabulig ha ira*, (I see my Mama and Papa struggling so I wanted to finish my studies, get a job, and help them)."

The grant from ESGP-PA lessened Rona's financial burdens. She became more confident and focused on studying, learning, and getting high grades.

She intends to work and take up a master's degree since she also wants to be able to teach children with special needs.

*"Dako nga factor an akon pagiging ESGP-PA grantee para ako maging honor student* (Being an ESGP-PA grantee was a huge factor for me to become an honor student)," she said, adding that she is grateful to the different assistance her family gets, but she knows that success is a product of hard work.

"The government will provide us with opportunities, but our success and achievements depend upon us," she explained.

She also expressed that Pantawid Pamilya has created a big chance in their family:

*"Dako gud nga pagbabago an nahinabo ha amon pinaagi han Pantawid Pamilya.* (A big chance has happened to us because of Pantawid Pamilya)."

Like Rona, Gilbert Galit is also a cum laude graduate. He took up Bachelor in Secondary Education, major in Filipino.

"We are living testaments that this program (ESGP-PA) is fruitful," he said.

Gilbert is the eldest among the eight children of Cleofe, housewife, and Nilo, a farmer and a carpenter. Before he

became a grantee, he was an out of school youth for six years. During that time, he worked in a convenience store in the nearby town of Pambujan.

"During those six long years I was out of school, I feel like I'm just rotating in a small circle. No progress. Life was very stagnant. There was no growth in all aspects of my life," he recounted.

*"Dako tak pasasalamat ha ESGP-PA. Maupay ha feelings nga natatagan ka hin chance after many years of hopelessness* (I am very grateful to ESGP-PA. It feels good to be given a chance after many years of hopelessness)," he said.

Gilbert also shared how Pantawid Pamilya and the ESGP-PA enlightened his parents on the value of education:

"My parents' perspective about education changed positively. They said that even if there is no grant, they are willing to sacrifice until the end just to send their children to school. Now, they know that education is a huge investment."

He encourages his fellow grantees "to set a goal for their lives, persevere, spend wisely, and be humble all the time."





## FROM BABYSITTING TO TEACHING

The sleepless nights were not dedicated to books and pens. They were spent taking care of a baby - her way of supporting her studies.

Melona Dumayon of Barngay Tiogan, Leon Postigo, Zamboanga Del Norte is the fourth child of the nine children of Esperedon and Anecita Dumayon. She worked as a babysitter while in college to help her family.

"With more than nine mouths to feed, my parents' earnings from farming and peddling snacks were not enough to cover for the basic needs of our family," shared Melona.

"But despite this, mother would always remind me of the importance of education. Mother would tell me that it is the only way for us to be freed from the hardships of life," she added.

Melona also narrated how she was able to endure walking a few kilometers just to reach school and the challenges in her life.

"I have always wanted to finish my studies. Despite having to walk for long hours, or even work part-time, I was able to finish school. But life was really hard, and even if I worked part-time, it's not enough to send me

through college. I thought that it was the end of my dream. I continued working and started to baby sit so that I could help pay for the family's ballooning expenses," said Melona.

The little flame of hope she was holding on to was almost dimming until she received the news that she was among those who were included in the first batch of grantees of ESGP-PA.

Immediately, Melona enrolled at the Western Mindanao State University-External Campus in Ipil, Zamboanga Sibugay and took up Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education.

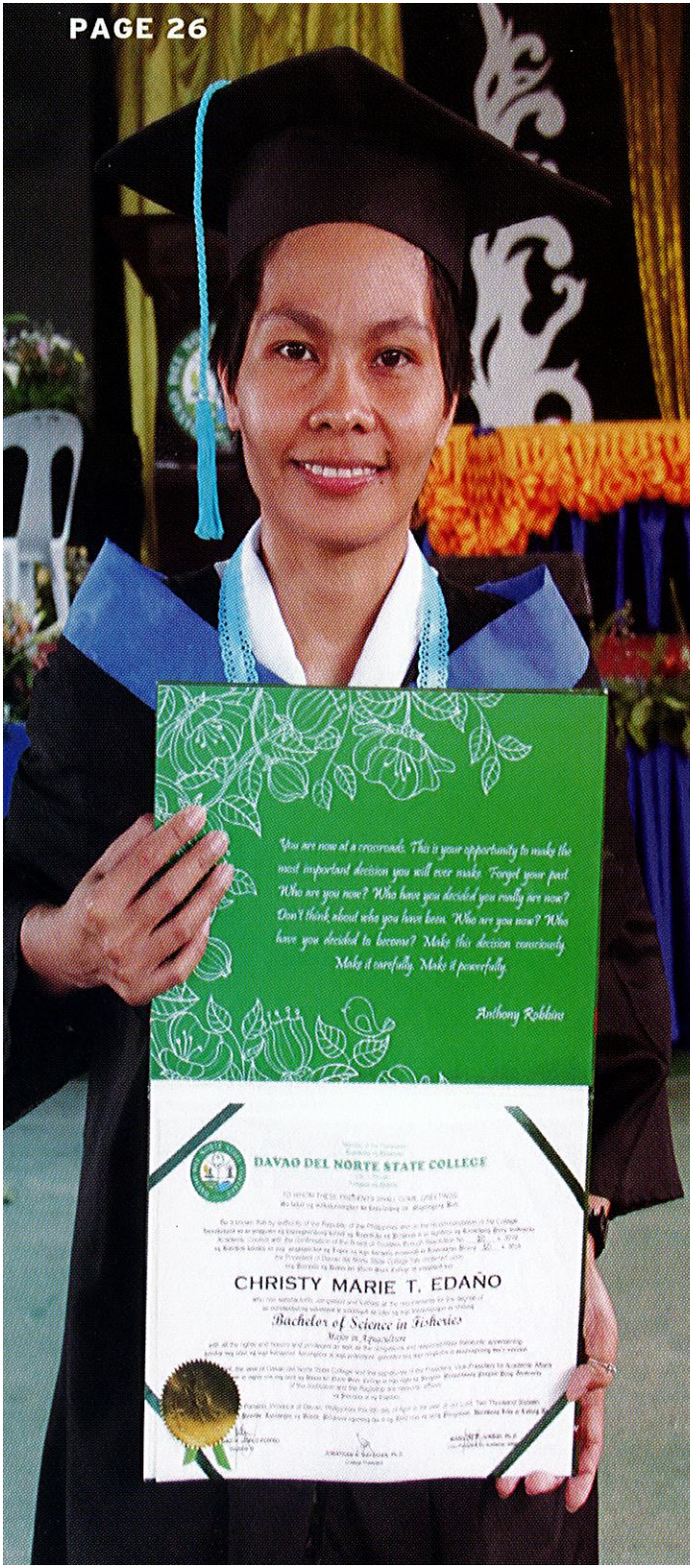
"The grants I received truly helped me sustain my education. I am very grateful for the program as it opened doors of opportunity for students like me whose dreams are just floating, not knowing whether it can be fulfilled," she said.

On April 7, 2016, Melona finally graduated. She is preparing for the Licensure Examination for Teachers. In the future, she will not be babysitting anymore but teaching students who, like her, have big dreams to pursue.



"(ESGP-PA) opened doors of opportunity for students like me whose dreams are just floating, not knowing whether it can be fulfilled."





In my 26 years of existence, I have had enough adventures and misadventures to last me a lifetime. My name is Christy Marie Edaño. I am what others may deem as different - a non-conformist. They say that a person's choices in life define one's own character. I say, that this choice, however, is the deciding point that can either make or break you.

Living in the remote barangay of Kipalili, San Isidro, Davao del Norte with my parents Saranie, 47; and Julito, 49; I thought that life would be plain and simple. I was mistaken. Being born next to the eldest, I have to work in a farm to help sustain the needs of my family and continue going to high school. My parents were not able to finish elementary, thus, it does not matter to them if we finish our studies or not.

After high school, I stopped studying so that my younger siblings

## CHOOSING HAPPINESS, CHASING DREAMS

Delivered by Christy Marie Edaño

could go to school. I took care of my younger siblings. My mother had to take laundry services in our neighborhood and my father tended the farm so we could bring food on our table. In 2010, I took up a two-year computer programming course at St. John Learning Center in Tagum City. To support my studies, I worked as a house help. I did other people's laundry, I babysit and accepted tutorial services. I allotted some of my salary for my school and family's needs.

It was in November of 2012 when I got accepted as a Students' Grant-in-Aid Program for Poverty Alleviation (SGP-PA) student grantee at Davao del Norte State College in Panabo City. I enrolled in Bachelor of Science in Fisheries, major in Aquaculture.

I thought that being in college would change how other people look at me. I was wrong, I struggled hard for acceptance and respect. I was scared being with people for fear of being judged.

I have always been different from as far as I can remember. I am a lesbian. I was used to being judged, discriminated and bullied.

Even my own father once could not accept the choice I made. But it did not dampen my spirit.

I worked hard. I wanted to prove them wrong. I wanted to show them that one's personal choices can be his or her motivation to excel in life. My hard work paid off when I was identified by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) as one of the top five SGP-PA National Academic Awardees with the Highest General Point Average in 2014.

It is amazing how people's opinion of you changes when you have achieved something commendable. It amazes me and saddens me all at the same time. I hope people would just respect each other regardless of their decisions in life.

I am now a graduating student. I am one of the 526 SGP-PA grantees in Davao who will graduate this April. I am forever grateful to Pantawid Pamilya and to SGP-PA for these programs helped me achieve my dreams. Others may have judged me but these programs served as my strength to pursue and push through.

Few years from now I will be looking back to all the adventures and misadventures and I will have a warm smile in my heart for I know I made the right choice.



## NATUTO AKONG MANGARAP DAHIL SA PANTAWID

Delivered by Rudolf Gutierrez

Bata pa lamang ay hindi ko na pinangarap na makatuntong ng kolehiyo. Tinanggap ko na hindi kayang suportahan ng aking ama ang aming pag-aaral mula sa maliit na kinikita nito sa pagbobote. Ang tanging hangad ko lang noon ay makatapos ng high school at makakuha ng kahit na anong trabaho basta kumikita ng pera. Namasukan ako sa iba't ibang establisyemento at kompanya.



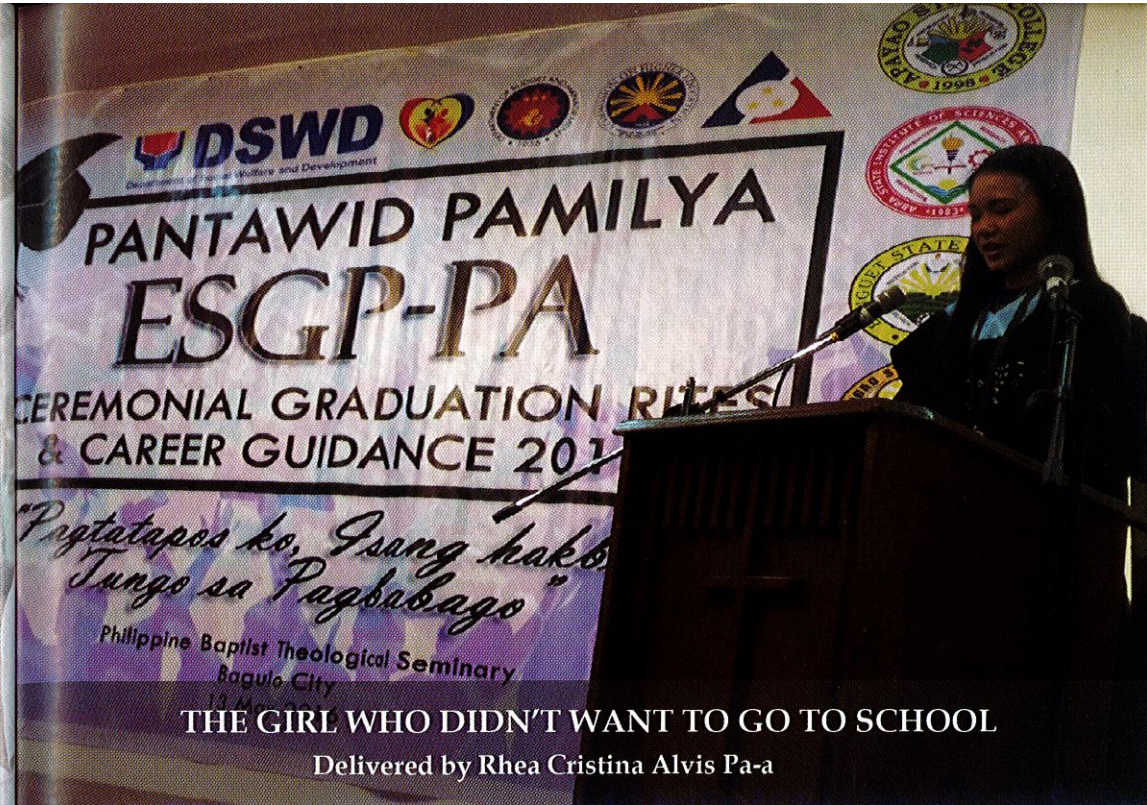
Naging construction worker, pump boy sa isang gasolinahan at naglinig ng mga malalaking sasakyan at trak. Maraming akong sidelines para makatulong sa aking magulang at siyam pang mga kapatid. Nakuntento na ako sa paglilinis ng trak hanggang sa naging miyembro kami ng Pantawid Familyang Pilipino at natanggap akong scholar ng Expanded Students Grant-in-aid Program for Poverty Alleviation (ESGP-PA) ng Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) at Commission on Higher Education (CHED), katuwang ang Department of Labor and Employment and Philippine State and Universities and Colleges (PASUC).

Akala ko dati ay habang-buhay akong hahawak ng maduming basahan. Akala ko na hanggang doon na lang ang misyon ko sa mundo pero mali ako, mayroon palang gobyerno na handang magmalasakit at tumutulong sa mga mahihirap na katulad ko upang maiangat ang pamumuhay.

Kaya naman kinuha ko ang oportunidad na makapagpatuloy ng kolehiyo. Nag-aral ako ng Bachelor of Secondary Education in Values Formation sa Philippine Normal University. Bilang iskolar ng ESGP-PA, nagpursige akong makakuha ng matataas na marka para hindi matanggal sa programa. Nagsumikap ako hindi lang para sa aking sarili kung hindi para sa aking pamilya na nagtitiwala sa aking kakayahan.

Kung walang Pantawid at ESGP-PA, suguro kasama ako ng mga kabataang nangungulo sa kalye at lulong sa droga. Marahil naligaw na ako ng landas. Sobrang laki talaga ng pasasalamat ko sa programa dahil binago nito ang aking buhay. Higit sa lahat, binigyan ako nito ng pagkakataong mangarap.

Matapos ang apat na taon, may diploma na ako iuuwi sa aking mga magulang. Hindi na rin basahang panlinis ang hawak ko, kundi ang panibagong pag-asa ng mas magandang kinabukasan. Handa na akong harapin ang bukas na may ngiti at positibong pananaw. Ako ay patuloy pa ring mangangarap at maniniwala na maaabot ko ang mga ito.



## THE GIRL WHO DIDN'T WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL

Delivered by Rhea Cristina Alvis Pa-a

I'm Rhea Cristina Alvis Pa-a and my story began on the 16th day of February 1996 in Barangay Biio, Lagangilang, Abra. My father, Crisanto Pa-a, is a very hard-working farmer. His burnt skin and the calluses on his hands are evidences of his hardships and love for us. I also have a very caring, patient, and loving mother in the name of Maria Pa-a. She was the first one who taught us to read and write. She showed us how to be humble and friendly. She taught us to always believe in and talk to God.

There are six children in the family and I am the fifth child. My kuya Anthony, ate Diana and ate Marie Cris have their own family now. Ate Irish graduated last year with the degree of Bachelor of Elementary Education and our youngest, Jayson, will be graduating this school year with the same course.

Being blessed with the family bonded with strong love, I have nothing to ask for. Yes! We are not rich in money but we are rich in two things, which nothing and no one could ever destroy and steal; LOVE and RESPECT for each other.

I was five years old when I entered kindergarten at Barangay Tagodtod, Lagangilang, Abra. Like any other child, I hated school. But my parents didn't stop instilling in my heart and mind how important education is. Through the help of my passionate teachers and friendly classmates in elementary and high school at Tagodtod, I learned not only to enjoy schooling but also to love it. Missing classes made me feel incomplete.





So, even when I was sick or not feeling well, I would still go to school. And sometimes, even if I had to walk from our house to our school with only five (5) pieces of coco biscuits as my baon for the whole day, I would still go. I never complained because compared to the struggles of my parents, mine was nothing. They endured the heat of the sun. They didn't mind body pain. Their resting time was spent taking care of us.

To make up for the sacrifices of our parents, I and my sibling also worked hard to receive awards in school every year.

Graduating as the valedictorian both in elementary and high school made me proud not of myself but of my parents.

They were the reason behind my stories. Every time, my tears fall as I watch them go on stage to accompany me in receiving my medals and scholarship from different state colleges and universities. I am very proud to let the whole world know that they are my parents. When I graduated in high school, I decided to take up Bachelor of Elementary Education at Abra State Institute of Science and Technology in Lagangilang, Abra. Since I received an ASIST Scholarship Award when I graduated, my tuition fee was free.

Everything was perfect until September 17, 2012 came. My colorful life turned the other way around. It was the darkest day for my family, with the passing of my dear mother because of a serious disease. Challenges became so much harder to fight and the pain of losing her almost brought me down. It was very hard for me to open my eyes everyday without seeing one of my reasons why I'm studying hard. I didn't want to wake up and stand. I didn't want to go to school.

I was always absent minded. I wanted to stop pursuing my dreams. But then, I saw this man standing and acting so strong in front of me. There was a smile on his lips but pain and sorrow in his eyes. I realized I still have this man with me, I still have my tatang. I still have a reason to live. I tried to wake up with a more positive outlook in life. Instead of thinking about what I have lost, I have to treasure what I still have.

Sending ate Irish, Jayson and I to college became harder for tatang. He worked seven days a week. He didn't want us to stop going to school. We know that his body was already tired and was giving up, but he never did. He is indeed the best father and we are very lucky to have him.

Before my third year in college started in May 2014, something surprised me. I was chosen as one of the ESGP-PA scholarship grantees of Pantawid Pamilya Pilipino Program. They refunded the expenses since my first year in college. The scholarship promised to help and support my studies until I graduate. I studied harder to prove that I deserve this blessing. It was a great help not only for me but also with my sister and younger brother.

April 1, 2016 was the start of a brighter tomorrow for me. I received my diploma with flying colours. I was one of the students who graduated with honors and I also received Student Teacher and Student Researcher Awards.

Seeing how happy and proud my father was on that day was the best gift. All the sacrifices and hardships were pay off.

Trials in life are very hard to face but they are indeed the best teachers. Facing them will teach you a lot and will make you stronger. So, never ever give up. Keep on dreaming. God is always with you. He will help you find way to achieve whatever your heart desires or dreams. Never stop believing!