Dear Friends

We don’t need to tell you that 2020 was an unusual year... Certainly, Young Focus was in a rollercoaster like everyone else, and, honestly speaking, I was wondering what on earth an Annual Report 2020 was going to look like after a year of adjusting programs and activities. At some point almost all of our ‘normal’ activities were cancelled, yet, at the same time, we were busy discovering our ‘new normal’ within what was possible in terms of supporting our beneficiaries.

Not surprisingly, the poor have been the most vulnerable group in the time of Covid-19. In so many respects, fighting worldwide poverty has come to a halt. In ‘our small part of the world’ of the Smokey Mountain area of Manila we witnessed an extreme measure of poverty when families had nothing to eat during the most acute stage of the lockdown. Young Focus staff adapted and reached out to the most vulnerable people in our area. Our fundraising campaign ‘No Work, No Pay, No Rice’ was Young Focus’s answer to provide rice for thousands of people. This was, I believe, something of a ray of light in very dark times as so many of you responded and gave to our campaign.

I hope this Annual Report will give you hope and inspiration as we outline how we found a way to help those who were in need. Thank you to all friends, partners, donors, volunteers and staff who made this possible!

Without this amazing response from all of you we could not have done what we did.

Paul van Wijgerden
Managing Director

Distribution of 89,250 kg of rice in the months March–June 2020 in Bulacan, Naic and Metro Manila
Improve the spiritual and social well-being of young people in poor communities by means of education and personal support.

Give underprivileged children and young adults the chance to develop themselves intellectually, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually by means of education and personal coaching. The organization wants to see young people developing their (hidden) talents, and, in doing so, escape the vicious cycle of poverty.

Young Focus operates in a highly complex environment, holistically addressing a myriad of socio-economic issues for target beneficiaries - children and families who live in the Smokey Mountain area (Manila’s former dumpsite). Thousands of families rely directly or indirectly on the garbage ‘industry’. Jobs range from scavenging for recyclable materials to driving bike taxis. Financial constraints, as well as a lack of educational and social support, mean that many children are unable to complete their education, and as a result, are unable to break the cycle of poverty.

Young Focus works here in three main communities: Permanent Housing, Vitas and Temporary Housing, all located in the Smokey Mountain area, and including smaller pockets of shacks. In total Young Focus estimates that about 40,000 people live in these communities. Young Focus also has a number of beneficiaries in Bulacan and Cavite, who were relocated in recent years.
Four goals in order to change the lives of children and their families

1. To enroll children into the government education system and provide extra educational, as well as social and creative support

2. To motivate, stimulate and prepare children and youth who have dropped out of school so that they can finish elementary, high school and college

3. To provide comprehensive Early Childhood Education and Development for 3-4-year-olds, giving them a solid basis for enrolling in elementary school

4. To provide social support for all the students, families and wider communities in which Young Focus works

“In a digitally driven world, where the use of computers has become a necessity, the Young Focus Grade 12 students went through a series of hands-on exercises, testing their knowledge of MS Word shortcut commands and formatting functions.”
- Reine Amber, Grade 12 coordinator; February 2020
Programs

Child Care PLUS / Early Child Care & Development
Child Care PLUS is for children aged 3-4 years old. The main objective is to provide high quality education which helps the children’s social, emotional, physical and cognitive development. It also provides them with life skills, play and basic education.

Grade 1 - Grade 12 and College Education
Local students aged 6-20+ are supplied with school fees, uniforms, books and other required materials. In addition, Young Focus runs compulsory tutorials for all of these students at the Student Center, which has a computer room, a library, classrooms and recreational areas for them to use.

Love2Learn
This program focuses on children who dropped out of elementary school due to poverty and a lack of educational and social support. This program provides classes for one year before re-enrolling them into government schools, and works with the families to solve any problems that might get in the way of the children completing their education.

PostCare
PostCare students have re-enrolled into government schools. During the the transition from being a school dropout these students receive extra coaching to prevent them from dropping out again.

ALS (Alternative Learning System)
The ALS program is the formal ‘study acceleration’ program of the government. It allows us to work with youth who cannot re-enroll into high school as they have been out of school for too long. Students receive an official high school certificate upon successful completion.

YoUNgLI (Young Unlimited)
Youngli works with the most vulnerable 15+-year-olds who have received no - or very limited - formal education, many of whom are addicted to solvents. We provide them with a safe space to hang out and receive training in hygiene, education, personal coaching and life skills with the aim of recapturing their love for education. We then either enroll or re-enroll them in local schools through our school sponsorship program.

Combat Malnutrition
The program Combat Malnutrition provides nutritious and healthy meals for children in Love2Learn and YoUNgLI. Combat Malnutrition also teaches parents on health and nutrition.

Family & Social Care
Young Focus works with families and students who are in need of more specialized social support. Besides personal social support the social workers also provide training on child protection, health, hygiene, nutrition, family planning and parenting skills for the parents of all Young Focus beneficiaries.
I am John Mark, twelve years old and the eldest of my siblings. My dream is to get a good job so I can help my mother and my siblings to have a better life. When I was in elementary school, my mother worked in a restaurant as a janitress. Often, my parents argued about the lack of financial support from my father, which eventually led to their separation. My mother then raised us alone and decided to work as an online seller. Until now, we have an income from selling home-made products such as sushi, peanut butter, fish sauce, etc. She is also an agent that offers different cleaning products.

In 2019, I was given the chance to be part of Young Focus’s Student Support program. It gives me hope to pursue and complete my education until I finish college. I will use this to make my dreams come true, not only for me but also for my whole family. My favorite part of Young Focus is the tutorials where I can catch up on the lessons I have difficulty with. Though it’s challenging, I like it when our coordinator gives exercises in Mathematics, because I often get perfect scores. Also, I have been able to make new friends, who give me even more motivation to attend tutorials.

Since elementary school, I have been an achiever awardee. It’s undeniable that the Covid-19 situation has brought different effects financially and psychologically. One of the things that challenges me the most is the method of learning we use. I understand that the teachers and our school have been doing their best to help us academically. So, as a student I make sure to do my part by completing and submitting weekly modules and attending online classes. I am thankful to Young Focus because they not only provided us with rice during lockdown, but also with a cell phone I can use for my online classes.

Young Focus has motivated me to keep going despite the hardships that we have been facing. Their passion to teach and help a student like me makes me realize that I am not alone in this battle—if we face this and work hand-in-hand, soon we can overcome and succeed.

I won’t waste the opportunity that has been given to me. I will strive harder as a way to thank Young Focus for supporting me with my studies.
FEBRUARY 2020
What an inspiring time we had at Pinto Art Museum in Antipolo! A group of students were treated to a fantastic day out by friends from arc church. Together we enjoyed the beautiful location and explored the wonderfully diverse pieces of art, sharing ideas of their message and meaning.

Abegail Asis (4th year high school)
"The artworks that I saw were beautiful and each told a message that needs to be remembered. I liked the sculpture of the pregnant woman who was holding her belly. This artwork's title was 'Women aren't toys' because the sculpture showed that women should not be played with but should be given respect instead."

Angelo Rentino (4th year high school)
"Since I am interested in painting I truly appreciated this experience. For me the art pieces are created skillfully by Filipino artists and they also have deep meanings about Filipino traits. I like the painting 'Hating Kapatid' (Share Like a Sibling / Share Fairly). This piece shows that we need to share with our siblings and with the people around us."

Salve Bolante (1st year college)
"The artwork that I liked best is the one titled ‘Salita’ (Word). Aside from how it’s beautifully and skillfully created, the message it conveys is that there’s a person who wants to say a lot of things but he’s unable to do so. The words are carved on his body as if they are hindered from going beyond himself. And there is a typewriter inside his chest which he uses to express what he wants to say through typing on it."
School dropouts, Absenteeism & Nonattendance

Throughout the years, one of Young Focus’s main objectives is to give children an opportunity to go to school. **Young Focus has programs to give children education, keep them in school until their education is completed, and provide them with an opportunity to go back to school if they do drop out.**

In the deprived areas where Young Focus works children do drop out for reasons that are related to a number of issues. These issues most often have to do with a lack of finances (children work instead), poor parental care, the influence from peers, or lack of motivation.

No recent or valuable data is known regarding the school dropout and nonattendance rates in deprived areas such as ‘Smokey Mountain’ in Tondo, Manila. If we take the Philippines as a whole as an example there is some data from the National Statistics Office’s (NSO)/Annual Poverty Indicators Survey (APIS), 2004: 35% at elementary and 28% at secondary school children from the poorest 20% are not going to school.

Young Focus’s maximum dropout rate of elementary is 7.2% and for high school it was 7.8% for the school year 2019/2020. Indeed, compared to the national survey, Young Focus programs have a tremendously positive impact on the dropout rate/nonattandance. Besides that, children are equipped through our tutorials and coaching so that they will be able to go beyond elementary and high school: over the last 10 years 44% finished high school and the other 56% went on to also finish college education.

In the chart below we have an overview of the percentage decrease of school dropouts in elementary and high school since 2017.

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**Reasons why children/youth drop out of school**

- Influence from peers
- Too old for class
- Poor parental care
- To work
- Indiscipline
- Lack of motivation/personal interest
- Sickness
- Instability at home
- Absenteeism
- Lack of money for uniform, school supplies and fees
- Death/separation of parents
- Poor performance
- Bullying
- Use of drugs
- Pregnancy

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**Chart:**

- 2019/2020: Elementary 7.2, High School 7.8

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*In the chart below we have an overview of the percentage decrease of school dropouts in elementary and high school since 2017.*
MARCH 2020
Together with entrepreneur and Young Focus friend Jeffrey Oh we planned a 5-session workshop for our college students and graduates on ‘building personal confidence for your future career’. We were able to hold the first session just before the pandemic lockdown shut down our centers. It was an intensive 3-hour training on the theme ‘Worth’, also featuring a special guest: singer and actor James Reid, who shared his personal story.

One of the things Jeffrey really challenged us on was the problem of shyness, that this can ruin a potential career. He even coached a few students on personal introductions... And within minutes they were shaking hands and introducing themselves to James with all the confidence in the world!

Hi, I am Christian David

... I'm 19 years old, and in college studying Food Technology. I live with my grandmother because our parents left my brother and me when we were little. She runs a small sari-sari store that provides an income for our daily needs. I always pray that God will give her a long life so she will be able to see me fulfill my dreams and graduate from college!

My dream is to get a stable job and have my own house. My favorite thing is cooking and trying out and studying different dishes. When I was at high school I had a lot of challenges, and there were even more when I planned to push through with college because of the pandemic. I was worried because studying in this 'new normal' is difficult. It's hard to imagine how can I learn everything if it's all online. But it doesn't stop me to pursuing my dreams because Young Focus and my grandmother are supporting me all the way. Young Focus supports me in my studies by providing finances for my cooking materials and projects. We also have online tutorials and life skills sessions to encourage us. I'm grateful that I have Young Focus.
The schools in the Philippines have been closed since March 2020. This is certainly a blow to the educational system in the country and the impact of this is huge on the academic level of the students - let alone on their mental health. Young Focus recognizes the limitations confronting impoverished communities as far as education is concerned in the time of Covid-19.

Private schools were able to quickly set up online teaching as they had relative easy access to the internet. Our families, who enroll their kids in local public schools, had to wait until October 2020 before the Department of Education had online teaching and printed handbooks ready. Poor internet signal, lack of gadgets, lack of finances for prepay internet and limited circumstances back home were the issues facing these students just in order to receive the limited amount of education.

Young Focus also prepared handbooks, modular teaching systems etc., in order to teach and support our children via the parents. As long as pandemic restrictions mean that children are not allowed at our centers, we will be dependent on the parents coming to our centers and getting the support and materials they need. As far as methods of teaching were concerned, there was much uncertainty about what would be allowed. We adjusted and adapted our methods of teaching in 2020: teaching via parents, partly online, partly using handbooks. We set up more computers for online learning in the centers for older students who were allowed to enter our buildings. We customized the methods as time went on. Facebook Messenger and Google Meet became ways to teach and communicate with our students when they had options to go online.

Survey of available gadgets in families - July 2020
Unfortunately, we were not able to have a grand ‘Graduation Party’ for our pre-schoolers due to Covid-19, but we had been able to take a photo of each of the ‘graduates’ just before the pandemic started. So, we gave out 115 certificates and photos to their families. 48 of the children would do another year of preschool and 67 moved on to Kindergarten. Kindergarten is part of the government's regular K-12 school program. In the midst of the challenges of the pandemic restrictions in the Philippines, these beautiful pictures of the children were an encouragement, representing what they had achieved while in the Young Focus preschool! Leo, our preschool team leader, said: “I could see how excited the parents were, receiving the certificates of their kids. Parents shared stories about their kids at home wanting to go to Young Focus school. I saw how happy the parents were to see the teachers as well. The parents were also excited and thankful for the booklets made by the teachers team. This booklet aims to refresh the kids with their writing and reading as preparation for their enrollment in public school (Kindergarten).”

A very special THANK YOU to ANN RAGUDO, who left Young Focus on December 19, 2020 after working with us for 12 years. "We want to thank you, dear Ann, for all the years of serving God through Young Focus, and all your love and work, in both big and small ways, both seen and unseen, for the children, for the parents and for your colleagues."

Ann's presence and her key role in Young Focus made us into the NGO we are today. She has been one of the main influencers and pillars of the organization.

Realme is a technology brand that sells smartphones in the Philippines. They donated 55 cell phones for online learning for our students as part of our ‘Quality Education for ALL’ campaign.
The Covid-19 virus caused an extended severe lockdown in Manila. That had a huge impact on the poor. Most people in the Smokey Mountain area are dependent on daily wages, and that indeed means: no work = no pay.... So, no food on the table...

Certainly, this was the biggest campaign we have ever held in Young Focus. Every two weeks, from March to June, 2020, Young Focus distributed 15kg of rice to each beneficiary in the program. We were also able to partner with other NGOs and churches in the area so we could distribute via them as well. In total 89,250 kg of rice was given out.

When the government eased the restrictions somewhat most people were able to go back to work. We were so grateful for the many donors around the world who responded to this call for rice from Young Focus and our partners. This carried thousands of people through a very difficult time.

I was just someone who didn’t have a dream or a clear direction in life. I was always on the streets, playing and roaming around all day. I had stopped going to school for two years because I was swayed by the bad influence of my peers and the problems in my family.

A friend introduced me to Young Focus and I got interested because of their support for children and youth like me. I applied and started enjoying being part of Young Focus. Aside from the help that I’ve received, I’ve also made friends and they’ve become a family.

Young Focus have helped me to realize the importance of education. They’ve given me a wider perspective on the future that awaits me when I finish my studies. The organization guide me in every decision that affects my studies and they support me in order to achieve my dreams.

I am very thankful that at Young Focus they help me with my school finances like covering my tuition fee; I have a coordinator who assists me; a student center that is available for me to use – with functioning computers. The people at Young Focus serve and act like my second family.

I am determined to finish my studies with the inspiration of my family and my dream of having a successful and happy life.

I am Jay-ar, 18 years old, taking a tech-vocational course.
Double victims

On top of the suffering due to the pandemic restrictions, a huge fire in Happy Land destroyed hundreds of homes, leaving more than 1,000 people on the street within a few hours. It was devastating, doubly so for these people, many of whom had already lost their jobs and incomes because of the lockdown. The homeless families were evacuated to different sites in the area, such as schools and covered basketball courts where, thanks to the local authorities - with the support of a network of NGOs - they received food and shelter. Toiletries, household items and clothes were also distributed. Young Focus helped with relief goods, as well as providing construction materials to build and rebuild approx. 30 homes.
Even though the pandemic caused online learning to become the ‘new normal’, not all children had sufficient access to the internet, definitely not our students living in the Smokey Mountain area of Manila. That’s why Young Focus launched the campaign ‘Quality Education for ALL’ in 2020, recognizing the extreme inequalities in accessing education.

In this campaign we focussed on the provision of educational modules (printed lesson materials) and gadgets, as well as setting up computer labs in our centers with internet access, more computers and with Covid safe dividers.

Senior high school and college students were allowed to visit our centers to use the computers and study.

Learning from home. We were so proud of them: the circumstances were not always that ideal – most of the time studying on the floor, but they were committed to finishing the school year and making the best of it!

Elementary students studying at home, making use of their tablets and cell phones when available.

Young Focus educator teaching online through Google Meet.
We gave out learning modules to the school dropout children of the community through our Catch-UP programs. All of the different Catch-UP programs, Love2Learn, PostCare, ALS (Alternative Learning System) and Youngli made use of written modules that were printed and distributed from the center, the parents picking up the lesson material.

Older ALS students were sometimes allowed to visit the center themselves and receive tutorials.

Distributing learning modules for our Love2Learn students via their parents.

During the pandemic we discovered many creative ways of communicating and teaching the children. Young Focus started producing short teaching videos that we were able to show online.

In our Child Care PLUS (preschool) Young Focus taught parents to teach their own children. Then each week the parents dropped by to pick up a teaching package and dropped off their children’s work from the previous week.
John Erick graduated from a four-year Bachelor of Science course in Hotel and Restaurant Management. Here is his story:

Before I became part of Young Focus I had already started studying and was in my second year at college, but my parents couldn’t support me financially. One of my classmates was part of Young Focus and he told me about them. I was so amazed to know that there was an organization like Young Focus willing to give financial support to a student. So, when the enrollment for new sponsorship came, I went to the Young Focus Sandigan Center hoping that I would be eligible as Young Focus would be such a great help for me if I’d be one of the lucky students… and I was! Young Focus has helped me to be the best version of me. My coordinator helped boost my self-confidence through weekly tutorials, especially with my English. Also, our coordinator checked up on us for updates, our life, how our study was going and if there was anything else they could do to help. They didn’t just give us financial support, they made us feel special.

Despite the pandemic, our college batch managed to complete our requirements for graduation. Now I’m working as a customer service representative and this is my training ground for my dream job. I’m here because I want to practise my English communication proficiently. After this pandemic, I want to work abroad in one of the many popular hotels and restaurants or on a cruise ship. My family is doing well now. We are healthy and we’re still eating okay. We have enough money since I have a good job, and my siblings are still studying. As a young professional my ultimate goal is to renovate our home, save money so that I can start my own business, and of course have my own house for my future family.
Completion of high school education is critical in securing job opportunities. Support to alleviate the financial burden of uniforms, school supplies, education materials, and transportation costs would greatly enhance the chances of more urban poor youths to complete higher education.


Young Focus’s ultimate goal for each student is that he or she will finish a 2, 3 or 4-year college level education.

However, not all students have the academic capacity to go beyond a high school education. Young Focus considers a 6-year high school education as a true accomplishment when students have built a foundation to enter the workforce in the Philippines and help earn for their families.

Over the last 10 years 44% of graduated students finished their high school education, and 56% went on to finish college as well.

In 2019 the Filipino government extended high school from 4 to 6 years. Young Focus has therefore decided that students who successfully complete their high school education do not 'automatically' go on to college. They first have to go through a new application procedure so that they can show their commitment and determination.
Mauel likes basketball, and he’s part of the Love2Learn Intermediate class. He’s a hard-working student, good in Math but has some difficulty in English. He has an eagerness to learn in spite of his tough life. Early each morning he wakes up and goes out to work as a scavenger. He looks for used paper, plastic bottles and other thing he can sell. He collects the items and then sells them to a junk shop. He gives the money he makes to his aunt who takes care of him.

Mauel is a school dropout, but is back in the classroom because of Love2Learn, one of Young Focus’s programs for out-of-school youth. Mauel says that Love2Learn not only helps him to learn, but also to be eager to learn more. He says: “They are helping me achieve my dreams. I get inspired to look for a better job someday. I dream of rising from poverty. Being part of Young Focus is also a good way for me to find a better circle of friends.”

Good luck Mauel! We know you can do it and hope that you can go back to school next year!

Mauel doesn’t want to be a scavenger the rest of his life
In November/December 2020 Young Focus launched a special Christmas Family Food Package campaign with, “Let’s do something EXTRA SPECIAL this year,” realizing that it had been a tough year for us all - and especially tough for our beneficiaries...

It was a great success, each family receiving PHP 1,100 worth of groceries.

1,000 families each received two eco-bags full of groceries for Christmas
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Legal Structures  
Charitable organization: registered & licensed as social welfare and development agency to implement Community-Based Programs and Services for Disadvantaged Children, their Families and Communities by the DSWD (Department of Social Welfare and Development - Reg. no. SWD-SB-A- 001358-2015 + Accredited by the DSWD

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