

# PORTRAITS OF **PROMISE**



# Naomi's Courage

by Ellery Sadler, staff writer

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As COVID-19 continues to ravage many of the regions where we serve, the statistics are troubling, with the potential for rising rates of poverty, starvation, and child labor.

But these statistics aren't only made up of numbers. They are faces. They are stories. They are precious children made in the image of a loving Father.

It is our honor to serve them and to fight for their potential. Because no child deserves to be defined by their circumstances.

**These are the stories.  
These are the souls.  
These are the portraits of the  
lives we're changing.**









## COLLATERAL DAMAGE

A report issued by the Department of Labor and Employment<sup>1</sup> says that children in the Philippines have become “collateral damage from the pandemic.”

As the economic crisis worsens amid the intersecting COVID-19 crisis, more families are being forced to put their children to work, sometimes in unsafe conditions, in order to survive. A recent International Labor Organization (ILO) and UNICEF study also confirmed that child labor is on the rise due to

increased poverty rates<sup>2</sup>. “As the pandemic wreaks havoc on family incomes, without support, many could resort to child labor,” explained ILO Director-General Guy Ryder.

When children are put to work, that means they’re pulled out of school. Instead of learning, they are spending long hours doing tedious, sometimes dangerous, work. Unfortunately, statistics show that once young children get behind in their studies, they often can’t catch back up. They become “collateral damage” amid

1. <https://www.ucanews.com/news/pandemic-fuels-child-labor-increase-in-the-philippines/90603>

2. *ibid*



an economic climate they did nothing to create or contribute to, but which can end up defining their entire futures.

Against this backdrop, Naomi's story isn't just encouraging—it is a triumph.

Naomi is the second of seven children and the oldest daughter in her family. She lives in a bamboo hut with her grandmother and three of the older siblings, while the three youngest siblings live with their parents about a two-hour walk away.

Her family makes ends meet by selling crops like sweet potatoes, purple yams, and bananas. COVID-19 has been difficult for their business, as it has for so many families across the Philippines and around the globe. Naomi helps her family by occasionally selling produce, and she also helps her grandmother by taking care of her younger siblings, cleaning the house, and washing clothes.

But more than anything, Naomi loves to study. When she grows up, she wants to be a teacher.

## THE FIGHT TO LEARN

When the pandemic hit the Philippines, the Department of Education placed all in-person classes on hold and implemented distance learning instead. One mode is done through printed self-learning modules to be answered by students and then submitted back to the teachers.

This was a difficult arrangement for many students, like Naomi. She lives about an hour's walk from Puray Elementary School. The unpaved roads are thick with dust when they're dry and slippery with mud when wet. Distance learning saves her the walk these days, but it also means she cannot quickly access her teacher to ask questions



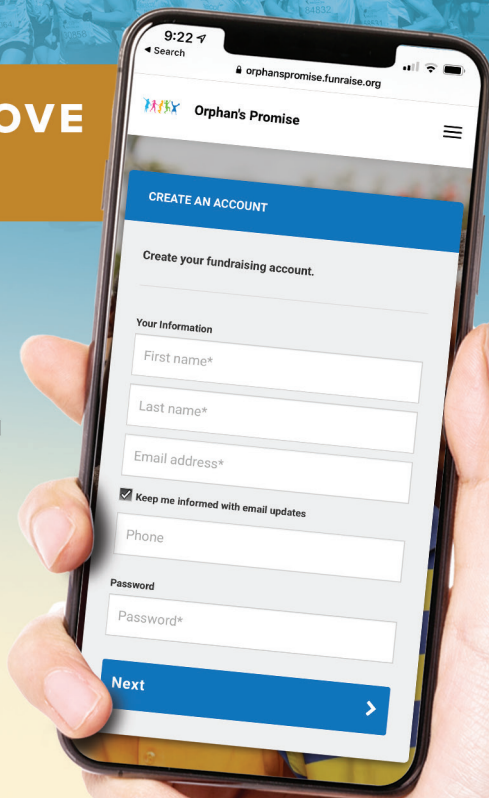




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or clarify learning concepts. There is now a greater weight on parents and guardians to help children succeed in accomplishing their self-learning goals.

For Naomi, that means turning to her grandmother or her mother, but neither of them knows how to read or write. They have a difficult time helping her with her schoolwork, which can be discouraging and frustrating for everyone involved. But Naomi refuses to be dissuaded and has convinced her mom to let her continue her education.

One thing that gives her courage in pursuing her studies is the support Orphan's Promise gives her through the Bless a Child project. Through this project, Naomi and her siblings are provided with nutritious meals, including food packs throughout the





pandemic, health check-ins, school supplies, and educational activities and support. Most importantly for Naomi, she also gets access to tutorial classes where she can receive assistance with her distance learning. She can ask questions and get the help she needs to ensure she does not fall behind.

Naomi is just one child, but she matters. She is not a statistic. She is not collateral damage. Her life has the potential to

**Despite child labor laws, millions of households across the Philippines reported that children between 5 and 17 years of age are still working nationwide, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). The COVID-19 pandemic and worsening economic crisis have only made the problem worse, as families struggle to survive<sup>3</sup>.**

3. <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2021/02/15/millions-of-children-5-to-17-years-old-still-working-psa/>



touch and transform countless lives around her.

Naomi already has the will and courage inside herself to pursue her education despite the hurdles she faces. She is a warrior, and she is fighting for her own future. But no child should be forced to do it alone. Orphan's Promise provides her with the support she needs to keep dreaming, keep growing, and keep succeeding.

To be that support is an honor. To stand beside Naomi is a privilege. To hear her say, "Thank you for coming here. It has made me happy," is the most precious reward.

We say the same to you: Thank you for being here. For showing up. For partnering in the story of these brave little warriors, like Naomi, who are courageously working to reach their God-given potential.



**Employment is the top reason why Filipino children ages 6 to 14 years old are not in school in both rural and urban areas, according to the PSA's Annual Poverty Indicator Survey in 2019<sup>4</sup>.**

4. <https://www.ucanews.com/news/pandemic-fuels-child-labor-increase-in-the-philippines/90603>







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