Access to fresh and nutritious food is a vital aspect of ensuring the good health of the children and their families in the child sponsorship program. Proper nutrition helps these families keep health care visits for illness at a minimum and keeps children healthy enough to continue attending school. Buying organic food, however, can be too expensive for families that are already struggling to make ends meet—but learning how to grow it in their own gardens can make this kind of healthy eating more accessible. Pearl S. Buck Foundation Philippines, in partnership with Alternative Gifts, Inc., has launched a backyard gardening project in Zambales, one of the areas served by Pearl S. Buck Foundation Philippines, to help families grow organic fruits and vegetables. This gardening project has become an important part of the Foundation’s health program for the almost 200 sponsored children served in Zambales. Started in October 2019, it was implemented over the course of six months. As part of the launch of this project, families in the program were trained on Bio-Intensive Gardening (BIG), learning basic principles of organic gardening including how to properly nurture their plants using natural pest repellents and natural fertilizers. Fifty parents attended this first training, bringing back to their homes and communities the principles they had learned. These families began to organically prepare their seeds in nursery trays before transferring the growing seedlings to the soil. The families tended and harvested their new organic gardens. Not only did this project teach families new skills on how to grow safe, nutritious produce, it also provided sponsored children and families with a new, self-sustaining source of fruits and vegetables. Thank you to Alternative Gifts, Inc., the staff at Pearl S. Buck Foundation Philippines, and all the donors whose generosity made a life-changing project like this one possible!
 Peer Counselors to Help Sponsored Children Navigate the COVID-19 Pandemic

For many children and their families in the Philippines, this unexpected but ongoing global pandemic crisis has been silently changing their psychological well-being. In family letters written by sponsored children, there have been direct and indirect expressions of fear, confusion, and worry that has led to anxiety and stress among many of the children as they deal with rolling quarantines, the uncertainty of whether or not schools will be open, and the inability of many parents to work to support their families and put food on the table. Pearl S. Buck Foundation Philippines staff have observed behavioral changes in some sponsored children in these trying times.

To help sponsored children and their families find a way through the fear and anxiety stemming from the pandemic, Pearl S. Buck Foundation Philippines is launching a peer counselling program. Training to be peer counselors will be a significant opportunity for sponsored children to learn the tools to help themselves and the other children navigate these uncertain times. The challenges of the “new normal” must be properly discussed with the young people at their emotional level to learn to cope with and embrace the many changes due to the current situation.

The goal is to have a total of 30 participants training to be peer counselors. These trained counselors will serve 550 sponsored children in the Philippines.

Some of the specific objectives this project hopes to achieve include:

- To provide a specific avenue for sponsored children to express and share their thoughts, concerns, and fears about the current pandemic crisis
- To help sponsored children/youth understand the current situation (Covid-19 pandemic) and its possible effects and impact on their psychological wellbeing.
- To help sponsored children/youth cope with the challenges of the new norms in our society and world in general brought about by pandemic
- To regain self-confidence among sponsored children and youth as they prepare to go back to school with the different mode of learning they will encounter there

This project, as with all of Pearl S. Buck International’s projects, is only made possible by the kindness and contributions of donors and child sponsors. To contribute to this project, go to https://pearlsbuck.org/fund-a-project. We are so grateful for your generous support!