

Proposal for Scholarship Support: Investing in a Legacy of Learning and Service

Project Location: Culion, Palawan

Prepared by: WE Foundation

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Introduction

The Self-Reliant Farm Scholarship Program offers a transformative opportunity for students, primarily from the indigenous community (*katutubo*) in Culion comprised of Tagbanua, Cuyonon, and Calamians, to break the cycle of poverty through education and service. This program focuses on sponsoring scholars in fields that are essential for Culion's economy, such as agriculture, healthcare, and vocational trades, ensuring they can fill critical gaps and provide the services needed by the community. The program envisions a self-sustaining cycle of learning where each scholar, upon completing their studies, returns to Palawan to offer their expertise and services. To expand this legacy, scholars also commit to “pay it forward” by sponsoring two future scholars, and the future scholars themselves will each sponsor two more future scholars, ensuring that the program’s impact continues to grow across generations.



Fr. John (5th from left) with Raymi Fermiza (3rd from left) and the scholars and some of our benefactors

Educational Challenges for the *Katutubo*

The *katutubo* (Tagbanua, Cuyonon, and Calamians) face significant educational challenges, with literacy rates below the national average. Most come from families where parents lack formal education. Many young people are unable to pursue higher education, reinforcing a cycle of poverty and limited community potential.

In Culion, educational access is constrained by the scarcity of local institutions and limited resources for tertiary education. For those who wish to continue their studies, students often rely on Palawan State University (PSU), located in Puerto Princesa, and Western Philippines University (WPU), with campuses in Aborlan and Puerto Princesa. While these state institutions offer free tuition under the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act, intense competition and limited capacity mean that thousands of qualified applicants are turned away each year—PSU alone sees about 15,000 applicants competing for only 2,000 available slots.

Even with the benefit of free tuition at state institutions, additional school fees remain a substantial financial burden for most families in Culion, preventing many students from low-income backgrounds from accessing higher education and perpetuating the cycle of poverty. Many families in Culion lack the financial means to support their children's education away from home. Just the travel expenses for taking the college entrance exams to schools outside the island is prohibitive for many. The aspiration to attend prestigious institutions such as the University of the Philippines remains out of reach for most due to limited resources and educational preparation.

Self-Reliant Farm Scholarship – Program Overview

The Self-Reliant Farm Scholarship Program supports scholars across junior high, senior high, vocational, and college levels. As of the 2024-2025 academic year, we are supporting the following scholars (a detailed list is also attached):

- **Junior High Students:** eleven (11)
- **Senior High Students:** ten (10)
- **Vocational Students:** six (6)
 - Automotive mechanics: three (3)
 - Organic farming: (3)
- **College Students:** seven (7)
 - Agriculture: three (3)
 - Veterinary medicine (2)

- Nursing: one (1)
- Laboratory technology as a pre-medical course: one (1)

Scholars gain hands-on experience at the Self-Reliant Farm, where they acquire skills in farming, agriculture, and livestock management, preparing them for community-centered careers. They also receive mentoring, educational resources, and exam preparation support through review books, computers, and virtual tutoring enabled by solar energy and Starlink internet connection donated by a benefactor. Additionally, Fr. John Vien Nguyen offers Catechism and faith-formation, enriching their personal and spiritual growth.

With donor support, we cover scholars' transportation and meal costs during their stay at the farm, including a typical weekend's rice consumption of around 100 kg for all the scholars. Through donors, the program also provides stipends for those attending high schools off the island in Puerto Princesa and Taytay. Additional support covers travel and lodging for college entrance exams at institutions like PSU, Central Mindanao University (CMU), Pampanga State Agricultural University (PSAU), and Central Luzon State University (CLSU). This comprehensive support ensures that disadvantaged students have the resources and guidance needed to pursue tertiary education.

Our college scholars are enrolled in fields crucial to Palawan's development, including agriculture, veterinary medicine, and healthcare. With healthcare access remaining a critical gap, we aim to support future scholars in medical and dental fields to uplift the Culion community. Vocational scholars studying at the Salesian Sisters' and Don Bosco Centers, with assistance from TESDA, receive training in organic farming and automotive mechanics, providing essential skills and sustainable livelihoods for the region. Collectively, these educational paths empower individual livelihoods and contribute to economic stability in Culion.

A Missed Opportunity: An Example of the Challenges our Students Face

One of our scholars achieved something that had previously been unimaginable for a student from Culion—she successfully passed the college entrance exam for Central Mindanao University, one of the country's leading institutions for nursing. This was a milestone not only for her but for our entire community. However, when the time came to accept her admission, an unfortunate obstacle arose. The solar power system at the farm malfunctioned due to an inverter issue, causing our Starlink internet connection to go down. Without internet access, she could not send her acceptance in time. By the time the connection was restored, the deadline had passed, and she missed the opportunity of a lifetime—an opportunity that she had worked so hard to earn.

This heartbreaking incident highlights a stark reality: something as basic as internet access, which many of us take for granted, remains a significant barrier for students in Culion. While the lack of connectivity may seem trivial to others, it has life-altering consequences for students like her, who face these challenges daily in their pursuit of education.

Budget Summary

Annual Budget for Each High School Scholar

Expense Category	Annual Cost (PHP)	Annual Cost (US\$*)
Stipend (for off-island scholars)	6,000	109
Food	12,000	218
Transportation to the farm	2,000	36
Other Educational Support, Miscellaneous	2,000	36
College Entrance Test** (transportation, lodging)	(30,000)	(545)
TOTAL (for 9th – 11th grade scholar)	PHP 22,000	\$400
TOTAL (for 12th grade scholar)	PHP 52,000	\$945

*Based on conversions rate of \$1 = PHP 55

**This is a one-time expense when a 12th grade scholar has to travel off the island to take the College Entrance Exam (CEE). This is the average cost of travel and lodging; actual cost varies depending on the location of the institution. For example, the cost of travel to the following institutions are as follows:

- PSU or WPU (Puerto Princesa): PHP 15,000 (\$273)
- Pampanga State Agricultural University: PHP 45,000 (\$820)
- Central Mindanao University: PHP 100,000 (\$1,818)

Average Annual Budget for Each Vocational Scholar

Expense Category	Annual Cost (PHP)	Annual Cost (US\$*)
Stipend	10,000	182
Food & Lodging	10,000	182
Tuition, School Fees	30,000	545
Transportation to Culion (Christmas, summer)	10,000	182
Other Educational Support, Miscellaneous	5,000	91
TOTAL	65,000	\$1,182

*Based on conversions rate of \$1 = PHP 55

Average Annual Budget for Each College Scholar

Expense Category	Annual Cost (PHP)	Annual Cost (US\$*)
Stipend	20,000	364
Food	75,000	1364
Lodging, Utilities	130,000	2364
Tuition** (for Private University))	(100,000)	(1818)
School Fees	25,000	455
School Supplies, Uniform	20,000	364
Transportation to school	10,000	182
Transportation to Culion (Christmas, summer)	15,000	273
Health, Dental. Optical	5,000	91
Miscellaneous	5,000	91
TOTAL (state university)	300,000	\$5,455
TOTAL (private university)	405,000	\$7,364

*Based on conversions rate of \$1 = PHP 55

**Tuition is free in state universities. This amount is the average cost of tuition for private universities; actual cost varies depending on the institution. For example, the annual cost of tuition for the following private universities are as follows:

- Holy Trinity University): PHP 70,000 (\$1,200)
- University of the East Ramon Magsaysay: PHP 140,000 (\$1,400)

Project Benefits and Community Impact

The Self-Reliant Farm Scholarship Program offers a multitude of benefits that extend beyond individual scholars to positively impact the entire community of Culion.

- **Enhanced Access to Education**

The scholarship program provides students, especially the *katutubo*, with opportunities to pursue higher education, breaking long-standing barriers. Many families in Culion struggle to afford basic educational expenses, and the program's support—covering school fees, materials, and travel costs—opens pathways that would otherwise remain inaccessible, empowering students to achieve their full potential.

- **Economic Growth and Reduced Poverty**

By supporting education in fields such as agriculture, healthcare, and vocational trades, the program contributes to the long-term economic growth of Culion. Graduates will fill essential roles that can stimulate local economies, from healthcare providers to skilled agricultural professionals,

creating a workforce that benefits the entire community. Graduates will also provide essential skills for sustainable practices, contributing to local food security and reducing poverty. This self-sufficiency will lead to breaking cycles of poverty through education and will result in a more stable and hopeful future.

- **Improved Community Health and Services**

With scholars pursuing fields in nursing, dentistry, and medicine, Culion will benefit from enhanced healthcare and public health support. Graduates committed to returning to the area will provide essential healthcare services, address healthcare gaps, and promote healthier communities.

- **Cultural Empowerment**

The scholarship program is dedicated to supporting indigenous students who often face greater barriers to education. Empowering *katutubo* youth to become community leaders ensures that indigenous voices and perspectives are part of Culion's growth. Graduates returning to work locally help preserve and elevate their cultural heritage within the community.

- **Promoting a Culture of Service**

Through its "pay it forward" model, the scholarship program instills a culture of service and gratitude among graduates. By sponsoring future scholars, the program ensures that its benefits multiply across generations, creating a lasting legacy of giving back and community support.

Request for Support: Ensuring Ongoing Funding for the Self-Reliant Farm Scholarship Program

The Self-Reliant Farm Scholarship Program is a life-changing opportunity for the students in Culion who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Our scholars, most of whom are *katutubo*, face challenges far beyond those of the average student. Raised in rural areas with limited access to educational resources and economic opportunities, they lack the resources many students take for granted. Most come from families who themselves lack formal education and cannot financially support their children's educational journeys.

As our scholarship program gains momentum, the cost of sustaining and preparing our high school scholars has grown substantially. During the summer months, when scholars stay at the Self-Reliant Farm for five days each week, our food expenses increase sharply. Currently, our program provides food for the weekend for all scholars, with the need more than doubling during the summer months to meet the demands of their full-time stay. Additionally, preparing the



scholars for tertiary education includes covering transportation and lodging expenses when they travel to take college entrance exams at universities beyond Culion. For many families, these expenses—such as inter-island ferry fares, overnight accommodations, and meals—are insurmountable without scholarship support. The investment in each scholar's preparation is crucial to their success, as they face a highly competitive admissions process with limited local resources and guidance. By covering these costs, we aim to ensure that no scholar is hindered by financial barriers on their path to higher education.

To ensure continued support for both current and future scholars, sustained funding is essential. Even in state universities where tuition is free, additional school fees, uniforms, school supplies and living expenses are often beyond their means. Without additional funding, we risk losing opportunities for these deserving students to fulfill their educational and professional aspirations.

This scholarship program has the potential for long-term, transformative impact on the Culion community. By empowering young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to become skilled professionals in fields like healthcare, agriculture, and vocational trades, we are investing in Culion's future. These scholars are committed to returning to their communities, where they will contribute to local economic stability, improve access to essential services, and inspire future generations.

We invite you to join us in this vital mission. Your support will help ensure that these young leaders can overcome obstacles, pursue their dreams, and create lasting change in their communities. Together, we can build a legacy of learning, service, and opportunity for generations to come.

Conclusion

We invite you to be a part of this meaningful journey toward transforming lives and uplifting the Culion community. By supporting the Self-Reliant Farm Scholarship Program, you are investing not only in the education of these remarkable young people but also in the future of a community rich in potential and resilience. Your generosity can help break the cycle of poverty and empower the next generation of leaders who will serve, inspire, and innovate in their communities. Together, we can turn dreams into reality, ensuring that no student is left behind due to a lack of resources. Join us in this noble mission to create lasting change and build a legacy of learning and service that will echo through generations to come.

SELF RELIANT FARM SCHOLARS

Junior High School Scholars

NAME	AGE	GRADE LEVEL	YR OF GRAD	CURRENT SCHOOL	DESIRED COURSE	POST-GRADUATE
1. Ladao, Bea	15	10	2027	Palawan National HS	Veterinary Med	
2. Villono, Gladish Mae	15	10	2027	Palawan National HS	Veterinary Med	
3. Buencuchillo, Gabriel	15	10	2027	Culion National HS	Nursing	
4. Estopin, Chavit	15	10	2027	Culion National HS	Electrician	
5. Albino, Ely Grace	15	9	2028	Halsey National HS	Nursing	
6. Lledo, Donna	15	9	2028	Halsey National HS	Education	
7. Aquino, Melow Jean	14	9	2028	Halsey National HS	Nursing	
8. Asis, Glaiza Jane	14	9	2028	Culion National HS	Education	
9. Cuyam, Glaiza May	14	9	2028	Culion National HS	Veterinary Med	
10. Llorca, Jenma	14	9	2028	Culion National HS	Veterinary Med	
11. Maceda, Leslie Joy	14	9	2028	Culion National HS	Education	

Senior High School Scholars

NAME	AGE	GRADE LEVEL	YR OF GRAD	CURRENT SCHOOL	DESIRED COURSE	POST-GRADUATE
1. Guimba, Hannah Mae	18	HS Grad	2024	Culion National HS	Nursing	Medicine
2. Guimba, Niña	18	HS Grad	2024	Loyola College of Culion	Nursing	Dentistry
3. Badang, Mark Joven	18	12	2025	Culion National HS	Electrician	
4. Estopin, Jolina	16	12	2025	Central Taytay Senior HS	Education	
5. Mascarañas, Jollyme	17	12	2025	Culion National HS	Nursing	Dentistry
6. Maceda, Lezelle Mae	17	12	2025	Loyola Collage of Culion	Education	
7. Villono, Larskeneth	16	12	2025	Central Taytay Senior HS	Electrician	
8. Valle, Angel	16	11	2026	Palawan National HS	Nursing	
9. Estopin, Sophia Ivy	16	11	2026	Central Taytay Senior HS	Educ or Agri	
10. De Luna, Jaymark	16	11	2026	Central Taytay Senior HS	Automotive	

Vocational School Scholars

NAME	AGE	START YEAR	YR OF GRAD	CURRENT SCHOOL	LOCATION	PROGRAM
1. Estopin, Voltaire	17	2024	2025	Don Bosco Tech Inst	Makati	Auto Mechanic
2. Briones, Ruslan	29	2024	2025	Don Bosco Tech Inst	Makati	Auto Mechanic
3. Panday, Jordan	19	2022	2024	Don Bosco Vocational	Iloilo	Auto Mechanic
4. Aguilar, Gener	20	2023	2026	Mary Help of Christians	Mindoro	Organic Farming
5. Acosta, Ian Jay	20	2023	2026	Mary Help of Christians	Mindoro	Organic Farming
6. Panday, Marvin	22	2023	2026	Mary Help of Christians	Mindoro	Organic Farming

College Scholars

NAME	AGE	START YEAR	YR OF GRAD	CURRENT SCHOOL	LOCATION	PROGRAM
1. Valle, Rosel	19	2023	2027	Western Phil University	Aborlan	Agriculture
2. Sanicoy, Elwisa	21	2023	2027	Western Phil University	Aborlan	Agriculture
3. Ladao, Jelaine	18	2024	2028	Western Phil University	Aborlan	Agriculture
4. Villono, Glycel Joy	17	2024	2028	Holy Trinity University	Puerto Princesa	Nursing
5. Adona, Adriel Lyjene	20	2022	2028	Pampanga State Agric Univ	Magalang	Veterinary Med
6. De Luna, Elmarie	19	2023	2029	Pampanga State Agric Univ	Magalang	Veterinary Med
7. De Luna, Mariel	22	2022	2026	UERMMMC	Quezon City	LabTech (PreMed)