
HOLISTIC COMMUNITY CARE PROGRAM EMPOWERS MARGINALIZED FAMILIES IN DUMAGUETE CITY



A pioneering community extension initiative is reshaping how mental health, livelihood, and family well-being are addressed at the barangay level, as Negros Oriental State University (NORSU), through its College of Arts and Sciences, implements a holistic and inclusive social innovation project in Barangay Cadawinonan.

The project, titled “Pag-amuma sa Katawhan sa Barangay Cadawinonan,” is led by Nora Maria Elena T. Osmena, and selected faculty members of NORSU. It serves marginalized and underserved families in Dumaguete City, particularly women, solo parents, persons with disabilities, and multigenerational households who face overlapping challenges of economic insecurity, limited psychosocial support, and family strain.

Implemented in close collaboration with barangay leaders and community members, the initiative reflects the university’s commitment to inclusive extension work that directly responds to lived community realities rather than abstract development models. Pag-amuma sa Katawhan is a holistic community care program that integrates: Mental health education and emotional regulation, Family strengthening and communication skills, Livelihood innovation through hygiene, food preparation, and income-generating activities, and Culturally grounded and participatory learning approaches.

Unlike conventional programs that address mental health or livelihood in isolation, this initiative recognizes that psychological well-being, economic stability, and family functioning are deeply interconnected, especially among low-income communities.

The program was developed in response to persistent challenges faced by marginalized families in Dumaguete City, including financial precarity, emotional distress, strained family relationships, and limited access to mental health services. Many participants are primary breadwinners, particularly women and solo parents, who carry both economic and caregiving responsibilities.

These intersecting vulnerabilities often lead to heightened stress, conflict, and emotional exhaustion. Recognizing this, the project was designed to address not just symptoms, but root causes of distress—linking mental wellness with livelihood security, dignity, and social connection.

The program was delivered using experiential, visual, and demonstration-based methods, ensuring accessibility across varying educational levels. Intergenerational participation allowed community members to exchange life skills, coping strategies, and shared values, strengthening social cohesion and peer support. As a result, participants demonstrated: Improved mental health awareness and early recognition of emotional distress, Healthier family relationships and parenting practices, Enhanced livelihood and hygiene skills contributing to well-being and income, Greater cultural and media literacy, especially among youth.

The project's success has led to requests for replication in other barangays, with Barangay Tabuc-Tubig already benefiting from the program through faculty-led transfer of knowledge and implementation strategies. This demonstrates the initiative's scalability, sustainability, and strong potential for wider community impact across Dumaguete City.

Pag-amuma sa Katawhan stands as a compelling example of how universities can drive inclusive social innovation by embedding mental health, livelihood, and family support within culturally responsive community engagement. By advancing equity, dignity, and sustainable well-being, the project offers a replicable model for strengthening marginalized communities—not only in Dumaguete City, but beyond.

