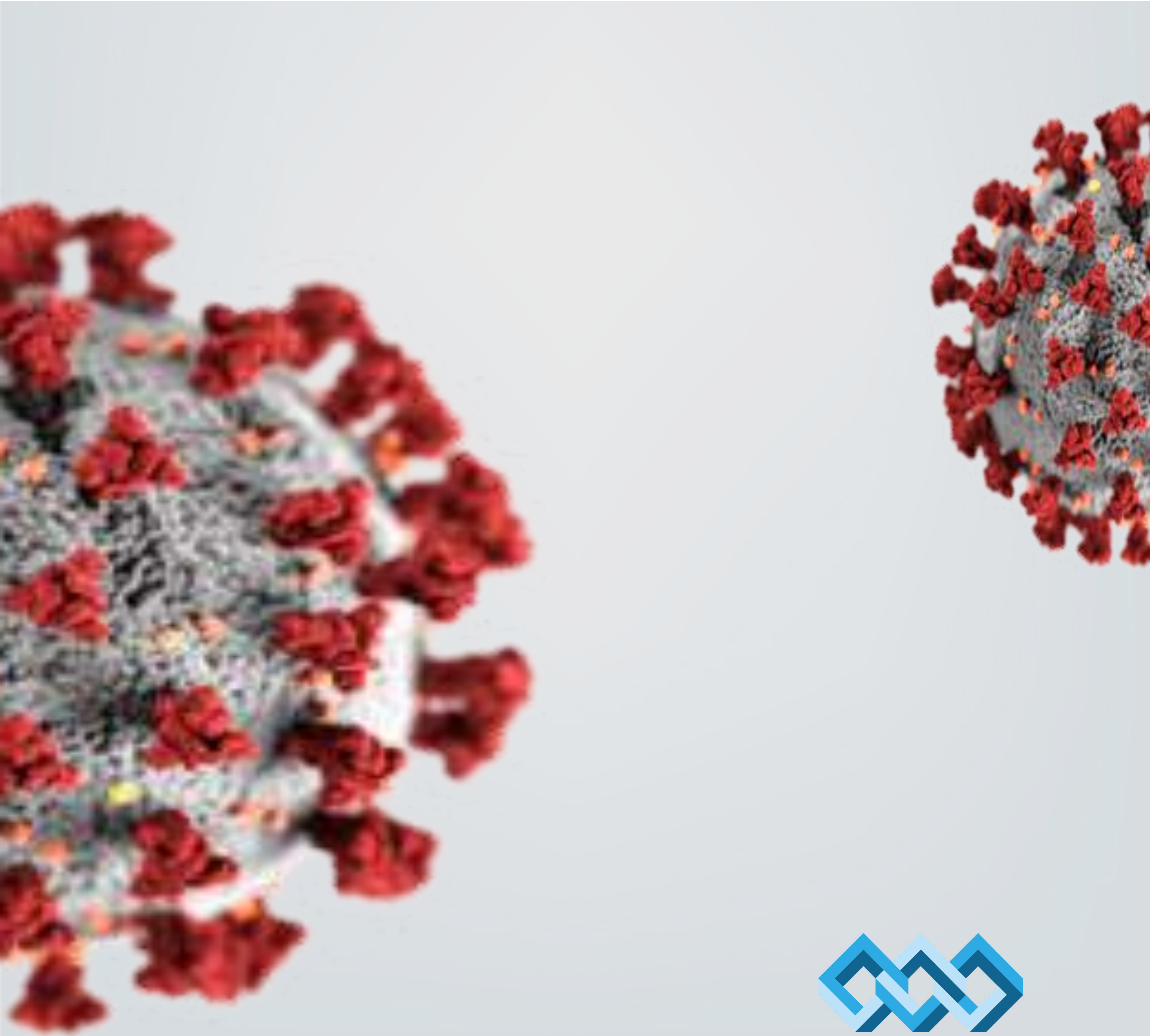


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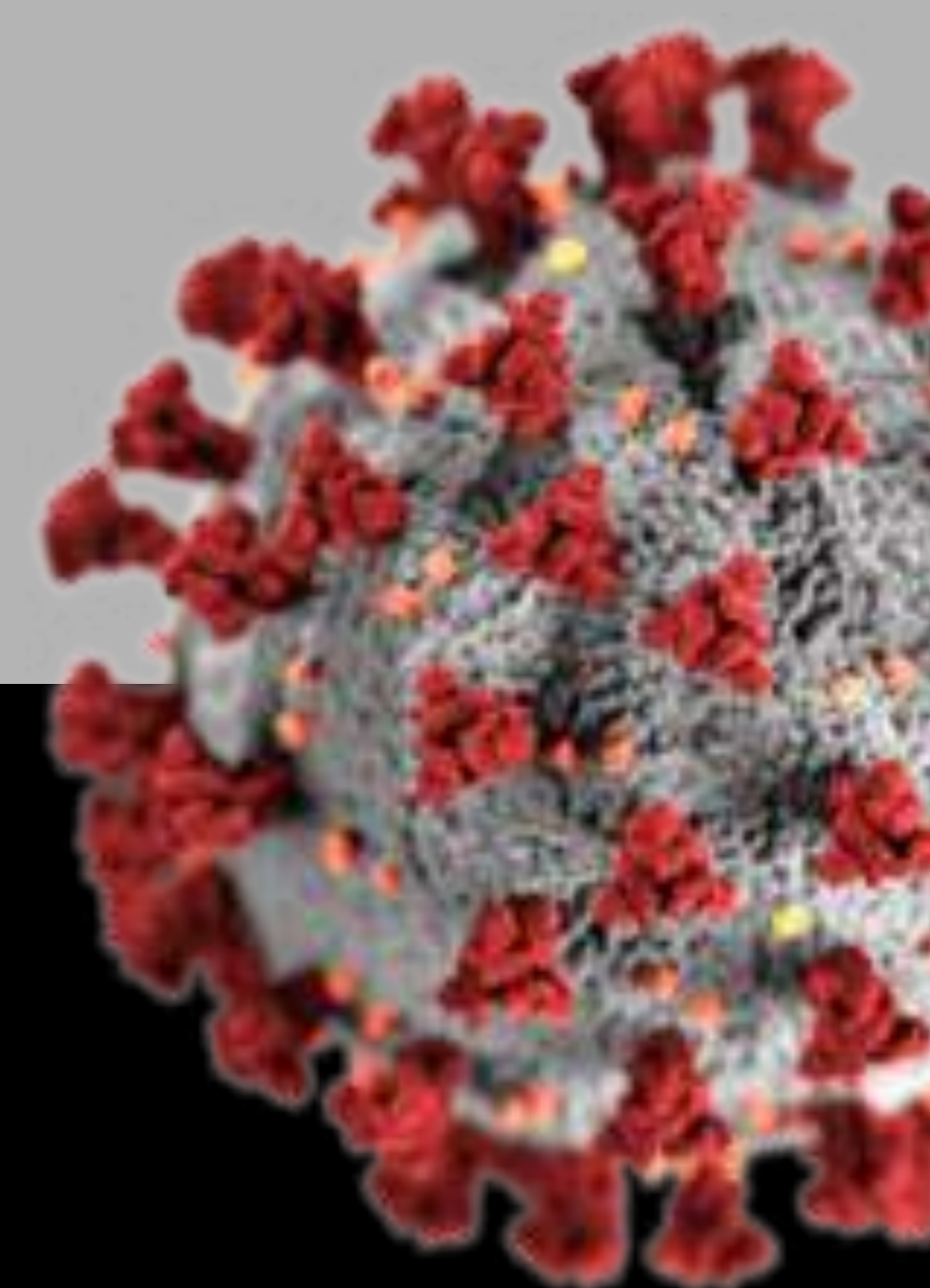
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PhiLab

Réseau Canadien de recherche partenariale sur la philanthropie
Canadian Philanthropy Partnership Research Network

ENTREVUE | INTERVIEW



Vous trouverez dans ce chapitre 6 entretiens d'étudiants-es du PhiLab.

In this chapter you will find 6 interviews by our PhiLab students.



INTERVIEW - ARTICLE

Kapit-Bisig Laban COVID Canada: Community and systems transformation through grassroots organizing and relief efforts with Filipino/a/x communities during COVID-19



Jacqueline Colting-Stol (Jackie) is a Ph.D student (Social Work, McGill University) with PhiLab since December 2019. Her research interests, community organizing, and social work practice meet at the intersections of collaborative efforts from the ground-up – where our collective knowledge, skills and passions are transformative and sustainable. She builds at the grassroots with Filipino/x/a, migrant, diaspora and 2SLGBT+ communities.

Deann Louise C. Nardo is a poet, artist, organizer, and facilitator, living and napping in Tiohtiá:ke/Montréal. Their practice thrives on the thin line where questions live; where memory, healing, and community are embodied and empowered through interdisciplinary art forms. They are currently involved with QPIRG Concordia, QPIRG Alternative Libraries and various organizations within the Filipino community.

Allan Matudio is a visual artist, writer and organizer. He has been volunteering in grassroots Filipino organizations in Tiohtiá:ke/Montréal for over 2 years. His personal research focuses on the transnational trauma within the local Filipino community. His main medium of expression is through comics and digital illustration. @filipiknow.mtl @allanmima



Par | By:

Jacqueline Colting-Stol, Ph.D student and PhiLab Québec student
Deann Louise C. Nardo
Allan Matudio

From left to right Jacqueline, Deann and Allan are community organizers with Kapit-Bisig Laban COVID, Montreal chapter.

What is Kapit-Bisig Laban COVID Canada ?

Jackie : Kapit-Bisig (linking arms, in Tagalog) Laban COVID (<https://kapitbisig.ca/>) is a Canada-wide community care and mutual aid network organized by Filipinos, allies, and concerned members of the community.

In the Montreal chapter, our mission is to empower Filipino/a/x and Filipino-Canadians in Quebec through advocacy, campaigns, community initiatives and educational workshops. In the short term, we are providing practical community-based emergency supports and information about government programs and workers' rights in accessible formats.

In the long-term, we are building solidarity and arming our communities with tools for advocacy toward collective empowerment and systemic change. We aim to address injustices in labour, immigration and other social and economic policies at local, national and global levels.

The initiative is led by BAYAN Canada, a multi-sectoral alliance of grassroots organizations and groups, including Migrante Canada, Toronto Committee for Human Rights in the Philippines, Anakbayan Canada, Gabriela Ontario, and Gabriela BC.

We are primarily funded by monetary and in-kind donations within our communities. Originally implemented in Toronto, Kapit-Bisig Laban COVID has spread across the country within the span of a month to Alberta (Calgary, Red Deer, Edmonton, Fort McMurray), British Columbia (Vancouver), Manitoba (Winnipeg), Ontario (Toronto, Ottawa), and Quebec (Montreal).

At the local level, Kapit Bisig Laban COVID Montreal is initiated by Migrante Quebec, Immigrant Workers Centre (IWC), PINAY Quebec, Filipino Parents' Support Group, Anakbayan Montreal and the Centre for Philippine Concerns.

Why did you join Kapit-Bisig in Montreal ?

Jackie : The issues facing the Filipino community during COVID-19 hit home - all the way to the Philippines. The lives of our communities are at the frontlines of the pandemic. The names of our kababayan (country people) who are passing away due to COVID-19 and who work in health care roles while providing for their families is devastating.

I have been involved in community organizing with the Filipino community and in social work practice in a wide variety of non-profit organizations for several years, so a desire to contribute to relief efforts and long-term systemic change through this initiative was easy to commit to.

What drives me to organize with this initiative is both the people who make up essential workers in precarious positions without being provided proper PPE or information about benefits, and the clear and stark social inequalities that we have an opportunity to organize around for longer-term systemic change.

The vision of Kapit-Bisig is grounded in community and collective values and action that are at the forefront. Yet, we don't stray from recognizing and addressing the social, political and economic structures that impact our livelihoods and our futures.

Deann : I joined Kapit-Bisig because I wanted to join a group with a diverse reach in my community, a collection of organizations already doing the work. I believe that we need to entrust each other to contribute and offer our skills and find ways to work together that do not operate within the same structures that have failed us in the first place.

The pandemic has laid bare the systemic inequalities that have always been apparent within the Filipino community. Last year, I worked with another artist and PINAY Quebec on a community art project for Réseau Accès culture Montréal called "Nandito tayo / We are Here / Nous sommes ici". We interviewed members of PINAY Quebec, the organizers and domestic care workers, exploring how domestic work is invisible work and uncovering the visible borders in the daily life of these women of various generations. This was all while Bill 9 threatened to cancel roughly 18,000 immigration applications [1].

What is it like to know that you're inside that gap and what are the steps to fighting for your rights as a marginalized worker? I watched as over 80 women under the Live-In Caregiver program (formally called the Federal Caregiver Program) fought for their rights against Bill 9 [2]. I see all this work in my community and know that we have the capacity to make the changes we need for ourselves.

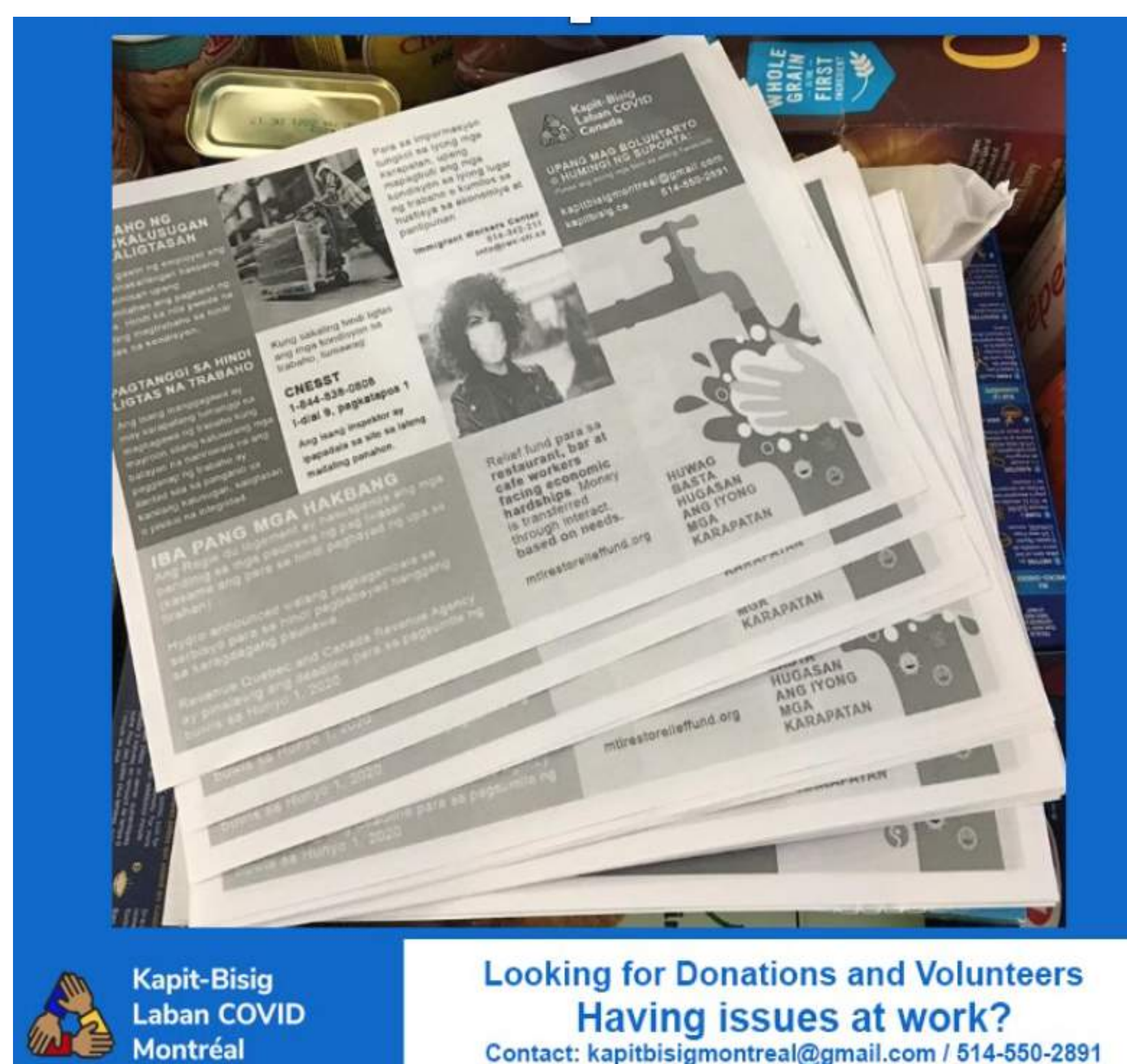
I am also currently part of Quebec Public Interest Research Group of Concordia (QPIRG-Concordia). QPIRG-Concordia is a resource centre for students, community research, and organizing which is rooted in an anti-oppression analysis and practice. Creating strong connections is a crucial lesson from this organization because supporting various grassroots initiatives means finding ways to meaningfully connect and nurture emergent social networks. Accessibility is important, and distribution of resources and information must reach everyone in the community for it to be effective. It is one thing to gather and have the information and another to be able to get it into the hands of those that need it most.

Allan : One of our main organizers (PINAY Quebec) approached me late in the month of May to create infographics in Tagalog about COVID-19. This led to creating project plans and looking into funding opportunities that would help support the project and other relief activities for the organization. A bit later, allies from Toronto suggested we join Kapit-Bisig as our activities were similar and that together we would be able to get inter-chapter support.

I have seen first-hand how Filipinos with precarious status are vulnerable even before the COVID-19 pandemic. Back in December, I was helping them fill out applications for an open work permit after their employers had unrightfully fired them after a week of work. Although their English was functional, the online government forms were in many ways inaccessible to them.

My goal with Kapit-Bisig is to give accessibility to Filipinos who are unable to request for relief. I want to provide them with services and content that would break the cultural barrier and allow them to have access to all the relief options that others have.

As newly arrived migrants, they are already at a social disadvantage as they are often isolated, underpaid, overworked. The cultural shock, transnational trauma and family responsibilities back home are also intangible factors that make it hard for Filipinos to live comfortably in Canada. If that wasn't enough, let's add the COVID-19 pandemic. I believe that Kapit-Bisig gives them a fighting chance.



How was Kapit-Bisig developed and why ?

Jackie : Filipino communities are on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic on a global scale and are facing specific challenges related to already existing inequalities and oppressive conditions (Cabana, 2020a; Tungohan, 2020). Many of our families and community members having essential and frontline jobs. We are domestic workers, personal support workers (PSWs) and nurses in long-term care homes and hospitals. We are temporary foreign workers (TFWs) who are in meat plants, agricultural sectors, and distribution and packaging centres (Cabana, 2020a; Cabana, 2020b).

In doing this grassroots mobilization, we honour and remember the human faces behind the numbers in our communities - the first health care worker to die from COVID in Quebec [3], a Filipina, Victoria Salvan, who worked tirelessly in a long-term care home to provide for her family.

The single largest outbreak of COVID-19 in Canada [4] at Cargill meat-packing plant in High River, Alberta brought to light the working and living conditions of these essential workers - among whom 70 percent are Filipinos and many who are hired through the federal TFW program (Cabana, 2020b). Workers and other community members are often housed in dwellings with multiple families making it extra hard to isolate.

Filipino health care workers are also carrying the burden of the impacts of COVID-19 (Cabana, 2020a). For example, about 90% of those who come to Canada through the Federal Caregiver Program to take care of those who are elderly, sick or have childcare needs are from the Philippines and most are women (Friesen, 2018; Gallerand, Gallié & Gobiél, 2015).

These women face exposures to social and economic challenges through their precarious status (they must work 24 months before being able to apply for permanent residence), long periods of family separation and back-logged applications, and a lack of labour protections in their employers' homes (Gallerand et al., 2015; Tungohan et al., 2015). Recent data on Montreal COVID-19 cases [5] has shown that women in general are more likely to be affected by COVID-19.

In Montreal, neighbourhoods in which the high numbers of Filipinos live are some of the hardest hit, such as Côte-Des-Neiges, Montreal Nord and Parc-Extension. These neighbourhoods face high levels of poverty, have the highest number of immigrant and migrant families, the highest population density and have high proportions of essential workers (Lindeman, 2020). Accessing the constantly evolving social distancing protocols, federal and provincial financial reliefs and subsidies require technological knowledge or skills and a high level of literacy.

The conditions of these workers abroad bring attention to the global immigration and labour export policies that are key to keeping the Philippines economy afloat (O'Neil, 2004). Filipino TFWs (referred to as Overseas Filipino Workers [OFWs]) are treated as commodities in a global capitalist economy – labour export policy is provided as the answer to reducing poverty and unemployment (Nguyen, 2020; O'Neil, 2004).

Yet unemployment rates and families back home often do not see the long-term fruits of these labours. TFWs in Canada are charged remittances used primarily to pay back foreign debts to the United States (Sassen, 2010). Through our organizing and collective efforts, we can work together to build responsive and alternative community, political and economic structures – beginning with grassroots efforts such as Kapit-Bisig Laban.

How does Kapit-Bisig Laban COVID Montreal work ?

Allan : Kapit Bisig is intergenerational and maintains our horizontal structure of service and care in the community.

We have established a virtual connection hub using different communication tools - Messenger, Facebook and Zoom. Volunteers registered through our online platform (AirTable) connect on an ongoing basis and have regular meetings about the daily provision of support. Community members also make requests using the Airtable form to identify their needs.

Facebook is the primary way Filipinos connect - through our public facing Facebook Group [6], consisting of over 100 members, we share the accessible and translated public health, workplace rights and government information.

We strive to support elders, parents, individuals and youth. For example, through a Kapatid Mentorship Program (KaMP) older youth provide tutoring, cultural and social support to local Filipinx/o/a youth in elementary and high school.

Our partner organizations reach families and communities facing the most barriers to support. We have received and followed up with almost 50 requests from seniors, families and individuals for PPE, support applying for benefits and food supplies. Our reach expands beyond these immediate requests, with the IWC delivering COVID-19 rights workshops to TFWs and other essential workers in rural and remote jobs.

What are some of the challenges of mobilizing to support your community during COVID-19 and how do you overcome them ?

Deann : While we have a wide range of strengths and capacities in our community groups, it can be a challenge to meet the demand given the size of our communities affected by COVID-19 . Our grassroots groups and organizations do not have charitable status, so we are not eligible for many of the funding opportunities regularly available to non-profit or charitable organizations. Some of the ways we have started building better infrastructure and processes to meet these demands include:

- Having in-house expertise from IWC keeping us up to date with provincial and federal government bonuses and funds for undocumented workers. We have developed accessible communication templates adapted to Kapit-Bisig based on IWC's rights information.
- Airtable is a free interactive platform that allows us to track volunteers, assign requests, develop inventory lists, and gather evaluation data.
- We have a very diverse group of volunteers with skills in translation, graphic design, policy analysis, grassroots organizing, and connections with church groups and other donors. We have formed seven different Coordinating Committees to systematize our processes.
- Through our collective efforts, we are proud to have secured \$5,000 (CAD) in funding from the SHIFT Centre for Social Transformation at Concordia University [7].



What are some of the hopes, visions and impacts of this initiative ?

Jackie : As mentioned, I hope we can meet the immediate need, but constantly have an eye to long-term change and sustainability of our mobilization and organizing efforts. We are already seeing that we can provide some assistance to those communities that are most impacted by COVID-19 and draw from their strengths to build a collective voice that can influence policies that perpetuate inequalities.

These lived realities combined with reported data highlight the vital roles of Filipino communities in Canada's economy as frontline and essential workers. Many organizations have begun to call for these inequalities to be systematically collected in data and used to inform public health responses at multiple levels of government. Some local municipalities (Toronto) have begun collecting data based on race, income level, location, gender and other social and demographic characteristics. Quebec has also announced that they will begin demographic data collection with little specifics. However, the Federal government has still not announced this move to collect this data.

This pandemic has been shedding much needed light on understanding the conditions of low-income families, neighbourhoods and essential workers, such as migrant workers and those without status, who face extra barriers during and beyond the pandemic.

In the longer-term we can aim for sustained community organizing around our employment and workplace rights, rights to access to social and community services, adequate housing and educational opportunities, so we can continue to affect systemic change through our collective voices and action.

Deann: There is data gathering, resource creation and distribution, and capacity building that will strengthen our grassroots networks. I want the Filipino community in Montreal to create connections with the concept of an inch wide and a mile deep. Even though there is not a lot of us, there is great importance for us to create inter-generational, boundary busting, deep connections; since Filipinos

have historically always been severed from their land and their families through colonization and empire projects that extract labour and land from us. To be able to provide mutual aid to temporary foreign workers and other Filipino migrants will help ensure security and support to the most vulnerable members of our society in the long run.

I hope that the structures put in place can fortify communication within the groups and individuals involved. I would love to find ways for us to make this more sustainable, not just financially but also in terms of volunteering and public engagement.

Kapit-Bisig is a multi-organizational hub that acts as a resource for relief but also as a way to create systemic changes that are needed within our community. I want to see this comprehensive structure extend past COVID19 pandemic relief. It is large in scale and takes on a holistic view of community care. I hope that its multifaceted nature encourages everyone to share their diverse expertise to serve and empower each other.

Allan : The data collected from Kapit-Bisig Montreal has allowed us to get a better understanding of the specific needs of this vulnerable segment of the Filipino community. In many ways, our activities have been reactionary to the results that we are collecting and that we are learning everyday. The majority of our results show that the community is in need of food and sanitation supplies, this is expected due to the fear of leaving their homes and the shortages of sanitary goods in stores. What we weren't expecting is the high demand for child support. This includes requests for goods for children and services like babysitting and tutoring.

The data also revealed very unique needs that we have not planned for at all. This can be as simple as helping somebody file their taxes to something extremely complicated like finding someone to assist an elderly person administer her medication.

Finally, we have gathered data that are representative of the Filipino experience in Canada such as the need for financial aid to be able to send money back to the Philippines or the fear of deportation after losing their job.

“

Kapit-Bisig is a multi-organizational hub that acts as a resource for relief but also as a way to create systemic changes that are needed within our community.”

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Being able to connect precarious workers to those with expertise with worker rights have alleviated some of the stress of the people we are serving. We have also been able to relieve parents concerns over their children's education. Although we are able to deliver goods and services, the virus is showing no signs of slowing down. Schools are closed until September and we already have a waiting list for parents as we are short on volunteers. I expect more requests for needs as there will certainly be more cases as a result of manufacturing companies starting up again.

At the very least, we are able to provide a sense of community through our social media. We are transparent about our activities and we publically celebrate those who are willing to help. Our page is growing with members that are not part of our partner organizations and is an indication of solidarity between the mainstream Filipino community and the newly arrived precarious workers. ■

Contact us for more information or to contribute :
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**Kapit-Bisig
Laban COVID
Canada**

We're in this together.

Kapit-Bisig means "linking arms" in Tagalog.

Community care and mutual aid are the best way for us to overcome the hardship caused by COVID-19. **That is why we've organized Kapit-Bisig Laban COVID, a mutual aid network.**

Request help 

Volunteer 