



UN Volunteer Rasa Pattikasemkul interacts with a young boy in a rare face-to-face meeting during COVID-19 lockdown.

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## COVID-19 education is child's play for Thai UN Volunteer

An innovative initiative to provide child-friendly information about COVID-19 was launched by UN Volunteer Rasa Pattikasemkul in Thailand, who recognized that children needed to know more about the dangers of the virus, while also having fun learning at home during the lockdown. On International Volunteer Day, marked annually on 5 December, Rasa Pattikasemkul talks about motivation, family loss and keeping children safe.

I am in charge of the Volunteer Leader programme of the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) which is part of the [I Am UNICEF](#) initiative. We have some 22

volunteer leaders in communities across Thailand, who told me that while there is sufficient information and support for parents about [COVID-19](#), there is nothing specifically for children. So, I had the idea of designing and distributing a children's activity book to teach children about best practices in avoiding COVID-19, while keeping them entertained at home.

The initiative consists of three engagement opportunities: a story for children showing what they need to do to stay safe during the pandemic, a painting or illustration activity with winning designs chosen to illustrate a UNICEF booklet and a challenge to get volunteers to distribute UNICEF COVID-19 information.

### **Loving the story and tears of joy**

At first, we planned to produce only 4,000 copies of the story booklet, but the requests have far exceeded the production quota. The kids love it, which fills my heart with joy.

I went to the community to help the emergency response distributing toolkits and supplies to those families in the slum areas. I saw quite a big smile on their faces. Some of them shouted to their neighbour "I got something!" After that, all the kids in the area were standing at their doorstep waiting for us to walk over. There was one little girl who ran to me after I gave her the booklet who said "Can I have one more, please? I have a little brother; he is still very tiny but when he is bigger, I will give it to him."

A few weeks after that we received more feedback from the community. They said that the booklet was effective. Children are learning while colouring the booklet and the content helps parents and caregivers to initiate conversations with them. I have read all the social media posts about the booklet, and my eyes are filled with tears of joy.



UN Volunteer Rasa Pattikasemkul at work in Khon Kean, in northeastern Thailand. ©UNICEF Thailand, 2020

## Role of volunteers "absolutely changed" during pandemic

COVID-19, which is now our main focus, absolutely changed the role of our volunteers. Before the pandemic, we were able to go outside, organize a walk, talk to people and advocate for children. Now, we have to be more cautious with no unnecessary physical contact between volunteers and children. That's for the safety of both sides.

Most of our activities now are online. For example, we recruited professional psychologists to volunteer with us to provide counseling sessions for youth who need mental health support.

We also recruited a videographer and editor, to produce an interview with a doctor and psychologist who provided tips and advice on how to cope with the lockdown.

All the UN Volunteers are now working from home. Personally, I don't think this change is a problem. We have to adapt to it, be flexible and have the right mentality of "nothing can stop you". We have worked with great team

spirit and we were able to launch the three initiatives.

## **Vulnerable children face a "wide range of risks"**

“ Even prior to the pandemic, children were vulnerable in our society. Lockdown measures due to COVID-19 have exposed children to a wide range of risks. Many families lost their sources of income so there can be heightened tensions in the household; stressed parents or caregivers, social isolation and increased risk factors for violence at home.

The children I have spoken to are very resilient; Some say it's good that they get to be with their parents more, some say that they want to go to school and play with their friends.

## **Acting as "big sister" following family loss**

My little brother died on a rainy day in September 2018. I loved watching him grow up, how he took his first steps; sadly I had to see the place where he took his last steps, as well. Ever since I lost my brother, I have wanted to recapture that feeling of being the big sister again; that is my passion.

As a UN Volunteer, I now have thousands of brothers and sisters who could benefit from my strength, my personal skills and my professional abilities. I think this is my calling, this is my passion. No matter what I do at UNICEF if I could make one child's life a little bit better. It's worth everything to me.

“ Some people take pleasure in making someone's life a little bit better. I am one of those people.

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