HIV awareness is series’ crusade

As figures of HIV-infected Filipinos rise, the need to raise awareness of the disease to prevent the figures from ascending further is what prompted director Chris Martinez and author Segundo Matias Jr. to create a series based upon the latter’s best-selling young adult reader, Mga Batang Poz.

Both author and director agreed to focus on the question of how people with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) or “poz” move forward and live normal, productive lives in spite of the stigma and isolation. What can families and friends do for a loved one who has HIV?

So, the series Mga Batang Poz came about. It started streaming on iWant on 26 July — for free, said the two in a recent press conference, to enlighten the audience, young and old, on the risks of being infected and also the prudence of engaging in protected sex to avoid infection.

The streaming of the series is also meant to shed light on HIV and give hope to HIV-positive people and their loved ones, underscoring that having the virus is not the end of someone’s life.

Mga Batang Poz is about the journey of four HIV-positive teenagers played by Mark Neumann, Fino Herrera, Paolo Gumabao and Awra Briguela.

The six-episode series takes the audience to what HIV-positive people from different backgrounds face every day: questioning what it means to live after knowing their diagnosis, managing their disease via antiretroviral medications and braving judgment from families, friends and society.

After finding each other in a social media support group for “poz’s” using their online alter egos, Gab, Luis, Enzo and Chuchay decide to meet at a coffee shop. From there, they form a bond and start a road trip together to search for hope, overcome their despair and uncertainties, and accept their present situation so they could move forward and fulfill their dreams.

Apart from the series, iWant also continues the dialogue in an exclusive special called Poz Talk with Karen Davila. Here, the four lead stars, the author of the novel and HIV-positive people bravely share their stories. It also started streaming on 26 July on iWant.

If you’re among many Filipinos who are not aware of HIV-AIDS, then this series could be your intro to the understanding of the disease that once rocked the world in the 80s. At the time, many Filipinos thought it was a disease that only infected Caucasian people until the first Filipino AIDS patients started coming home and dying in their native land. Many of these patients’ families kept the cause of the death of their sons a secret, though many also started talking about them in coffee shops.

The government’s Department of Health (DoH) said that the Philippines has the fastest growing HIV infections in the Asia-Pacific region. And majority of these are also reported to be among the young, aged 15 to 24. That’s according to the Philippine National AIDS Council in 2018. The DoH reported that 38 new HIV cases are reported daily this year, up from last year’s 32 a day.
Whether or not the figures alarm you, it is best that you know how HIV can change the course of your children’s lives and yours, too.

Mga Batang Poz was adapted into series by writer Jerry Gracio and is produced by Unitel, StraightShooters Inc. and Dreamscape Digital.

It also stars Yayo Aguila, Bobby Andrews, Joem Bascon, Gardo Versoza, Rita Avila, Mark Rivera, Benedict Campos, Raven Molina, Chesca Iñigo, Patty Mendoza, Soliman Cruz, Tarek El Tayech, Dolly De Leon, Marina Benipayo, Chienna Filomeno, Ricardo Cepeda, Andrew Gan, Arnold Reyes, Angeli Agbayani and Irma Adlawan.

The official soundtrack is also available on Spotify, featuring the songs “Gusto Kong Lumipad” by Agsunta, “Nothing On” by Kidwolf, “Puro Laro” by Carlo Bautista, “Ano Nga Ba Tayo?” by JMKO, “Sasamahan Kita” by Loisa Andalio and “Gitna” by Davey Langit. (For HIV counseling, testing, treatment and life coaching queries, contact Love Yourself Inc. through e-mail at info@loveyourself.ph or visit www.loveyourself.ph. You may also reach the National Youth Commission hotlines at 426-8479 and 371-4603).

THE cast of “Mga Batang Poz” with director Chris Martinez (rightmost), Love Yourself project manager Danvic Rosadino (second from right) and author Segundo Matias Jr. (third from left).

A fan’s bold and daring success

An avid fan of Heart Evangelista, Ghie Pangilinan’s eyes are always glued to the TV screen, watching out for Heart. She is also always updated on her idol’s personal life. And, guess what, she supports almost all of her endorsements.

Ghie, though, has her own dreams and goals. She says Heart is a big part of it as she feels that the actress is a strong influencer, especially in running a business.

This fan’s character is one that we can call bold and daring after all of the challenges of life she has hurdled. These, for her, were a “piece of cake.”
Now Ghi is a successful online seller — she is, in fact, a millionaire.

Ghi’s story can inspire countless women who are hopeless about realizing their dreams. A 38-year-old mother of four, she is the eldest in a brood of three.

And while tracking all the ‘what’s ups’ in the life of her idol Heart, Ghi didn’t give up on her own life, continuing to strive harder.

It was in 2003 when Ghi started to face the hurdles and obstacles of life. Pregnant with her first baby when she got married with a seaman, she was left to care for her firstborn alone.

It was what millennials call an “LDR” or Long Distance Relationship, and it was really hard for them, but they thought it was necessary so they could save for the future of their family.

In 2004, using the money she was able to save, Ghi tried going into her first business. She sold hamburgers and at a small store she opened at the front of her house.

The following year, although her capital was not that big, she opened a telemarketing business but after some months, all of these went kaput. She was saddled with unpaid loans from friends and families.

She then worked at Pure Gold Supermarket in 2009 and attempted to move to London but didn’t get a visa. She also tried finding work in Dubai, UAE, but after two months she was back in Manila.

That time, online businesses were thriving. Ghi bought different products in Divisoria, like gadgets, baby products, clothes and slippers and tried selling them online. Again she failed, losing all her savings.

In 2013, Ghi saw the opportunity to try another business. It was election year so she tried to sell election-related T-shirts. She even rented a van so she could sell the shirts in the city. Unfortunately, she got hoodwinked and didn’t earn anything, losing a huge amount of money instead.

Yet, Ghi saw a ray of light at the end of the tunnel.

She and her sister discovered rejuvenating skin care products. They both thought of rebranding it to become their own product. They called it Speaks G. They started the new business with only P7,000 as initial investment and luckily, this started it all.

At this point, Lady Luck met Ghi. Her husband and her sister came home and worked with her.

Then a strong competitor stepped into the industry and affected their sales. Some of their branches closed down in a short span of time.

“Masakit at nakakalungkot ang nangyari pero walang sukuan. Ang sabi nga, (It’s painful and sad but there is no giving up. As they say), no guts, no glory,” Ghi said.

This time, she seemed to play her cards right when they eventually became a distributor of a big skin care brand. And just like any other business, it had challenges. It was a rollercoaster ride but despite all the odds, she pushed on.

In 2015, Ghi was introduced to a skincare products manufacturer where terms and consignment deals were flexible.

With the help of her family and strong support from her husband, Skin Magical was born. At first, they found it hard to sell their new product but because of their diligence, Skin Magical became their key to success.
In 2016, Skin Magical had become a household name in skin and beauty. She brought back her Speaks G product, paid their debts and bought vans and trucks for the company. And finally, they also acquired their very own house and lot.

In August 2018, Ghie faced another hurdle. Her sister died of aneurysm. Her passing saddened Ghie, but it also strengthened her resolve to keep the business they both helped grow when she was still alive.

Today, Ghie and her family are helping those who want to try their luck in business.