



MANILA CENTRAL UNIVERSITY
STUDENT VOLUNTEER OPTOMETRIC SERVICES
TO HUMANITY



Serving Beyond Vision: Celebrating the 2026 SVOSH Leadership Awardee

by: Jennifer Lyn G. Viñola, O.D., MAEd, AAMM
DIRECTOR (2024-2027), BOARD LEAD ASIA
FACULTY ADVISER, SVOSH-MCU Chapter Philippines

Every year, the **Student Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity (SVOSH) Leadership Award** is presented to a graduating student who has demonstrated exceptional commitment to volunteerism, leadership, and humanitarian service. More than recognizing academic achievement, the award honors a student who embodies the true mission of SVOSH, to use optometry as a means of serving communities, restoring dignity, and improving lives through accessible eye care. The award recognizes outstanding performance and selfless devotion of time and talent in the activities and projects of the SVOSH-MCU Chapter.

This year, the **2026 SVOSH Leadership Award** is proudly conferred upon **Jhessa Mharie O. Cortez**, Assistant Secretary of the SVOSH-MCU Chapter (A.Y. 2025–2026). Throughout her years in the College of Optometry, Jhessa consistently exemplified what it means to lead with compassion. She was an active participant in community eye health missions, willingly shared her time and skills in outreach activities, and inspired fellow student volunteers through her quiet dedication and genuine concern for others. Her service extended beyond fulfilling responsibilities, it reflected a sincere desire to ensure that quality eye care reaches those who need it most.

Jhessa's selection as this year's awardee reflects not only the countless hours she devoted to volunteer work but also the values she consistently demonstrated. Whether serving patients in underserved communities, supporting fellow volunteers, or representing the ideals of SVOSH, she approached every opportunity with humility, professionalism, and empathy. She has shown that leadership is measured not by titles but by the willingness to serve others with consistency and heart.

For Jhessa, volunteerism has never been simply an extracurricular activity. It is deeply rooted in the values she learned growing up.

"Receiving the Student Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity Award is both an honor and a reminder of why I chose this path. Long before I dreamed of becoming an optometrist, I had already learned what it meant to serve. As a child, I witnessed my grandmother and my aunt dedicate their time to community service in our hometown. They never expected anything in return."

They simply believed that if you have the ability to help, you should. Today, that same spirit continues to guide me."

Those early lessons continue to shape the way she practices optometry and approaches community service. Every outreach experience has strengthened her belief that vision care should be available to everyone, regardless of financial circumstances or where they live.

"Every outreach reminds me that many people still live without access to basic eye care because of financial limitations, distance, or simply because these services are unavailable in their communities. Seeing patients smile after receiving an eye examination or their first pair of spectacles reminds me why volunteerism matters. It allows me to use the knowledge and skills I have gained to make a meaningful difference in people's lives. Quality eye care should never be a privilege reserved for only a few."

While grateful for the recognition, Jhessa views the award not as the culmination of her journey but as motivation to continue serving beyond graduation.

"This recognition is not the destination but an inspiration to continue serving. It represents something far greater than personal achievement. It reflects the values instilled in me from an early age and the mentors, patients, and fellow volunteers who have inspired me along the way. As I move forward in my profession, I hope to continue reaching underserved communities, advocating for accessible and equitable eye care, and encouraging future volunteers to use their skills in the service of others. I believe the greatest measure of our profession is not only how many patients we care for within our clinics, but also how many lives we are able to reach beyond them. Through service, we have the power to restore not only vision, but also dignity, opportunity, and hope."

The SVOSH-MCU Chapter proudly celebrates **Jhessa Mharie O. Cortez** for embodying the ideals of volunteerism and humanitarian service. Her journey reminds us that true leadership is found in compassion, generosity, and the willingness to serve without expecting recognition. As she begins the next chapter of her career, the entire SVOSH family is confident that she will continue to make a lasting impact, not only as an optometrist, but as a humanitarian dedicated to bringing clearer vision and greater hope to communities everywhere.