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Dear Friends,

One of the primary goals of the Lingap Center staff is to assist children, many of whom have seen life at its absolute worst, to transition back into their communities as fully functioning citizens once they ultimately leave the Center. In my November, 2019 update letter, I gave you a little insight into the day-to-day lives of the kids. Today I thought you might like to know what is being done to help with their transition back into their communities and further, to become productive members of Philippine society.

Many of the Lingap children were born in remote, poverty-stricken provinces without the aid of doctors or hospitals, or perhaps they were simply abandoned on the streets. Children often arrive at the Center with little or no legal documentation such as birth or baptismal certificates. Through no fault of their own, without such documentation the children will have difficulty registering for school and as a result, they simply are not able to attend. Some of the children may not even know their true names! Not having a formal identity also precludes them from ever attending college or vocational schools, so obtaining meaningful work can be difficult, if not impossible. In other words, they will in all likelihood, continue the endless cycle of poverty and face life as outcasts. In an effort to correct this social injustice, one of the primary functions for our five social workers is to establish formal identities for them. This is no easy task, since they are required to interview family members (*if any*), neighbors, barangay captains or anyone else who might be able to assist in legally proving who the children are. Once this research is done, court papers must be completed and followed up on in a very bureaucratic and frustrating system. When the children eventually leave the Center, all of them will have formal documents which will help to open the doors for promising futures. The Lingap social workers are truly miracle workers in being able to provide this critical, life-changing service for the children.

We also strive to involve the children in as many community activities as possible. One such activity is the annual Sinulog Festival, or Feast of the Santo Nino (*Feast of the Baby Jesus*). Sinulog is a national festival held at the end of January each year throughout the Philippines. It consists of a dance ritual that commemorates the time when Filipinos first embraced Christianity. It is a spectacular display of colorful costumes, floats and street dancing, including parades throughout the streets of the various cities. The event brings thousands of tourists to the Philippines. Each year, the Lingap children create and make their own costumes to participate in this annual event. The Lingap kids and staff are always a major part of the local festivities. It generates a strong sense of belonging and a sense of pride in their heritage, culture and their community.



2020 Sinulog Festival Parade.

The children are also very involved in the local church activities at St. John de Sahagun parish. Every Saturday

evening, the children go to the church to clean it in preparation for the Sunday Masses. This activity was initiated by our own Lingap Children's Council, the kids governing body, as a way for them to 'give back' to the community. Then on Sunday morning, they serve as acolytes (*altar servers*) and our choir is the official church choir! Speaking of the choir, as I have mentioned in previous update letters, they are extremely good and are often asked to perform at weddings, funerals, baccalaureate events at local schools or during barangay fiestas. They love doing it because again, it is a way that they can give back and be involved. Additionally, it generates in them a sense of pride and it raises their stature throughout the community.

On the Third Saturday of each month, we hold a children's Mass at the Lingap Center, called the 'Third Saturday Outreach.' We always invite all of the less fortunate children in the area to attend if they wish. Mass is then celebrated by a local priest. Following Mass, we provide a 'soup kitchen' during which we provide a meal for all of our guests. Typically, we will host between 200 and 300 children, but in January of 2011, over 5000 were in attendance - and we fed them all!!! (*a video of this can be seen on our website at: lingapcenter.org. The video is entitled: "A Look at Lingap."*) It was an unbelievable event but again, each month the Lingap kids extend open arms to their community.

The goal of 'Summerlympics' is to build a more peaceful and better world by educating the children through sports. It is practiced without discrimination and in a kind, Olympic spirit which requires mutual understanding through a sense of friendship, solidarity and fair play. Included are competitions in volleyball, basketball, badminton and a cheer-leading dance competition. While events are held at a number of venues, one of the major locations is our own Lingap basketball court where we welcome children from throughout the city.

In December of each year, in conjunction with the local government, the Lingap kids participate in the Summer Tree / Mangrove Planting, during which they plant trees as a way of becoming environmentally aware. It teaches the children to be good stewards of our planet and to understand the impact we all have on the environment and their own community.

Finally, in May of each year, the Lingap Center hosts the annual Lingap Honor Society and Homecoming event. This is a huge fiesta held at the Lingap Center, specifically to honor the Lingap kids for their academic achievements. I have written about this in the past (*July 2018*). It is a beautiful event featuring cultural dances choreographed by the children themselves (*with an assist from the staff*) and very colorful theme-based costumes that they make entirely by themselves. Former Lingap wards come 'home' to the Lingap Center to take part. Teachers, school administrators, local governmental officials and neighbors all attend. It is a breathtaking event. It never ceases to amaze me how creative the children are. It is also more than gratifying to see the kids who have gone on to have families of their own, become adults espousing Lingap values. They always recognize and express very deep gratitude to all of you, our supporters, who helped to change their lives for the better. Clearly, they have not forgotten their roots.



Honor society and homecoming performance.

Continuing with the theme of community support and involvement, I would now like to take a look back for a moment, to November of 2013 when the Philippines was struck by the horrific Super Typhoon Yolanda (*known locally as Typhoon Haiyan*), the worst typhoon in recorded history. It roared ashore on the islands of Leyte and Cebu with sustained winds in excess of 200 mph with a relentless and terrible vengeance. An estimated 6,300 or more individuals lost their lives. While the Lingap Center was spared, the children were emotionally shaken



November 2013 Super Typhoon Yolanda - People who had little, lost everything.

by it. With the support of the staff, the Lingap Children's Council organized and the kids prepared 1,200 small relief packages. We then traveled to some of the most devastated areas, where it would be days before the major relief organizations would arrive, to distribute their humble relief packages. Even though the packages were very small, containing only a small bottle of water, some canned goods, and a package of rice, it was very symbolic to those who received them. As the children personally distributed their 'gifts of life,' the victims recognized and understood that someone, the Lingap children, cared about them which gave them hope, which was priceless. The experience had a very deep and meaningful impact on all of the Lingap wards. It reinforced our teachings that "helping others is the greatest gift you can give to yourself!" I was with them on that very difficult day and I have to admit that was the single most spiritual, emotional or educational day that I had ever experienced. The sadness, pain and anguish we saw was almost overwhelming. It left an impression with me and I'm sure with the children, that will last forever. Frankly, I still vividly remember the human tragedy we witnessed. Later in the day after returning to the Lingap Center, three of the kids came to me in tears from the experience, to tell me that their goal in life was to help others as they have been helped. The experience helped them to understand the gift that all of you have given to them by making the Lingap Center possible and how they in turn, can help to improve the lives of others.

As always, I could go on and on, but I hope you are now aware of some of the many things happening at the Lingap Center to try to prepare the children to be the ambassadors of good will in their own community and throughout the Philippines. As mentioned above, our goal is to help them enter Philippine society as valued contributing leaders. But please never forget that all of this is happening only because of people like you. We could not possibly do it alone and never forget that 100% of your donations have all gone directly to the benefit of the children.

As I was writing this update letter, I could not help but remember a quote I heard long ago which is attributed to Carlos Slim, in which he said,



A few of the Lingap children.

"Most people try to make a better world for our children when what they should be doing is making better children for our world."

I believe that with your help, that is exactly what we are striving to achieve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Drake'.

John Drake