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Dear Friends,

In February of this year, the Philippine government lifted the COVID travel restrictions which had been in place since early 2020. That meant that I was finally able (*after two-very-challenging years of 'covid-chaos' and then the incredibly devastating December Typhoon Odette*) to visit the Lingap Center. I thought you might like an update as we work to restore things to a level of relative normalcy.

When I arrived at the Center on April 8, all 97 of our current wards lined up to welcome me 'home.' It was a wonderful homecoming. They sang '*What a Wonderful World*' (*my favorite song of all time*) which holds a lot of personal significance for me as they were all aware. There were many new faces in the crowd, and I missed many who were no longer with us since they are now grown and have moved on into adulthood. The older wards, all of whom have seemingly grown at least 3 inches or more over the last two years, were anxious to ask if I still remembered them and their names etc. The new kids were curious to find out who this 'Tito John Drake' fellow was? One of the younger new ones apparently had been counting the days until I arrived, but he was too shy to speak to me directly. One young man wanted to meet with me privately, to tell me just how grateful he is to be living at

the Lingap Center, and he asked me to be sure to thank all of his benefactors (*you*)! We also have three new staff members, whom I was anxious to meet. Since the inception of the Lingap project, approximately 700 young lives have received some level of support, encouragement and guidance from the Lingap Center staff.



*The kids enthusiastically helped "Olpan Taban."*



*...and how some of the Lingap wards have grown!*

The December 16 typhoon destruction and terror was far worse than I had imagined. As I mentioned in my January update letter, the Lingap Center building and campus only suffered a few broken windows and the loss of our mango trees. But the surrounding community suffered greatly. Many people are still displaced, four months later. It was an eye-opening experience to see some of it, with many dwellings and schools in our neighborhood still without roofs or simply destroyed completely. The kids told me that the nonstop, howling 'banshee' winds that

continued for 11 hours (*from 6:00 pm until 5:00 am the following morning*) with only a four-hour respite as the eye of the storm passed directly overhead, were absolutely terrifying. The fear is still apparent in their faces as they told me about it. I thank God that the Lingap Center is very well built and that we were able to provide shelter for some neighbors who lost everything and were crying for help during the height of the storm. I am extremely proud to tell you that a group of our older wards and staff have since joined with a church group to help build some small homes or shelters for several of those in the community who lost everything. The project was called “Oplan Tabang” which means “Operation Help.” The kids have truly learned the lesson that helping others is the greatest gift that they can give to themselves!!

As mentioned above, we are in the process of returning to some semblance of normalcy - but we aren't there yet. You will recall that the Lingap Center is a residential care facility. We are not a school although education is our primary objective after food, safety, shelter, health and spiritual development. The kids normally would attend several schools throughout the community. However, the schools are still closed due to COVID and the ravages of the typhoon, so we continue to teach classes utilizing our part-time tutors and Lingap Center staff, closely following the schools teaching modules. Our computer lab has been a Godsend, but keep in mind that the majority of the schools and most teachers do not have access to computers, so we are a step ahead of them. Students in the community at large are still not able to attend classes or even do the teaching modules. From an educational perspective, for them, the past two years have been totally lost.

Due to the pandemic, our choir had to be disbanded. Sadly, we also lost many of our older choir members as they have grown and moved on to lives of their own. Consequently, on Sunday, April 10, we held auditions in preparation for beginning of a brand-new choir. It will be a year or two of rebuilding, but as you saw in our September 2021 online webinar, we have a lot of very talented young singers in the group. Watching them grow into a performing choir is pretty exciting and extremely rewarding. At the same time, we have restarted our string ensemble lessons.

You will recall that during the pandemic, despite great personal sacrifice, the staff had gone to a week on, week off work schedule. Earlier this month, they finally returned to their normal eight-hour shifts, which is a very big step for all towards getting back to normal and getting them back with their families.



*A few of the Lingap kids....*



*The house parents helped bring the classroom to the Center during Covid.*

Our weekly Zumba classes, designed to improve the health of both the staff and kids, resumed in person instruction on April 9. I also met with our parish priest regarding the resumption of our Third Saturday children's Community Outreach Mass. We have been able to resume it for the Lingap kids, but due to COVID protocols, we are still unable to extend an invitation to the children in the community. We will do so as soon as the protocols are lifted.

In spite of past, sometimes horrific personal life

situations and challenges, not to mention the pandemic and storms, what strikes me most of all is how very happy the kids are. They are truly one family, all of whom care deeply for one another. This is possible only thanks to you. You have no idea how great the impact that all of you collectively have had on their lives, their dreams and their futures. Thank you all so much.

Looking back at the past two years, I am reminded of a quote from Isabelle Eberhardt, in which she said:

**“From every ruin, life springs up again and everything that dies is born again.”**

Clearly, the Lingap Center project is in the process of being born again and we are looking ahead to the continuation of our mission of helping as many of the world's most disadvantaged children as we possibly can. Ralph Waldo Emerson was absolutely right when he said:

**“It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man can sincerely help another without helping himself.”**

Clearly, the biggest winner of all, is me. It has been a “beautiful compensation” for me. Thank you for helping to make it possible.

Sincerely,



John Drake

P.S. Several of you have asked where exactly Toledo City, Cebu, Philippines and the Lingap Center is located. We are on the western coast of the island of Cebu, directly across from the island of Negros, in the Central Visayas. It is about an hour and 15 minutes by air south of Manila, the nations' capital, and an approximate three-hour drive across the island from the airport in Cebu City. Below is a map for your reference.

