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Dear Friends,

Typically, my letters are all about the kids, their activities and successes etc. But this time, I thought you might like to know a little more about the impact that the Lingap project has on the broader Toledo City community. It is much more extensive than you may think..... a whole lot more!

In everything we do, the Lingap organization strives to be a good community citizen. This can be seen by providing jobs and other opportunities for our 25 full-time staff and five part-time employees, all of whom come from the Toledo City area. In most cases, these employees are the primary support for their own families. As an additional benefit, we extend the Lingap Education Program to the full-time staff and their children. We also purchase all of the food for 100 kids, clothing and other needs from city markets. Everything is purchased locally (*to the extent possible*) in an effort to help as many merchants as we can.

Not all of the Lingap kids are true orphans. Many of our wards come from families suffering from extreme poverty. Since it is my hope that we can help these struggling families, we take the kids in to give them nutritious meals, give them a safe place to live and we send them to school. I believe that the only way to break the insidious chain of poverty gripping so many of them is through education. Our wards, from these families in particular, are excited to be able to attend school and college, because they hope to one day be able to help to raise their families from poverty and help their siblings to have a brighter future as well. In this way, the larger families of the kids are also the beneficiaries of Lingap support and activities. Additionally, we always invite their families to attend Lingap activities such as our Third Saturday Children's Masses and the Lingap Honor Society event each May.

We are one of the largest supporters of St. John de Sahagun Catholic Church in Toledo City. As a requirement for our help, I have ensured that the support we give to the church is always focused on programs aimed at street children or children in need. Additionally, Lingap kids are the altar servers, the choir and they periodically help to clean the church. We also make a special effort to invite children from the surrounding community to attend our Third Saturday Outreach Masses.

Speaking of the choir, our choir and string ensemble has performed at numerous community events, including funerals, weddings and at the malls in Cebu City. In 2016, they were even invited to be part of the larger choir that performed at the International Eucharistic Congress which was held in Cebu City that year. Sadly, it was the first year that the Pope could not attend, but there were cardinals, bishops and priests from all over the world present – and the Lingap kids were in the front row! They



The Lingap Children's Choir.

were tremendous representatives of Toledo City and their participation created a real sense of pride on their part and for the community as well!

The Lingap kids attend seven different schools in town and we do our best to help these schools. For example, several years ago, we coordinated a Rotary project which included three Philippine Rotary clubs, nine U.S. Rotary clubs and Rotary International, to construct a community library with a computer lab at the West Bay Learning Center (school).



New stairs at LaRosa Elementary School.

Another example of Lingap support for the schools was our funding of several classrooms at the Toledo City Science High School, as well as classrooms at LaRosa Elementary, where many of our elementary kids attend. Just last year, since LaRosa is built high on a very steep hill near the Lingap Center, we replaced some incredibly dangerous and deteriorating stairs with new ones. In the very remote community of Malubog, we provided the school's first-ever television, so their children could take advantage of the many new audio-visual educational programs that are now available. For a number of reasons, all of this is done totally anonymously.

The construction of the Lingap Center in 2005, the Lingap Learning Center in

2019, the classrooms and stairs projects among others, also provided much-needed jobs for many construction workers in the area. We have even taken street children with serious medical or dental conditions for doctor or dentist visits or to the hospital for treatment.

In 2013, the Lingap kids organized several relief missions following Typhoon Yolanda (locally named Typhoon Haiyan) which hit the islands of Leyte and Cebu. It was the worst typhoon in recorded history with sustained winds of 175 - 200 mph. While their 'relief packages' were very small, what mattered most to the storm victims, in the most remote areas we could reach, was just knowing that someone cared. This also served as a tremendous learning experience for the kids as they recognized how important it is to help other people in need! During the December 2021 Typhoon Odette, we provided shelter and food to a number of local citizens who had no other place to go.



People who had nothing, lost everything but hope.

In my January 2024 update letter, I mentioned that we had achieved the

Level III accreditation rating from the Philippine Department of Social Welfare and Development. This is the highest possible rating and very few organizations in the entire country have ever achieved it. Since then, we have received numerous requests from other organizations to visit the Lingap Center to see how we did it. Early last year, ABSNET (*Area-Based Standards Unit – an advisory group for non-government organizations*) brought 70 of their members to the Lingap Center for their first quarterly meeting and to conduct a ‘Best Practices Seminar.’ They took many pictures, copied our policies, procedures and programs in hopes that they might be able to achieve even a Level I rating. Jojin Ladroma, Lingap Center Manager, was recently elected as the 2nd Regional Vice Chairman of ABSNET. She is frequently contacted for advice and guidance. We also received a request from a university in Mindanao (*an island in the Southern Philippines*) to send their third-year social work students to the Center to study what we do and how we do it.

In summary, while the Lingap Center has had **791** wards who have passed through our doors with **43** college or vocational graduates (*so far*) since we opened our doors in 2006, our reach goes much, much farther than it appears. I can safely say that the Lingap Center staff and all of you have touched the lives of literally thousands of people and children who now have a chance at a better life. How can I ever thank you enough for helping to make such a significant impact possible?



41 of our 43 college or vocational graduates.

My favorite Bible quote is from the Book of Galatians, 6:9, which says: **“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time, we will reap a harvest if we do not give up!”**

I always tell the kids that “helping others is the greatest gift you can give to yourself!” Having said that, I must admit that I totally love what I do! This project has been an absolutely wonderful gift to me. I have already “reaped a harvest” far greater than anything I could ever have imagined. But we could never have achieved any of it, if it wasn’t for people like all of you. Please just think of the thousands of kids, families and community members who you will probably never meet, but whose lives you have helped to change in such a positive way. Thank you all so much.

Sincerely,

John Drake