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Dear Friends,

One of the greatest challenges we face with the children at the Lingap Center is instilling a belief in themselves. They belong to a culture where education is not mandatory and as a result, it is not a deep-rooted value. Being abandoned, abused, neglected or coming from the streets, they often doubt their own abilities or self-worth. Consequently, we do all we can to turn that around. As you are aware, our #1 priority is education because it truly is the only pathway out of poverty available to them. But an education by itself is no guarantee. They must also be 'the best' in order to have any hope of a brighter future.

May 28 marked the date of our 7th Annual Lingap Honor Society and Homecoming celebration and what a wonderful event it was. This event is without a doubt, our premier event of the entire year! It is an event that I will never miss - ever - for any reason! It is a celebration of all of the children's academic successes and it ties together all that the Lingap project stands for. As I mentioned above, education is critically important and Honor Society is an attempt to show the kids that learning has its own rewards and can be more than fun. It is an opportunity for the children to showcase their incredible talents and motivate them to work together as a team and strive to excel in everything they do. But what is so exciting for me is that the kids don't even realize all of the learning that is built into the event! We try very hard to also include the arts along with their academic performance. You may recall that at the Lingap Center, we strive to nurture their bodies, minds and souls and instill in them a core set of solid values.



*Fr. Ignacio blesses the new Lingap Learning Center.*

The evening began with the official dedication of the new Lingap Learning Center. You may recall from my February 2019 update letter, that the new building was completed in November of last year. The landscaping was completed in April and the building is now in full use. For the first time, we have a home for children who are still in school but are too old to live with the little ones. In this way, they can continue their educations regardless of their age! Additionally, we have a new, larger library and computer lab which will certainly benefit their school work. We also now have a maintenance shop and some much-needed storage! Fr. Ignacio Inanoria from St. John de Sahagun parish in Toledo City celebrated Mass followed by a blessing of the entire facility. It was a wonderful event.

The dedication was followed by a celebratory dinner which was attended by several hundred people, including city officials, school teachers, school administrators, catechists from St. John de Sahagun parish, friends of the Lingap Center, relatives (*if any*), staff family members, former Lingap wards and others as a show of support for them. Our cooks and the kids certainly outdid themselves preparing the food. It was a feast like none other featuring the much-loved Philippine favorite, lechon (*like our Thanksgiving turkey*)! And for me, there were desserts galore such as buko pandan, (*a coconut milk gelatin*) cakes and some mango things that were too good for me to even be able to describe. (*I love that sort of thing!*)

Following dinner, the formal event began, which featured cultural dances by the staff and the children. The kids and staff made all of their own costumes and choreographed each of the dances. One featured presentation was the ‘Trashion Show,’ in which the kids costumes were all made from trash, such as garbage bags, disposable cups, newspapers, magazines, straw and leaves called “Kaban-Kaban.” This was part of an initiative to teach them environmental responsibility - but the costumes they made were beyond belief. Their creativity is incredible.



*Performing to the Toledo Hinulawan theme song.*



*Alesa's beautiful gown is made from 'Kaban-kaban' leaves.*



*Their dancing skills are tremendous!*



*The 'Trashin Show'.*

Our Lingap choir performed, and as you know from previous letters, they are extremely good. They are in great demand to perform at community events and other venues - including their 2016 appearance at the International Eucharistic Congress in Cebu City for Catholic cardinals and bishops from all over the world! This was followed by a performance by our Lingap string ensemble. One of our most recent college graduates, told her life story: how the Lingap Center changed her life. It was a way for her to say thank you and in the process, she became proficient in public speaking and gained a lot of poise and self-confidence. Another ward performed a very moving 'declamation' or one-person drama about a child in poverty. I have no words that can effectively describe it other than "unbelievably fantastic!"

While everyone enjoyed the colorful and inspirational performances, the most important event of the evening was the awarding of certificates for academic achievement, thereby reinforcing the importance of learning. We presented three acrylic plaques, one to each of the top performers in elementary, high school and college. These three students will have their photos placed on the wall in the Lingap Center as role models for the others. Interestingly, the quest to achieve the top honors has become very competitive over the years as all of the kids want to be the ones in the wall photos! It also shows in their school work!



*All are so proud of their academic awards!*



*These recipients are so happy with their awards!*

Additionally, it was a celebration for our 30 college graduates to date. Please keep in mind that all of these children came from very humble beginnings, often begging on the streets just to survive. Now, we have had 30 college graduates all of whom are beginning to give back to the community. One of them, received a degree in nursing and has been accepted into medical school. He will soon be a doctor - whose life goal is "to help other less fortunate children, such as he was." I could not be prouder of them all than I am right now.

But the very best part of the evening for me was that 15 or 20 of our former wards "came home" to see us. They included many of the original 26 kids I found living in a pig slaughterhouse back in 2003, with no hope, no future and no place to go. People often ask me if the kids are grateful for all that they have been given. The honest answer is "yes and no." Little kids do not realize what is being done for them, but those that have gone out on their own, and have faced the harsh realities of the world, see it all very clearly. Gratitude for them, is not just a word. **To these children, gratitude**



*The 'Homecoming' of the original Wards was a highlight of the evening.*

**is everything.** There were tears and hugs and so many emotions. In fact, I tear up just remembering it. I can't help it. Their expressions of thanks to us and to all of you, their supporters, were heartfelt and deep. To quote many of them, ***"without you, I am nothing!"*** The kids returning home made me remember the words of that wise childhood philosopher, Winnie the Pooh, when he said:

***"If there ever comes a day when we can't be together, keep me in your heart. I will stay with you forever."***

The Philippine school year begins in June and ends in March. So, the 2019/20 year began for the kids on Monday, June 3. They all returned to school after a very full summer, anxious to see what the new year would hold!

I want to thank all of you, our supporters, for making all of this possible; for giving the less fortunate children a chance at life; a chance to make a difference in their own communities and a chance to help others along the way. You have touched their lives in a very deep and meaningful way. The Honor Society and Homecoming event was a celebration of all of this.

I did my best to try to describe it for you and I can only hope that you get a sense of the impact that your support has had on them. Also remember that since the Board of Directors and I pay all administrative fees, 100% of your donations went directly to the benefit of the kids. I can have all of the great ideas in the world, but without you behind us, none of this would have been possible. Thank you all so much!

Sincerely,

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

John Drake



***'Gratitude' is not just a word; it is everything.***