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Dear Friends,

My past update letters have told many stories of individual Lingap kids' successes; where they came from, how they arrived at the Lingap Center and the stories of their lives. However, I am often asked for more specific details about the project. My March 2017 letter told you quite a bit about the composition of our 22 full-time and two part-time staff members; what they do and how they face the daunting challenge of working to rebuild the lives of children who have no official records, such as birth certificates and what they do to help give them hope for the future.

Today, I would like to give you a little insight into some of the details of running the Center. First of all, I am often asked what the word "Lingap" means. In Tagalog, the national language, it literally means something like *emergency shelter*, *crisis center* or *to help*. In other words, the Lingap Center is a haven of safety for kids in need. They come to us from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD); from the police; or they are often referred to us by barangay captains or neighbors when they see a child in crisis. Keep in mind that it is my feeling that children are always better off staying with family. Sometimes however, for the good of the child, this is not possible. One of our four social workers will conduct a home visit to evaluate the situation and depending on the outcome of the study, they may take them in to the Center. Some are temporary wards, for example, while a court case may be going through the judicial system. In other words, our kids come to us through many differing avenues and not all stay with us for their entire childhood. It depends on many factors.

The kids range in age from 4 to 22 (if they are still in school). While our capacity is 100 children, we typically have approximately 90-95 in residence. In addition, this year we have 11 college and vocational students and 'independent living kids' (those who are still in school but are too old to live with the little ones). These students currently reside in boarding houses near their respective schools but they are supervised by members of the staff.



The Children love rice!

The Lingap Center is a 24 hour a day, 365 days per year operation, so our two cooks prepare approximately 110,000 meals annually – not including special occasions such as the Third Saturday Outreach Children's Mass and Soup Kitchen, or the annual "Honor Society and Homecoming" celebration of education. Of course, the children love to cook, so they always are there to help – especially our commercial cooking class students.

While we are not affiliated with any particular church or religion, it is certainly one of our primary values. Most of the children are Catholic since the Philippines is a predominantly Catholic country, but we have children and staff belonging to several different religions. We accept them all and ensure that they are given the opportunity to attend the church of their choice. All of the children are very active in church and they are quite devout! They are the altar servers, the

official choir and they even clean the church on Saturday evenings in preparation for Sunday Mass at our home parish, St. John de Sahagun in Toledo City. Since 2006, we have sponsored 123 for baptism.

One of our requirements is that all of the children must attend school even though it is not mandatory in the Philippines. In my opinion, education is the only route out of poverty available to them, so attendance is mandatory for all Lingap kids. The elementary and high school students, independent living as well as staff children who are included in our education program attend six different schools throughout the community. Our 11 college and vocational students also attend six different schools, colleges or universities, all on the island of Cebu and one, our pre-med student, attends school on the island of Negros.

Since the new Lingap Center opened in 2006, we have had 20 vocational or college graduates including one who recently received her Master's Degree in Horticulture. Others have obtained degrees in Hotel Restaurant Management, Advertising, Education, Marine Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Management Accounting and Social Work to name a few. Additionally, our vocational students have received licenses or Level II certifications in the areas of welding, electro mechanics, electrical technology and automotive technology. I am very proud to report that all of our graduates are now gainfully employed and some are even beginning to give back to the Lingap project. One recently enrolled in our "Place at the Table" sponsorship program so that she can help others in need, just as she was not too long ago. Two of our graduates are working aboard Norwegian Cruise Lines ships, one as a chef, with a degree in Culinary Arts and the other as a ship's photographer. I have received post cards from them from countless ports around the world!



The Lingap Children's Choir

at the International Eucharistic Congress in Cebu City. Sadly, it was the first year that the Pope was not able to attend, but there were cardinals and bishops from all over the world present and the Lingap kids were in the front row! Think of it, street beggars who were previously the outcasts in the community are now the Ambassadors of Goodwill to the world! This is possible only thanks to your help and to my very first Lingap child and her husband who are now giving back in a very big way. Together, you put out your hands and you touched the lives of a lot of kids in need. Not only that, but while the kids may not know you personally, they know without any doubt whatsoever that someone, somewhere really does care about them. That means everything to them!

In November of 2013, following the horrific Typhoon Yolanda that decimated the islands of Cebu and Leyte, the Lingap wards planned and conducted a relief mission to some of those areas most impacted by the storms. They prepared 1,200 relief packages which they personally delivered. I was with them and for me, it was the single most emotionally draining and spiritually uplifting day of my life. The kids' actions made it clear that they understood the lesson that 'helping others is the greatest gift that they can give themselves!' To a

The very first child I worked to help in the early 1990s, long before the Lingap Project became a reality, has since married. She and her husband now own a number of highly successful music studios in Cebu City. Every Sunday, they visit the Lingap Center with their chorale instructors, and string teachers. They are working with all the kids but especially the Lingap choir and our very own string ensemble. The kids are getting better with each passing week, so much so that in January of last year, they were invited to be part of the larger choir that sang



We put out our hand and touched their lives.



The children have learned the importance of helping others.

child, they were deeply moved by the experience and they are even more committed to helping others in need, like themselves. They also proved to those storm victims who had lost everything, that someone cared for them as well. It worked too. The gratitude I saw expressed towards the Lingap kids that day from the storm victims was heart-wrenching. It was proof that even the symbolic help that our small relief packages gave meant the world to those who received them. Someone cared regardless of how large or small the packages may have been.

As I think about the miracle that is the Lingap Center, I can't help but remember one of my very favorite songs from the original soundtrack *The Prince of Egypt*. It has been performed by many artists through the years but my absolute favorite version is the one performed by One Voice Children's Choir.

When you Believe

*"Now we are not afraid,
although we know there's much to fear.
We were moving mountains long before we knew we could."*

*There can be miracles, when you believe,
though hope is frail, it's hard to kill.
Who knows what miracles you can achieve....
when you believe, somehow you will...
you will when you believe."*

I hope you might find One Voice Children's Choir on YouTube. Please listen to this song and hopefully like me, you too will be reminded of the Lingap kids and agree that the Lingap project really is a miracle.



Thank you all for helping this dream come true for the Lingap kids; for providing them with hope for a brighter future and most importantly, for giving them the chance to believe in themselves. Who knows what miracles they will achieve? It simply would not have been possible without people like you.

Sincerely,

John Drake

P. S. There are so many stories that I could share with you, but perhaps you might have questions, or things you would like to know more about. If you do, please let me know. Perhaps I can include the answers to your questions in one or more of my future update letters. In other words, what would you like to know???