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November 2019

Dear Friends,

Typically, my update letters focus on some of the children or on a specific Lingap activity. Today, however, I thought that you might like a little insight into what everyday life is like for the kids at the Center. It is a very busy place as you will see.

On weekdays during the school year, the kids get up at 5:00 a.m. They slowly emerge from their rooms, shower and begin the day. During the school year, some iron their school clothes, some go out into the garden to tend their section, some help in the kitchen with breakfast preparations and others get the tables and chairs set up for the morning meal. Breakfast is at 6:00 and all sit down together as a family. No one begins eating until all are seated and they collectively say a blessing. No one leaves the table until all are finished eating. Then, they gather their trays and assigned groups wash the dishes, stack the chairs, mop the floors and take out the garbage etc. Just like a family, they each have household responsibilities. Then, they prepare their lunches and head to their rooms to get ready for school. Since the kids attend five different schools throughout the city, they leave at



Ready for school!

different times. Our vehicle makes four runs to get everyone to where they need to go.



Eating together as a family.

The kids begin to return home at around 4:30 or 5:00 p.m. (*depending on which school they attend*). This is the time when they generally relax, play basketball or jump rope or simply run around on the playground. At 6:00 p.m., all gather to pray the Rosary. One of them rings a little bell which calls them together. When they pray, they are on their knees on a hard tile floor and they are all very sincere and extremely devoted!! It is really something to experience. Dinner follows. Again, eating does not begin until all the children are seated. A

blessing before meals is led by one of the children (*each child takes a turn*). The evening routine starts with dinner clean up, free time and homework. Our tutor is available during this time to help anyone with their homework as needed. One by one, they begin to head off to bed around 8:30 p.m.

Saturdays begin with ‘morning devotions’ during which the kids share their deepest thoughts with each other in a group, based on a Gospel reading. This begins at 5:30 a.m. and it’s a very inspiring event during the quiet early morning hours. Frankly, it’s quite astounding to watch. Everyone participates - even the littlest ones and it can be very emotional since they often share the darkest hardships of their lives prior to coming to the Center. Believe it or not, I sometimes get pretty choked up! After devotions, they do their chores, such as washing their clothes (*everyone is responsible for their own and clothes are washed by hand*) and clean their rooms.

In the afternoon, we have our Zumba classes. We do this to ensure that the kids (*and staff*) exercise as a part of their wellness routine. Health has always been a big concern due primarily to diet and other issues. I have found that getting everyone moving has made a big improvement in their personal health. (*We have an RN who monitors things closely*). It has also significantly reduced our health-care budget! Our Zumba instructor is simply fantastic - I am exhausted just watching him in the 90+ degree heat! But everyone loves



Keeping healthy with Zumba.



Payag is a gathering area.

to keep moving to the fast-paced music and they are all working to keep in shape! (*Zumba classes are held twice a week*). Following Zumba, the children have free time to play, visit with each other, or are in the kitchen helping with the cooking (*they all love to cook*)! You can often find the children in our ‘payag’ (*a garden hut for relaxing*), singing, playing a made-up game or talking with one another. Basketball is a favorite at any time. Or, they do what whatever it is that kids do or they simply take a nap.

Sunday begins with our regular 6:30 a.m. Mass at St. John de Sahagun Church in Toledo City, where our kids are the altar servers and the ‘official’ church choir. After Mass, they return to the Center for breakfast followed by English as a Second Language classes. We have three levels of classes – for the little ones, for the bigger ones and another for the staff. Interestingly, they all **LOVE** it!! Our instructor is beyond good and the kids talk about the English classes far more than they do about their school! Even the staff members love it! The reason this is necessary is because perhaps only half of them speak English - yet once they graduate from college, the board exams are exclusively in English.

It is the business language of the world so in order for them to compete not only in the Philippines but in the world market, they really need to be able to read and speak English. Before they leave the Center, my goal is that everyone will be fluent!

Late on Sunday afternoon, our music program begins. Thanks to a generous donor, we have a string ensemble made up of violins, violas, cellos and guitars. We have two levels of students - very beginner and a little more advanced. *(In a couple of cases, the violins are as big as the child playing it!!)* In the office, guitar classes are taking place. Over in our new library, our senior choir is rehearsing *(they are off the charts good)*.

But there is a new twist - they are in the process of adding dance routines to the singing!! Our instructors are all volunteer and travel two hours, one way, just to get there to teach the classes each Sunday. The owner of the music company, is my very first Lingap kid!!! She and her husband have said that “this is their way of giving back.” They are so good in fact, that they are advisors for the Philippine team in the World Championship of Performing Arts Competition held in Los Angeles each year! *(Last year, some of their entries finished first in the world!)* It is amazing to think that this is the quality of training that the Lingap kids are receiving! As I have said so many times, the Lingap Center is simply a miracle. Our choir is going to try out later this month to *(hopefully)* be part of the Philippine team in the world competition. It’s great to see them set a goal such as this! Please keep them in your prayers.



All ready for church on Sunday.

While all of this is going on, over in the kitchen, some of our commercial cooking class kids are baking some of the best cinnamon rolls and hot sugar donuts on the planet Earth. If you want to know how good they are, just look at my waist! *(I limit myself to only four or five!!)* The birthday and wedding cakes are incredible and are sold for quite a bit. The money they make is shared by the cooking class members and is put in our own ‘financial co-op’ for them to learn money handling skills and to ensure that they will have money of their own when they ultimately leave the Center.



Produce from our garden.

Just think of it all this way: 500 or 600 kids *(so far)* who have seen life at its worst and previously had little or no hope what-so-ever for any kind of future, are now in school or college. Several of our first Lingap wards are now adults with good jobs and are beginning to start families of their own. All of them are learning Lingap values and to do gardening under the guidance of the staff, and maintenance *(welding and electrical)* with our maintenance man. They are learning to be skilled bakers in our commercial cooking

class (*and have been offered jobs as a result*). They are learning things that they can't get at school (*English*) and they are being exposed to the arts (*not taught in school*) at a level that is almost unheard of. Of course, there is so much more that I could share with you, but I hope that this gives you a little glimpse into what takes place at the Center. **All of this is possible only because of people like all of you. Please never forget that. Remember, 100% of your donations went directly to the benefit of the children.**



Kids doing what kids should be doing!

When I consider all that we have going on at the Center and why we are doing it, I am reminded of a quote from a Vietnamese philosopher, when he said:

“To reap a return in ten years, plant trees. To reap a return in 100, cultivate the children.”

Above, I said that the Lingap Center is a miracle and it truly is. But the greatest miracle of all is you - the people who help to make it all possible. Thank you so much for helping to ‘cultivate the children’ and to give them a chance to have better lives and to be instruments of hope for generations to come!

Sincerely,

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

John Drake