



Building houses in Philippines



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Community Service Project in the Philippines

by Sr Maria Ng, fmm

"Willing Hands..... Caring Hearts", a commitment made by 20 youths, 3 volunteers along with 3 staff, to the poor and needy in Philippines, was the Centre's main aim and focus, values which we hoped to inculcate in the youths participating in this community service project.

This year, unlike previous years' projects, some of the preparations like research and



planning were done by 3 youths who were currently clocking hours for their Gold Award in the National Youth Achievement Award.

OUR TASK ?

Be Construction workers for the duration of our project at Taguig, Metro Manila, working alongside with families from the slums who works at the worksites under a 'BUILDING HOMES SCHEME', a project of Habitat for Humanity Philippines.



It was a grueling yet refreshing experience for the youths to be in the hot sun, with an uncomfortable hardhat and thick gloves while engaging in shoveling and sieving sand, manual brick-making, steel fabrication, rolling and hauling steel wire mesh making, laying bricks, and forming long human chain to haul bricks and sandbags. It was an enduring first time experience for the youths at doing 9 to 5 manual work .

OUR CHALLENGE.....

This batch of youths had similar characteristics with other batches....their allergy towards anything that requires lots of energy, sweat and no self benefits. So it had always been the

Centre's greatest challenge through the year's programme to help them to overcome their natural inclinations, to test their mental boundaries, to go beyond their comfort zone and be challenged to explore their potentials.

Hence this project can be considered as a culmination of the efforts, ours and theirs against all odds.

The first 2 days saw a lot of enthusiasm and zeal in adjusting to a different rhythm of keeping time, of activity, of thinking patterns and accepting differences. In the evenings, time was set aside for a daily dose of personal reflection on questions such as 'What did you accomplish today.....what difficulties did you encounter.....how did you

handle it.....what did you see and learn' etc. Group evaluations feedback brought bountiful new and refreshing insights, and deeper awareness of oneself, others and the context at hand. It provided



opportunities to make necessary changes and avoid similar mistakes from occurring, and allow the next day to be yet again another opportunity to give one's better self to meet challenges. A debrief on what to expect for the next day's work and the various adjustments we intend to make helps everyone to work as a team with a united aim.



The next couple of days saw a settling down of working side by side with not only their own peers but also with the local engineers, workers as well as the potential owners of these homes being built for who were better known as Homepartners. It was another challenge posed to us to work side by side with them, in spite of our lack of experience and at times the barriers of language and culture. Through reflections, the team realized the differences of our culture in our Singaporean social inhibitions in comparison to the locals' exuberant social skills.

The last few days proved to be a source of inspiration to the Team leaders. In spite of their physical weariness which some were experiencing more than others, they surprised us with their unanimous stance to give their best and contribute as much as they could. A further resolution they made was to interact and bond more with the locals, especially the Homepartners.

SPECIAL EVENT

A SINGAPORE STYLE 'BAZAAR'

Part of our aim was to organize a Singaporean style 'Bazaar' at two slum communities. Baseco, a slum in the Dump known for its crucial state of poverty, and yet ironically their friendly, joyful and simple ways won the hearts of our youths.



The minute we got down from our bus, we were hit with a messy dump site that defy human dignity which made an impact on us all. After visiting the families, distributing

biscuits, we were swamped by bare feet children of all ages, babbling excitedly in Tagalog. Along the way, much of our concentration was also focused on avoiding the clumps of faeces strewn in the dirt path. The grimaces of the youths were indeed another sight to see, when one of us accidentally stepped on 'gold'!

An hour later, the Team was back at the community hall, all prepared for the crowd of villagers eager to begin their Christmas 'shopping'. Crowd control was a challenge but was managed efficiently in the end. The 450kg of clothing items were soon left quite diminished; we were relieved as we had promised the 'Taguig' people, another slum village, to hold a similar bazaar for them. This second Bazaar was planned and organized entirely by the youths themselves in the evening after our usual reflection and evaluation session. It was gratifying to see the Team's enthusiastic planning process and their



ability to organize, based on their experience at Baseco.



OUTCOME.....

- ⇒ More than 70 families in the Baseco slum received new clothings and other items. 12,000 Pesos were raised from it which were used to buy necessary groceries for the families.
- ⇒ Close to 30 families from the Taguig community received new clothings and the proceeds were channelled to purchasing necessary worksite gears for the Homepartners, to ensure greater safety.

FAREWELL.....time for saying "Selamat Po", our sincere thanks and appreciation

The above event was held at the worksite with a makeshift simple tent and chairs. Tokens of appreciation were presented to significant persons who had been great help and support to us during our stay. Our team had prepared two items to express our appreciation - a guitar and singing item from the Centre's guitar team and our Japanese team with their repertoire of Japanese drum beat, improvising drums and sticks with our hardhats and water bottles. In turn we were introduced to the talent and creativity of our Philippine counterparts with their singing and dance items. Overall it was a good closure to our project and experience of the locals.



YOUTH CORNER

In Singapore, I don't get a chance to do all this hard work.

The hardest part was the flattening of the top of the bricks, but it didn't stop me from accomplishing my task.

Visiting the slums at Baseco, I saw the differences between the place the poor lived and where I live in Singapore. I feel sad. It's a good experience for me to learn.

I feel very pleased with what I can contribute because giving is more worth than receiving...

I know how the slums people live and now I know that earning money is very difficult.

I liked the bazaar sale the most. It really was an experience for me. It also had taught me to be patient and further improved my understanding about teamwork.

CONCLUSION

Through this 'Willing Hands...Caring Hearts' project, we had hoped to culminate the Youth's learning and development for the year in an experiential way. The impact of the experience on the youths was encouraging and gratifying. The meaning and importance of Teamwork, Resilience, Determination and the value of having the spirit of service could not be better emphasized during this project.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & THANKS

Salamat Po !! to our 2 "Indian chiefs" - Koh Hock Siong and Koh Cheng Chye for their great volunteering spirit. Their passion to help and serve, not to mention, their fantastic connection with the youths, were an inspiration to us all.

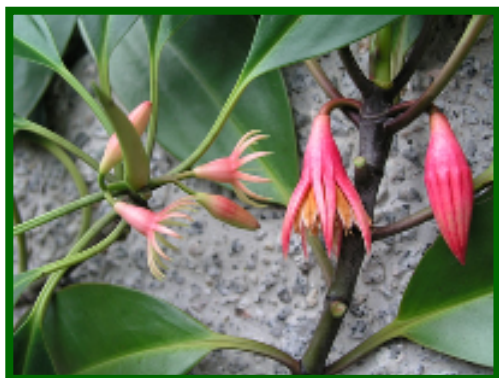
Special thanks to National Youth Council, Lee Foundation, and many friends of PTC who had kindly supported us with donations and encouragement. Last but not least to Habitat for Humanity Singapore and Philippines for their invaluable collaborative help and guidance.

Mangrove Conservation

by Tan Beng Huat, Staff

“Mangrove Appeal” - a Straits Times article on the 1st of March 2006 inspired a Mangroves Conservation Project at our Centre last year. Dr Jean W. H. Yong from the National Institute of Education, Natural Sciences & Sciences Education department and a team of scientists from NIE had unearthed a mangrove species never documented here before, the *Bruguiera hainesii*. A second species believed to have been extinct, the *Bruguiera sexangula*, was also spotted recently for the first time in more than 50 years.

Mangroves do not just act as a carbon sink (a single hectare of mangrove forest can absorb up to 1.5 tonnes of carbon dioxide in a year - about the same amount spewed by a motor vehicle during the same time). They prevent shoreline erosion and their roots can absorb excess pollutants, cleaning the water in which they grow. It also provides fertile spawning



grounds for a variety of fish and other marine creatures. What's exciting to hear was that mangroves are an effective barricade against tsunami!!

During our weekly Friday's kayaking activities, we always notice mangrove seedling (propagule) of various species floating on the surface of the sea. It

seems that we are the most suitable candidates to do the collection of the mangroves' propagules. We had even spotted a few trees of the red flowering *Bruguiera hainesii* in the Sungei Jelutong in Pulau Ubin.

From July 2006 to November 2006, the youths collected about 600 mangrove seedlings from 8 species, and nursed them in potting bags with beach sand at our Centre. The mangrove seedlings impressed us with their zest for life and sprouted up profusely when given water, sunlight and a chance to grow.



On 17th November 2006, we successfully transplanted all the seedlings at the Pasir Ris Mangroves Boardwalk with the blessing and approval of the National Parks Board.

Dr Yong, despite his busy schedule, gracefully came and gave us a lecture to educate us more on mangrove conservation. He was also on hand to give us and the Nparks officers more tips during the actual transplanting at Pasir Ris Boardwalk.

Most of our youths enjoyed the muddy transplanting in the mangrove swamp and for those who are taking their NYAA awards; they could clock all the time they spent in this project under the Conservation Project of the Service section.

It was a meaningful conservation project.



Volunteers' Appreciation Day

Visits To Bollywood Veggies and Aerogreen Tech Farms

by Cecilia Chin, volunteer

Volunteers' Appreciation Day was on Deepavali, 21 October 2006. As it was a public holiday, eighteen of us participated.

Being very new, I did not know what the occasion was all about. With child-like enthusiasm and anticipation, I was looking forward to the day.

The day dawned warm and hazy. I was the first to arrive at Poverello Teen Centre. "Happy Volunteers' Day !" Sister Maria greeted me. I was surprised and taken aback a little. "Volunteers' Day?" I asked myself. I thought it was just an outing for fellowship.

The day started with the celebration of the Eucharist by Mgrs Eugene Vaz. It was very appropriate to begin the day praising and thanking God for all He has done for us and to ask Him to be with us during the



Offering up our prayer petitions

outing. For the prayers of the Faithful, each of us wrote petitions on a little card on which a candle was attached. We lighted the candles and placed them on the ground in front of the altar. It was very beautiful and meaningful. I visualized that our prayers were being carried to the Lord by the whirling smoke of the flames. At the end of the mass, Father blessed the new kayak and lorry.

We set off in two cars and the lorry. As we passed Kranji, the sight of small zinc and wooden houses reminded us of the 50's in Singapore and the kampongs in Malaysia.

Arriving at Bollywood a little too early for lunch, we took a walk around the farm. There is a variety of vegetables and fruit trees grown. It is interesting and educational. The plants are in a sorry state. They do not look healthy. Lunch was simple, consisting of spicy vegetable dishes, eggs, tofu and

chicken. For dessert, we had banana fritters.

The next destination was the Aerogreen Tech Farm which is a short distance from Bollywood. A preview video was shown, giving us an idea on the cultivation of growing Butterhead lettuce, using hydroponics, from seeds to matured plants. We had an opportunity to taste a drink concocted from the Butterhead lettuce. To me, it tasted a bit grassy but was acceptable.

An employee of the farm took us around, explaining the different stages of growing the lettuce in the greenhouses, with plastic netting around them, to protect the delicate plants from pests. The roots of the lettuce are sprayed with chemical solution in every thirty minutes. This is done automatically. The lettuce is for local consumption only.



This gourd is bigger than my head !!

Next we visited the herbs and spices garden. Then we came across a very big and heavy gourd. The guide said that it is a bottle gourd. When it is ripe, its content is scrapped out. The dry gourd is used to store water.

As usual, wherever we go, we shop. There is a small shop selling veggies, fertilizers and other knick knacks. Armed with bunches of vegetables, we started for home.

Thank you Sister Maria and the staff of Poverello for organizing the excursion. We enjoyed ourselves although the weather was hazy and warm.



SNIPPETS



Qing Yan Berwin Junyong Keith Denley Charlynnne

We congratulate our graduates who completed their 'N' levels 2006, as well as the 'Youth Development' programme with us. All of them achieved excellent academic results and are now continuing their studies in ITE College. Well done !



Our latest and youngest addition to PTC — only five months old. We named him SNOWY — he is 80% white with some black patches and a long black tail. He's very playful, frisky and always game to play catch ball with anyone who stops by his "kitty corner". He is a delight to the youths who are here and enjoys being the centre of attraction. He is already learning to stalk any unsuspecting birds that hover near the Centre. He is also our therapeutic break when we need that five minutes away from our PC or work.

