

The children of SOS Children's Villages Philippines grow up in a loving and secure environment.



WHERE THE HEART IS

One organization gives abandoned children a loving home and a new lease on life.

Every day, Wilma Papa gets up before dawn to get her eight kids ready and see them off to school. In the afternoon, when the children get back, she involves them in household chores, then helps them with their homework. On free days, they go out to eat and play, while Sundays are reserved for church.

Wilma's family is just like any other Filipino family, save for the fact that the children are biologically unrelated to her, or to one another. As one of the house mothers at the SOS Children's Village Manila (an affiliate of SOS Children's Villages International, which provides homes for orphaned and abandoned youth), she has made it her life's work to look after each child as her own.

"Dito sa bahay, simple lang. Parang tunay na pamilya na nandiyan ang nanay—siya yung nangunguna sa pagbuo ng pamilya," says Wilma. "'Tsaka dito, monthly kami may family meeting kung saan tatanungin ko ang mga bata, 'Kumusta na ba kayo sa palagay ninyo ngayon?' So ako, as mama nila, nagiging aware din ako sa needs nila."

She continues, "Meron kaming curfew; Yung mga bata, kadalasan

spontaneous prayer, kasi tinuturuan ko rin sila kung papaano eh. So guided sila spiritually kasi sa part ko rin, sa aming lahi, mga religious kami. Ang upbringing sa 'kin naibabahagi ko rin sa mga bata."

This is the heart of SOS's programs and advocacies: to provide a loving, stable, and supportive home and family life for children who do not have the fortune of growing up with their own. And by doing so, the organization hopes to equip the children with all that they need to become secure and successful in the future.

SOS originated in Austria, birthplace of philanthropist Hermann Gmeiner, who founded the organization in 1949 after personally witnessing the plight of countless children orphaned by the war. It currently helps children in 134 countries across the globe.

Locally, the SOS mission of "family-based care" is fostered in eight communities nationwide, including Davao City, the largest in the country with 14 homes catering to eight to twelve children each; Lipa, Batangas, where the first SOS Village in the country opened in 1967; and Ayala Alabang, its Metro Manila arm, which houses

the headquarters of the organization's Philippine division, and where Wilma and her brood reside with seven other families.

Every SOS Village has its own support system, with a Village Director that helps the mothers cultivate a happy and healthy community for the children. For SOS Manila Village Director Raymond "Kuya Mon" Rimando, the job goes beyond simply managing the community's daily operations. "Ang pinakamahalaga doon, dapat kilala mo silang lahat by name. Kasi iba talaga kapag tinawag mo sila sa sarili nilang pangalan," he says. "On that level pa lang, medyo at ease sila sa 'yo; nafe-feel na nila na para ka nilang kaibigan."

In the two years that Kuya Mon has held the post of Village Director of the community in Alabang, he has become a father figure to the resident children. So, while guests and colleagues call him "Kuya," to the children he is "Papa."

Unlike typical orphanages, SOS Children's Villages permanently assume full-time care of the kids, at least until they come of age. "Hindi kami nagpapa-adopt," says Kuya Mon. He explains that the organization looks into all possible living options for the kids before deciding if welcoming them into an SOS community is the most ideal. "Parang kami ang pinaka-huling pupuntahan ng bata. Kasi halimbawa, yung bata ay adoptable pa, hinahanapan namin

muna sila ng other home."

JM Giron, Field Coordinator for SOS Philippines adds, "Kung may tito o tita pa na mag-aalaga sa kanila, dun namin muna sila ibibigay."

Once all other options are exhausted, then children are taken under SOS's wing. Boys live with their "mama" and siblings until, at 14, they transfer to a youth house close by. Girls, on the other hand, can opt to move into dormitories once they enter college at 18. All of the children stay closely in touch with their SOS families until the age of 21, when they will have been fully prepared to stand on their own two feet.

Of course, no childhood is complete without school. For these kids, especially, education plays a crucial role in setting them up for independence and success later in life. Under SOS's care, every child is given the opportunity to study, from pre-school to college, through scholarships and special programs offered by various companies.

If they are not able to finish formal schooling, the organization makes sure the

children are prepared to fend for themselves through alternative means. Says Kuya Mon, "Kung hindi man niya kaya academically, merong mga vocational courses, mga TESDA courses, para kahit papaano magkakaroon siya ng skills na bitbit niya 'pag natapos niya yung time niya dito."

After nearly five decades of doing this, SOS has seen many of their kids grow up to fulfill their dreams of becoming a pilot, teacher, entrepreneur, and many other professions. On holidays and special occasions, says Wilma, the Village lights up when the former residents visit—this time with their own children in tow. "Dito kami nagce-celebrate talaga. Maingay kami kasi nagdadatingan sila."

SOS Philippines looks forward to building a brighter future for any child who needs it. While many have made generous donations of clothes and school supplies, the organization still needs help raising funds to sustain long-term efforts for the children's education, health care, and living expenses.

NOBODY GETS LEFT BEHIND

With a fervent desire to help and generous donations from kindred spirits, one mom gives back to her hometown and inspires many to do the same.

It is reassuring to know that when crisis strikes, we don't need to look further than our very own to find help. This was never more true than when Super Typhoon Yolanda (international name: Haiyan) hit the Philippines in November 2013. When the storm's unprecedented strength left thousands of families without food or shelter for days on end, countless Filipinos readily came to their aid. Among them was Leyte-bred journalist Krizette Chu. The 31-year-old mother of two is the woman behind Waray Bayaay, a Facebook page that facilitates the collection and delivery of donations to the typhoon victims.

"In the days before the typhoon was to arrive, we'd already been hearing news that it was going to be a really huge one," recalls Krizette, who is now based in Manila but grew up in Tanauan, a town just 30 minutes away from Tacloban City, the province's capital. "I'd never started relief drives before, but I felt compelled to do so this time if only because I am from Leyte. I knew that help would be needed, but I didn't imagine just how much."

Dubbed one of the strongest and deadliest typhoons ever, Yolanda wreaked havoc in several provinces in the Visayas when it made landfall, but it was Krizette's hometown that bore the brunt of the damage. To show solidarity with the victims, she named the social media page after the phrase for "walang iwanan" in her native dialect. Says Krizette, "It was pretty



At 58 years old and after 27 years of service, Wilma is taking care of her fifth batch of children.

Visit sosphilippines.org or call (632) 809-8098 to find out how to donate. You can also search SOS Children's Villages Philippines on Facebook to see if they have a booth at an establishment near you.



Leyte's fishermen can set sail again thanks to a generous donation of boats.

easy to come up with the name because I felt that it should be a rallying call for anyone who had the ability to help their fellow Filipinos."

Waray Bayaay's first callouts were for canned goods and clean drinking water. "In any emergency, those are the most important basic necessities. Fortunately, a few people donated, and we got our first piece of good news that a water bottling company was going to give it to us for cheaper. So on the day of Yolanda, we filled up a container van full of water and sent it on its way to Leyte," recounts Krizette, who was running the page from her home in Mandaluyong. "It arrived the next day, and I have every reason to believe that it was one of the first relief goods to arrive in the province. It wasn't much, but a container van full of water was much appreciated during the first few days in post-Yolanda Tacloban."

Soon, the page went viral and donations poured in: from food and water to milk, medicine, and construction materials to build makeshift homes for the victims. "I lived in a 50-square-meter condo and in a couple of days, my children couldn't even sit on the sofa because the donations were stockpiled so high," says Krizette.

Fortunately, she found room for the constant influx of supplies. "It was a shot in the dark, but I posted the need to borrow warehouse space and trucks to pick up goods from those who wanted to donate, and by the grace of God, we found willing

donors who let us borrow not only their trucks, but also threw in labor. A friend of a cousin generously donated his huge warehouse in Quezon City, which we used for more than a year, with a caregiver who made sure all the items were taken care of."

The positive response to Waray Bayaay's efforts encouraged Krizette to solicit for bigger items. Monetary donations, for one, were much needed to fund more trucks, which cost anywhere between P55,000 to P75,000 each, to transport the goods to Leyte. She and her friends collected enough money to send 10-wheeler trucks on twice-weekly deliveries at the height of the relief efforts.

On site, Krizette counted on trusted contacts, including her cousins who lived in Tacloban, to manage distribution. "I'm amazed because even as victims, my cousin Rheo Tiu and family would use their personal trucks and cars to go around the area back when fuel was very expensive," she says.

It's generous acts like these that have transformed Krizette's humble information-and-resource-sharing platform to a true community that's changing lives in typhoon-ravaged areas up to this day. "I thought Waray Bayaay would just help with the delivery of goods, and I'd be done," she says. "It filled a need during a time of crisis: Many people wanted to help but didn't know who to approach. Leyte was cut off from the rest of the world because there was no electricity, news reports were muddled and erratic, and the relief efforts were

fragmented, with a lot of doubt being cast on the government's ability to send help."

Krizette continues, "It's a collective effort of everyone who donated and helped make it happen. I'm just the conduit, but it's really a diverse group of people from different walks of life who understand that nothing will get done if we wait for another person to step up and help."

Today, as typhoon victims continue to rebuild their communities and livelihood, Waray Bayaay focuses on sustainable efforts: Twenty-foot-long motorized fiberglass boats have been turned over to Leyte's fishermen, brand new sewing machines have been given to women who still live in transitional homes, and scholarships from the AY Foundation have made it possible for many students to continue studying.

The scholarships were "definitely a highlight," says Krizette. "We plan to continue it as long as their grades are okay." Her biggest dream is to build homes for those still living in transitional shelters.

Krizette feels "overcome with gratitude and awe" at all that Waray Bayaay has accomplished so far. And yet she acknowledges that so much still needs to be done. She urges anyone who would like to donate or personally help out to get in touch with her. "So many people need help, and not just in Tacloban. As long as we are able to get donors, we continue to give, not just in Leyte, but elsewhere." No help is too little, she says. "All our contributions are like puzzle pieces that make up a whole—your piece will fill a space no one else can."



Waray Bayaay would not be possible without the help of all the donors, says founder Krizette Chu.

If you would like to volunteer or make a donation, visit facebook.com/WarayBayaay or email krizettechu@gmail.com.