

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER

For Projects Abroad Philippines 



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The Host's Experience

Hosting volunteers is a family decision for Elenita Ursal, or 'Elen' as many may know her by. It entails a lot of discussion with her husband and three children, coupled with anxieties on how it would be to be a host family. "Accepting people from different countries with their culture is quite difficult. With prodding of Ethel Pasaol, a Projects Abroad staff member, and assurance from Country Director Kenneth Sotto, that all will be okay, I started to consider it", she said. Braving fears and taking risks, she opened her doors to volunteers. It also served as an act of thanking the Supreme God for sparing her house from the wrath of Typhoon Haiyan in November 2013.

Her first volunteer arrived from France on December 16th, 2013. In the Philippines, this date signals the formal waiting of Baby Jesus in which the traditional "Misa de Gallo" is celebrated every day at 4:30 am to 5:30 am until the eve of Christmas. Her husband is an active trainer/organizer and accompanist of the church choir and has an assigned church where his group would serve. Upon knowing this, her French volunteer delightfully asked if she could come. After the mass, she said that the volunteer had never anything like this and therefor never missed a day attending the "Misa de Gallo" until the fall of Christmas. A week before the New Year, her second volunteer, a Chinese-American girl came. Being a medical student, he was doing a medical relief project at the hospital.

Elen was asked by her relatives and friends why they have foreign guests. She explained that they are Projects Abroad volunteers there due to typhoon Haiyan, that she is one of the host families hosting volunteers from Projects Abroad doing the medical project, disaster relief project as well as care and teaching projects. When she was asked what Projects Abroad is, she answered, "Well, it is an organization which sends off volunteers to destinations worldwide and the Philippines is one of them. I learned from the internet that volunteers will pay an amount to Projects Abroad relative to the length of time they will do volunteer works". "I am impressed and thank volunteers for such a noble act indeed!" she added.

Being a host, she sees to it that volunteers are comfortable while staying at her home. Their voluntary work is from Monday to Friday. She prepares meals most of the time and sees to it that their packed lunches are ready before their pick-up cab arrives. She also ensures that their rooms are clean, and linens are changed every week. As a host, she also gradually introduces local food and fruits to the volunteers, as well as the culture and traditions; like the saying of grace before meals, the kissing of hands of elders and attending Sunday Mass. If time allows, they talk and share things of interest, like what the families are doing. Elen has learned that the reason people are volunteering is purely to do something good in their lives. Some claim that they want to experience change because something big happened in their lives.

Volunteers generally very much enjoy staying with host families; they have somewhere they can call "home" when they are off from their work activities. Elen says the volunteers learn many things from the community while at the same time fulfilling the tasks in their volunteering placements. Weekends are the times they can explore the nearby islands; the Capitancillo Islet of Bogo City, Malapascua of Daanbantayan, Kalanggaman of Palompon, Leyte and Boracay in Bohol Province, a cold spring nearby. Some have even gone as far as the Banaue Rice Terraces of the Mountain Province in Luzon.

As a temporary part of the family, Elen invites volunteers whenever her family has gatherings and events to attend. They are very open and engaged; they share with all their guests what each member of the family does for a living. There are volunteers who would stay at home for the weekend and request her to show them around the community. Of course, the first thing that would come up in her mind is to link things to why they are here; she always takes them to relocation sites of the victims of Haiyan like the Yolanda Village and, if time permits, she shows them the video clips during the mighty typhoon, courtesy of the city government of Bogo.

Currently, Elen is hosting her 14th and 15th volunteers, from Japan and from UK. She's happy seeing the two blend well together. "East meets West" she said. Elen feels privileged to have volunteers at her home. She feels good thinking that she is involved in the noble intention of volunteers sent by Projects Abroad to Bogo City for the disaster relief caused by Haiyan.

The most rewarding aspect of it is the family has friends in the farthest parts of the world and has cherished memories with them. Some of them keep in touch through Facebook. "Isn't it amazing? If they will visit the Philippines again, they can manage to come directly to my address" she said.

Becoming a host is a fantastic experience for Elen. She is not just a mother of three now but a mother of four, five and more to come! ☺



Unleashing the Artistic Side

Eoin Kinsella is a disaster relief volunteer from Ireland. He loves art very much and does digital paintings and pen drawings.

Creating images is very important to him on a creative and personal level as it is a passion he discovered at a young age, and he continues to develop. The portraits he draws are about light and darkness, finding interesting contrasts on the face.



His paintings are an exploration of themes and emotions which he feels compelled to create.



Some of the paintings are inspired by what goes on in our minds, emotional distress and suffering. Other paintings are inspired by hope and the power and resilience of the human spirit.



A Fruitful Week



Korean volunteer Joong Kyu Lee always hoped to volunteer abroad, but hadn't had the chance to, until he took the opportunity during Korea's long holiday, the Chuseok. It is a traditional celebration of thanksgiving where Koreans visit their ancestral homes and feast on traditional food. Lee wanted to do some volunteering work while on a holiday, so he applied at Projects Abroad. "Projects Abroad is a very special organization. Not only does it give me the chance to meet other people from around the world, but also really helps the Philippine society. So I think it is really worthwhile to volunteer at Projects Abroad", he said.

Lee had experienced working in the disaster relief project; he helped in the construction of the classrooms in Jovencio Nailon Masong National High School and also helped the teachers and children at kindergarten in Bogo Central School 1. "In Bogo, there are many victims who lost their homes to the typhoons. So they really need workers and funds to help build houses", said Lee.

"Projects Abroad is very helpful to their society. They offer them homes, schools, educations, medical laborers and cultural exchanges", he added. He was given a variety of tasks, even though he only volunteered for a week. On the first day, he looked at the sites where he would work and had his induction and city tour. On the second day, he worked the whole day at the disaster relief project in Nailon where he painted the walls. On the third day, he taught English and number counting to a kindergarten class at the school in the morning and helped at the housing project located in Maño, San Remigio, Cebu, a town near Bogo.

When helping to build houses he mixed cement, made cement bricks and generally assisted on the building site. On the fourth day, he worked at the school for the whole day; in the morning he assisted with basic lessons and in the afternoon there was a special dental care workshop where, together with the other volunteers, they taught the children how to brush their teeth.

"It was not that long of a time, but I learned how different their lives are from my country and how differently they think as well. It was really surprising that they had a lot of Korean culture like drama, movie, actors and songs. I also realized the different cultures between Asian and European. I think this experience might help me to understand other cultures", he said.

It was a memorable experience for Lee; he adored the children in the schools for being so cute and adorable. He was amazed with how kind and funny the local workers and other volunteers were. For him work was hard, he felt it was a rewarding job. He also admired the kindness of his host family for every meal he ate was great! "The only difficult thing was English as my English isn't that good and made it hard to talk to other volunteers. The most important thing is that it was a really memorable experience and it is worthy to do," he said.

No matter how short the time Lee spent volunteering in the Philippines, the memories he had will surely last a lifetime. For it's not about how long or how short you spend your time on something worthy, it's about how well you spent it.

Joong Kyu Lee (Care and Disaster Relief Volunteer, Korean)