Dear Friends,

We just returned from following up on the families of blind children in northern Cebu that went through the typhoon. All of the blind children in that area are safe even though most of them lost their homes and had to find temporary shelter. Despite all the difficulties in the area, most of the schools are already holding classes. In the picture below, where two of our children attend, all of the classrooms in the school lost their roofs except for two. But they are now holding classes for several hundred children outside the classrooms, without electricity and without shade. It was blazing hot when we were there but no one was complaining. That is the resilient Filipino spirit.

So far we were able to help 14 families in four towns to start rebuilding their homes, including one of our trained teachers who lost his home. Beyond Cebu, in the rest of the typhoon hit area, we know of 40 additional families that lost their homes, 6 teachers who lost homes, and 14 school Resource rooms that were destroyed. We still have not been able to make contact with 18 school programs in the worst hit areas. I expect that once we get to those areas our numbers will double.

Next week we will be visiting families and schools in parts of Iloilo province. That area was hit hard but hasn’t received as much attention as the worst hit areas. That will be our focus for the next week or two, before we move into the more devasted areas. I will add here some pictures and background on five of the families that we gave assistance to this week.

*With the roofs gone and the buildings unsafe, school continues in the school yard for several hundred students.*
Reneir is one of our students on Bantayan Island. This empty lot is where their house stood before the typhoon. His father took us to the place, where he had already removed the debris. His mother had gone to fetch relief goods at one of the distribution centers. Like most people, they have no work until the infrastructures get put back in place.

At the right, Renier’s father, with his neighbors, told us how they ran for shelter when the typhoon hit. The winds were fierce, then there was a brief calm as the eye of the storm passed over. Then the winds returned with even more destructive power, flattening his house.

They are now staying in a temporary shelter but have been asked to vacate as soon as possible. We bought lumber, metal roofing, cement, sand, and other supplies to help him start building.
Jake and John Paul are two low vision boys in a barrio school in the town of Medellin. Their house lies in the background. The father, Benjamin, works as a laborer in the sugar cane fields and he also plants some crops for their own needs. They have 13 children.

During the storm, they evacuated along with many other people to the school which I mentioned on the first page. All the roofs came off the school but it looks like it was safer than in their home. The family is now staying with their oldest son, whose little home somehow escaped damage. That puts 15 of them in a little house about 3 meters by 4 meters wide. When we visited, the father was busy pulling nails from their demolished home. He will use the nails in building a new house with materials from the old house. To speed up the rebuilding project, we provided assistance to Benjamin to buy the materials needed to quickly rebuild his home. He can do the actual labor himself, along with some of his relatives.
Before the typhoon, Faith, 9 years old, was already living in quite a desperate situation. Her parents abandoned her some years ago and she lives with her widowed grandmother, who has no means of income. During the typhoon, they took shelter in a nearby cemetery, along with their neighbors. Their small house was knocked down by the winds but they have patched together a shelter out of debris they collected nearby.

We found a carpenter living in the area and had him prepare a materials list for putting her house back together. We are talking now with a contractor friend who may assist in the reconstruction. While we were in that town we came across an emergency medical team from Singapore who happened to have an eye doctor. We were able to get three of the blind children’s eyes checked, including Faith’s. We plan now to bring her to Cebu for surgery to improve her vision.
Hisao Chiba, (at the right), a long time friend from Japan who has an extensive background in disability and development work, accompanied us on our trip. He will try to put us into contact with Japanese relief organizations.

We visited Ariel (at the right) whom we mentioned in our last letter. We were so surprised to see him already back in school. His home was completely demolished and the school had heavy damage but their Special Education center escaped serious damage. He enjoys school and his teacher tells us that he is an honor student.

Ariel’s father, below, put up this little shelter for his family of six immediately after the storm. It is maybe 3 meters square. We brought him materials and some hand tools so that he can build a more substantial dwelling.
John, below, with some of his nieces and nephews, is one of our newly trained teachers and has just started his program for blind children. He lives with his parents and other extended family. He is the only one of his family to graduate from college and they are dependent on his income to meet their needs. Their home, which was weakened by the earthquake a couple of months ago, was completely leveled by the typhoon. John’s biggest concern was getting his students back into homes, but we want to help him get resettled as well. We gave assistance for the rebuilding of his home and will wait for a quotation to fix up his Special Education Resource room at the school.

*Teacher John’s and his parents have moved in with other relatives until their home can be rebuilt.*
With assistance given to 14 families in Northern Cebu, we have completed the first part of our relief assistance to the families of blind children in Cebu Province. This coming week we move over to Iloilo and Cadiz provinces where so far we know of 23 families that lost their homes, along with three teachers. Five Resource rooms have also been damaged or destroyed.

The good news is that roads are being cleared, which gives us more access. The difficulties are that electricity will be not be restored for quite some time, and communications is not always available. Also, building materials are in short supply because of so much wide spread damage. With so many coconut palms knocked down by the winds, chain saws are running non-stop, converting them into lumber to be used in rebuilding. But the demand outpaces the supply. In some cases we have to place our orders for building supplies and wait until they are available. Carpenters are also hard to find because so many of them are focusing on rebuilding their own homes. But progress is being made and we are able to demonstrate the Lord’s concern for our blind friends who are in difficult times. If you would like to contribute to that effort, please go to www.blind.org.ph and designate your gift for typhoon relief. Or contact us at info@blind.org.ph or donate@blind.org.ph for other giving options.

Thanks,
Randy Weisser
Director
Resources for the Blind