December 13, 2013

Dear Friends,

Our team just returned from another week of visiting each of the blind students who were in the path of the typhoon. This week the starting point was Roxas City. The number of families who lost their homes in this area took us a little by surprise. We expected only a few but we found 18 families that had damaged or destroyed homes. Most of them are still in very temporary and inadequate housing arrangements. You can read about a few of the families below.

Like many of the families we visited, the family of Jovie (in the yellow shirt) took shelter in the school building. When that roof blew off they just huddled in the corner to wait out the storm. The next day, finding that their house was gone, Jovie’s father gathered scraps to put this shelter together, where the family of 8 has been staying for the last month. We purchased them enough building materials to put up a bigger, more weather proof home.

We found 18 families of blind children in the Roxas area that need emergency shelter assistance.
Angel, at the right, has lived with her grandparents since her mother died 8 years ago. She has been enrolled in the school program in Roxas City for two years. The family lost their roof in the storm, and because their house is near the coast, it was also flooded by the storm surge. For the time being they have moved in with two other families in a relative’s nearby house. We gave them assistance to get the roof back on their house so that they can return to their home.

Diana lives alone with her single mom (below). Her mom sells barbeque pork sticks and makes about P200 a day. During the typhoon they took shelter in the home of their aunt. When a mango tree fell on that house, they ran to the house of their cousin. When another tree fell on that house they ran to the house of a neighbor. The next day, when they went back to their own house, they found it in shambles and everything soaked. Diana’s mom had been saving money for a myoma surgery, but the money she had saved was gone. She had no means to start repairing her home, so we purchased construction materials and helped her pay for a carpenter to do some emergency repairs to her home.
The Batings, below, a farming family, have nine children. Five of them are blind. (The other four are married with their own families.) During the typhoon, their father kept them in their house, under their beds for safety. Despite trees falling on the house, and roofing coming off, they all came through it unharmed. We gave assistance to repair the roof.

This is a little bit of a sad case for us because none of these children have been able to go to school. They live in such a remote place and have been beyond the reach of our trained teacher. We are still determined to find a way to get the younger ones in school and to at least give braille literacy to the older ones. They are all very bright and cheerful kids, and all have their assignments in the farm work, but we want them to have the opportunity of an education and all the benefits that come with literacy.

For homes away from the ocean, the damage was caused mostly by roof-removing winds.
With their home destroyed, Jose (right) and his mother and sister stayed in the elementary school for three days after the typhoon. Finally some neighbors put up this temporary home for the family, which is of course hardly adequate.

We found a local carpenter and left enough materials and resources for Jose’s mother to put up a more permanent structure.

In the picture below, Cristina, in the middle, is the oldest of seven siblings. Her parents, although very poor, make sure that Cristina is in school every day. Although starting late, she has quickly learned to read and write in braille and is a good student. During the typhoon, neighbours helped the family carry their children to safety away from the river. When they returned home, not only was their home flooded and their roof gone, but someone had stolen their supply of rice. To feed the family, they had to buy a sack of rice on instalment basis. When our team visited, the only thing the family had to eat was rice.

Concerned about the danger of the river, the family had saved up enough money before the typhoon to purchase a 48 sq meter plot of land farther away from the river. We will help them to relocate to this new place, which will lessen their vulnerability to flooding during typhoons.
You might remember the house of Ariel from our previous letter. Within a few days after the typhoon, Ariel’s father put up this temporary shelter for the family (in the picture below). During our visit we delivered some lumber, roofing, and a few hand tools for him to build a more sturdy and weather proof shelter. In the second picture below, you can see some of the progress he is making on their new improved home.

Most of our work so far has been like this, to arrange for some immediate help for emergency shelter for families who are still exposed to the weather. So far we have assisted 32 families, with more to come. We very much appreciate your help all this making that possible. Thank you on behalf of the families that have been assisted.

For Ariel’s house, we provided the materials—the family provided the labor.
In some selected cases, depending on certain criteria, such as whether the family owns the land or has a long term agreement for the use of the land, and what their level of income is, we may choose to build a more solid, typhoon-proof house out of concrete hollow blocks.

This week, a team from the Church on the Rock, in Alaska, arrived to help us start the first “typhoon-proof” home. They will be working alongside our own carpenters to put up a 12 foot by 20 foot home. We hope to have it finished in two weeks time. These homes are more expensive, but hopefully it will be a good long term investment and will still be standing after the next super typhoon. If you would like to help, please go to our website and designate for typhoon relief. The website is www.blind.org.ph. Or email us at donation@blind.org.ph for other giving options.

A very sincere thank you to all who have helped to make this assistance possible.

Randy