Dear Friends,

Our assessment team just returned from the field after visiting 18 more families of blind children, mostly in the province of Iloilo. They brought back so many stories of difficult circumstances and families struggling to get back into decent shelter, let alone trying to keep their blind children in school. The team gave help while in the field and we are making our plans now for additional help in the weeks to come for some selected families.

The family below has 11 children, 8 living at home, and 4 of whom are visually impaired. The father was injured during the typhoon when the roof blew off and hasn’t been able to work since then. The mother works about three days per week doing laundry at about P150 (US $4.00) per day. We gave some assistance to help replace the roof but we hope to do more.

Almost 3 months after the typhoon and many families still do not have adequate shelter.
Little Sarah Claire has lived with her grandparents since she was a baby. She is blind but also has cerebral palsy, and can’t walk or talk.

The grandfather works as a labourer and when someone is available to take care of Sarah, the grandmother works in the sugar cane field.

Their home, which you can see in the picture below, was flattened by the typhoon. They have taken shelter with a neighbor for the time being but hope to be able to rebuild their house in a different location. We left some funds for them to get started but will follow up to make sure they are able to rebuild.

On top of that, both grandparents have cataract. By one of those divine appointments, when the team was having lunch in one town, an eye doctor sat at the table next to them and recognized them as being from RBI. We are working with him now to schedule the eye surgeries that are needed.

*Blind children are often left to the care of grandparents.*

*With a house made of bamboo, there isn’t much to reuse after the typhoon.*
The children at the right are being raised by their grandparents. Their parents left several years ago, with no contact since. Their home survived the typhoon except for the roof. For the time being they have made a little shelter at the back.

The single mother below, who was abandoned by her husband, has five children, including her 15 year old son (seated) who is blind and unable to walk. She had to carry her son to safety during the typhoon. After losing their home they put together this very crude shelter to keep them out of the weather. We gave assistance to both of these families but they will need more help to get back on their feet.

The strong winds followed by flooding drove most people from their homes.

So far we have visited and helped 36 families on Panay Island and 15 on Cebu Island.
Some of the cases we encounter are so difficult. Mylene (below, left), who is 14 years old and has poor vision, is an illegitimate child. Because of that she has lived with her very poor grandparents since she was 9 months old. As you can see, she is not very well nourished. She also has tuberculosis, but is currently undergoing treatment through the local health center. Their simple home was destroyed by the typhoon and now they are living underneath this tarpaulin to keep dry. One of the criteria for us to build a typhoon-proof house for these families is that they own the land where the house will be built. Unfortunately, many of the families visited, such as Mylene’s, are not living on land they own. The problem this creates is that the land owner might force the tenants out after we build a house. So in some cases we simply give some funds to improve the house or to build a very simple inexpensive house that won’t catch the interest of the landowner.

In any case, we need to do something to protect children like Mylene who are really at risk due to their inadequate shelter.

Many of the families are “informal settlers” which means they don't own the land they live on.
Faith is another girl who lives with her grandmother. I mentioned these two in a previous update. Their house collapsed during the typhoon and they were living in this very make-shift dwelling at the right. They don't own the land they live on so we had to scale down the type of house we could build for them.

In this case we built a plywood shelter on top of the existing concrete foundation wall (below). This is a more secure home, and the roof doesn't leak, which is a big improvement from their situation after the typhoon.

Faith is attending school and will have cataract surgery soon.

Although their new home is not “typhoon proof” it is a big improvement over their previous home.
We are hoping to build about 20 “typhoon-proof” homes. This is the first home we built, with help from the Alaska team, for the family of Sheila. We won’t know for sure until the next typhoon, but we believe that our efforts to strengthen the structure and to prevent the roof from blowing off will provide a good return on our investment. It is built of cement hollow block, with an attached bathroom.

Safe and secure shelter for the family of a blind student.

With the edges of the roof protected by the cement wall there will be less roof for the wind to catch.

Thank you to all who have helped bring some relief and comfort to those who were so traumatized by the typhoon. If you would like to help, please go to our website, at www.blind.org.ph. Or email us at info@blind.org.ph or donation@blind.org.ph. Or call us at 726-3021 to 24 in Manila.

Randy Weisser
Director
Resources for the Blind
Help Yolanda’s Blind Victims!

You can help rebuild blind children’s homes and special education resource rooms in the areas badly affected by super typhoon Yolanda

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