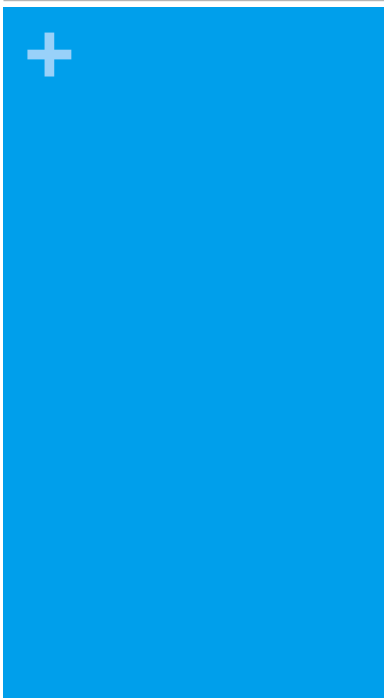


Abuyog Trip Report



Buhay Makulay in Abuyog, Leyte

On May 16, 2014, the Buhay Makulay Children's Project Inc. in partnership with Morning Star Ministries, invited 500 children from the town of Abuyog, Leyte, for a day of play and discovery! We brought our Buhay Makulay Children's Fair to the little ones of Leyte! Our special guests were children from three different barangays, including host barangay Balinsasayao, whose covered basketball court was the site of our joy-filled activity for the day. This Children's Fair was the fourth of eight Buhay Makulay fairs happening all over the Philippines this year.

Our Children's Fair was the first of its kind in the town. We gathered children between grades four and six for music, crafts, play and fun - all centered around the theme of hope - in the light of all the trials we may face, and in the light of Jesus in our hearts.



The town Abuyog, south of Tacoloban, was hit hard by super typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda in November 2013. Their community suffered infrastructure damages, loss of electricity for over three months, and serious food shortages. Six months later, upon our arrival in the town, we met an amazing community of people boldly moving forward from a grave calamity.

We used two important images to share hope with the children of Abuyog.

First, our theme verse:

“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.” Hebrews 6:19

With God as our anchor - nothing can shake us or frighten us. Just as an anchor keeps a large ship tethered to a spot in untamable waters; to anchor our lives in God gives us stability, strength and courage. No storm, no trial, no worry can move us away from God’s love. This is a powerful image for the children when you consider how the homes they lived in, the trees that shaded them, were torn up by the violent storm. But not even the most violent of storms can tear them away from Jesus.

Second: Our Buhay Makulay Hope Tree Mural

A fallen or falling tree has become a regular part of the landscape since the super typhoon. Some trees tilt slightly from the weight of the wind, others are almost completely uprooted. We painted a mural of a tree leaning over in response to the storm, inspired by a story from friends of ours from Roxas City. We’ve been taking this story around the country this whole year.

Community Art: The Buhay Makulay Hope Tree

“What happened to the tree?” we asked the children. “It fell over,” they said, “It died!” No, it did not die, but it sure was hurt by the super typhoon. We asked the children what the tree was missing. “Fruit!” they answered, “leaves!” Some trees would never recover because of the storm, but many trees just as the tree of our friends, still spread life in new buds just days after the catastrophe. Today was a special day, we explained. They would be part of the story of this Hope Tree. They would be the very leaves and fruit of this tree for their town.

The children made cut outs of their hands to decorate them as the leaves of the tree. Handmade paper butterflies, more images of renewal, would be the fruit of the tree. Our giant tree, though quite big (we needed a ladder to even put it up!), could not hold all the beautiful hand prints. We saved those for a separate project, and instead filled our Hope Tree with the fruit of new life in Jesus. How beautiful their fruit looked!



A day for the children: Let the children play!



On the morning of the Children's Fair, the basketball court filled with the voices of 482 children. It was a bursting collection of yellow, as the children received their Buhay Makulay shirts and new knapsacks with a fresh box of 16 crayons. We opened the morning in song, teaching the children our theme song for the year that points us to God's blessings, "Salamat Diyos sa Pag-laum!" (*"Thank You, God, for Hope!"*)

The children were grouped into teams and guided by a teacher or volunteer to experience all the different booths and activities - all of them pointing the children to the joy and hope we can experience by putting our faith in God.

To supply our knapsacks, we employed women from a Manila-based livelihood program. These women worked on a similar assignment of bags for us before, but never as many as 500!

Each group of 25 children had a leader assigned to guide them through the fun string of activities from one corner of court and all the way around. We had crafts, games, and other creative learning activities. There were ten stations, and at each station two teams. Every ten to fifteen minutes, after every group wrapped up their current project or game, the whole court of kids would rotate, traveling to the next station of the fair to discover more things!

We were amazed at how the children received our Children's Fair! They were well-behaved, followed instructions and were kind to one another. We played relay games, memorized our verse of hope, decorated banners, made butterflies of hope. They fished for toys, made bright windsocks and colorful bracelets. We sang of God's hope, we made a mural about God's hope, and best of all, we allowed them to be themselves - children!

We closed the day with more singing and a festive lunch of food cooked by community volunteers!

Reflections of hope:

At the butterfly making station, Jojo* a young boy of about nine years old, sat down and followed the simple instructions of how to make a butterfly out of table napkins and pipe cleaners. You have two small napkin squares of slightly different sizes. You walk your fingers down each square, gathering the napkin at its center. Jojo watched his station leader guide them through the process. He worked on his two little napkin pieces.

When it was time to piece the two together, a volunteer came beside Jojo to see how his work was coming along. Jojo looked unsure about his butterfly in progress. The volunteer gently held Jojo's butterfly up to him, showing him how to do it. And as the butterfly came into its full shape, Jojo's eyes lit up with wonder! It seemed he couldn't believe he had made something so beautiful.

In that moment, Jojo discovered his own potential, his own creativity, and the beauty in something simple. Jojo was discovering a bit of his worth that he may not have seen before. At the next station, Jojo proudly joined his butterfly with the hundreds of butterflies of all the children discovering something new on that beautiful morning in May.

**not his real name*



OUR TEAM of VOLUNTEERS

Our team was made up of five from Manila, a local leader and a troop of 40 volunteers from the communities. We were blessed by our local volunteers - the youngest just 14 years old, and the older ones schoolteachers with decades of experience. We spent a day with them in orientations and training.

Our volunteers were the hands and feet of Jesus, sharing His message of hope. We had also spent days preparing all the basic materials for crafts, gift packs and activities. We were blessed by the ready hands available to help us in the community.

Thank you to the incredible team of servants!



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