

18 February 2013

The past two months has been a very rewarding time for Disaster Aid Australia. The rebuilding of four communities in the Ban-ao region is testament to the commitment of our amazing volunteer DARTs (Disaster Aid Response Teams) and our Deployment Manager, Ed Cox. Faced with a disaster zone, they never lost sight of our goal to make a difference by rebuilding communities for those who lost everything following Typhoon Pablo (Bopha). For six weeks they cleared thousands of coconut trees to make way for our communities to be built with the assistance of our valued partner in the Philippines, the Balay Mindanaw Foundation.



Making way for a new beginning ...

Yes, the blue represents new communities and hope is reborn ...

I would like to share with you a couple of stories from this deployment; they reflect the impact we have on those we serve following a disaster.

James's Story

"When the typhoon came, my brother Jessie went to the evacuation centre: this is where he died." James is now looking after his family of five. His story is common among the survivors of Typhoon Pablo that hit Mindanao.

Many people went to the evacuation centres, schools, municipal gyms and day care centres. This is where the majority of the 1000 deaths happened, as the buildings had no chance of standing up to the force of Typhoon Pablo. James had the foresight to ignore the Government advice of going to the evacuation centre and decided to look after his family at home.

The storm was more powerful than anyone imagined. It smashed its way into Baganga and headed west, leaving in its wake a path of destruction, buildings crushed like aluminium cans, and coconut trees all lying ominously flat pointing to the typhoon's path.

The inhabitants of Ban-ao spent a terrifying night holding their loved ones close and praying for protection. "I told my family to hide under the table in our home," says James. "Our home was totally destroyed". James and his family survived the night, despite debris flying through the air. "Once, the roof was ripped off our home and the table we were hiding under went flying through the air".

When it was safe to do so, James took his family up into the hills and told them to take shelter behind a large tree, as he went to find help. It is on his way to look for medicine for his mother and children that he found out about his brother and his nephew who were among those that perished in the Ban-ao municipal gymnasium.

more ...

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Now James is rebuilding his life with his family and the family of his brother Jessie. "One of the first things we needed was shelter, the children were becoming ill and we didn't know what to do. Disaster Aid was the first NGO that came to us to help, we are so grateful and my family is so happy now".



The devastation turns to smiles ...



Madria's Story ...

One year on from the cyclone that devastated Cagayan de Oro, the survivors are now helping the community of Ban-ao to rebuild their lives. Madria Gado is only 17 years old; his house was totally destroyed by Sendong and he became a recipient of Disaster Aid's Family Survival Box. He lived in one of the two communities that Disaster Aid set up in Indahag.

"We really became a community," said Madria who lived in a Disaster Aid tent for almost 10 months with five other family members. "We were very comfortable; we were very happy - we had nothing left after Sendong". Madria decided to come to Ban-ao to help those affected by Typhoon Pablo. "I just really wanted to help - I know how these people must have been feeling".

Smiles have returned to the faces of the children of Ban-ao. They have returned to school in the temporary school complete with new shirts (as part of their uniforms) and a special back pack supplied by Save the Children and Plan International.

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"They all look so proud," said Ed Cox of Disaster Aid. "When we first arrived the children were still very scared and did not know what was going to happen - they had just been through one of the most terrifying experiences of their lives."

Now the children are very happy in their Disaster Aid communities, with clean drinking water, toilets, a school, and normality to their lives. This was all possible due to the combined relief efforts of Disaster Aid and their partners Balay Mindanaw, along with DART volunteers from USA, Australia and the UK and volunteers like Madria.

Madria is now living in a permanent home in Indahag but he still remembers the help from Disaster Aid, "it made me stronger," says Madria, who is now passing his strength and courage on to the children of Ban-ao.



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