



newsletter

Island Kids
Philippines 

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In this edition

- Projects in Collaboration with Other Organizations
- Activities with and for Teenage Mothers
- Start-up of Ruth Kellenberger Safe House
- Successful Graduation
- Concert of the “Gendarmen” and Quattro Schtatzjoni
- **Kuya**Thom

Dear Friends of Island Kids Philippines

“With all my heart I wish you a Happy New Year and I thank you for your precious support during the past year. Thanks to kind people like you, we have so far been able to generate CHF 88’224, which is more than half of the required CHF 165’000 to build the second children’s village. Thankful for the generous donations, we hope to collect the balance and therefore achieve the fundraising target. I wish you will be able to enjoy the beauty of this life despite of all the obstacles we are confronted with in our everyday life.”
Thomas Kellenberger

The cooperation of PIKIFI with other organizations, local, national and even international, is constantly expanding, for which we are grateful. Together with our partners, our sponsors and donors we reach more and more people in difficult situations, and we can offer them sustainable help to escape the cycle of poverty. “If we rescue, love and nurture a child today, she/he may save the world tomorrow”, says Thomas Kellenberger about the work of PIKIFI.

■ Projects in Collaboration with Other Organizations

The programs in collaboration with **Save the Children Philippines** (project SaferKids) and with the Australian Embassy for the protection of children and adolescents against sexual abuse and exploitation (OSAEC/Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children) will be continued this year. The focus is now on the education and instruction of more public authorities (including local authorities, schools, police), enabling them to organize training workshops themselves. On 24th November 2022, a review of activities during the past six months took place with rounds of questions and answers, forums and interactive workshops.



Participants of Workshops.

Noteworthy in this context is a [documentary on Swiss TV](#), informing about “Verbrechen im Netz” (Crimes in the Internet) and highlighting the eminent significance of the fight against OSAEC. Esther Bühlmann (Swiss) who is portrayed in this film, is working together with PIKIFI with her newly founded aid organization “[Streetlight](#)”.

On 25th November 2022 another event took place, this time together with **OKK** (sa Pagkab-ot sa Kaugmaon sa Kabataan / future for children) and the local police. The theme was “the strengthening of the partnership to achieve the best future for children who have deserved the best chances in the community”.

OKK is a family intervention program for children in street situations. Often, they already have come into conflict with the law or have fallen victim to human trafficking. The program aims at prevention (support of parents with childcare, access to vulnerable children) and at social reintegration of underage delinquents and victims of human trafficking. It covers psychosocial interventions, programs to secure their costs of living, propa-

gation of practical skills, support with regard to job-seeking, education and scholarships. The program targets at strengthening the partnership between authorities, police and aid organizations.



Participants of OKK.

On 7th December 2022, together with the Department of Agriculture of Northern Mindanao, milk was distributed to disadvantaged families for the second time. The inhabitants of the slums in the biggest district Carmen, where many of our schoolchildren live, profited from this campaign. At the same time, the children were shown a film about the origin of milk. The teenagers were able to attend a seminar about education and mutual respect, whereas the adults were informed about domestic violence and its consequences.

On 8th January 2023, in the context of a **BRC**-program (Building Resilient Communities), a family day was organized in the district Canitoan where the IKP children’s village is situated. Families, whom we take care of, were invited for a day filled with games and talks. At the end, all participants received a food package.

■ Activities with and for Teenage Mothers

On the 6th December 2022 teenage mothers and their children could visit the **Kidzoona**, a big indoor playground inside the huge SM-Mall. SM paid the entrance fee for them. For one day, mothers could leave behind their worries, have fun together with their children and enjoy the nice food.

Before Christmas, on 20th December 2022, a **TESDA-baking workshop** for teenage mothers was organized. They learned to bake banana muffins and binangkal (fried dough balls made of flour, sugar, butter, egg, milk).



Learning how to bake banana muffins and binangkal.

The purpose is that the young women can make pastries on their own, at home, and then sell them in order to earn a small supplementary income.

■ Start-up of Ruth Kellenberger Safe House

Immediately after inauguration, the newly constructed Ruth Kellenberger Safe House is already intensely used.

Two mothers with their children in need of protection are living in the two apartments for women on the first floor. Already before, five children in a critical situation were accommodated. They have been travelling with their mother in an overcrowded bus, when the mother suddenly fell off the bus and tragically lost her life. The mother carried no papers on her, and the still very young children did not know the name of their village. It took some time for the police to find their family and domicile some 300 km away of Cagayan de Oro. During this time, the half-orphans found shelter in the safe house and were looked after by our staff.

On the upper level the boys from the Red House moved in. They settled in and feel very comfortable in their new home. Before, they had to share the common space and kitchen in the overcrowded first children's house of PIKIFI with the young adult women. "In the new house we at last feel at home, and we can furnish everything the way we men like it", the boys commented. The supervisors Herald and Arnold, too, are very pleased about the new accommodation, especially their own kitchen.



The Ruth Kellenberger Safe House is already intensely used.

■ Successful Graduation

We congratulate our long-time PIKIFI colleague, Rachel Quitiol Gose, on her successful final exam as a State Licensed teacher. Since 2016, Rachel has been working as a carer in our children's village. During this time, she was studying for her Bachelor in Secondary Education, Major in English. We are happy for her about her success.



Rachel Quitiol (on the far left).

■ Concert of the “Gendarmen”

Finally, after a break of two years due to the pandemic, the “[Gendarmen](#)” and “[Quattro Schtatzjoni](#)” could again perform charity concerts in Advent for the benefit of IKP. How we were looking forward to them – and were not disappointed! The compositions, presented with humorous interludes, showed once more the versatile skills of the musicians. Accordingly, the audience listened and laughed with the three ladies of “Quattro Schtatzjoni”, reminisced during “Tränen lügen nicht”, got carried away by “W. Nuss vo Bümpliz” and apparently took the invitation “Gimme! Gimme! Gimme!” literally – IKP received a generous amount of CHF 9'100.–. “With this we cannot change the world, but we can do something on a small scale. A matter of the heart – for you, for us”, the “Gendarmen” commented on this donation.

We sincerely thank the “Gendarmen”, “Quattro Schtatzjoni” and the audience for their support.

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Actual information you'll find as well
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KuyaThom

On his walk home to the Philippines, Thomas Kellenberger is braving various internal and external impediments. Nevertheless, he is progressing as planned towards his destination. At the time of publishing this Newsletter, he was in Bangladesh. Everything being well, he should arrive in Cagayan de Oro in May 2023.

... From Tulga we make our way across the Great Himalayan National Park to Banjara and from there to Shimla. ... After a great day of trekking with a 2000m ascent, we pitch our tent at beautiful spot at 4200m. ... Overtired, we leave at dawn to cross the mountain range and descend to the next valley. There is no visible path, only big snow covered rocks. At 4700m we realize that we are no longer on the planned route. After a risky descent, we go to the other side of the high valley and climb up a steep snow-covered slope to the summit. The ascent without crampons is quite challenging. In addition, Marijn's headache intensifies. The joy of the summit is short-lived, because the descent on the other side is over very steep slopes with occasional climbs and very difficult terrain. Down in the valley it doesn't get any better; difficult terrain, no apparent path, steep slopes and eventually losing our route forces us to set up an emergency bivouac at nightfall.

... Road construction laborers from Delhi accompany us on our way down to the valley. Every morning they walk 10km to work and in the evening they walk 10km back to their lodging, which is a small room shared by five of them. They earn 400 Rupies/working day (CHF 5.-). They invite us to their room and offer us soft drinks and cookies.

... Near Shahzadpur I meet a farmer plowing one of his fields. He lets me plow part of the field with his tractor and invites me for tea and cookies.

... On the way to Haridwar I want to cross the Rajaji National Park, a reserve for tigers, leopards and elephants. However, at the entrance gate a ranger puts an end to it. One may cross this park not on foot but only on driving safari. In addition, the park is currently closed.

... Late in the evening I arrive in Haridwar just in time for the end of Diwali, the 5-day festival of lights of the Hindus. Based on its spiritual and social significance, Diwali can be compared to Christmas and New Year's Eve.



... Since the Ganges is sacred, no alcohol is allowed to be sold within 13km of the river, hence in almost all of Haridwar. What I don't understand, however, is that it seems to be allowed to litter the holy river with garbage and dirt. Everyone just throws their trash on the ground, or right into the sacred river. At the bridgehead, numerous lepers and people with severed limbs collect alms, while the gurus wash themselves in the dirty river below.

... Near Lal Dhang I spend the night in the "Forrest Nature Camp". I am the first guest in the newly opened camp. Sapi, the owner, is enthusiastic about my project and offers me not only a free overnight stay, but also a rich dinner and breakfast cooked by his lovely wife.

... In the thicket of the jungle I don't see far. No idea what is hiding behind the lush greenery or lying in wait there. With every sound I hear my heart pumps faster and I get totally concentrated. I have to admit my stress level is quite high here. Suddenly my feet get caught in a left behind round sling. I stumble, lose my balance and fall. With the inside of my left knee I hit a stone with full force. I can get up, but feel a buzzing pain in my knee. Limping, I walk on and leave the jungle as quickly as possible. I decide to follow the main road or highway for the rest of the way to Nepal.

... Suddenly I feel a burning pain behind my ear, strike reflexively and find a dead hornet in my hand. In an instance a whole swarm attacks me. I run as fast as I can, as if I were not carrying a heavy backpack. When the hornets finally let go of me I experience nausea and almost have to vomit. Also my knee hurts now more again. ... Kitchens in India are often extremely unhygienic. ... Nevertheless, I eat everything and everywhere, just like the locals do. For a long time I was lucky with my seemingly strong digestive system, but sooner or later it had to come differently. ... Exhausted from the diarrhea, with a painful and increasingly unstable knee, I have to interrupt my hike 40km before the border with Nepal. Now my mental condition too is suffering. ... Exhausted and at an absolute low point, I now just want to get out of India. ... I listen to Swiss music and dream of home in Switzerland and the Philippines. Tired of travel and adventure, I am longing for the familiar and for my loved ones.

... On November 8, I stay overnight in a cheap motel in the village of Attariya. Around 2am I am violently jolted out of a deep sleep by a strong shaking of the whole building. "An earthquake!" ... The exit is too far away, the staircase too dangerous," so I drop out of bed onto the floor and lie flat in the life-saving triangle between the floor and the edge of the bed. After what feels like an eternity, the shaking finally stops. In the morning I learn that the quake, whose epicenter had been very close to me, had a magnitude of 6.3. Nearby several houses had collapsed and some people had been killed or injured.





KuyaThom

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... Two days later I reach Pokhara, the tourist capital of Nepal. ... A middle-aged woman who has just returned from a silent retreat in a monastery asks me how I would meditate and find myself. Surprised and also a bit perplexed, I reply, "well, I just hike."

... In the late afternoon, I reach the village of Deurali, which situated on a small mountain. On the TV screen of an electrical store the World Cup match Switzerland vs Cameroon is in its final stage, with Switzerland winning one to zero. After learning that I am from Switzerland, the exclusively male spectators cheer at the final whistle.

... The very friendly landlady offers me a place to stay for the night. Her daughter, 13-year-old Subeksha, is very talkative while she prepares my room and changes the beddings. ... While she is cutting vegetables for dinner, I ask her where she learned English so well. As if it were self-evident she answers, „On Youtube and Tiktok.“ ... Subeksha: "What are you writing?" Me: „Well, I'm writing a blog about my trip, and later on I want to write a book about it too.“ Subeksha: „Are you including me in your book?“ Me: „Yes, I'm writing about you and your family right now. Why don't you read through it and tell me what you think.“ Subeksha reads the English text. After reading it she says, „Yes, that's right, that's how it was! Will you give me one of your books then?“ Me: „Yes certainly, if the book is actually printed, then I will send you a copy.“

... My two friends Rolf and George, who have come all the way from Switzerland, are already waiting for me and welcome me with a cold beer on the terrace of a café. ... Shortly after leaving Gorkha, we come across a lively wedding convoy and are immediately invited by the warm-hearted people to dance with them on the street. ... Even little surprises like this wedding always make my journey an exciting adventure.

... After four days we reach Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. I have now covered exactly 10'000km on foot. This does not include the kilometers I had to fly or drive. Two thirds of my very long trek are now behind me. ... After turbulences and a crisis, I now feel a gradual calm coming over me. ... On a hill above the big city, the three of us lie down in the sun, listen to relaxing music and together enjoy this magical moment in the here and now. Gradually all my thoughts fade away, the music becomes quieter and quieter. Suddenly there is complete silence. It is perfect, I could not be happier! Life is beautiful.

... Not far from Thamel is the Durbar Square with its historic temple complex and the royal Kumari Ghar Palace. ... Pre-pubescent girls from Nepal's Newari Buddhist community are selected as Kumari. ... In this tradition observed only in a few cities in Nepal these young girls are seen as the physical incarnation of the Hindu war goddess Taleju. The chosen girls are usually separated from their families and henceforth live a secluded life in the Kumari Ghar.



... After their first menstrual bleeding, the girls are cast out as goddesses and sent back to their families. Many of them find it difficult to reintegrate into their families. Due to the lack of schooling, they also have poor chances for the future. In addition, they often suffer from physical conditions because they were not allowed to walk and had too little exercise in the palace. Most of them also remain single their entire life, as legend has it that men who marry a Kumari die early. ... The subject occupies my mind for some more time. Researching about it, I later learn that a former Kumari, who was lucky enough to have been allowed to stay in her parents' home and receive proper education, is now campaigning for the right of Kumari girls to education. I hope that she will succeed in her endeavors or that the tradition will one day be abolished altogether.

... From the village of Tauthali, it's a steep climb up to a nameless peak. At the top, I meet a film crew shooting scenes for a musical video. Subash, a member of the film crew, welcomes me to watch on the set and later he invites me for lunch.

... Peter came from Switzerland to accompany me for a while. Together we visit the children's aid organization "[Nawa Asha Grisha](#)" located on the outskirts of Kathmandu. The nonprofit and nongovernment organization was founded by a Swiss lady. Peter and I both have a very good impression during our visit. I see many parallels to the work of Island Kids Philippines in Cagayan de Oro. ... For a short moment I feel like at home in Cagayan de Oro. I miss the children we support and my work there. At this moment, I once again realize where I belong and I wished that I had already arrived there.

... Khem Lakai, who runs a very successful hotel management school in Kathmandu. Khem had himself attended the hotel management school in Thun (Switzerland) years ago and has strong ties to Switzerland. ... Over the next three days we meet several times, have very interesting conversations and enjoy the great time together. Khem informs the media about my trek, whereupon [an article](#) appears in one of the largest newspapers in Nepal. Khem also introduces me to Pradeep Bashyal, the author of the bestseller "Sherpa", and to Sushil Thapa, the Vice President of the Nepal-Swiss Chamber of Commerce. Both of them do interviews with me.

Standort von Kuya Thom, 08.02.2023.

