



newsletter

Island Kids
Philippines 

2023/2

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Dear Friends of Island Kids Philippines

"There are a thousand possibilities to make the world a better place. Because anything is better than doing nothing".

This is a quotation of Samuel Koch, paraplegic since his accident in the TV show "Wetten dass...?" 12 years ago. We are very grateful to the numerous friends who are helping to make the small world in and around Cagayan de Oro a better place. It is you, with your support, as well as with our staff on-site, in Switzerland and in Germany and also with the growing number of partner organizations in the Philippines. We take small and bigger steps which might not be significant for mankind, but which mean a big difference for the life of individuals and eventually for a whole community. We pursue our goal in many ways: information campaigns, fight at the Court, continuous motivation to attend school and varied school vacations, are examples we will give an account on in this newsletter.

■ Events at PIKIFI

In our Socialtherapeutical Center for Prevention and Intervention (Alice Rose Clover Child Development Center) numerous lectures, seminars and meetings continue to take place.

- 17th February: **FAITH-Gardening** in the context of the BRC-project (Building Resilient Communities). The abbreviation FAITH stands for “Food Always In The Home”. The aim is self-supply with vegetables by cultivating one’s own microgarden.



FAITH-Gardening.

- During the **“Safer Internet Month”** in line with Safer Kids many events took place in cooperation with various partner organizations. For instance, on 8th February, children of our community aged between 6 – 11 learned about the protection against dangers in the internet. The month, full of activities culminated in a two-day event on 25th/26th February. Themed “Together for a Better Internet”, children, teenagers and interested parents met in age-appropriate groups. The safe handling of the internet, the protection against exploitation and abuse were in the center of lectures and creative activities.

Child Labor, Children in Conflict with the Law and/or Street Situations as well as Rights and Protection of Children were in the center of the external event “Against Child Exploitation”. From 19th to 21st January, the organizations [ACE \(Against Child Exploitation\)](#) and World Vision together with the regional police passed information and held educational courses for staff members. The purpose was becoming aware of affected women and children around. Virgie Demata-Vicare, co-

founder and director of PIKIFI, took part in the panel discussion on the second day.

■ Fight for Justice

Currently PIKIFI supports 48 children and adolescents at Court because of sexual abuse, exploitation and multiple rape. The following cases could be closed, but most are still pending:

- The 16-year-old D. was abused by her father. As he admitted his guilt, she did not have to testify against him, and he was convicted.
- Another father has to go to prison for 40 years because of very brutally raping his child.
- When A. was five-years-old, her mother died while the father was in prison. A. was left in the care of her grandmother who maltreated her physically. In the same household lived three uncles who regularly raped the little girl for three years. They were sentenced to life in prison, and the grandmother had to go to prison, too.
- J. was raped by a relative of a high-ranking politician. For a settlement out of court she was offered the high amount of CHF 3’000, which she declined.
- One of the many children, whom the (already convicted) Australian sexual offender Peter Scully had misused in the darknet for cruel crimes and in at least one case had murdered, is Z. who was 18 months old at the time. Today the 11-year-old currently lives in our women’s house together with her mother. Her case will shortly be closed.

■ School Life

After a long time without front-of-class teaching, regular full-time classes could finally start again. For a few of the older children and adolescents learning with modules could have its advantages, and some even resumed education because of this method. However, the disadvantages now appear of what had been declared as “The New Normal” of the living situation changing yet again. For some children it is very hard to find their way back to a daily routine structured by attending classes



and doing homework. They abandon school, work or just hang around. After two years without regular classes, many pupils are clearly set back in their education process. This fact might damage the Philippines over generations. During the pandemic, pregnancies among teenage girls have risen dramatically which will complicate their situation after having given birth. Our staff fight for every individual child and try to find the best solution for it to continue the classes and possibly finish school.

■ Kuya Thom

Thomas Kellenberger has arrived in the Philippines. When this newsletter went to press, he was a few kilometres south-east of Manila. In the capital city he met the Swiss Ambassador and members of various organizations. Joint meals and talks with old friends strengthened him for the final 1,400 km of hiking ahead. On 25th May he plans to arrive in his second home Cagayan de Oro. Soon afterwards he will return to Switzerland for various events where he will talk about [his long journey](#) and the future goals of IKP's work.

■ School Vacation in the Children's Village

Volunteer Seline Gutmann reports on the program of a week of vacation which she helped to organize and in which she took part:

"Last week the children were on school vacation, therefore the team of PIKIFI put together a varied program for the week. Each morning we started with sporting activities: dancing, jogging, Zumba and walking early in the morning gave us the necessary energy for the week.

Monday morning the children could relax and start their school vacation in a stress-free way. The children spent the morning with their house parents in and around the house gardening, cleaning the house, or just enjoying the free time. In the afternoon we did some sport. With the smaller children we played various games like sack race and relay race. The older children organized a volleyball competition where they could release their energy.

After morning sport on Tuesday, the older children took part in a "workshop" about security and handling the internet in the context of "Safer Internet Day". The smaller children were creative folding and painting paper butterflies. In the afternoon we all made Empanadas over the open fire. The children cut vegetables, kneaded dough, stuffed and formed Empanadas which we enjoyed the following day as a mid-morning snack.



Wednesday morning we organized a workshop for the older children about puberty and sexual health. The smaller children were creative drawing their favourite animals and learning how to write and spell their names. In the afternoon we were again baking and playing. We made donuts over the fire and the children let off steam playing Dancingball.

On Thursday, the older children participated in the second part of the workshop about puberty and sexual health. The younger children learned about the rights of children in the Philippines and practised their skills in writing and spelling. After lunch, sport was on the agenda. The older children drove to the Sport-Center doing jogging laps. The smaller children played various catching and ball games in the courtyard of the school. In the end everyone was dancing together.

Friday morning, the children with their house parents got ready for the monthly community meeting which took place in the afternoon. The children of the Blue House lead us through the meeting where news of the Philippines, of the area and of PIKIFI was presented. In addition the children could express their concerns and wishes. After the meeting and the dances prepared by the children, we all played various games which were explained and organized by the children of the Blue House.

For the whole week everybody was looking forward to Saturday, because on the agenda was: swimming! Early in the morning we all drove in our big bus to a swimming pool. Once we arrived, nothing could hold the children back. Most children spent the whole day in the water, and only left the pool for a short moment to have mid-morning snack, lunch and tea. Although in the late afternoon, all of a sudden it started to rain heavily and we had to pack up in a hurry, it was a very successful day. The children had a lot of fun and could release their energy with swimming and competing at diving. On the way home, almost everybody fell asleep.”



■ Fates

The 15-year-old J. is suffering from diabetes Mellitus Type 1 and needs regular daily blood sugar readings and insulin injections. When she fell in love, she ran away from the children's village one evening. She stole insulin out of the fridge, but didn't take any syringes or needles. An immediate search for the girl was without success. After about 24 hours our housemother / social worker Rachel got a phone call from J. In the meantime she was alone in her parent's house, had thrown up, was already dehydrated and could not walk any more. Thanks to Rachel's quick action, J. was brought into hospital by ambulance in time with a life-threatening blood sugar level of over 27 mmol/l. The young girl survived, but it is not yet clear how much damage this hyperglycemia has caused.

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Actual information you'll find as well
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KuyaThom geht nach Hause

"I am alive, I am healthy, I am free, I am happy"! Not always Thomas Kellenberger succeeds in maintaining this feeling. He is too sensitive to all the various things he has encountered on his long journey. Not only physically his way leads him across hills and valleys:

... My goal is the summit of the Pikey, which is on an altitude of 4'065 mamsl. I was told that from there one should have a good view of Mount Everest, Nuptse and Lhotse. After having hiked across almost all of Nepal, I want to see at least once in my life with my own eyes the highest mountain in the world; even if it's only from a distance. For this I even gladly welcome the detour over the Pikey. After my break and the beautiful encounters in Kathmandu, hiking in the mountains now once again makes me really happy. I make very fast progress in the mountains, as I overcome up to 2,500 meters of altitude on distances of up to 41 km per day. ... Reaching the summit, I finally get to see Mount Everest, the highest mountain in the world. With a clear view on the highest peaks of the world and a sea of fog below the atmosphere is perfect! For at least two hours I sit (almost) alone up here. I marvel at the magnificent panorama and eat the last piece of Gruyère cheese and the last slices of rye bread that Peter had brought me from Switzerland.

... In Mirchaiya I meet Subash, who invites me over night to his home. His family lives very simply, in a half-collapsed house with a makeshift roof. The mother and Subash's younger sister Diwa cook our dinner outside on the fire. We have lentils and fried eggs. Afterwards we go to bed early. I sleep next to Subash in the straw, with the family's cow, calf and goat just a few meters over.

... However, before I am going to leave Nepal that I have come to love so much for good, I am visiting the aid organization [Maiti Nepal](#). It was founded in 1993 by Anuradha Koirala, a Nepalese woman. Since then the organization has been fighting human trafficking and continuous to rescue numerous girls and women who have become victims of this terrible crime against humanity. ... In Biratnagar the organization runs a temporary shelter for girls and in Itahari, 20km away from Biratnagar, they run a practical skills training center where the girls can attend courses in sewing and dressmaking and manicure and pedicure, among other things. These courses are intended to help them become self-sustainable. I learn that many of the victims get rejected by their families. ... Staff members are on duty here day and night. They observe the border crossers in order to recognize victims, rescue them from being trafficked to India and offer them direct help. One such post of Maiti Nepal is located at every border crossing from Nepal to India, saving numerous girls every year.



... The next morning, Peter surprises me with a wonderful Christmas gift. Peter organized for us a visit to [Bud-dhas Smile School](#). This School in Sarnath is a day school for more than 200 children who live in extreme poverty and to a large extent on the streets of Sarnath and Varanasi. The charity was founded in 2003 by Mrs. Rajan Kaur Saini. At the day school, the children aside from education receive hot meals, school uniforms, loving care and a holistic development of their individual talents. The school's staff regularly makes home visits and visits the children on the street. Sick children are also accompanied to medical examinations and receive medical care. ... We sing and dance with the children, talk with them and after lunch hand out chocolate cakes for dessert. I am once again filled with joy in the company of these very precious and most beautiful children. I could not have imagined a better gift for Christmas. ... In the evening, I walk through the streets of Sarnath in desperate search of a SIM card. I desperately want to have internet connection in order to reach my family in Switzerland and wish them a Merry Christmas. SIM registration in India is complicated, thus no store wants to sell me a SIM card. ... Annoyed and frustrated I am on my way back to the accommodation. Suddenly I hear a voice calling, "Thom, Thom." As I turn around I see a young girl running towards me. I recognize her; it's 12-year-old Samira, whom we had met at the BSS earlier on that day. With much excitement she brings me to her family, who lives nearby in a makeshift

shanty on the side of the road. She introduces me to her younger siblings and her mother. Sitting with the family for a long time that evening and making fun with Samira and her siblings, I have long forgotten the frustration because of the SIM card.

... Early in the morning, Peter and I set off for Bodhgaya, in the Bihar region. ... Thousands and thousands of monks and devoted Buddhists have gathered here to listen to the teachings of the Dalai Lama for three days. ... In the dense crowd of monks and visitors from all over the world, numerous elderly, women with small children on their arms, people with disabilities, lepers and poor children beg for alms. People with amputated legs move forward on a kind of roller board or drag their bodies across the street without any aids. ... What saddens me the most is the fate of the tightrope walkers. In several places in the city center, children perhaps five to eight years old balance for many hours on tightropes while adults standing below collect money with a hat. Onlooking pilgrims watch the sad spectacle and here and there throw some money into the hats. The children are made up like clowns. Nevertheless, you can clearly see that they are very unhappy. Once again, I feel anger and sadness because of the injustice in this world.



... Inspiring is our visit at Bowl Of compassion. It was founded in 2008 by the German backpacker Michael Saatkamp and is locally run by the Indian co-founder Murari Singh. Over 120 children receive hot meals and schooling at the organization's two day schools. In addition, the aid organization runs a hostel for volunteers and guests who through their stay contribute to the operation of the schools.

Unfortunately, we don't get to see any children because it is school vacation time. ... Murari tells us about the Indian caste system and how they fight against it in their school. He says that although their students are all very poor, they are not all from the same caste. At the start, those children from a slightly higher caste would not sit next to those from the lowest caste, let alone touch the so-called "untouchables". He did not tolerate this and made it clear to all the children that there are no castes at [Bowl of Compassion](#) and that all people are equal. Murari firmly believes that through education and enlightenment of the next generations the caste system will one day be abolished.

... After registering myself for the event with the Dalai Lama, I unexpectedly fall ill. I have a fever and once again terrible diarrhea. For 48 hours I am either on the toilet or sleeping. I have Giardia Lamblia and have to take antibiotics. Only on the third and last day I manage to see the Dalai Lama and attend his teaching in full stage.

... In 26 days, I walk through an area that has about as many inhabitants as the entire European Union. Being the only white guy far and near, it is hardly surprising that I am constantly approached, asked for selfies or stared at with big eyes. Once again, I feel like a parrot in a pine forest. Not only do I not meet a single tourist, but also not a single hill. The land here is at least as flat as in Holland. I am progressing fast, covering the leg of 836km in less than a month, which is a new personal distance record.

... In the village named Baisi I meet Hamid Raza. He invites me to spend the night with his family. Hamid prepares dinner for me and leads me to the deep well with hand pump, where I can take a shower. I am showering once again under the open sky and with the giggling young men of the family clan as my audience. The hand pump squeaks, the water has a brown tinge and smells of rust.

... In a small village, I get invited to visit the school. Classes are segregated by gender, and lessons are held in minimalistically furnished shelters half outdoors, with nothing except a small blackboard and a few books.



... Bangladesh: The predominantly Muslim country ... is the most densely populated country in the world (with the exception of a few city states). Widespread poverty, overpopulation and heavy pollution pose huge challenges to the country. Wherever I go I find garbage. There seems to be no functioning solid waste management in the country. Garbage is dumped right and left on the side of the road or simply into the numerous rivers and dikes. Even in the inner cities I see piles of garbage everywhere, which here and there are set on fire by the people. Rivers and streams near agglomerations are black from dirt and pollution, with rising gas bubbles on their surfaces. In the heavily contaminated bodies of water, I see men fishing and immediately decide that I will never eat fish in Bangladesh. After five days I reach the Capital Dhaka. ... Dense crowds everywhere and the perfect traffic chaos; clogged streets with countless bicycle rickshaws, dented buses, not a single functioning traffic light, overexhausted road traffic officers and elephants crossing the largest intersections of the city. In addition, there is the deafening noise of the incessant and senseless honking of horns day and night, and the smog that covers the entire city as a milky veil in front of the sun and the blue sky. ... Here I am, swimming in this gigantic river of humans and nearly drowning in my own loneliness. After a Chicken Biryani for dinner, I want to drink a tea on the street. Around the tea stall stands and sits a group of young people. One of them is playing a ukulele and the others are singing full of emotions. One of the two lady singers invites me to take a seat. Not long after, I am completely overwhelmed by the music and the very passionate singing. Although I do not understand any of the lyrics, the emotions of the young people penetrate my heart. Suddenly I hear neither the noise of the big city nor the crowds of people. The loneliness fades and I am suddenly filled with joy.

... It gets even worse as I leave the mega city via its industrial area on the outskirts. In addition to the exhaust fumes from traffic, the road dust and the burning piles of garbage, there are now also the smoky chimneys of the unconstrained industrialization. I now feel uneasy due to pressure on my lungs, and the exposed skin on my forearms and face itches uncomfortably. This place is hell on earth.

... While walking, one very particular scene on the sidewalk leaves a strong impression in my memory. It is only for a brief moment that I see the two women, passing them without stopping. The younger woman, maybe the daughter, is in a sitting position on the heavily trafficked

sidewalk. On her lap lies the bald head of the older woman, whose body is emaciated to the bones and whose wide-open mouth struggles for breath at longer intervals. The younger woman strokes the older woman affectionately and gently with her hand over the bald head. It is obvious that the older woman is dying. Dying on the streets of Dhaka, with all the uninvolved strangers frantically passing by. The only dignity left to the dying woman is the loving care of the younger woman on whose lap she can hopefully soon fall asleep and find rest in peace. Even weeks later, the image with the two women will occasionally appear before my inner eye. It is one of those impressions that I will probably never forget. Late in the evening, I board the night train to Benapole, on the border with India, and leave Dhaka behind me.

... I made the last 140km from Hanoi to Halong Bay in one day, in 23 h and 50 min. Tomorrow I will finally go to my second home, the Philippines, where I will cover the last 2'000 km of my long-distance trek.