



newsletter

Island Kids
Philippines 

2023/3

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Dear Friends of Island Kids Philippines

We very much regret that the scheduled and announced talks with Thomas Kellenberger had to be cancelled. After his arrival in Cagayan de Oro (CdO), the founder of Island Kids Philippines was in poor health, and until today a return to Switzerland has not been possible. We ask our friends, patrons, sponsors and donors for their understanding and patience, as no lecture tours will be possible in the foreseeable future. Together with Thomas we hope that soon his health will improve and he will be able to talk about his impressive trip in due time.

Nonetheless, the daily business at PIKIFI is continuing: seminars/workshops took place and the school year 2022/23 ended. Again, PIKIFI received an award. And daily our staff and people related to our work and organizations fight for the rights and protection of children and adolescents.

Our children have hopes and dreams – you provide them with a future!

Salamat kaayo – many thanks!

■ Kuya Thom Finished his Long Walk

On 25th May 2023 Kuya Thom arrived in the center of the city of Cagayan de Oro (CdO) in very poor health, after 21 months of walking. The extreme and humid heat, as well as two slipped disks from the past, caused him serious problems during the last kilometers in his adopted Country. But only few knew about it. In his usual brave way, showing no mercy towards himself, he participated in the festive receptions held in his honor. In the City Hall, Mayor Rolando “Klax” A. Uy and other representatives of the city welcomed Kuya Thom and his companions: friends from Switzerland, Céline Fürst (official representative of the Swiss Embassy), journalists and staff of PIKIFI. Kuya Thom described some impressions gained during his long walk, and he had a conversation with Mayor Uy. After a joint lunch the group started its journey through the city to the Landfill Community Learning Center, and on to the square in front of the schoolhouse in the PIKIFI Children’s Village.



The City Mayor Rolando „Klax“ A. welcomed Kuya Thom and his companions.

Even in the pouring rain, children and adults did not stop celebrating the arrival of “Kuya Thom”. At certain meeting points they waited for him in large groups and accompanied him waving little flags. More and more groups of IKP kids and staff in white “Kuya Thom Goes Home-T-Shirts” joined the walking group which towards the end counted several hundred participants. During the last two kilometers the walkers were accompanied and cheered on by a village band on a pickup truck.

On the square in front of the schoolhouse, several hundred more children, adolescents, parents and staff jubilantly welcomed Kuya Thom. While they could hardly stop chanting his name, Thomas Kellenberger, overwhelmed by emotions, lost his composure for a moment

and burst into tears. Later, he said that this moment was one of the happiest in his life. After a prayer of gratitude in the form of dance and more speeches on the festively decorated square, a big celebration started with delicious food for everybody.



A warm „Welcome“ at Surigao City.

Unfortunately, soon afterwards Thomas was in very poor health. During several stays in hospital, he was checked thoroughly. A bradycardia, possibly caused by too high a value of potassium in the blood, and a slight hypothyroidism could be successfully treated. Nevertheless, after two months some varying and changing symptoms persist, like flu with headache and light fever, rashes, pains in feet and legs, circulatory disorder in the limbs, swollen lymph nodes, inflammatory reactions, as well as an overwhelming feeling of heaviness and a paralyzing fatigue. Possible causes could be the after-effects of a nondistinctive viral infection, fungi or parasites in the blood detected under a microscope, or a chronic fatigue syndrome. Unfortunately, the type of fungi or parasites cannot be identified in the local laboratories. Therefore, Thomas is currently undergoing an alternative therapy aimed at strengthening the body’s own immune system. Despite this very difficult time, he is grateful that his health has gradually been improving over the past two weeks, and that he can work again, although in a very reduced way. Thomas has a positive attitude; he absolutely wants to recover completely and he believes in overcoming this unexpected obstacle with patience.

Thomas is in touch with medical specialists in Switzerland and in CdO. Based on all evidence, he concluded that his illness is not life-threatening and he has not to be repatriated by Swiss Air Rescue Service, as has

been discussed. He is very well supported and looked after around-the-clock.



Thomas at the hospital.

Although, at the editorial deadline of this Newsletter, Thomas's health seemed to improve, a return to Switzerland is no option at the moment. As an active person, Thomas finds it difficult to be at PIKIFI and hardly be able to contribute anything. We wish him strength and perseverance to tackle, and get through, this challenge.

■ End of Term

On 11th July the school year 2022/23 ended. After a hesitant start with teaching in classes consisting of only half the number of students, regular teaching finally resumed. Most of our children successfully finished the school year. We are pleased and congratulate every one of them!

We are especially proud of **Flordelyn Laure**. With summa cum laude, she finished her four-year studies leading to a Bachelor of Science in Information Technology at the Mindanao State University in Iligan City, one of the best universities in Mindanao. Because the income of her parents was too low to cover the costs of studying, the now twenty-two-old earned her tuition fee by achieving good grades. Her mother Isabel suffers from asthma and a heart condition, and works as a domestic helper in a recycling shop. But when her father Virgelio became paralyzed due to a stroke and was unable to work anymore, Flordelyn had to ask PIKIFI for support in order to finish her studies. PIKIFI paid for her board and lodging. From the 3rd year, Flordelyn was granted a scholarship which enabled her to again pay some of the expenses herself.

Shortly before the end of the term, her mother Isabel had to go to hospital because of heart failure. Thanks to the financial support of PIKIFI she was operated successfully and Isabel could proudly and happily attend the graduation ceremony of her daughter in Iligan.



Flordelyn Laure.

It was no easy route, but the determination, discipline and perseverance of Flordelyn as well as her ceaseless diligence were finally rewarded with this honorable degree. PIKIFI and IKP Switzerland and Germany congratulate this young woman wholeheartedly on her hard and well-earned success.

■ Seminars and Workshops

Together with various organizations, PIKIFI again organized several seminars:

Feedback-Reaction-Mechanism

This seminar-workshop was aiming at how positive and negative comments from the community can be made in an effective way in order to deepen our relations and to improve our services (rights and protection of children), as well as to show donors and partners the quality of our work.

Social Responsibility on Behalf of the Children

The deputies of parents and children of different elementary and high schools met to discuss and learn more about this topic.

Workshop for Producing Sausages

In the context of the BRC program (Building Resilient Communities), adolescents learned the skill of producing sausages.

■ 73rd Anniversary of Cagayan de Oro

On 15th June 2023 the City of Cagayan de Oro (CdO) celebrated its 73rd anniversary. Together with Mayor Rolando "Klarex" A. Uy, representatives of PIKIFI were invited to the celebration. Our co-founder and director, Virgelia Demata-Vicare received an award for the work of PIKIFI.



Virgelia Demata-Vicare.



■ Fates

On 13th June 2023 J.N. was buried only 20 years old. She leaves behind her little son.

It was Thomas Kellenberger who spoke with her on a former landfill about 10 years ago. He then led an admission interview with her parents enabling J. to attend the school of PIKIFI. When she gave birth to her son at the age of 15, she dropped out of school. Unfortunately, her sister too abandoned school only after second class.

After Thomas's arrival in CdO, he and the former trainee Esther Bühlmann ([Streetlight](#)) showed the [nightly children's street prostitution](#) to a Swiss video journalist. There they met A. with whom they could have a convincing first conversation. Then they met the 13-year-old W., who spent most time in the streets, and was being neglected by her alcoholic mother. They accompanied the minor child home and agreed an interview with the mother the next day for a possible admission of W. to the Children's Village.

Unfortunately, Thomas had to go to hospital the next day and Esther had to do this visit on her own. It was then Esther saw J.N. lying limply on her mat, not saying anything about her true condition. It was only after her death that Esther learned about the miscarriage the young mother suffered a few days earlier. Despite her bleeding she did not go to the doctor. The dirty conditions in her poor home led to blood poisoning causing her premature death.

Poverty, lack of hygiene and education, neglect and shame still bear great risks for the life of disadvantaged young mothers. Meanwhile, W. and A. live in the PIKIFI Children's Village. We hope that soon they will feel at home and seize their chance for a better life and future perspectives thanks to education.

■ Book Recommendation

Maggie Gobran – Die Mutter Teresa von Kairo,
adeo Verlag
Judith Kubitscheck, Judith Kühl
(Fotos: Christoph Jorda)
ISBN: 9783863340469

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Actual information you'll find as well
www.islandkids.de
www.islandkids.ch

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KuyaThom goes home

... On the last leg of my long journey, I trek from the north of the main island of Luzon southward to Mindanao, to my second home Cagayan de Oro City. In the beautiful mountains of Ifugao I refuel new energy for the last 2000km. Here I understand once again how beautiful this country is.

... I am currently facing a hard blow of fate that shortly before my long-awaited arrival could still jeopardize the successful conclusion of my long journey. The dangerous extreme heat days and the very long daily marches of up to 60 km/day soon left their mark on my body. Obviously overheated, I often felt feverish and unwell in the evenings. In Calauag, during a very restless night, I suffered massive sensitivity disorders in my right leg. ... I ended up in the hospital, where I slept through for 22 hours. Back on my feet again, I decided to hike in the late afternoons and overnight in order to escape the scorching sun. I also shortened my original route.

... When I finally reached Surigao City at the northernmost tip of Mindanao, I was warmly welcomed by friends and family of my friends. ... From here it was only 320 km to my final destination in Cagayan de Oro City. However, bad fate or should I better say self-neglect wanted it that the biggest crisis so far would hit me so close to my destination. The long and hard marches in the unbearable summer heat of the past month have taken their toll on my body.

... The doctor's verdict was shocking: not only am I no longer allowed to carry my backpack. No, even the continuation of my hike with long walking distances to Cagayan de Oro is now, in my current condition, too dangerous. ... Since giving up so shortly before the goal is out of the question for me, I insisted on completing my journey driven by my own physical strength. The doctor eventually allowed me to continue the journey by bicycle instead of long hikes. Vincent Eviota lended me one of his two bicycles and now accompanies me with the second bicycle on my way to Cagayan de Oro. Marc and Floro followed us with their car and delivered my backpack to Butuan City. Vincent and I now drive slowly and carefully in order to avoid putting unnecessary strain on my ailing body.



Kuya Thom

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... If everything continues to go well, we will reach Gingoog City by tomorrow evening and after a steep climb over a pass will arrive in Claveria by Monday evening. From Claveria, I am planning to hike the remaining 70 km to Cagayan de Oro in short hikes over three days and without baggage.

... I also thank all of you, dear friends, from the bottom of my heart for your faithful company on my long way and for keeping your fingers crossed and thinking of me on the now remaining 170 km. If you want to support the project "Kuya Thom Goes Home" in favor of needy and abused and exploited children, you are most welcome to do so under the following link <https://islandkids.ch/kuya-thom/>. As of July 20th, we together already raised the proud amount of CHF 117'358. We thank all donors from the bottom of our hearts for their extremely generous support and hope that together we will be still hitting the donation target of CHF 165'000.-.

