



newsletter

Island Kids
Philippines 

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Dear Friends of Island Kids Philippines

"We must learn to live together as brothers and sisters or perish together as fools." These words of warning by Martin Luther King Jr. describe the essence of our work: The tireless weaving of a net that will hold - even as the storms get more violent.

This net was substantially woven in Cagayan de Oro by two women, whom we are now saying goodbye to. Virgelia Demata-Vicare, co-founder and long-standing director, and social worker Grizshelle Labang.

After two years on the waiting list for heart surgery, 10-year-old John Noriel died shortly before the procedure from complications of an infection. His death leaves a huge void and a gnawing question about justice: Why should financial resources decide upon life and death? We are mourning, while his fate is a reminder and encouragement never to give up fighting for the most vulnerable.

Yet luckily, life together shows its bright sides as well: The Bata Alima Farm is prospering, and at end of January, the children could attend a belated Christmas event and just act like children. In the poor quarter of Mano-Mano, people were given a voice in order to control their own destiny. And the first term 2026 highlight, at our PIKIFI school, was the 11th graduation ceremony. Each graduation is a victory of education over lack of perspective.

Life together means sharing the burdens and celebrating the successes together. Thank you for being part of this togetherness and for allowing us to grow together.

■ Belated Christmas Event at the Farm

On the last weekend of January, a day-long event for children took place at the Bata Alima-Farm. The focus of the day was on giving the children space to relax and to experience nature together – without any rigid schedule. They played games, sang karaoke and relaxed in the hammocks. After a barbecue together, an exciting scavenger hunt led the children across the farm. Through quiz questions and puzzles, they learned in a playful way about the various areas and projects of the farm.



Each child got its own personal Christmas gift.

They were guided through the vegetable garden, where the children learned about the process of coffee production and how organic fertilizer is produced. As a special highlight, the last stop was a hiding place where each child could find its own personal Christmas gift. Afterwards, everybody went home tired and satisfied.

Vanessa Lang

■ Giving A Voice to People in the Poor Quarter

On 6th March 2026, an event organized by the University of Science and Technology of the Southern Philippines (USTP) Claveria Campus took place in the IKP Learning Center. Social work students met residents of the poor quarter of Mano-Mano in order to spend a day on Participatory Situational Analysis (PSA). The goal was to

- discover the community's hidden treasures and

greatest challenges

- connect with helpful organizations
- identify risks to ensure the safety of families
- take up goals and dreams of the community

It was not just a meeting – the residents were given a voice and were heard. We hope that concrete projects and measures will ensue.

■ End of Term Celebrations

On 26th March 2026, PIKIFI School in the Children's Village could celebrate the successful end of term for the eleventh time – from the youngest in kindergarten to 6th grade.



End of Term Celebrations 2026

During the morning the big steps of graduation were celebrated:

Kindergarten: 40 children (20 girls and 20 boys) graduated from Kindergarten and are looking forward to starting first grade in June.

6th grade: 16 girls and 12 boys successfully completed Elementary School. They will continue their education at a Junior High School starting in June.

In the afternoon, the students from 1st to 5th grade were finally sent off with a ceremony and dismissed into the well-deserved long summer vacation.



The program offered a lively mix of motivational speeches by the school administration and the PIKIFI board, as well as colorful children's dances and musical performances by particularly talented students. In her report on the state of the school, Principal Ursula Janeth Abellanosa praised the teaching staff, but also pointed out challenges – such as the missing birth certificates of the children. The highlight was the presentation of the long-awaited diplomas and special awards for exceptional diligence, strength of character and/or outstanding achievements.

There was cause for celebration at other locations:

Community Learning Center: 26 children celebrated their graduation from the Center of Early Childhood Care and Development, ECCD

Junior High Schools: At various urban high schools, 16 students supported by PIKIFI (7 girls, 9 boys) completed 10th grade.

Senior High Schools: Another 15 students (13 girls, 2 boys) completed successfully 12th grade.

After graduating from Senior High School, all doors are open to these young people: They can start studying at a university or enter the job market directly, where they can expect at least the minimum wage. Another attractive option are the vocational courses offered by TESDA (Technical Education and Skills Development Authority). A certificate from TESDA enables these young adults, among other things, to take on skilled work abroad.

■ It Takes a Village to Raise a Child

Graduations at every level – each single success by a child or young person fills us with pride, joy and gratitude. We only know too well how difficult it is for young people from poor neighbourhoods or the streets to successfully complete their education. Poverty, worries about the family, and all too often traumatic experiences, such as violence and abuse, distract them from their educational goals. Strokes of fate, early pregnancies, or illnesses often lead to dropping out of school. Sometimes trivial reasons prevent them from attending school, such as a missing birth certificate.

At the same time, school is often a safe haven for many disadvantaged children. Teachers and social workers frequently become the primary caregivers or “surrogate parents”, when the child's own family can no longer cope with the situation. They are always there to listen, provide victim support, offer emotional support, or help dealing with the authorities – such as getting important official documents (e.g., birth certificates). Their work extends far beyond the classroom, the desk, or the consulting room. It takes them to the darkest corners of poor neighbourhoods, to the hospital beds of overcrowded public hospitals, or – in the fight for restorative justice – all the way to the Courtrooms of the city. Sometimes investigations even take them to remote areas of Mindanao or to other islands in the country.

A successful graduation of a child is always the result of a collective effort: It is the outcome of the efforts of the child and its family, but it is also the sum of all the efforts of our staff, the Department of Education, and other government authorities. Perhaps this is the reason why in the Philippines an African saying is often quoted: **“It takes a village to raise a child”**.

■ Farewells and New Beginnings: A New Chapter for PIKIFI



Virgelia Demata-Vicare, co-founder and retired director of PIKIFI.

Changes are often moments for reflection, gratitude and courageously looking ahead. At PIKIFI, we are at such a turning point, as we bid farewell to two influential personalities while at the same time setting the course for a continuous promising future.

At the end of February, **Virgelia Demata-Vicare**, co-founder and long-standing director of PIKIFI, has stepped down and retired. Thanks to her tireless commitment Virgie not only helped to establish PIKIFI, but played an essential role in shaping and expanding it over the years. Her legacy is firmly embedded in the foundation of our work. Full of gratitude, we look back on her valuable achievements, and wish her all the best, happiness and satisfaction in the years ahead.



Grizshelle Labang, social worker.

We also bid farewell to **Grizshelle Labang**. Since 2016, she has been an indispensable support in her role as a social worker. She left at the end of April to concentrate fully on her law studies. We thank her with all our heart for her huge dedication to PIKIFI and her empathetic and committed work in the service of the people under our care. We wish Grizshelle success and energy in her legal career.

In particular, we acknowledge the achievements of these two women in the area of child protection and the restorative justice for children who have been victims of sexual abuse and exploitation. In this field, they have taken PIKIFI's work to a new level and have often played a leading role in the fight against child abuse and child prostitution in the city.

In order to meet the growing demands and manage PIKIFI in even a more efficient way, we have set up a target-oriented organization:

Executive Management: We are pleased that Fred Madrona has taken on the role of interim Executive Director. He has already proved his competence as a Director of **Administration** by his highly quality work.

Management for Programs and Services: We are currently conducting interviews to fill the vacant position.

Program Management: Marilou Lacre serves as key contact for all day-to-day matters. As a retired teacher with a degree in accounting and many years of experience as treasurer on the PIKIFI board, she has enormous experience to ensure the quality of our work.

Reinforcing our teams: A key element of the new organization is the delegation of responsibility to team leaders, who will be granted more influence and responsibility in future.

We are convinced that these flatter hierarchies will promote the dynamism and innovative spirit of PIKIFI. With this reinforced team, we are ready for future challenges!

■ Bata Alima-Farm

In February, the Bata Alima-Farm celebrated its first **anniversary**. What a milestone and what a joy! The encouraging results of a whole year of farming also show in figures (as of February 2026):

- The tree cover has grown to over two hectares; in two years, the trees will bear fruit
- 15 pumpkin plants yielded 300 kg – now 200 more are growing
- 20 cucumber plants yielded 200 kg – now another 150 have been planted
- Every four days, 60 to 100 kg of runner beans are harvested (the Children's Village uses 20 kg per week)
- Since December 2025, a total of 600 kg of vegetables has been delivered to the Children's Village

and School

- The production of organic plant protection products, such as effective and indigenous microorganisms, etc., has increased from originally 2 liters to over 500 liters
- We produce 3 m3 of compost monthly (Berkeley method)



The tree cover has grown to over two hectares.

Furhermore, there is always something **new** happening on the Farm:

- At the end of January, the building for organic fertilizer production was completed
- A new delivery van for transporting building materials, agricultural equipment, and ingredients for organic fertilizer to the farm, as well as for transporting vegetables to the Children's Village and to the market

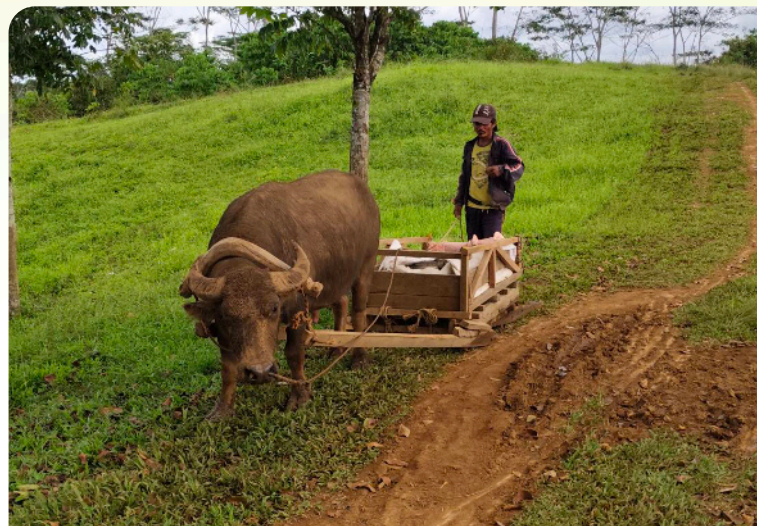
- Purchase of an additional eight hectares of land (thanks to a sponsor) to finally build an access road (dirt road) from the main road to the Farm
- Construction of a spring intake (well house) and installation of water tanks for the drinking water supply and for collecting rainwater for the irrigation system
- Intensifying the collaboration with Esther Bühlmann and her organization Streetlight (Time-out-Spaces)

The organic-based sprays are proving effective. They strengthen the plants, enabling them to repel pests and thus grow well and healthily. The **surplus harvest** is currently sold to vendors at the public market, but we plan to start supplying it to the Women's Association at the landfill for resale. At the moment, we are selling around 300 kg of vegetables monthly, and the trend is upward. We, therefore, plan to set up an organic fruit and vegetable market in the currently vacant space on the ground floor of the Social Therapeutic Prevention and Intervention Center in the Children's Village. Until now, the space has been used for training sessions and meetings.

From January through the end of March, **15 students** of USTP agricultural department stayed at the Farm for the second time. In their 4th year of study, they gained an insight into our activities during three months. They put into practice through 600 hours of work what they had learned in college:

- Plant propagation, cultivation, and growth management
- Production of organic fertilizer, humus, compost and plant protection products
- Coffee production
- Tree planting

In mid-May, a **camp** over several days will take place at the Farm for the children and young adults of the PIKIFI Children's Village. In addition, PIKIFI's **Working Students** will spend part of their vacation on the Farm and help out with the work.



Worker on the farm.

Bata Alima also provides several **jobs** for people of the local Higaongon tribe: A married couple and another employee were given a permanent job after successfully completing their probation periods. Another person is working on a temporary basis. As the Farm continues to grow, we will be able to offer more jobs in future which will support the development of the village in a sustainable way.

■ Fates

John Noriel, a bright pupil of 4th grade, suffered from a severe rheumatic heart disease. His only chance for a cure was heart surgery at the Philippine Heart Center in Manila, where he had been on the waiting list for over two years. During this time, he was closely assisted by Rose Quidlat from our health and social service. Since his mother works in Saudi Arabia as a domestic helper in order to support her family financially, it was primarily his father and his teacher at the PIKIFI school in the Children's Village, Cathy Galvez, who supported him. The latter became an important maternal figure in the absence of his mother.

The way leading up to the heart surgery planned for early 2026 was full of setbacks: On 30th January, a severe pneumonia required hospitalization, and the scheduled flight to Manila had to be postponed. After his discharge from the hospital, PIKIFI temporarily took in John Noriel to help him build up his strength for the up-

coming surgery by providing special care, a healthy diet and a reliable administration of medication. On 4th February, the time had finally come: John Noriel traveled to Manila for the long-awaited surgery. But fate struck again: In hospital a viral respiratory infection broke out triggering another pneumonia in the weakened boy. Despite all medical efforts and the tireless work of the doctors, his weakened heart could no longer cope. On 6th February, John Noriel's heart stopped beating. We mourn deeply with his family and Cathy Galvez.

The death of John Noriel not only leaves us grieving, but raises the question that continually challenges us as an aid organization: How much should it cost to save a life? Could John Noriel have been operated on sooner in a private hospital and thus his life saved? It is very painful to be confronted with the reality that limited financial resources all too often decide over the chances of recovery and survival. This injustice motivates us in our daily work, even when moments like these break our hearts.



John Noriel.

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