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Child-Centered Spaces Help Children Recover

Cagayan de Oro, Mindanao, Philippines – Dec. 30, 2011 – ChildFund continues to provide emergency relief aid to 2,000 children and families in the hard-hit province of Cagayan de Oro, in the wake of flashfloods and landslides brought about by Typhoon Washi [known locally as Sendong], on Dec. 16.

The storm has claimed the lives 1,249 lives, as of Dec. 28.

The relief packs ChildFund is distributing contain food supplies (rice, dried fish, bottled water, canned sardines and noodles), as well as essential non-food items including cookware, laundry detergent, hygiene kits and intimates. All of these items are much needed by families who've lost all their belongings, if not their homes as well.

Beyond food and non-food aid, however, ChildFund has focused on the well-being of children at evacuation centers through psychosocial interventions called child-centered spaces.

Populations who've migrated to evacuation centers for shelter are primarily focused on survival and basic needs. Parents are burdened by securing access to relief supplies, inspecting and beginning repairs to their homes or salvaging what can still be used if their homes had been completely destroyed.

ChildFund's Emergency Response Team and staff from its local partner, the *Kaabag sa Kalumban Pinaagi sa Kabtangan sa Katilingban* [KKKK], observed how children are often inadvertently unattended at the evacuation centers, or are left with nothing to do within the confines of what little space is allotted them.

Normalizing activities, like playing and interacting with other children, as well as carefully crafted activities that allow children to express themselves and soothe the stress and trauma of recent experiences, are a necessary component of ChildFund's emergency response operations in times of crisis, and have been found essential in Cagayan de Oro.

ChildFund organized three child-centered spaces at the evacuation centers at City Central School, West Central School and Bulao Elementary School. ChildFund and its local partner have trained 28 elementary and high school students to serve as youth facilitators at the child-centered spaces. The youth facilitators are leading activities for 279 children at the evacuation centers, even



conducting a simple Christmas program on Dec. 24. Despite their unhappy circumstances, children were able to experience some semblance of a holiday celebration.

Pai Urangot, principal of City Central School, supports the continuation of child-centered spaces, perhaps even after school resumes in Cagayan de Oro on Jan. 3, 2012. "The activity helps heal the children," she says. Local Department of Education Supervisor Juan Suarez concurs: "[This] child psychosocial activity is a great help in erasing trauma in children."

After two weeks of conducting activities at child-centered spaces, Christine, 15, a youth facilitator, says she sees much improvement in the children at the evacuation centers. "I see them laughing and smiling now," she says. "Their smiles and faces look just like they might have before the typhoon," she adds.

ChildFund continues to raise funds to meet the immediate needs of children and their families. "ChildFund has worked in the Philippines for 40 years, so we are able to provide immediate assistance," ChildFund Philippines Program Director Mark Dasco said. "In the midst of a disaster, ChildFund is there as part of the relief effort. And after the crisis has passed, we stay on to fight the root causes of deprivation, exclusion and vulnerability," he adds.

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