



Children on the street in Cubao



Welcoming children from Cubao

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate distribution

Stay at home! But what if you are a homeless child?

COVID-19 is a threat to children living on the streets in Manila.

Orphaned, abandoned and runaway children are among the most destitute in Filipino society. Surviving as best they can on the streets in the heart of Manila, they are highly vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and malnutrition. The COVID-19 pandemic is hitting this group the hardest, leaving them without access to food, shelter and health care.

Australian Marist Solidarity supports homeless children and young people in Manila through a partnership with the Kuya Centre for Street Children. Staff at the Centre use games and drama to focus on topics such as substance and drug abuse prevention, child rights, sex education and life skills. They provide practical support and skills but importantly also a safe and supportive space where these young people have a sense of belonging and community.

Australian Marist Solidarity CEO Rebecca Bromhead commends the project “the work being done at the Kuya Centre provides important social development for homeless children, including their education, personal development and values formation”. She continues “There are thousands of children living on the streets of Manila who have broken all bonds with their families. Victims of violence and of drugs, their survival strategies include begging, stealing and prostitution, leaving them marginalised and very vulnerable”. The Centre’s Street Services Team spend five afternoons per week with the street children in their own environment, getting to know them and offering non-formal education.

Australian Marist Solidarity is receiving regular updates from all of its 70+ projects across the region. In the case of the Kuya Centre, Metro Manila is currently under “enhanced community quarantine” until April 13. Movement between cities in Metro Manila is virtually impossible and now it has become very difficult to move between local areas (Barangays) within Quezon City. People are requested to remain at home, and only one person per household is able to go out to get food. Therefore, all of the Kuya Center's community and street-based programs have been temporarily suspended since March 17, 2020, leaving the children in a vulnerable situation.

It is anticipated that the poverty in Metro Manila will increase severely as so many people have lost their employment or livelihood. Sister Kate O’Neil RNDM said, “once our community and street-based programs

resume, the needs of the people in our areas of work will be high. There may be more street kids in need of residential shelter, however it is not easy to predict.”

Rebecca Bromhead confirmed the ongoing commitment by Australian Marist Solidarity to the Kuya Centre for Street Children “Australian Marist Solidarity is proud to partner with the Kuya Centre for Street Children and acknowledges in particular the importance of its residential care service during this challenging time, providing safety and belonging for very marginalised children. We are committed to ensuring this service can continue and preparing for the anticipated increased need for their community programs as soon as it is safe to continue”.

To support Australian Marist Solidarity and the Kuya Centre for Street Children program, visit www.australianmaristsolidarity.org.au

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