

## Summer of Service in the Philippines

This summer, I was given the amazing opportunity of volunteering for 6 weeks in the Philippines. Nathalie Peiris, and I chose to do our work right outside Tacloban City on the island of Leyte.

We found an impressive non-profit organization called Volunteer for Visayans (VFV) who allowed us to partake in their services. VFV is a charitable organization that works very hard to improve the lives of the local community.



Me and Tonton, Vanessa, and Nikki who worked at VFV

They offer a Child Sponsorship program through which sponsors pay for the education and medical needs of children who otherwise can not afford such services. The sponsored children get paired with the volunteers to practice English and communication skills. My sponsored child was Alison who was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. She was shy but so nice and fun, I loved helping her practice English and answering all her questions about me and my life as well as finding out all about her.



Alison, her friend, and I

The volunteers also offer tutor sessions for the sponsored children so all can do well and learn the most possible since the public schools are so poor and overcrowded. While we were there, Nat and I got the opportunity to teach the fifth graders. We did countless division and multiplication problems and practiced spelling and sentence structure. I don't know if they ever really paid attention to our teaching but they loved to play with us and we loved attempting to teach them.



Nat attempting to teach our 5<sup>th</sup> graders



The 5<sup>th</sup> graders loved to take pictures!

The VFV also is working on a Dump Site project to get as many of the local children who are forced to scavenge out of the dump site and give them the skills to survive. They also organize build a home projects to house those without shelter. The VFV truly helped the community in so many ways and there were so many different chances and ways to volunteer when there.



Local kids playing outside the dumpsite instead of in it as they used to



Painting at the VFV

The VFV matches the volunteers with local host families in order to truly experience living immersed in the culture and lifestyle of the community. Nat and I lived with an amazing host family, There was Mama, who was like a grandmother to us, Nanay Pipey, our surrogate mother, Lucy who was like an Aunt, and Chabel, the cutest 10 year old ever. We had very modest living conditions but the sense of belonging made it so much easier to cope. Nat and I would play Uno almost every night with Chabel and would spend free time listening to our Nanay play guitar and sing. At the end of my six weeks, I truly felt like I was part of my homestay's family.



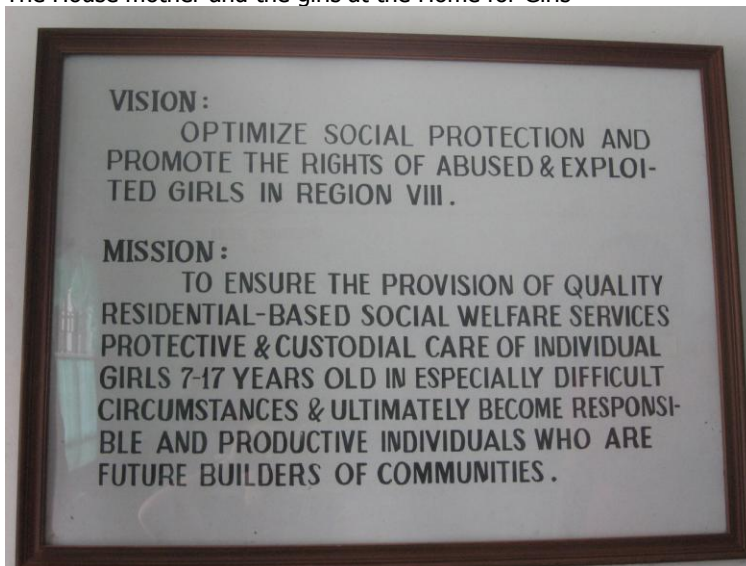
Me, Nat, Mama, Chabel, and Crystal at our house!

Through the VFV, we did our primary volunteer work at The Home for Girls, which is a government run facility that houses abused girls between the ages of 7 and 19. There were about 55 girls while we were there and the majority of them were victims of incest or rape whereas the

rest were victims of child trafficking, maltreatment or neglect. Only four of the girls were able to continue their school work and the rest, due to their cases or lack of birth certificates, were confined to the Home for Girls. Nat and I were able to bring the girls supplies, do arts and crafts and games with them, and most importantly, carry on conversations and listen to their thoughts. The girls have very little and do not get much outside interaction so they loved hearing about us and our lives while getting a chance to talk to us about themselves. Everyday, they would ask when we were coming back to make sure that we were going to return.



The House mother and the girls at the Home for Girls



The vision of the Home for girls

Meeting these girls and seeing how strong, resilient and still so compassionate and loving they are despite their circumstances, has truly affected me. I love each one of those girls and truly admire them. Working at the Home and with VFV has made this a truly unforgettable summer.



Nat and I on our last day at the VFV center



Romeo and I outside the VFV center