
Manila Women's Forum

A Network of Women Professionals

January 2011

Giving Back the Smile to Street Children

By Lisa Kircher Lumbao

Virlanie Foundation's slogan is "Giving back the Smile to Street Children," but at the Dec. 6 Manila Women's Forum meeting a group of former street children brought smiles to all of our faces with their beautiful Christmas carols. In addition to a few of the standard songs, they sang some really beautiful classical songs that were very moving. And talking with them afterwards left me inspired and impressed with their enthusiasm, positive outlook, and friendliness.

Much of the credit for this goes to choir master Lourdes Hermo, pianist Margarette Villarín, and Virlian's head of art and sports Dolly Alejandro. In turn, they're supported by the staff and volunteers of Virlian Foundation, a non-government organization (NGO) caring for children who have been abandoned, abused, exploited, neglected, or orphaned. It is one of the largest, private, non-sectarian child-caring institutions in Metro Manila.

I was further inspired and impressed by our speaker, Julian Fowler. He leaves his photojournalism career in Paris to volunteer for nine months each year, organizing fundraisers,



Virlian group with Lisa Lumbao (extreme right)

preparing Virlian's annual report, improving the website and more as Deputy Manager for Fundraising and Communications. Julian, who is British, is joined by more than 130 Filipino staff and volunteers from the Philippines and other countries, supported by a network of donors and sponsors that have helped more than 12,000 children over the past 18 years.

French social worker Dominique Lemay, who spoke to Manila Women's

Forum several years ago, founded Virlian in 1992. He first visited the Philippines in 1987 to do research for his master's degree in social work. He was so impressed with the polite behavior of Philippine street children compared to the violent young drug addicts in Paris.

Julian described several of Virlian's outreach programs. The main program is focused in children and families held

(Continued on page 2)

January Meeting ■ **When:** 6:30 p.m., Monday, 2011 January 17. ■ **What:** Cecilia Flores-Oebanda, Founding President and Executive Director of the Visayan Forum Foundation, will speak on the escalating social malady that has enslaved numerous Filipinos in various parts of the world — human trafficking. Cecilia, an internationally recognized human rights advocate and multi awarded freedom fighter, has recently been chosen by children across the globe to join the prestigious roster of candidates for the 2011 World's Children's Prize for the Rights of the Child. ■ **Where:** Sharlene Cathro's home, 17 Balete Street, South Forbes Park, Makati. ■ **Bring:** Something to share for the potluck dinner. ■

(Giving Back . . . from page 1)

in the Reception and Action Center run by the City of Manila. Virланie works to improve their living conditions by providing health care, recreational activities and education, and trying to ensure that their rights are respected.

Another successful program is the Mobile Unit. It is an education and health program on wheels that operates in the Divisoria area of Manila. Volunteers pull out a black-board to teach the children in a fun and interactive way. Once the lesson is over the children are fed. The Unit's nurse and social worker take care of the children's health and welfare.

Virланie runs 12 homes where about 400 children are cared for each year. Children can be in a Virланie Home for as little as a few months to many years

depending on their needs. The homes have a family structure with house parents and social workers ("aunts" and "uncles"), and most of the the children go to school and receive psychological support and counseling, as well as assistance with their legal cases if needed.

Virланie works to re-unite the children with their families if possible and in the best interest of the children. Children who have been abused or have physical or mental handicaps are in the Specialized Homes. The mother and baby home is dedicated to young unwed mothers and those about to give birth.

Funds come mainly from about 600 overseas sponsors, as well as donors and partner organizations. The annual budget is about P62 million per year, so

it is a challenge to raise enough funds each year. You can provide in-kind donations, volunteer your time/ expertise, donate to the foundation (for a home or program), or sponsor a child. You can also hold a party at Virланie, invite the Virланie Children's Choir to sing, or have an on-the-job-trainee, or hire a young adult in your office. For more information, you can visit the Foundation in person, look over the website (www.virlanie.org), or contact Julian at virlanie.frcomm@gmail.com.



Lisa Lumbao, Julian Fowler, and host Pilar Martinez-Miranda

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Manila Women's Forum (MWF) is a cross-cultural network for women. It provides opportunities to build friendships, talk to women of various cultures, and share information about resources. Our meetings are intended to provide intellectual stimulation and lead to personal and professional development. All women are welcome to join.

The current officers are: **Amy Alexander**, Message Board. **Julia Holz**, Treasurer, Membership and Programs. **Lisa Lumbao**, Chair. **Junie Navarro**, Message Board. **Lisa Stuart**, Message Board Moderator. **Beulah P. Taguiwalo**, Newsletter, Website.

Cost of membership is P300 per year. Members receive a copy of the current mailing list in addition to the newsletter, which is also sent to non-members. A contribution is collected at each monthly meeting: P20 for members, and P50 for non-members. For more information about MWF, please contact Lisa Lumbao at Tel. 813-0168, or at lumbao@mozcom.com.

Visit our website – a work in progress
www.geocities.com/manilawomensforum

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