

Philippines after Haiyan/Yolanda: Reflexions from Mi-HANDs' volunteers who went to Leyte to help survivors of November 8 disaster

Sunday 22 December 2013, by [MONTILLA John V.](#), [SAJOL Maribel P.](#) (Date first published: 19 December 2013).

We are posting below the reflections of two of the volunteers from Mindanao who went with the emergency relief operation of Mindanao Humanitarian Action Network Against Disasters (Mi-HANDs) in Leyte's devastated areas. The first one, John V. Montilla, is himself a survivor of Storm Sendong which hit Iligan City in December 2011. The second one, Maribel P. Sajol, is an ear acupuncture specialist and was part of the Medical Team.

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Experience of a Storm Sendong survivor helping the survivors in the Visayas regions ravaged by Super Typhoon Yolanda

I am John V. Montilla, single and a resident of Iligan City for more than seven (7) years. I have a small business in Upper Hinaplanon, Iligan City and I am very helpful to others at the same time a devotee to God.

When the tragedy brought by Tropical Storm Sendong hit Mindanao on December 17, 2011, Iligan City was severely affected; destruction to agriculture and properties were severe and it took the lives of thousands of people. At a glance, all the properties that I acquired and my small business (because of it I was able to support other people) were washed out and now living in a temporary relocation site here in Iligan City. Through this experience, I learned to appreciate other people and it gives me courage to help other survivors as well.



Two (2) years have passed; I was able to cope and gradually recovered from the effects of the disaster. As a leader at the same time a volunteer, I strived at helping other survivors to make them understand that life is like a rolling wheel, constantly changing and that the tragedy of life are just tests.

We were able to form an organization of Typhoon Sendong survivors with the helped of NGOs in Iligan City and named it Iligan Survivors Movement (ISM). I became one of the officers, through ISM my knowledge widened, and I realized that IDPs have numerous rights.

ISM became the pillar that supported IDPs [Internal Displaced People] in claiming what is due for them. The organization worked hard to help IDPs stand for their rights and helped them start rebuilding their life with support from local and international organization and the government.

Today, I am one of the active volunteers who provided psychosocial first aid to person in distress. I learned to value other people's emotion and attitude, helped them feel calm and encouraged them to live a normal life despite the hardships.

When Super Typhoon Yolanda ravaged part of Visayas Regions (Ormoc City, Leyte, Cebu, Tacloban and the neighbouring towns) on November 8, 2013, many have lost their homes, livelihoods and thousands of lives were lost, leaving the Visayas Region wrecked.

I was part of Mi-HANDs volunteers who went to Ormoc City to distribute relief assistance and to conduct psychosocial first aid to the survivors. I saw the severity of damage incurred and I realized that the effect of Yolanda is worse than the effect of Sendong. However, despite of what happened, I saw from the face of the survivors the eagerness to rise again and to face the new chapter of life. During the conduct of play therapy for children, I observed that the children are still laughing and full of hope that one day, with the help of their parents they can surpass the tragedy in their family.

For me, being one of the survivors of a tragedy was a great challenge. I learned to be humble and realized that no matter what degree you have finished, in disaster, we are all equal. Life is more happy and full of love if you are able to help and willing to sacrifice for the sake of others and of course with guidance from God.

John V. Montilla

Reaching out to the Survivors of Super Typhoon Yolanda

The Mi-HANDs Emergency Response team went to visit and assist the super typhoon Yolanda survivors last November 29 to December 3, 2013. I was one of the five (5) members of the Medical Team. Ours was no ordinary medical team. We are alternative medicine practitioners. I am an ear acupuncturist trained by the National Acupuncture Detoxification Association (NADA) in the Philippines. The other four members of the medical team were body acupuncturist and tuina massage masseuse.



Our medical kit includes acupuncture needles, ventosa bottles, and the usual assortment of alcohols, gauze and dressings for minor injuries. We also brought with us lagundi (cough and fever), malunggay (vitamins and hypertension regulation) and turmeric (uric acid) capsules, turmeric and ginger granules, herbal ointment for itches and scabs and oils for massage. The women organizations affiliated with Mi-HANDS produce these herbal medicines, ointments and oils. We also brought western medicines for ordinary illness such as cough, fever, headache and minor infections.

As we are alternative medicine practitioners, the communities we served were very curious. Almost everyone has no experience with acupuncture. Our team was at first amaze then later on amused when: 1.) the mothers want their small children to try the acupuncture first to see if it wasn't painful; and 2.) the young men and women challenging the Senior Citizens to try the needles. Because medical support in the areas we served were rare, the people were more than willing to try acupuncture despite some people's inherent fear of needles. Many also availed of our tuina massage.

Though the Mi-HANDS team was supposed to serve Leyte and Ormoc, the medical team only managed to serve the two areas in Leyte: Villaba and Palompon. This was because of the heavy rains when we went to Ormoc our team could not find a place to set up and serve our patients.

I have been to many areas in Mindanao, visiting conflict and devastated areas by natural disasters. In 2011, I also volunteered to be in the medical team in serving the survivors of typhoon Sendong. Now the devastation caused by Super Typhoon Yolanda was much worse that I also wanted to reach out to the survivors through my skills in ear acupuncture.

Ear acupuncture is considered a specialized field of acupuncture. It targets five points in the ear. While it helps in the detoxification of the body, it is very helpful to people who suffered trauma caused by natural calamities like the one wrought by Super typhoon Yolanda. People who receive ear acupuncture are induced to relax and enable them to sleep. Normally, a series of session must be followed for the treatment.

Many of my patients in Leyte shared their traumatizing ordeal. One woman told me that she could not sleep. This was echoed by others. Each time the wind blows and causes their roof to make noise, she is afraid that it is another typhoon. After I treated her with ear acupuncture, she began to relax and feel sleepy.

Easing the burden of the survivors, even just a little bit, filled my heart with gladness. Seeing the happy smiles given to us by families we helped is salve to our weariness. The Mi-HANDS team traveled for thirty-six (36) hours from Mindanao to Ormoc and most are still sleepless from the long travel but we do not want to waste our time so we immediately went to the communities that we targeted to visit and help.

For me the whole experience was very worthwhile. I think this is what most of us felt. We were welcomed by the communities like families. Even though we came there to help the communities we visited, they also reciprocated it by taking care of us, ensuring our security.

My only regret is that our time was very limited. A week was too short to do our work. I just took

inspiration that we can go back and continue what we had started. More than the destroyed houses and devastation of other physical structures, the trauma felt by the people will take a long time to heal. However, with our initial session, its severity has been lessened. With patience and compassion, hopefully, soon they will get over it and lead normal lives.

The long road to recovery and rebuilding is still long for the survivors. With the communities that we visited, we are optimistic that they can move forward with our help and all concern's cooperation. Our salute and solidarity to the people of Ormoc and Leyte!

My personal thank you and salute to the volunteers of Mi-HANDS! Hurray and mabuhay!

Maribel P. Sajol

The author is an ear acupuncture specialist. She is also good with hand and ventosa massage.

To send donations

Donations to Mi-HANDs campaign for Yolanda victims can be sent through the association Europe solidaire sans frontières (ESSF, Europe in solidarity without borders).

Cheques

cheques to ESSF in euros only, payable in France, to be sent to:

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P.S.

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