
Japanese Youths learn Pinoy family values

Many Filipinos have given up on the country and have gone abroad for a better life, but a Japanese has found HOPE in the Philippines.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER Japanese youths learn Pinoy family values

Akira Futagoishi, 71, has been bringing Japanese youngsters to the Philippines since the 1980s so his young countrymen could learn Filipino's values-their being God-and family-centered.

It all started in 1985, said Futagoishi, when he was the secretary-general of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in his hometown in Saitama, Japan.

"I was dealing with 25 school dropouts aged 13-18. They were delinquent children who had done very bad thing except kill a person. I kept them in my house for three years. Their parents [did] not care where they were," he said.

He wrote to YMCA chapters in five countries-Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Thailand, Fiji and Bangladesh-asking them to host the children whom he would bring for a visit.

It was the Philippines, he said, that responded first.

So Futagoishi brought the children to the Philippines and visited the TALA Leprosarium in Caloocan City where they saw "funny people with missing fingers or other body parts." But the Japanese children were surprised because the families at the leprosarium were intact, with the children taking care of their sick parents, he said.

Money vs family

He said during a session among the Filipino and Japanese children, they were asked, "What is the most important thing to you?" The Japanese said "money" while the Filipinos said "God, family," he recalled. "Quite different answers, he said. The children soon started to talk to each other, touching on topics such as respect for parents, their elders and teachers and spirituality. "After two weeks of exposure to Filipino children, the Japanese children changed a lot," Futagoishi said. "They said they felt foolish being money-oriented. Now, those 'bad' children have grown up to be responsible adults, becoming doctors, teachers, and others," he said.

Community spirit

Every year since then, Futagoishi has been bringing a group of Japanese children to learn Filipino values. He accompanied several groups to Barangay Canan in Malasiqui, Pangasinan from 1988 to 1990 where the Japanese children stayed for two or three weeks with families in village.

Josefina Geslani Tamondong, whose late husband Celso Lolarga was a board member of the Pangasinan YMCA hosted Futagoishi and some children that time.

Tamondong said the children were initially quiet and would hardly answer in conversation. "But after a while, they began to get acquainted with their Filipino counterparts and become gregarious," she said. Tamondong said the community also gained from the visits, as their sense of community was revitalized. "They were united in welcoming the Japanese by preparing different activities like mothers' classes and cultural presentations," she said. She related an incident when Futagoishi asked an elderly man to recount to the Japanese teenagers his experience during World War II at the hands of the Japanese Imperial Army. The old man recoiled saying it was embarrassing to discuss the cruelties of the Japanese soldiers in front of the visitors. But Futagoishi urged him to talk, saying "she said.the young students should learn that "war is not good."

After the old man's narration, the Japanese and the Filipino children held and kissed each other, he said.

God's little nook

Futagoishi and the YMCA founded the Caring for the Future Foundation (CFF), which runs a facility for street children in a hilly tree-filled compound overlooking Lingayen Gulf in Barangay Baquioen in Sual town, Pangasinan. Fifteen Filipino street children are housed at the 2.6 hectare compound.

Futagoishi brought a group of campers to the area and later found people willing to sell the land to the foundation.

The facility was opened in 1998 to provide a home for abandoned, neglected or abused children and provide them with basic necessities like food, shelter, clothing and education.

It promotes physical, mental, social and spiritual welfare and development of the children.

"It is God's little nook," Tamondong said.

Futagoishi said the beauty of nature helps heal the children who are "wounded in the heart."

The CFF compound also doubles as a summer camp for Japanese children whom Futagoishi brings to the country yearly.

"The [facility's] concept is the same-for the Japanese children to learn Filipino spiritual values," Akira said.

But now, instead of going to different places in the Philippines, they stay at the compound. The CFF in Japan is in charge of the tours to the Philippines.

Futagoishi said the compound was established "to give back" to Filipino children the help they have extended to the Japanese.

He said they were encouraging the Japanese "graduates" of the program to do something to help in return, and they have been helping the foundation financially.

Lourdes Abarabar, CFF administrator said the visitors stay from two to three weeks and spend between P290 to P500 daily for food and accomodation.

"But they work around the place, [and this is] something they really enjoy," Abarabar said.

"They build roads, riprap walls, plant trees. They would do anything and they love it," she said. A group arriving this month will be painting walls of an open conference hall near the cottages.

Adorning a carved wall of a hill in the compound are names of the Japanese visitors and the dates when they camped there. Since the facility opened, 46 groups have been accommodated in the area.