

Training programme a boon to S'pore volunteers aiding Filipinos

SINGAPORE – Her vehicle had a brake fluid leak during a recent mission trip to the Philippines. However, a training programme she underwent prior to the trip taught her “to remain calm”, said Ms Joan Tan.

“We were in a foreign country,” said Ms Tan, 50. “I realised we were not going to get anywhere in a hurry.”

Thanks to the IVA (International Volunteerism Association) training, the co-leader of the mission trip to Mindanao said she was able “to co-ordinate with the rest of the team as planned in an emergency”.

In August, the Caritas Humanitarian Aid & Relief Initiatives (CHARIS) ran a volunteer mission leaders’ training with the help of IVA.

Fourteen volunteers from various CHARIS affiliates such as Project Micah, NTU Catholic Students Apostolate and A Call To Share (ACTS) underwent two days of theoretical sessions and, after that, hands-on practice in a farm in Lim Chu Kang.

The training included lessons on how to develop a cohesive mission team, how to organise mission programmes, risk assessment, emergency medical response and measuring the sustainability of the mission’s social cause.

Ms Tan was part of a team of eight volunteers who later helped to build homes in the Barangay Babag in Compostela Valley,

Mindanao, from Sept 8-15.

During their stay, they transported bricks, planks and construction materials, mixed cement, laid bricks and shovelled earth in preparation for foundation work. At the end of each day, Mass was celebrated with spiritual sharing and formation.

CHARIS had funded and supported some of the restoration work for victims of Typhoon Pablo in 2012. The recent mission trip was to participate in home building to show solidarity with the local community and to support the work that CHARIS funded.

A young Filipino couple told the Singapore team, “If God were to give us three things, we would want good health, work, and education for our children.” They were one of 40 families living in evacuation centres, and who had been waiting for eight months before seeing the building of their transitional homes.

One of the Singapore volunteers, Ms Sharon Heng, said, “I was more aware of the sensitivities of the local community after attending the IVA training and was on the lookout for opportunities to learn from them, and to find out what their needs were.”

She added, “I was able to put the risk assessment lessons learnt into practice in Davao when we were at the worksite.”

CHARIS organised the training in partnership with IVA “as



Singapore volunteers helping to build homes for victims of Typhoon Pablo in Mindanao.

we felt there was a real need to give our volunteer mission leaders a sense of what can happen or go wrong on a mission trip, and how to deal with some of these scenarios,” said Mr Edwin Sim, chairperson of CHARIS’ Missions and Outreach Committee.

“They can then go back to their organisations and share the lessons learnt.”

CHARIS is a member of Caritas Singapore, and provides overseas humanitarian aid to countries affected by natural disasters and other adverse circumstances. □



Participants of the CHARIS programme at a farm in Singapore, the venue of part of their training programme.