



THE COMMUNITY OF HOPE

By Sr. Cecilia Cuizon

Columban Sister Cecilia Cuizon was missioned for many years in Chile before assuming her present ministry with special-needs children in the Philippines.

Each day, something exciting happens at the Community of Hope Special Education Center in Ozamiz City in the Philippines.

The Center had very simple beginnings. The Sisters discovered many children in the city and outlying barrios with a variety of special needs due to great poverty and malnutrition.

They found children who were blind, deaf, non-verbal, slow learners, and developmentally challenged; others had autism, cerebral palsy, Down's syndrome, and—in many cases—a variety of physical problems.

These children were loved and cared for within their homes, but many of them were confined to their homes with little access to education or specialized medical care. Communication was very difficult for both the children and their families, further



Jernann, the aspiring artist

contributing to their great stress.

It was also clear from the start that the Sisters would need to educate the wider community in accepting these special children as persons who have a right to develop to their full potential, even if limited.

Gradually, due to the contact with the Sisters and staff at the Center, attitudes have changed within the families and in the larger community.

Responding to what they saw, the Sisters set a goal to have a little place where the children could come for socialization, basic literacy programs, physical

therapy, to learn sign language, and to give support and guidance to the families.

At first, a small room was rented where children could come for a few hours each day. As the number of children with special needs increased—and through the generosity of our benefactors—it was possible to erect a larger, purpose-built center known as the Community of Hope, which has continued to grow and expand the services offered to these special children. There is now access to new and more effective ways of helping them—all of which is transforming lives.

The impact of all that is made possible through the Community of Hope Special Education Center is illustrated in the stories of Jernann and Raymond.

Jernann, born with clubbed feet and no elbows, is the youngest of eight children. He and his family live as squatters along the seashore in Ozamiz City.

Because of his condition, Jernann was kept at home where he sat on the floor all day long. His hands were useless, so he



Jernann now drawing with his hands



Sr. Cecilia and the Children of the Community of Hope in Ozamiz City, Philippines

used his feet to feed himself and grasp things. When we discovered Jernann in this dire situation, we brought him to the Community of Hope for assessment. After some treatment, surgery, and therapy, he began to walk, and is now going to school where he has learned to read, write, and count.

Through different activities, he is developing social skills and self-confidence. He has become very good at drawing, using both his hands and feet. Last year, he won 3rd prize at the local Regional Competition in Art.

His parents are very thankful to the Community of Hope, the Columban Sisters, their staff, and volunteers, for the support given to their son. Without their help, Jernann would have remained helpless his whole life.

Raymond is a 4-year-old diagnosed with muscular dystrophy. After being

professionally assessed at the Community of Hope Center, medication and exercises were prescribed and his recovery began. His condition improved from crawling, to standing, to walking. His father died last year and his mother supports the family by taking in laundry.

Two of his older siblings also earn small wages to help feed their family. Without the support and services of everyone at the Community of Hope Special Education Center, Raymond would never have received the help he needed.

We need your help to continue in this vital ministry, as the Sisters are constantly discovering more children with special needs, both in the city of Ozamiz and in distant barrios. We strive to meet these new challenges with support from you, our friends and benefactors, who care so much about those in need around the globe.

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