

The Need



Once among the wealthiest countries in Asia, the Philippines has followed a generally downward economic trajectory since the end of World War II. In 2001, a change in leadership instigated a period of gradual economic growth – culminating in 2007 with the highest growth rate

in 31 years. Largely excluded from these gains, however, are the island nation's estimated 4.7 million poor. Rather, poverty has worsened in recent years – largely due to high population growth, income inequality and insufficient social services.

With lower education levels and larger families to support, rural agricultural workers are particularly vulnerable – placing children at high risk of abandonment. Families seeking work in larger cities also often leave behind children they can't support. Neglected and abandoned children in the Philippines are more likely to suffer from abuse, poor education, child labor and drug addiction.

Holt's History in the Philippines

After developing successful programs in Korea and Vietnam, Holt began exploring opportunities to serve children in neighboring countries. In 1976, Holt helped establish a partner agency in the Philippines – the Kaisahang Buhay Foundation (KBF), or Working Together Foundation, in Manila.

The first of Holt's partnering agencies, KBF solved a problem posed by Filipino policy; in the Philippines, a child care agency could not operate as a child care institution. In Korea and Vietnam, Holt provided care until children could be placed with a family. Unable to replicate this model in the Philippines, Holt created a new mode of operation.

With Holt providing funding and technical assistance, a local team of professionals developed and staffed KBF. Though not a

child care center, KBF became a resource for the many orphanages around the country. The staff worked to improve care conditions while also encouraging institutions to move children into permanent families. By partnering with local staff to work with orphanages in the Philippines, Holt indirectly accomplished its goal to unite orphaned, abandoned and vulnerable children with permanent, loving families.

As Holt's philosophy of care matured, a system of placement priorities began to emerge. In the Philippines, Holt began to explore the possibility of keeping or reuniting children with their birth families before pursuing adoption. Through crisis counseling and other emergency assistance, KBF helped stabilize families, enabling them to care for their children.

In the 1980s, KBF broadened its outreach, establishing a medical sponsorship program, a day care center and a program to house street children. Through a family rehabilitation and outreach program, KBF also helped numerous other agencies increase their services to children. In 1984, KBF introduced a model foster care program to provide attentive, loving



care for children awaiting adoption. After a temporary stay in foster care, many children joined families in the U.S. In the early 1990s, however, changes caused by governmental elections, instability within the Philippines' social welfare department and an influx of adoption agencies caused a decline in ICA to the U.S. During this period, KBF worked to expand foster care for children beyond Metro Manila, serving as a model for other agencies as they developed programs.

Although the process of ICA eventually stabilized, many children continued to endure lengthy stays in institutional care, not becoming legally available for adoption until 5 to 7 years of age. For older children coming of age in institutions, KBF opened the Genesis Home in the early 2000s, providing scholarships and other support needed to attend vocational school and university.

In 2006, more restrictive requirements reduced ICA assignments further. However, as ICA dwindled, more local families began to pursue adoption through formal channels. Domestic placements grew rapidly, enabling many children to stay within their birth culture. Beginning in 2007, consistency returned to ICA as Holt worked to place more children with special needs – a growing population of children in care in the Philippines and a profile of child that is often difficult to place with domestic adoptive families.

Current Projects

Through the years, KBF has grown to become a recognized leader in child welfare services, targeting homeless and at-risk children from birth to 18 years of age. In the early years, KBF relied heavily on Holt for funding and direction, but has slowly become an independent organization whose partnerships now include several European adoption providers. Holt continues to be KBF's only U.S.-based partner.

KBF continually strives to keep families together. Support services include parent effectiveness training, financial and employment assistance, micro-financing and follow-up services to ensure stability. To prevent child abandonment, every year KBF counsels dozens of families and pregnant single women, who also receive housing, prenatal care and post-delivery services. Microloans to start businesses further reinforce single mothers' capacity to support themselves and their child.

To further ease the burden on struggling families, children in low-income communities of Metro Manila receive nutritious meals, medical assistance and learning activities at six KBF day care centers. Families provide a small donation for weekday care and parents often volunteer at the centers.

Though family preservation efforts have enabled thousands of children to remain in their families, many children nevertheless grow to adulthood without the support and love of a family. To help children in institutions develop adult living skills, Holt supports the Independent Living and Educational Assistance program for high school and college students. While living in independent group housing, the young scholars learn skills such as managing household finances. By providing a stimulating, family-like environment, Holt foster care also helps give many more children these essential life skills.

Strategic Directions

More than any other country in Southeast Asia, the Philippines has the greatest potential to serve more children through Holt's sponsorship program. Although sponsors support many children in child care institutions and all children in foster care under 16, until recently, only 50 of the 300 children in KBF day care were sponsored through Holt. In August 2010, an additional 250 children attending day care began to receive support from sponsorship. Holt expects to add another 100 children every year for the next three years, reaching a target of 700 in 2013.

Child sponsorship will also provide the funding needed for program expansion. In the coming years, Holt will work to expand family preservation services in Metro Manila while also developing programs for children coming of age in care. Subsequently sharing successes and lessons learned with partners will build an even greater support system for institutionalized children throughout the country.

Domestic adoption remains strong within the Philippines. Another major permanency solution for homeless children is kinship – or relative – adoption. With clear, professional procedures for the adoption of children to their relatives in the U.S., the Philippines is the only country from which Holt assists with this type of ICA. However, the Filipino adoption board recently changed ICA requirements, making it more difficult to adopt internationally. With the board's preference for families of Filipino heritage over other families applying for ICA, Holt has adapted recruitment strategy accordingly. At the same time, a greater number of children available for ICA are older or have special needs. Holt is continually working to find families open to this profile of child.

In early 2011, Holt will begin sending older child ambassadors to the Philippines. After spending time getting to know the children, the volunteers will return to the U.S. and help find them families. Holt



hopes the Ambassador Program will not only maintain consistent assignments, but also gradually increase the number of children joining families in the U.S. every year from the Philippines.