

Tuesday 18 December 2012

Help in the field in Philippines

33-year-old Rotarian Alfrancis Verdida is from Iligan City's Lanao del Norte in the northern region of Mindanao Island, Philippines. He is a nurse by profession but is currently helping ShelterBox assist families who have lost everything to devastating Typhoon Bopha.

Alfrancis first heard about ShelterBox when Mindanao's Iligan City and Cagayan de Oro were devastated last year by Typhoon Washi in December. His Rotary Club was involved in the emergency shelter response and he was sent as Iligan City's representative to help ShelterBox set up tents. ShelterBox Response Team (SRT) member, Abner Tayco (PH) trained him.

"My sister-in-law and her two children were one of the tens of thousands of people affected by Washi," said Alfrancis. "She totally lost her home when logs and debris in raging overflowing floodwaters hit it. Many people lost their lives but my sister's family was lucky. They decided to stay over at my house that night because of the heavy rain, a decision that saved their lives."

When deadly Bopha struck, Alfrancis saw on the ShelterBox Philippines website that SRTs were to be deployed to assess the situation on the ground.

"I contacted SRT member, Sonny Ongkiko (PH), rearranged my schedule and told him I was free to help out in any way I can to help deliver ShelterBoxes to affected families.

"As a Rotarian, I have been using my contacts to gather the latest information about the disaster and assist with logistics. I have also been acting as an interpreter."

The work in the field for SRTs is physically and mentally demanding. Response team member, John Cordell is extremely grateful for Alfrancis' assistance:

Great asset

"Having Alfrancis as part of the team here has alleviated a lot of pressure in terms of the contacts he has and also for his language skills. Communication is key in the field and to be able to talk to the affected families and hear their stories has allowed us to build relationships with them and find those most in need. He is a great asset."

"One green box always makes a difference to those families made homeless by disaster," commented Alfrancis. "ShelterBox is a humanitarian aid organization that is fast, efficient and true to its cause, which is to deliver emergency shelters to those who need it the most in times of disaster. I believe that giving back warmth, privacy and dignity of a home to those affected is one of the best gifts one can ever receive during these times."