

Habitat for Humanity, Manado Masons (Singapore) Global Village to Kanonang Village, Minahasa, Manado, Indonesia 9th - 16th Aug 08

The Manado Masons

(Left to Right): Karen Wong (co-leader), Daniel Lau (with kid), Quek Kwang Yong (team leader), Michelle Tham, Kuah Hoe Wei, Jessie Chong (co-leader), Christopher Chan, Noridah Zulmalek, Isaac Poh, Chern Pei Pei, Matthew Lai, Michele Neo
(Behind): nameless, Pak John (with cap), Pak Steven (peace sign)



The Manado Masons is made up of eleven virgin habitat builders, one veteran builder and first time team leader - me. We came with no preconceived expectations but only the intention to contribute in whatever way we can.

Manado is a world-renowned scuba-diving destination at the tip of North Sulawesi. Our team found she has much more to offer if you look past her coral reefs and sandy beaches and venture inland into the misty hills, sulfur springs, mountain lakes and flowery villages where foreigners seldom venture. In this magical realm we had the opportunity to experience the hospitality of the place and her people, and in return, to contribute and make a tangible difference to the community.

Our first stop in Manado was to visit an orphanage that the habitat team had arranged for us. It was a grim experience for us. How 70+ children (ages 3 to 17) with the minders are able to live in the cramped quarters while displaying such earnest enthusiasm with us, was a humbling experience that left us at a loss for words. I have immense respect for Pak Fredrick, his family and the helpers who are still able to bring up the kids in a nurturing environment. We did something for them then, but we are not stopping there. We are looking into how we can raise more funds to improve their living conditions.

Our build started the next day, and just as every build was different, so was this build. We were reminded a few times that we were making history, as we were the first GV (global village) group to Manado, Indonesia. A first in many ways for us as well as for Manado, paving the way for future overseas volunteer groups.



Pak Refli/Ibu Syeni – Pei, Kwang Yong, Noridah, Isaac, Hoe Wei, Michelle Tham



Pak Jefri/Ibu Jeane – Chris, Jessie, Michele Neo, Karen, Daniel, Matthew, baby Michele

We were first separated into teams of six to work on two homes - for farmers Pak Jefri Rawis and Pak Refli Walangitan, whose families currently live in wooden huts. Our daily routine involved waking up early, having our breakfast and being ready to move off by 730 every morning. We hop on our transport and take a 45 min. journey to the village. Work starts about 9am, with a break at 12 for a pre-packed lunch. Afternoon offers a yummy tea break prepared by Ibu and the day wraps in the late afternoon with a 45 min journey back.

There was an initial period of adjustment but gradually everyone settled down and got into the routine. For the five days, we dug, mortared, painted, setup girders, sifted sand, mixed cement and slowly watched the houses come together. At the same time there was the camaraderie, the bonding, the laughter, the shared food, the pictures and the moments created. It wasn't just the homeowners that touched us or were touched. It was the whole community; the children, the neighbors and even the doggies - these interactions what I will remember more than the physical work.

On the last day of the build, the community prepared a sumptuous lunch to show their appreciation. Speeches were made, certificates of appreciation were presented, gifts were exchanged and pictures were taken. And with an emotional farewell we reluctantly prepared for our journey back. Just as we have touched their lives, I wonder if they realize how much the experience transforms the volunteers.

Habitat build trips are becoming a regular affair for me, featuring prominently in my annual vacation calendar. It is something that I truly enjoy. For working people you can describe it as a therapeutic executive vacation. It offers you the chance to visit a new country, really get to know the people, some physical activity and also to do something truly meaningful. A break from the routine.

Many have the interest but not the opportunity to go on one of these builds. It is not from a lack of volunteers, but of team leaders stepping up to make it happen. The greatest satisfaction as a first time leader was from seeing how my team members have been transformed by the experience and that I have with them, paid it forward. Thanks to my friends who asked me to step forward.

We would like to acknowledge Habitat Singapore and Habitat Indonesia/Manado for what they represent and for helping make this build a success.

Quek Kwang Yong