

School Food Program

The Buyong Sponsorship Program, with the American School in Japan Philippine Relief Organization as its largest donor, started a food program at the Buyong Elementary School in 1986. Pompia Tohay, the Home Arts teacher, attended a seminar on nutrition and began preparing daily meals using a UNICEF recipe for malnourished children. During the first few years of the feeding program the school saw daily attendance improve and a reduction in the number of malnourished students.



A selected group of fifth and sixth grade students, along with parent volunteers, helps prepare the daily meal. Students start the meal preparation at 7:30 AM by building wooden fires in the outdoor "kitchen." Mrs. Tohay shops for fresh vegetables, fruit and meat daily. When students finish washing, chopping and mixing all the ingredients in large cauldrons they return to their first period class. By 9:45 the food is ready to be served and the students deliver a large pot to each of the thirteen classrooms. The morning recess (9:45 – 10:15) also is "feeding time." Each class has the responsibility for serving food and washing their bowls and utensils.



The menu varies, but usually includes either 'binignit' (a hot fruit and vegetable dish that includes coconut, banana and camote), chicken, vegetable and rice stew, or noodles with vegetables. For many students this is still the most nutritious meal of the day. Buyong Elementary School is the only school in this region of the country to offer such a program. The Philippine Department of Education and Congresswoman Nerissa Soon-Ruiz have recognized this as a model program.



The Buyong Elementary School Food Program continues largely due to the support of ASIJ students. Three Buyong teachers, Liliosa Soliano (Grade 5), Evelyn Cabanisas (Grade 2) and Pompia Tohay (Home Arts) have volunteered their time to ensure the success of the program. Since its inception in 1986, more than one and a half million meals have been served. The cost of feeding 700 students is approximately sixteen dollars a day.