

A Shoulder To Lean On

Twelve-year-old Shindy Octaviani was sound asleep when the 7.9 earthquake began to wreak havoc in her hometown of Cendana Banuaran, Padang, West Sumatra, late in the afternoon on Wednesday 30 September.

Fortunately Shindy, like all her Year Six classmates, was well trained in the event of an earthquake. She woke with a start and made a dash for the backdoor. Unfortunately the door was locked, and while she struggled to unlock it amongst the commotion, the house came crashing down on top of her.

Her family, who had made it out of the house safely, was forced to watch the scene in petrified horror as the building enveloped Shindy.

“The walls just caved in on top of her,” Shindy’s father Akmal said. “After the dust settled, all we could see were her little feet sticking out of the rubble – I thought she was dead.”

Shindy said: “The weight of all the bricks on top of my back made it hard to breathe, I was so scared.”

It was Shindy’s older sister Eka who snapped into action, calling everyone to start digging frantically. “It was 10 minutes before we managed to pull her out, and when we did we realized how lucky she had been,” Eka said. Remarkably, Shindy was pulled from the carnage with barely a scratch on her body.

While the dramatic experience of the earthquake itself has gone, the memories remain and many people in the region are faced with the difficulty of rebuilding and reshaping their shattered lives.

For days Shindy insisted on sleeping outside instead of inside her relatives’ house, and even now she sleeps next to the door which remains wide open all night.

“The psychological effects derived from a natural disaster of this scale are harder to see than the physical devastation, but are equally as important in the recovery period,” says SurfAid’s Matt Hannon.

Surfaid International has built four Psychosocial Support posts in strategic locations of Padang, which are providing a community-based program of activities which are geared towards easing psychological stress and mental illness, along with issues such as displacement and disruption of social networks.

The program is called *Tampek Mangadu*, which translates in the local Minang dialect as “a shoulder to lean on”.

SurfAid's team of psychologists, along with a large contingent of volunteer psychology students, are busy running the program which is packed with fun and educational activities that incorporate fine and gross motor skills, and enhance cultural knowledge and values, as well as livelihood projects.

The program is a window of opportunity for the Padang people to express their experiences, emotions, fears and hopes in order to find the best way forward for the individual and their community as a whole – as well as building capacity for emergency preparedness and disaster response in the future.

“The program makes me happy to be able to go somewhere safe to play with my friends,” Shindy says. “And I can't wait for the end of the month special event.”

- Matt Hannon

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