

Published: June 25. 2012 1:01AM

## Palmyra group takes on poverty issues

LEBANON DAILY NEWS

PALMYRA -- For August Fisher, seeing children starving in the slums of the Philippines was very powerful. Picturing his own daughter in that same situation brought him to tears.

"There's no answer for that (severe poverty)," Fisher said during a recent interview in Palmyra.

Fisher, who is a coach with the Palmyra Circles Initiative of Lebanon County, was in the Philippines as part of the Global Justice Volunteer Program. He was accepted into the program through the United Methodist Church. Fisher and 20 other volunteers from around the world spent time earlier this month studying how poverty affects families and what can be done to help them get out of poverty.

"They're facing what America faced during the Industrial Revolution," Fisher said.

Fisher joined the Palmyra Circles Initiative two months ago. He is a student at Kutztown University studying sociology and anthropology, with a focus on poverty issues.

The Circles campaign, launched in 2007, currently has 60 member communities in 23 states. Fisher learned about the Global Justice Program through Circles coordinator Lee Smedley of Annville, who encouraged him to apply for the program.

Smedley has been the driving force behind the local Circles Initiative. The program is designed to help people in poverty find the relationships, the resources and the meaning for a productive life.

"They begin that journey very quickly in the Initiative program. They build relationships with people who can help them move forward," he explained.

Fisher, a native of Lebanon, said the training he received through the Global Justice Volunteer Program would help him as he works with Palmyra Circles.

"The mission of the Global Justice Volunteer program is ministry with the poor," Fisher said. This program prepared me to work in the organization, he said.

During his Philippines trip, Fisher said he witnessed extreme poverty in Manila, "much worse than what we have."

"No one really wants to be poor or considers themselves poor. When you're in a situation of poverty, it's hard to get out of," Fisher said.

Smedley said people in the middle class often have the financial resources and social connections to help them get ahead.

People who are living in poverty lack those kinds of resources, he said.