

Mary Ward International Australia *Volunteer Story*

“I encourage anyone who may be interested in volunteering to contact MWIA – it is an experience you will never forget!” *Danielle Forbes*

This summer, I spent one wonderful month volunteering in Baucau, East Timor with Mary Ward International Australia (MWIA). I spent my time mainly in Health care facilities around Baucau, the first week at a Leprosy clinic ran by Indonesian sisters and the following at a rural clinic ran by German born doctor, Christiana. I learnt many things during my time at these clinics, both about myself and about Medicine. I think that this experience has altered my perceptions of developing world medicine, and will definitely influence the way in which I practice medicine in the future. The language barrier was a challenge, with many of the health workers operating in Tetun or Indonesian, and most of the patients speaking one of many different district languages. I found most people were trying to learn English and I very much enjoyed helping them out when I could. I believe they, in turn, were amused by my attempts at learning Tetun! With many of the people I met speaking at least four languages, I found it difficult enough just working out which language they were speaking, let alone what they were actually saying!



I found that my best language teachers were the children at the Champagnat Creche. I spent many of my mornings volunteering here and it was definitely one of the highlights of my trip. I was absolutely amazed at the quality of teaching achieved there, and the love and care shown to each child that spent their days there. I loved helping the kids with their puzzles and listening to their songs, playing in the sandpit and drawing, and was acutely aware of how lucky these kids are. Unfortunately, this facility is one of the few of its kind and the majority of the children of East Timor are unable to enjoy such luxuries as these. A realisation of how lucky I am and how important it is not to take any opportunity I am given for granted, was a recurring thought throughout my entire stay in East Timor.

I very much enjoyed my time in East Timor. I made some amazing friends and will definitely return. My most sincere thanks must go to Sisters Natalie Houlihan, Diaan Stuart and Anne Kelly who welcomed me into their lives and made my stay as comfortable as it could possibly be, and to all the wonderful Timorese that I lived with in Baucau. I encourage anyone who may be interested in volunteering this summer to contact MWIA – it is an experience you will never forget!



Volunteering with MWIA provides an opportunity to gain a rich insight into the work of Loreto Sisters in Australia and abroad. Both long and short term placements are fully self-funded and involve working with a specific project in a Loreto program in Australia or overseas. To find out more about MWIA, our projects, and how you can support us through volunteering or donations, please visit www.loreto.org.au or email mwiaustralia@loreto.org.au