



## MAY 2009 PROJECT UPDATE FOR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS OF MARY WARD INTERNATIONAL AUSTRALIA

Welcome to the first MWIA Project Update for 2009. In this update we bring you news from a trip to India by MWIA Executive Officer, Sr Janet Palafox. During her trip, Janet became acutely aware of the needs of poor communities in particular the lack of educational opportunities for the very poor children, especially girls. This update reviews current projects in India, Australia and in Zambia, as well as ongoing possibilities of education and capacity building in India. For regular updates please visit our website [www.loreto.org.au](http://www.loreto.org.au)

### INDIA

#### COLLECTIVE VOICES – DARJEELING

In our last Project Update we included information about the Collective Voices Project (co-funded by Loreto Family International). This project was launched in Panighatta on International Women's Day on 8 March 2009.

The goal of the project is to create a model "Woman-Youth-Child Friendly Community" whereby women, youth and children are helped to participate in the planning process in their community and have access to education, health and nutrition.

Community ownership through proactive partnership is key to this project. The target is that in three to five years the community will be empowered to make their own decisions regarding their development and access the government schemes available to them.

The Mary Ward Development Centre (MWDC) in Darjeeling is collaborating with the Child In Need Institute (CINI) to undertake this project. MWDC is the Australian equivalent of MWI in Darjeeling and CINI is a national NGO championing health and nutrition, education and protection, co-founded by an Australian Loreto Sister, Sr Pauline Prince. Sr Pauline attended the launch. She said, "Communication between government officials and the target group is vital. The target group needs to have greater access to government policies. We will act as the facilitator for this process." The MWDC and CINI emphasise the key to long term sustainable change to poverty and inequality is to build partnerships that are child/woman centred and friendly.



*Launch of the Collective Voices project*

#### DEVELOPMENT THROUGH EDUCATION

MWIA Executive Officer, Sr Janet Palafox, travelled to the Darjeeling region to review MWIA funded projects. She reports that the Collective Voices project is well underway and other projects have become self-sustaining.

Janet was able to see first hand the enormous impact MWIA funding and other assistance is having on the lives of poor and disadvantaged people in the region. In Darjeeling, MWIA funds are contributing to:

- supply of medicines and medical equipment
- paramedic salary and teaching aids
- library shelving and books
- workshop materials, community worker salaries
- teacher training and teaching aids
- social worker training
- board/lodging for students from remote villages.

Janet believes our help can make the most difference in education and small scale development projects (self

help groups and health care). The Loreto Sisters in the region are mainly involved with poor people who work in tea plantations, as stonebreakers or as farmhands on other people's farms. Janet was alarmed at workers' wages – where laborious work can result in a day's pay equivalent to a can of soft drink here in Australia.

Tea plantation workers (mainly women) have to collect 24 kg of leaves a day to be paid Rs 70 (AU\$2.30). If they collect less they are penalised Rs 2.50 per kg but are only paid Rup1 for every extra kg they collect. The stonebreakers are paid Rs 4 per shovel of stone. It takes 15 days to break 30 shovels of stones. This equates to about Rs 240 or AU \$8 per month.



*Weighing tea in Darjeeling*

Janet's report highlights the need to fund education, especially for children of stonebreakers and tea plantation workers. There is very little opportunity for education in these communities due to extreme poverty. Girls face even less opportunity - if the family can afford to send a child to school it will be the son.

The cost of funding one child to attend school for one year from these regions seems minuscule to us. It costs about \$100 per year in Nepal - less than \$10 a month. That's the equivalent of three cappuccinos per month to change a child's life and future. The cost is \$600 per year in India (less if state school). For us, that's less than the cost of going out for dinner once a month to help a child achieve her/his dream of an education.

#### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Talk to your friends, networks or school group.
- Find out more by going to our website.
- Put aside a dollar each time you have a cup of tea. If you have 2 cups per day, in 8 weeks you will have saved enough for one year of education for one child in Nepal.

## ONGOING PROJECTS IN KOLKATA

Janet also spent time in the Kolkata Province. In Kolkata and the regions of Shillong and Satarda (near Goa) she observed significant progress in educational and building works. Primary and secondary education is the main ministry and the sisters work as principals or teachers.

Items funded thanks to our generous supporters include:

- electricity for coaching centre and school
- school canteen co-operative, masala grinding
- barefoot teachers training (see our website)
- vocational training for women – baking, sewing
- teachers' salaries.

Janet was very impressed with the outreach to very marginalised people: from babies through to elderly in Kolkata, Thakurpukur and other areas of West Bengal. Fellow Loreto Sister, Sr Cyril, has set up many programs in the area, assisted by local NGOs, state and national governments; and local and overseas corporations.

## NEW OPPORTUNITIES

There is a significant opportunity for MWIA to become involved in funding schools in the thousands of brickfields in Kolkata.

Each brickfield employs 200 to 300 families with about 175 children. Families are very poor and income is deplorable. Each worker receives Rs 65 (\$3 AU) for every 1000 bricks they make. It takes two workers plus helpers to make 1500 bricks in one day. The Loreto Sisters in partnership with local NGOs have opened 20 schools in the brickfields that cater for 1200 children. Without these, children would have no access to education and would therefore face a bleak future.

Workers travel to different brickfields each year. Children are provided with a student card to help them enroll at different brickfield schools. New schools are established depending on where families take up work; based on the permission of the brickfield owner and on the condition that productivity is not affected. The scheme is running well and the sisters hope to open more schools so that wherever workers go, education is accessible.

#### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Find out more about the brickfields schooling project by going to our website.
- Make a donation to MWIA to contribute to the development of more schools. \$3,000 a year will fund a school in the brickfields.

## ZAMBIA

### BABY MILK PROGRAM

MWIA is supporting a Baby Milk Program in Zambia. The program began in August 2006 as part of Lukulu Parish Health Care outreach.



*Above: Baby Kakoma Kakoma pictured with his mother Mwiya Simushi. She is HIV+ and so Kakoma was weaned at six months when he began eating solids. He was then admitted to the milk program to receive a milk supplement as all breast feeding was stopped. Breast feeding for a baby from a positive mother becomes more risky once mixed feeding starts. Therefore a milk supplement becomes advisable. Mwiya Simushi has four other children under the age of 15 years. The father is also HIV+, and both parents are on antiretroviral drug therapy which helps to keep them strong. They have no income, living only from subsistence agriculture.*

The Lukulu district is very poor, malnutrition is common and the community is faced with survival and food security issues. The community's staple diet is low in nutrients, and availability is restricted due to the limited use of water and fertilizer. Even when a wide range of fruit, fish and vegetables are in season malnutrition is common. The community is also affected greatly by HIV/AIDS. Babies in the Lukulu district are at risk of malnutrition and poor health if their mothers have died, are too sick to breastfeed, or are HIV positive.

Loreto Sisters Pat Harvey and Elizabeth Donnan, are working with the Lukulu District Hospital and four rural health centres to help implement a Baby Milk Program. The program is carried out by Clinical Officers at each rural health centre, and two volunteers in the town.

There are currently 80 babies aged up to 18 months in the program. The needs of babies are assessed, milk is distributed and progress of each baby is monitored.

AU\$500 pays for one baby's annual milk supply. Thanks to our supporters like the Wishing Well, MWIA is funding the provision of milk to two babies per year over the next three years. The project is also supported by other international aid agencies and NGOs.

### NEW CLASSROOMS

MWIA funds have helped rebuild classrooms that were previously built by the community using bush materials. The thatch roof was leaky, desks rickety and sand floor unstable.

Sr Elizabeth Donnan is working with the Kayeo village community and along with 20 volunteer builders and one paid supervisor has organised the construction of new classrooms at the local primary school.

MWIA, with Kirribilli Parents and Friends, has provided funding for an iron sheet roof, a cement floor and well-made desks that will provide a more comfortable and secure learning environment for the children.

The new classrooms are already being used even in the absence of walls. The community have started collecting tripped saplings and bark fibres to fill the walls. In 2010 the cement floor for the classroom will be poured.

In Zambia, only two-thirds of primary aged children attend school. In Lukulu, even less children have access to education. Sr Elizabeth has been meeting with community leaders and mentors, carrying out needs assessments for the school and providing learning materials. With the help of our generous supporters, MWIA provided the funding for Sr Elizabeth to purchase materials and employ a building supervisor.

The Kayeo community is very committed to the education of their children and many volunteered to help build the classrooms. Once the building is complete, the students will benefit from a weatherproof, safe and functional learning environment. The project will increase enrolments and improve the quality of education.

## AUSTRALIA

### STRONG YOUNG MUMS

In the last three months members of the MWIA funded Strong Young Mums Program in Bourke have made significant progress in their personal lives as women and mothers.

They have demonstrated autonomy and responsibility by being punctual at TAFE classes (previously they were collected by the family worker) and are also showing increased self esteem and confidence.

The women are continuing to participate in playgroups and health information sessions. Topics have included: health checks for children, drug and alcohol and its effects on families, budgeting and well-being for mums.



Participants are becoming more aware of the needs of their children and putting them before their own needs. **Kelly\***, a young single mother who has few opportunities to go out socially, wanted to go to her friend's birthday party. Kelly left her son with her mother, who had consumed alcohol that day, and was likely to have more drinks while minding the baby. Kelly went to the party but was so worried about the wellbeing of her son that she went back to her mother's house and took him home, thereby missing out on the party.

The women have also enrolled in a TAFE course called Jobstart that aims to build confidence for job interviews and within work situations. Participants are improving their IT skills, developing planning and research skills and are learning how to prepare job applications. One participant, **Sandra\***, has already applied for a job at a local aged care facility after taking the course. Sandra said she would not have considered herself able to do this before completing the course. It has increased her

confidence by teaching her practical skills and improving her understanding of what employers expect.

Some participants completed their Responsible Service of Alcohol Certificates in March. This has opened up opportunities for employment, and some participants are now exploring work in the hospitality sector. One participant, **Tanya\***, commented on the difference having a qualification has made in terms of how she sees herself. Tanya is proud of her achievement and the fact that she has completed a course and has something of value to show for it.

*\*Names changed to protect identities.*

Research shows that young mothers in the program:

- are appreciating education and learning
- have become stronger and clearer about quality of life they want for themselves and children
- have improved parenting skills and knowledge of children's developmental needs
- have developed a strong support network
- are better informed of services and more confident in approaching them
- are taking action to end violence in their relationships
- are developing a sense of hope for their future.

Their children are:

- developing social skills
- exposed to early learning opportunities
- receiving improved parenting
- learning the routine of regular attendance, which has the potential to see them attending pre-school, and primary school on a regular basis.

Centacare believes the *Strong Young Mums* Program has the potential to create systemic change and to break the generational cycle of poor health, poor educational achievement and family violence in Aboriginal communities. Our aim is to continue to extend this program to more communities within western NSW.

In 2008, Strong Young Mums was operating in Lake Cargelligo and Narromine as well as in Bourke. In 2009, Centacare hopes to extend the program to new locations in NSW including Cowra and Brewarrina. With your continued support, we can make sure this successful program expands to reach many more young mothers.

#### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- [Make a donation to MWIA for the continued funding of this project.](#)
- [Visit the Centacare website for more info: http://www.centacarewf.org.au/services/children/strongmums.html](http://www.centacarewf.org.au/services/children/strongmums.html)

## MARY WARD IN THE KIMBERLEY; SUPPORTING READING RECOVERY

The Loreto Sisters, through MWIA and with the generous support of Julianne Maxwell (Roarty '76) and the Roarty family, are funding Reading Recovery in six primary schools in the Kimberley for three years.

Financial support for the program started this year (2009). MWIA, in partnership with a number of organisations, including the Western Australia Catholic Education Office and the Kimberley Land Council, hopes to extend this program to all schools in the Kimberley through a grant from the Federal Government in 2009.



The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations are funding the expansion of the Reading Recovery program for one year. Throughout 2009, six new teachers will be trained in reading recovery to add to the 17 already trained, and 48 new primary school children will benefit from the program.

Extending this funding beyond 2009 could see a total of 53 trained teachers and over 400 students benefiting from Reading Recovery throughout schools across the Kimberley. In spreading the program and thereby improving literacy standards, Indigenous children will have access to the same opportunities as literate people.

MWIA hopes that with the support of Loreto network partners, more students in the Kimberley in need of support will access the Reading Recovery Program.

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Write to Federal Ministers to encourage them to continue funding the program.
- Download a template of the letter from the MWIA section at [www.loreto.org.au](http://www.loreto.org.au).

## NEW PROJECTS

In our last Projects Update we wrote about future projects needing funding. We are pleased to announce that these two projects are now being funded thanks to your support.

## TIMOR LESTE

MWIA is funding the provision of interest free loans for staff at a local teachers' college.

MWIA have agreed to support the staff of the Instituto Catolico para Formacao de Professores in Baucau (Marist Teachers' College). The small loans without interest will assist staff on low wages, who are experiencing financial difficulty, to cover basic living and travel expenses. Australian Loreto Sister working in Timor Leste, Sr Diaan Stuart, provides staff with training in budgeting as part of the program.



Above: Sr Diaan with some of the staff at the college  
Note: they are not necessarily the recipient of staff loans

## BURMA

MWIA is funding travel/other costs associated with teaching English in Myanmar, Burma.

Religious congregations in Myanmar work in every part of the country in dispensaries and day care/nursery centres for children. They provide limited accommodation according to their means for orphans and enable remote village children to attend schools.

This project, by Sr Pauline Prince, assists adults to acquire a higher education so that they can teach local students. The units in debating and public speaking will improve the self esteem of the people and encourage them to think independently. To ensure sustainability, Pauline will provide training to a local person who will conduct the English courses in future.

# VOLUNTEERING WITH MWIA

## VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

We are pleased to share news of our significant progress on MWIA Volunteer Program, including a completed volunteer policy, new website information and recently held volunteer preparation sessions.

The MWIA Volunteer Program is aimed at Loreto students, past-pupils, staff, parents and friends of the wider Loreto network wishing to become more involved with Loreto works for justice and development in Australia and overseas.

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.

Why volunteer with MWIA?

- Gain a greater understanding of the work of Loreto Sisters locally and overseas.
- Stand in solidarity with the most marginalised people and learn from them.
- Use your skills and abilities to provide technical assistance in Loreto works for justice and development.
- Have an important cross-cultural experience.

What qualities can I offer as an MWIA volunteer?

- Motivation.
- Openness to cross-cultural experience.
- Willingness to learn from others.
- Cultural sensitivity.
- Realistic self-assessment: strengths, limitations.
- Ability to reflect on self, others and situation.
- Demonstrated experience of conflict resolution or problem solving.
- Capacity for team work.

For how long can I volunteer?

- Placements vary depending on the need of each ministry or program.

Where can I volunteer?

- MWIA supports Loreto ministries and programs in Australia, Timor Leste, India, Kenya, Zambia and Vietnam. Volunteer placement depends on the need of the project partners.

## VOLUNTEER PREPARATION SESSIONS

*By Caitlin Leahy, MWIA Assistant*

Throughout March, April and May 2009, a group of young women have been meeting to prepare for their roles as MWIA volunteers.

Sr Janet Palafox is the host of fortnightly MWIA volunteer preparation sessions at her community house. The sessions begin with a home-cooked culinary feast whipped up by the sisters-in-residence. The young women are then guided by Sr Mercia Richards through important aspects of Ignatian spirituality.

These methods of reflection encourage us to think deeply about everyday events, our personal attributes, challenges we face and the way we make sense of our experiences. Reflection is central to volunteering. We will be in an unfamiliar place and facing challenging situations which will call on our strength and courage.



The sessions are then followed by a preparation day. On our preparation day we talked about Catholic social teaching, Mary Ward values, charity and development, crossing culture, coming home and the practicalities of volunteering. Ten young women attended, seven of whom are leaving for placements in June and July. Five of the women are going to India (Kolkata or Darjeeling) and two to Peru. Sisters Libby Rogerson, Angela Slattery and Janet Palafox led discussion activities and I gave an account of volunteering with the Jesuit Refugee Service in Cambodia in 2005 (organised by Sr Margaret Burchell, previous MWIA Executive Officer).

We shared our ideas about what it means to volunteer, different models of development, how the values of Mary Ward relate to our world and how they are threatened. It was a chance to raise fears and concerns about living and working in another culture and assisting with complex and confronting issues. It was an opportunity to talk about how to make sense of our experiences on return to Australia, and how we can continue to work with MWIA to support Loreto projects around the world.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

To find out more about MWIA, projects, how you can support us through volunteering or donations, please visit [www.loreto.org.au](http://www.loreto.org.au) or email [mwiaustralia@loreto.org.au](mailto:mwiaustralia@loreto.org.au)