

the *Mercy Works*
Bilum

PLUS:
SOME FOND
FAREWELLS

SISTERS OF MERCY IN AUSTRALIA & PAPUA NEW GUINEA | JUNE 2016

**PARTNERS
IN PROGRESS**



MercyWorks

SISTERS OF MERCY
IN AUSTRALIA & PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Mission Statement

Mercy Works supports the local and overseas relief and development activities that are part of the vision and mission of the Sisters of Mercy in Australia and Papua New Guinea. The programs engage in partnerships with communities to promote justice, self reliance and to support displaced people and communities who are denied access to basic resources such as education, health care and social welfare. Mercy Works Programs strongly endorse the principles of freedom, mutual respect, environmental sustainability, participation and protection of the rights and responsibilities of all.

Direction

In *Australia*, Mercy Works offers community education in world development concerns, provides assistance with refugees, and works in partnership with Indigenous peoples. *Overseas*, the primary focus is in the South East Asia-Pacific region where, in collaboration with local partners, Mercy Works directs its efforts towards the education, health care, and social and spiritual well-being of those who are poor or displaced.

Mercy Works

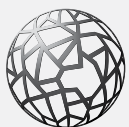
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The Bilum

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ACFID
MEMBER

We are a member of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) and as such committed to the ACFID Code of Conduct for Australian aid and development organisations. See www.acfid.asn.au

Cover: Three young students in the Mercy Connect program at Our Lady of the Rosary Primary School, Fairfield NSW.

The Bilum

In Papua New Guinea, bilums or handwoven string bags have been crafted and used by people for hundreds of years to carry their most precious and essential belongings. *The Bilum* carries and communicates the stories of the people involved in the many projects supported by Mercy Works. See what's inside our bilum this issue...

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Growing enduring partnerships

Our partnerships with many different individuals and organisations are what enable us to achieve so many development outcomes, both here in Australia and overseas in Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea.



A tiny seedling is nourished when it is planted in rich soil. It needs tender loving care to develop into a flourishing plant that will bear fruit. When many hands work together for a common good so much can be achieved that otherwise would not have been possible.

This edition of The Bilum features some aspects of our work in which we engage in development work together – in partnerships. In Mercy Connect, for example, we partner with educational authorities throughout Australia for the good of students from a refugee and humanitarian background in schools. A lot of our work with the disadvantaged in Papua New Guinea happens through partnerships with Dioceses and generous donors. And in Timor-Leste our partnership with the Diocese of Maliana is assisting in the establishment of the education foundation there.

Partnerships are as important for Mercy Works as they are for our partners. For a partnership to be successful it needs to have some specific components. Firstly, there needs to be compelling reasons for entering into the partnership. Then a supportive environment needs to be set up to allow the partnership to flourish and, finally, joint activities that build on the relationship need to be developed so that the partnership can be sustained.

When entering into a partnership Mercy Works attends carefully to these components so that it can flourish, just like a seedling in nourishing soil. At Mercy Works we value

our partnerships and work to ensure that they develop, flourish and are sustained.

Another vital partnership that plays a major role in our progress is our partnerships with you: the friends of Mercy Works and the readers of The Bilum. For, without your continued support Mercy Works could not grow and flourish. Each year we hold a function for the friends and supporters of Mercy Works, as a small way of saying thank you and to share some insights into our work. This year I was delighted that we were able to hold the event in Adelaide for the first time and thank our many supporters in South Australia in particular. While our head office is based in Sydney, everyone at Mercy Works is acutely aware that our friends and supporters come from right across Australia, and even beyond. We may not have been able to hold a Friends' Gathering near you, but that does not mean your contribution is not valued. You can be assured your help is much appreciated.

This edition also features articles on two valued staff members – Sister Gaye Lennon and Mrs Margaret Coulter. Gaye, our Co-ordinator of Overseas and Indigenous Projects and Margaret, our Development Officer, are leaving us after many years of service. Mercy Works has experienced significant growth during this time. These women have made major contributions to this growth. I wish them both well as they move to the next phase in their lives.

Ailsa Mackinnon RSM AM

Executive Director

At Mercy Works we value our partnerships and work to ensure that they develop, flourish and are sustained.

IN BRIEF

The Gift of Water

Back in 2008, Peter and Pam Dougherty of Grafton generously gave Mercy Works funds to bring a supply of safe water to the village of Fohorem in Timor-Leste. It made a huge difference to the quality of life for people in the village.

Now we are delighted to announce that Peter and Pam are kindly supporting another water project – this time in Papua New Guinea. They are funding several large water tanks for remote villages in Diocese of Wewak, East Sepik province. The villagers themselves will source the materials for the tanks' bases and build them. We will bring more details about this exciting new project in future issues of *The Bilum*. ■

Catholic Mission Partnership

We're pleased to announce a new partnership with Catholic Mission in the funding of some of our projects in Papua New Guinea. In 2016 they are supporting some of our activities in Kiunga: the Leadership Program and the pre-school. We look forward to the partnership growing and developing in the coming years. We will report on our work together in future issues of *The Bilum*. ■

Thank you for the cards

We're delighted to report that last year the Gifts of Mercy Cards raised over \$31,000. That was \$6,000 more than the previous year. The new look cards, with bold colours and catchy headlines were clearly a big hit. They were also available to buy directly from our website for the first time. As well as our wonderful regulars who buy cards every year, many new people also supported them. ■

The cards, suitable for all occasions, are still available from our website: mercyworks.org.au/giftsofmercy

Mercy rained

We had a heart-warming response to our *Let Mercy Rain* appeal to help people suffering because of the drought in Papua New Guinea and around in Kiunga in particular. The emergency assistance was used to provide health care for malaria and snakebites and for water purification systems.

Mater Health Services, Townsville, responded immediately and generously to the appeal. Trudy Clarke, their Director of Mission said, 'We believe in supporting Mercy Works as it is another Mercy ministry and we should support each other. Making connections and building relationships between Mercy Works and Mater Health Services NQ is important. As a Health Organisation we like supporting the Kiunga program in particular because of the focus on training local people to be Village Health Attendants. That's why we responded to the *Let Mercy Rain* appeal straight away. Our long term vision is to build our relationship with Mercy Works and hopefully in the future provide an immersion program for some of our nurses to go there, experience the culture and provide some training and education opportunities for health workers in Kiunga.'

Fortunately rains have come and the drought is officially over. However, the region is still facing the ongoing repercussions of such a long period of water shortages. The appeal raised a total of \$60,000 and is now closed. ■



Left to Right: Friends of Mercy Works Gathering, Sr Ailsa Mackinnon RSM and Sr Lorraine Phelan RSM with MHOW client and guest speaker Ali; Luis Arriola and Councillor Carol Martin with Mercy Works board member, Kathleen Donnellon.



Residents of Kiunga who have endured the recent dreadful drought.



Left: Judith Cahill. Right: Sr Anne Foale RSM

Two warm hellos...

We have welcomed two new staff members to the Mercy Works team. Judith Cahill has joined us as the Project Coordinator for Mercy Connect Sydney. Judith has a great background in education and project coordination and was a volunteer with Mercy Connect herself during 2015.

Sr Anne Foale RSM has also joined us as our new Coordinator Offshore and Indigenous Projects. A trained midwife, she has extensive experience working in Aboriginal communities, Timor-Leste and with refugees. Her role as an education facilitator has included advocacy and developing resilience for workers facing the mainstream health system. ■

...and a fond farewell

After seven years as our Development Officer, Margaret Coulter is leaving Mercy Works in June to begin the next exciting chapter of her life. Margaret brought a remarkable level of professionalism to our communications and fundraising. Her many achievements for Mercy Works include building a strong network of supporters and donors, overseeing our new website, introducing Gifts of Mercy and the Friends of Mercy Works program, developing videos and producing a much admired range of print materials. We wish her all the best in her new adventures. ■



A welcome in Adelaide

In April the annual *Friends of Mercy Works* gathering was held in Adelaide, to enable us to say thank you to our many friends who have helped make the Mercy House of Welcome so successful and who have supported our other projects. Over 60 people gathered at St Aloysius College in Adelaide for an inspirational evening, hearing about the Mercy House of Welcome from Sr Lorraine Phelan RSM and the staff at the House; Meredyth Taylor, Emma Yengi and Sr Mary Symonds RSM. Two of the clients told their stories of how the Mercy House of Welcome transformed their lives. ■





The power of partnerships

The Mercy Connect program is a shining example of what can be achieved when many different people and organisations come together to help a group of people in need. Mercy Connect trains and supports volunteers who mentor students from refugee and humanitarian backgrounds as they adjust to life in Australian schools. What began as a pilot program in three Sydney Catholic schools nine years ago has expanded rapidly and now includes programs in Melbourne, Ballarat and Perth. We are also hoping to start a program in Brisbane in 2016.

A broad range of support

Schools with students who need additional language learning support have enthusiastically embraced the program and local communities have rallied around to provide support. We receive funding from several clubs each year and just recently United Way Ballarat donated \$4,630 to support the Mercy Connect Ballarat program.

Many of our volunteers are retired school teachers, keen to help and provide a useful outlet for their educational skills. However the range of volunteers is becoming increasingly diverse. When Mercy Connect advertised for volunteers for the Perth program, we were delighted by the different backgrounds and ages of the people volunteering.

Our long term partner

Mercy Connect's most enduring organisational partner has been Sydney Catholic Schools (SCS) Office. They were involved from the very beginning, over nine years ago, when the program was piloted in three Catholic schools in Sydney.

Virginia Francis is the Education Officer: Social Justice and Community Engagement. She has been involved with Mercy Connect from the outset and spoke about the positive impacts of the program.

'It was originally designed to assist students as they transitioned from intensive English programs into the mainstream setting. It's quite a jump! Students suddenly faced with a broader range of subjects all requiring well developed language skills, can be overwhelmed and become anxious. Mercy Connect provides the additional mentoring tuition for children at the point of need, right in the classroom.

We know that students from a refugee background require consistent additional language support for 7 to 10 years if they are going to reach the level of proficiency needed to be successful learners. For students with no formal schooling or disrupted education, it's important to work with organisations like Mercy Connect so we can provide that level of solid, reliable support. Schools can't provide everything, so it's great for them to reach out to the community. Mercy Connect provides a level of mentoring and academic support that really boosts student wellbeing.'



Students from Mary MacKillop College, Wakeley with Mercy Connect volunteer, Mary Straton

VOLUNTEERING

Adapting to a new culture

Dean Evans completed the volunteer training and has recently begun helping students in a Perth Primary School.

A disability support worker for 10 years, Dean has spent the past three years working with adults who have autism and has a number of reasons



for becoming involved in Mercy Connect:

‘I have a teaching background and wanted a way to connect with underprivileged kids. I lived in Japan for 7 years, so I know what it’s like to adapt to a new culture and new language and I thought I might be able to connect. I also grew up in a multicultural community so I’m passionate about addressing issues such as racism, bullying and I’ve been concerned about levels of islamophobia. I was also keen to do something for my community beyond my work with people with autism.

‘The training was much more thorough than I expected. There were lots of speakers from schools as well as the Mercy Connect trainers. I was really impressed at the level of professionalism, given that most of the speakers were volunteers.’

Although he went to a Catholic primary school, Dean is not a Catholic but he felt very welcome as part of the program: ‘I was impressed that Mercy Connect goes to both public and Catholic schools’.

Building rapport

Dean has recently completed his induction at the Intensive English Centre at Thornlie Primary School and has met the students he will be working with. ‘They’re seven years old, the boys are from Liberia, Iraq and Burma and the girl is from Thailand. Straight away all of the students responded quickly to my presence in the classroom and turned to me for help. I’m looking forward to building rapport with them and providing a positive male role model. Education is really important but I also think that self-esteem and resilience are lifelong tools that children can learn.’

‘My key partner is the teacher in the classroom, who has been really supportive and open to communication. From an organisational perspective, Jennifer, the Mercy Works Co-ordinator is who I’ll be interacting with most through our monthly reports.’ ■



Erina Walker, Mercy Connect volunteer with a student at Our Lady of the Rosary Primary School, Fairfield

... the volunteers themselves say how much they gain personally from the program, how they value being able to put their own skills to use and how much they learn

A mentoring role

Virginia explained that the benefits of Mercy Connect go beyond the students whom the program aims to support. ‘Many of the volunteers have tremendous skills and decades of teaching experience. A teacher in one school reported how thrilled she was to have an experienced science teacher at the back of the classroom with her. Many of the volunteers have become mentors to the teachers, as well as working with the students. And the volunteers

themselves say how much they gain personally from the program, how they value being able to put their own skills to use and how much they learn. They bring amazing skills and yet they express a hesitancy about their new roles working with refugee children – We are highly grateful for the breadth of talent and compassion that the volunteers bring to the role.’

Each year, at Christmas, the CEO Sydney hosts a thank you function for the volunteers. ‘It’s a fabulous celebration,’ said Virginia, ‘and a testament to how important everyone thinks the program is. It’s a busy time of year and the in-school coordinators and principals all find time to come and acknowledge the volunteers. Dr Dan White, Executive Director and my own Director, Dr Mick Bezzina always keep the event in their calendar. I think the lasting success of Mercy Connect is that it is truly collaborative. Everyone is important in the success but nobody thinks they are the most important. Everyone acknowledges everyone else’s role. It’s a lighthouse project that shows how well such projects can work.’ ■



TIMOR-LESTE

Beyond bricks & mortar

The focus of much of our work in Timor-Leste has been education. With 45% of the population aged under 14 and so little infrastructure, the importance of education in nation-building cannot be underestimated. Not only is there a desperate need to build more schools, but finding, training, supporting and resourcing teachers from the other 55% of the population is a huge challenge. In addition to our work in establishing early childhood learning centres, we have been partnering with the Fundação Sagrada Coração de Jesus (FSCJ) and the Diocese of Maliana as they endeavour to establish the administrative, accounting and financial procedures required to run an education system.

Over the past year we have been working with the FSCJ as they developed a strategic plan for the next 15 years. The plan is comprehensive and far-reaching. One of their first steps is to establish accurate data on which schools can be upgraded, which need to be demolished and where new schools need to be built. This data gathering alone could take two years. Then the plan is to ensure that each district in the Diocese has a new school complete with the right facilities. They are planning for indoor and outdoor sports facilities, furniture, IT equipment, clean water and good sanitation.

Teacher formation is vital. The plan is to begin finding and educating teachers from this year so we can increase the quality of teaching in existing schools, expand to new schools when completed, and lift the graduation rates for students attending the schools.

The strategic plan also covers the important role parents will play



Top: Sr Gaye Lennon RSM and Sr Helen Nolen RSM talking with Fr Natalino and Chico from the FSCJ; below, the dreadful state of one of schools in the Maliana district in Timor-Leste.

in schools. Having had limited access to education themselves, it can be difficult for parents to even understand the benefits of education for their children. We need to ensure they support the concept of education and feel they are part of the school community.

One of the strengths of producing such a comprehensive strategic plan is that it makes it clear that simply building a school is not enough. Many well-meaning people are enthused by the idea of 'building a school' for children in need. While that enthusiasm is wonderful, for it to be effective, it must be done in partnership with people who understand that a school is more than four walls and a roof. It is the people, systems, resources and planning that make a school viable. ■

English of track

TRAMS is a unique and welcoming space where English lessons help refugees to feel less isolated, gain confidence and build links to their local communities.



Above: Guests at TRAMS building their English skills; Right: Children are an important part of the TRAMS project.



One of our more recently established partnerships is with Toowoomba Refugee and Migrant Support (TRAMS). There are around 90 people living in the Toowoomba area on bridging visas. Their ability to participate fully in the life of the community is greatly diminished through a lack of English. We have partnered with TRAMS to establish free English classes to enable these asylum seekers to participate in and contribute to the wider community.

TRAMS welcomes everybody regardless of race, religion, ethnic group or visa class. People who use the centre are 'guests' rather than clients. There is no waiting room, no place in the queue. The space is owned

by those who make it their home. People connect across religious, cultural, age and gender barriers. Together the challenge of bureaucracy can be negotiated, and a few recipes shared!

Children are central to TRAMS. Their smiles, their squeals of delight, their tears, their cuddles are what makes the place work.

Basic life skills

The English classes aim to support people who must learn to navigate Australian society. Many other providers of English classes in Toowoomba are unable to take these people because their English skills are too low and their classes do not cater for them. TRAMS

English classes teach basic life skills including how to fill out a form, explaining symptoms to a doctor, knowing what to do in an emergency, and how to use Australian currency.

The provision of free transport and free child-minding as part of our English classes has helped remove the main barriers that stop women from being able to access this support.

Toowoomba is a designated settlement point for women at risk. These are particularly vulnerable people who would be very isolated and at risk without English skills. The English classes allow these people to come and socialise, feel a sense of belonging and safety but also learn the skills they need to support and protect their families. They help the



A little help from our friends

If there is a one place in Adelaide that is a testament to the impact of partnerships it is Mercy House of Welcome (MHOW). It continues to help 30-40 clients a day for English as Another Language (EAL) classes as well as material assistance and legal help. The food supplies are kindly provided by FoodBank SA and OzHarvest. Through our partnerships with local organisations we've also been able to offer some wonderful programs.

Assistance with visa applications

We assist clients with their Temporary Protection Visa or Safe Haven Enterprise Visa applications. The applications are complex and time consuming: the forms are 40 pages and the process involves several hours of interviews. The Myer Foundation provided a grant of \$10,000 to help with the legal support and other activities we will provide in 2016.

Art on the go

We have partnered with The ART Bus (www.theartbus.com) to offer an art program (funded by Arts SA). The program began in February and will culminate in an art exhibition at the Hawke Centre in November. The ART Bus' goal is to provide unique art opportunities for our clients and their children. It's a mobile learning space full of supplies, aimed at sparking creative natural instincts.

A healthy partnership

MHOW has also received \$4,000 from Cervical Health SA to offer a course covering women's health issues, food and exercise. We're working with the Kilburn Community Centre and St Brigid's School to encourage women to attend the course.

Peace and welcome

The community garden based at MHOW was officially opened in November. Since then, a Community Reference Group has been set up and a Memorandum of Understanding signed between MHOW, St Brigid's School, Kilburn Community Centre and the local St Brigid's Parish, to ensure that the garden is successfully managed in the future.

Scholarships

Asylum Seekers are able to study in Australia, if they can find the fees. In 2015 we helped 5 clients study advanced English at TAFE thanks to \$5,000 from the Catholic Charities Fund and private donations. St Ignatius Parish has also supported several clients. The Catholic Charities Fund has donated a further \$5,000 for 2016, some of which will be used to help two women study Aged Care through the Red Cross.

Whether it's volunteers offering their time or organisations providing money, the continued generous support for Mercy House of Welcome is very welcome indeed. ■

women engage with their children as they all learn how to navigate a new culture and language. The classes are aimed at filling a gap but not creating dependency. As participants develop their English skills most move on to either further education or employment.

Running the classes requires the participation of up to 50 volunteers including childcare volunteers, teachers, assistants and bus drivers. The volunteers also benefit from the program: making new friends, taking on new challenges and enjoying the satisfaction of watching the students and children grow, learn and gain independence. ■



Maria Rallis and Margaret Coulter taking part in an art class with MHOW clients in the garden.

A woman and baby from the Fly Region in Papua New Guinea



.BROAD horizon



For the past six years Horizon Oil has quietly, consistently and generously supported our activities in Kiunga. As well as considerable financial support the company has provided much logistical help. Brent Emmet, Horizon Oil's CEO recently took time out of his busy schedule to talk to us about the partnership with Mercy Works.

Why do you support Mercy Works in Kiunga?

Kiunga is the hub for our exploration and development activity in PNG. The community in that region has been very supportive of our work and we feel it's important that we give something back to that community. The Horizon Oil Board looks on our contributions to Mercy Works as an investment – for us it is a matter of social responsibility and it is the right thing to do. Mercy Works is a great contributor to the region with great people on the ground faced with a challenging task and we believe they deserve our support. We are particularly keen to see improvement in the devastatingly high maternal and infant mortality rates in Western Province and Mercy Works is very effective in tackling this issue.

How did the recent drought impact the area?

It was a very serious event. The prolonged dry weather saw the Fly River fall to levels that prevented shipping reaching Kiunga for long periods and many stores ran out of stock, including basic supplies like rice, flour and fuel. Foodstuffs became very expensive. Water sources dried up and many people were forced to leave their villages to live in bush camps in order to find better sources of water and improve their chances of securing food.

How would you describe Mercy Work's role in the Kiunga community?

Mercy Works plays a key role in enhancing the delivery of health care services and their Village Health program is particularly important in terms of providing access to training for health care workers in regional health centres and aid posts, some of which are located in extremely remote and difficult to reach locations.

How important is it for Horizon Oil to build strong partnerships with organisations like Mercy Works?

Very important. As a company, we want to try and give something back to the community but at the end of the day, we're an oil and gas company. Partnering with organisations like Mercy Works allows us to maximise our contribution to the area and achieve long term sustainable results that we, acting independently, would not otherwise be able to provide. ■

Fair weather friend

Building projects depend on many factors: finding supporters to fund them; the materials to complete them; skilled labour for the work; and a bit of luck with the weather.



which were to be transported once the river had sufficient water to bring container ships to Kiunga.

Fortunately the drought has now broken, supplies are getting through and work has begun again.

...to too much

Over in Kainantu in Papua New Guinea's Eastern Highlands, our weather partner created the opposite problem. We're building a dormitory at the Maria Hilf Vocational Training Centre, but work stopped due to unprecedented wet weather. Construction work up to the timber frame on the first floor was complete, the concrete blocks for the walls of the ground floor and dining hall had been laid, but then torrential rain stopped progress, delaying the installation of the roof.

More space

Our other dormitory projects have enjoyed more supportive weather. Another upgraded dormitory at Yarapos High School in Wewak is now complete. Previously 630 girls were crammed into rooms originally built in 1966 to house 120. Now they can enjoy privacy and comfort in separate cubicles. A final dormitory upgrade is due to start very soon – weather permitting! ■

Sometimes it doesn't matter how many supporters get behind our work, or how big a donor supports a project or how many people on the ground are willing to pitch in, the biggest 'partner' influencing the completion of a project is the weather. This is especially true when it comes to building projects.

Thanks to a major partner who is supporting a number of projects in Papua New Guinea we are undertaking the building of dormitories to help students have a safe and healthy place to sleep while they are at school.

From too little...

We've had a long relationship with St Gabriel's Technical Secondary School in Kiunga, in Papua New Guinea's Western Province. Currently we are building two dormitories for the students there. However the devastating effect of the El Nino drought has impacted the building work. The Fly River is the primary source of transport for the region and was at record lows in the second half of 2015. Naturally food and fuel were the priorities for any transport that was able to reach the town.

This meant the materials ordered from Singapore for the dormitories were not able to get through and were transported back to Indonesia. This brought our work to a halt. The ground had been levelled, foundations dug by hand and concrete poured, but we were waiting the arrival of steel frames, walls, metal roofing and tiles



Clockwise from the top: construction on the new dormitory at Maria Hilf Vocational Training Centre; workers laying concrete at St Gabriel's Technical Secondary School, Kiunga

Clementine and her friends staffing their lemonade and cake stall.



Happy Art/Shutterstock.com; Olga Kovalenko/Shutterstock.com

Clementine & lemons

When the daughter of Elizabeth Grady, Mercy Works' Fundraising Officer, heard that her mother was organising a special appeal to help the drought-stricken communities of Kiunga, she decided that she had to do her bit to help. Clementine may only be 9 years old but she

promptly set about organising a lemonade stand in her local park with friends to help with the emergency effort. She even wrote her own report on the event (a true development and fundraising officer in the making)! ■

JUICY NEWS

Launching **LEMONAID**

Inspired by Clementine, we are inviting primary schools across Australia to join us on August 5 for LemonAid, Australia's Biggest Lemonade Stall. We're hoping as many schools as possible will be able to hold their stall on the same day to raise funds for our projects. We'll share our delicious secret lemonade recipe with you, provide tips on holding a successful stall and run a competition for the best event poster and best-tasting lemonade. For more information contact our Fundraising Officer at mwfo@mercy.org.au or visit our Facebook page [f /MercyWorksLtd](https://www.facebook.com/MercyWorksLtd)

FUNDRAISER REPORT

by Clementine Gerber

On Sunday 21st of February Eliza, Karen, Tyler, Leila, Zoe, Ruby, Chiara and I went to Enmore Park to raise money for the Papua New Guinea drought for Mercy Works. We ran a stall selling cakes, spring rolls, hot cross buns and lemonade, all selling for \$1. In the end we raised over \$400.

We were down in the park for two and a half hours. There were lots of people in the park because it was a beautiful day, we also got lots of people from our school community (St Pius Primary School, Enmore).

I was really glad to think that over \$400 would go to families, children and adults in need of food and water. It was a lovely day and all our friends enjoyed it.



Enjoying the (fundraising) benefits of a rice meal

A day of rice

On Ash Wednesday, students at Sacred Heart Central School in Cootamundra chose to swap school lunch for a bowl of rice in order to raise funds for Mercy Works. In all they raised \$700 which the student leaders chose to direct to our Wewak projects. We thank them for giving up their regular lunch, but judging by all the happy smiles in the photos they seemed to enjoy the activity. ■

Our online community

One of the ways the Mercy Works' community has expanded in recent years has been online. In the last two years a Youtube channel and Facebook page have been established, and the page now has around 640 friends. It has rapidly become an essential means of communication between Mercy Works and our supporters.

Late last year we launched the new range of Gifts of Mercy cards and made them available for sale on our website for the first time. We posted a link on the Facebook page and got our first orders within hours. Similarly the launch of the Let Mercy Rain appeal got a great response from the Facebook page.

Maria Rallis, Mercy Works' Office and Social Media Manager said, 'One of the wonderful things about the Facebook page is that people can get immediate updates on what we're doing. It's a great way of spreading our message. When we posted a story about

'We would like our Facebook page to be somewhere that people naturally turn to when they want information about development work in Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste and Australia.'

a Mercy House of Welcome client getting a grant to study at Monash University, the post received a thousand views. That means hundreds more people finding out about the excellent work that the Mercy House of Welcome does.'

The Facebook page also offers a way to share all the exciting things that are happening in the broader community in terms of

fundraising and lifting awareness. A school can host a fundraising event one day, send us some pictures and the next day we can share that.

'We also include information on broader issues,' said Maria, 'For International Women's Day we had a post on Malala Yousatzai who was shot by the Taliban for demanding that girls be allowed to receive an education. It helps put our work in a broader context.'

As the Facebook page gains friends, and the youtube channel gets more videos, we hope that Mercy Works' social media presence will play an increasingly important role. 'We would like our Facebook page to be somewhere that people naturally turn to when they want information about development work in Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste and Australia,' said Maria. 'We want people to use it to access details on our own projects, but also as a gateway to further information.' ■



Planting seeds

Gaye Lennon RSM has been involved with Mercy Works since its very early days, from Pakistan to Papua New Guinea, Thailand to Timor-Leste she has tirelessly helped communities to help themselves. For the last six years Gaye has been Mercy Works' Coordinator Offshore and Indigenous Projects but has now decided to move on to fresh adventures. Here she talks a little about her time with Mercy Works and the lessons she's learned.

'I've learned people have their own answers and solutions, they just need support in bringing that to life. It's really

important to hear the voices of people and give them the time to reach their own decisions.

'Just recently I was in Goroka celebrating Hamanus Day (Hamanus means happy). We were celebrating improving people's lives and brought people who had graduated from our skills programs together to share their stories with people who were thinking about undertaking training. In the crowd was a woman who had attended many trainings but had never officially "graduated". She still lived in a bush hut, but through the sessions she had attended, she learned enough to build a house with a tin roof

for her father, rent some land to plant and grow rice and had even employed people to help her work the land. She had paid off two loans to help her buy equipment and was on her third loan. She'd improved her own life, her father's and the people she employed and yet she had not technically "graduated". It affirmed to me that people do not always walk the traditional path, or the one we might set out for them, but that doesn't mean they don't achieve the same goals. She had returned to us, in the hope of graduating, but as everyone clapped and cheered her story, I told her: "You have graduated, just in a

different way."

'This story is just one example of the many things I've learned in partnering with people through Mercy Works and being part of their journey. I've learned the importance of planting seeds – not just to grow crops, but in people's minds to grow ideas and nurture possibilities. Mercy Works has been a big part of my journey, my life and my ministry. I hope I've planted some seeds and know the many seeds that have been planted in me will remain with me always, helping me grow and develop in the years to come.' ■