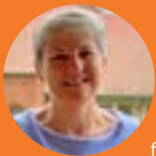


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SISTERS OF MERCY IN AUSTRALIA & PAPUA NEW GUINEA | MAY 2020



Our world today is starkly different from what it was

this time last year. The full impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are unprecedented and still unfolding throughout the global community. Our Mercy Mission has never been more important! We have had to especially alter the way we deliver our essential support services and projects in Australia and Papua New Guinea. In the spirit of our theme for this 20th anniversary year, holding out the shining light of hope, we do this as the key to getting through this crisis together.

Papua New Guinea, our closest neighbour to our immediate north, is a developing nation. The people of PNG are currently facing serious economic, social and environmental issues. In PNG Mercy Works has changed our existing programs and created new partnerships to ensure those that rely on these services are not left behind.

Thank you for your continuing support of Mercy Works. Our projects hold out the shining lamp of hope for all who are poor and marginalised in communities across Australia, Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste.

Sally Bradley RSM
Executive Director

MERCY WORKS' RESPONSE

Coronavirus in PNG

The people of Papua New Guinea have been hit hard by their Government's declaration of a State of Emergency to combat the spread of COVID-19. Thankfully these measures appear to be working with the number of reported cases remaining low. The impact, however on the lives of poorer inhabitants has been devastating.

Goroka, the capital of the Eastern Highlands Province, is a town of over 19,000 people usually bustling with crowded markets and social gatherings, but it has largely fallen silent. The strict social distancing rules have restricted travel for people living in this region, limited their contact with family, friends and support networks, and also curtailed markets that supply fresh food and clean water.

Anne Foale RSM, our Overseas Projects Coordinator, recently had the opportunity to speak with Mercy Works PNG Coordinator, Maryanne Kolkia RSM, about Mercy Works' response.

What are the needs that Mercy Works is responding to during this pandemic?

The most urgent situation is the people living in the settlements on the outskirts of Goroka. Water access is a long way from their homes and there is little adequate sanitation as well. They have little if any land to cultivate because their home country may be a long way from Goroka, in other provinces.

How is Mercy Works adapting?

Mercy Works is looking to support 26 families from the settlements with bowls

and soap for hand washing, masks and basic gardening equipment to grow food where they can fit it in.

The Provincial Government has said that as schools resume functioning in this State of Emergency because of the pandemic, all children have to wear facemasks. Mercy Works has been contacted by several schools to make 3,158 masks as soon as possible. Our sewing department is very busy with this task and several women from previous sewing training classes have come to join the work of filling the orders from the schools so that children can resume their studies.

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Alphonsa and Judy at our Goroka Office preparing to sew masks

Accessing education during the pandemic

For students from poor families in the remote regions of Papua New Guinea, accessing education is never easy. Add in a global pandemic and it becomes that much harder.

One such student is Peter from East New Britain. Without an Access to Education Scholarship awarded by Mercy Works, he would not have been able to overcome that barrier to education. As a result, he has been able to continue studying at teachers' college and is hoping to graduate in 2021.

Lecturers at Divine Word University had identified him as a student with great potential, yet being from an impoverished background and a consequent lack of financial means was jeopardising his ability to finish his education.

Losing both parents at a young age left Peter as the sole carer for his 9-year-old sister plus his cousins. The weight of this responsibility would be immense for any student. Studying while providing enough food to feed himself and the young ones in his care, meant he was forced to resort to any means he could, including living on the streets.

When Peter was almost at the point of losing hope to realise his dream of becoming a teacher, his story reached a Mercy Works staff member. This led him to receive a scholarship that would offer him sufficient financial and pastoral assistance to complete his studies.

The onset of the coronavirus pandemic has seen drastic



ATE Student, Peter discusses his studies and plans for the future in this short video clip: <https://youtu.be/P3DXGQztuWM>

changes in the delivery of Peter's classes. His studies have continued through a mix of online and limited face-to-face learning conducted in accordance with social distancing restrictions. This has required a significant adjustment to keep up with his classwork, but he is managing to stay on top of his studies.

In these challenging times, Peter is particularly grateful that he no longer has the added financial pressures he was under previously. But more than that, he finds both strength and comfort in the certainty of the support granted by his Mercy Works scholarship. ■



Stall at Mercy Markets in Goroka before COVID-19 Restrictions

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What direction are you taking with SME Training?

The diocese has offered their large youth centre hall so we can run training classes with our partners for people to attend and learn about small and medium business enterprises and what is involved to start earning income.

What steps have you taken to keep the starting up of Mercy Works in Simbu on track?

I gained permission from the authorities to travel alone and do a return trip to Simbu Province to do some more preparation for our work there. I contacted all of the parish priests and village leaders and gave out a survey form to find out what the current needs were especially with the impact of the pandemic. I assured them that Mercy Works would be back in July to follow up activities with the communities.

Sr Maryanne has drawn upon all her management and business experience as she develops connections and creates opportunities to ensure the survival of communities and their residents during this difficult time. ■

HOW TO HELP

Should you wish to contribute to the cost of providing bowls, soap, face masks and basic gardening equipment for these struggling families in the Goroka settlements, please contact Kingsley Edwards by calling 02 9564 1911 or email kingsley.edwards@mercyworks.org.au to make a donation.