

mini MercyWorks Bilum

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



The year is far from over. Having just passed the winter

solstice means that we are on the path back towards summer. As we continue to pick up old routines and learn to live with new practices that are designed to keep a virus at bay, we need to remember to look back and see all that we as a community have come through.

The engine room of our many projects are getting closer each day to full steam ahead as they continue to look for ways to adapt to the changes that will drive our 'new normal'.

In this edition we share with you two projects with Indigenous women, and our recent emergency support of the West Papuan refugees. This practical support has been welcomed by the West Papuans. But more than that, it has been a source of much hope to sustain them while they await Government assistance.

Thank you for your ongoing support of Mercy Works. Our projects help develop the tools to build the foundations of support for all who are poor and marginalised in communities across Australia, Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste.

Sally Bradley RSM
Executive Director

BAABAYN

Closing the gap

Out in the western suburbs of Sydney, Mercy Works supports the Baabayn Aboriginal Corporation run their Young Mums & Bubs Group. This program works towards empowering young Aboriginal women and their children through cultural education, increased financial independence and support networks.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed us, and this Young Mums & Bubs Group is no exception. Not being able to have group meetings, part-time childcare worker Janaya has had to rethink the way she delivers programs at the centre. She has designed 'take home packs' of different materials including art supplies which has given these women the chance to continue creating art at home.

Online tools such as Zoom has given these young children the chance to continue learning at home with their mothers. Putting together these activities is not done overnight. Janaya uses her extensive childcare background to research and design activities to engage these children that are then shared with families online.

Janaya has overcome many challenges in delivering these

programs during this global pandemic. Her commitment has ensured that the community continued to have access to these early learning services to prepare them for the change to the classroom. This group has become a safe place for the mums to learn and their children to grow.

The Baabayn team is currently working on plans to return back to the centre and face-to-face learning. Continuation of online learning alongside the return to group activities has the considerable potential to expand their reach within the community. ■



Top to bottom: Sheridan and her bub; Some of the group with Sr Sally Bradley during a visit in March

QUICK FACTS

- Located in Mount Druitt, New South Wales
- In 2019 attendance rose by 9.5% in early childhood education for Aboriginal children aged between 4 and 5 years

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Refugee emergency

Surrounded by escalating violence and civil unrest, many West Papuans fearing for their lives in November last year were forced to flee Indonesia and cross the Fly River into Papua New Guinea.

A makeshift refugee camp was built on Monfort Catholic Mission ground when these refugees began arriving. Some were resettled into the village of Iowara before the State of Emergency was declared in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

There still remains, however 140 people living in poor conditions with basic shelter and little access to clean water or sanitation. Steven Dude, Mercy Works Coordinator in Kiunga, aware of their plight, visited the camp in early June to talk with the community and listen to their needs.

Steven found the situation in the camp to be dire. Families described how they fled with nothing but the clothes on their backs and were in desperate need of basic assistance. The risk of infection and disease is high and there is barely enough food to survive.

Mercy Works has responded with emergency funding for food and clothing. In addition, working tools have been provided to grow vegetables to feed themselves and as a means of growing produce to sell. ■



New West Papuan arrival speaking with Mercy Works Kiunga Coordinator Steven Dude



Peaceful view from backyard at Prospering After Prison

Prospering after prison

Times are increasingly becoming unpredictable

now that we are in the midst of a worldwide pandemic. There are many aspects of life that are uncertain where there is a fine line between stumbling backwards instead of moving forwards. One such example is transitioning from prison back into the community.

Mercy Works, in partnership with the Diocese of Port Pirie, is supporting a program called "Prospering After Prison". Located in Port Augusta, South Australia this program aims to assist Aboriginal women as they adapt to a new life upon release from prison.

The program participants will be supported one-to-one by dedicated case workers. The process will start with building resilience, both personally and financially, and also connecting to their chosen community across the Far North and Eyre & Western regions of South Australia.

The pastoral support given to

QUICK FACTS

- Located in Port Augusta, South Australia
- Aboriginal women account for 33% of the prison population despite making up just 3% of the total population

these women as they navigate the difficult transition from prison back to everyday life is most needed at a time when they are particularly vulnerable and at risk.

Developing better living skills, helping with cultural healing, community connectedness and building financial and personal resilience are the key focus areas of the Prospering After Prison project.

This new program will provide a crucial support system for these Aboriginal women when facing the significant barriers of improving their capacity and confidence, establishing a home and integrating back into their chosen community. ■



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