

mini MercyWorks Bilum

SISTERS OF MERCY IN AUSTRALIA & PAPUA NEW GUINEA | APRIL 2021



In this season of Easter, we can replace all fear with new hope.

Though we are still learning just how much we have been changed by this pandemic, we remain entirely focused on ensuring that our Mercy Works programs and projects are operating safely.

In this edition, our focus is on 'Resilience'. We share with you some stories of resilience. The Mums & Bubs group at Baabayn Aboriginal Corporation in Sydney are becoming a tight knit group as they settle back into regular meetings. After the strictest lockdown in Victoria, a Pilates Studio in Brighton came together to support asylum seekers and refugees. As a result our Mercy Connect Adult Literacy Class in Dandenong, Melbourne were gifted with a car load of culinary delights.

We are most grateful for your continuing support of Mercy Works and all our projects, especially as we continue to face the uncertainties that COVID presents. Thank you!

Sally Bradley RSM
Executive Director

BAABAYN ABORIGINAL CORPORATION, SYDNEY

After the Lockdown

2020 was a difficult and challenging year but like everyone else Baabayn found a way to keep moving forward. The impacts of the forced lockdown weren't just felt in terms of restrictions but in the group as a whole.

Face-to-face sessions finally recommenced as the third school term started and they were able to continue with minimal interruptions until the end of year. Group attendance did fall off drastically as a result of mothers moving away to be closer to immediate family. Though this was sad to see, it did bring some positives with it. It meant that the women who were attending every week became a closer, more tight-knit group. This development in their relationships gave them the opportunities to co-design some projects.

Towards the end of the year, as the state consistently recorded zero community transmission, restrictions for group gatherings were relaxed. An influx of new mothers,

brought the weekly numbers back to twelve mums with fifteen children between them. Even though these women were less experienced with art and less commercially focused than the previous group, it didn't stop them from diving in the deep end.

The staff are adapting to the needs of the mothers by shifting their focus from the exhibition and sale of arts and crafts to a more educational style, providing resources and opportunities to explore avenues of art and expanding their cultural education.

Over the past six months Baabayn has made massive strides towards meeting the needs of the new women in the group. They offer general support such as, financial assistance and planning, and also external services such as help accessing the NDIS and referrals to local mental health organisations.

Another form of support that Baabayn offers

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Baabayn 2020
Christmas party

Learn, shop and share

It's not often that the students at the Mercy Connect Dandenong Library Adult Literacy Class are surprised. However, one Thursday afternoon in February this is exactly what happened. As the refugee students filtered into the library for their weekly class they were each given a number. They were puzzled and this was just one part of the surprise our Mercy Connect Melbourne Coordinator, Sr Mary Lewis RSM, had in store.

Earlier that week, contemplating a car boot full of donated groceries, Mary had a lightbulb moment to stage a 'shopping spree'. Red Rock Pilates Studio in Melbourne had generously provided these groceries after hearing about Mercy Connect's outstanding work supporting refugee adults. The owner, Noeleen O'Shea, organised the donation through our Mercy Works Board Chair, Kathleen Donnellon.

After COVID style refreshments, Mary announced that the group was going shopping. Before she could tell the group the reason, the room burst out into laughter as they had never had to pay for their Mercy Bags before. The group gathered around the table of groceries with the numbers they had been given when they arrived. Then Mary called out three numbers.

The mystery behind the numbers was solved. As each number was called one of the group was asked to step forward to select an item from the table just like they were shopping. They were like children in a lolly store making sure they'd inspected each item carefully before choosing. Numbers were called until the table was empty.

Many items were unfamiliar – there was a talk about how to use the items. After being assured that marmalade was fantastic on warm toast with butter, it was snatched up by the next shopper, saying 'I will take it', keen to try this combination.

Another shopper wanted to know what to do with a tin of apricots. After being told they paired nicely with either yoghurt or ice cream, the tinned apricots were quickly claimed.

Mercy Works especially wishes to thank Noeleen O'Shea and the generous women of the Red Rock Pilates Studio in Brighton for their efforts in collecting these variety of items at Christmas time to share with the refugee students at Dandenong Library. Going home with an extra bag of goodies for the week definitely spread even more happiness and prolonged Christmas joy within the group thanks to the generosity of the Red Rock Pilates Studio. ■

► continued from previous page that is much less visible but just as important to these young Aboriginal women is the opportunity to connect with community Elders. By providing a space to make this possible the mothers have been able to attend a series of fascinating talks given by Elders on a range of topics including Aboriginal Astronomy.

Extra funding from Mercy Works allowed Baabayn to increase Janaya's hours, which enabled her to conduct home visits to group members. These visits have been a great success and Janaya's positive energy has further developed positive relationships with the children she teaches.

Janaya also frequently provides practical and emotional support to the mothers. Her visits give them the time to complete household tasks that are difficult to do when children are around.

The time she spends one on one with the children has also given Janaya the chance to gain a deeper understanding of each child's needs, helping her to incorporate activities during group time that will support each child to develop and thrive.

Positive changes have opened the door for the growth and development of the group. The shift in focus as the group dynamics have changed has allowed the mums to identify their needs and explore options for the group to help them. The plans for the next six months are exciting and we can't wait to see what these young mums and their children will get up to! ■

