

mini MercyWorks Bilum

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



Six months into the

year and it feels like time has flown. You don't often see the day to day growth of things but when you look back over a large space of time it becomes more evident. This is exactly what we see when we look back at the last six months at Mercy Works.

In this edition, our focus is on 'Growth'. We've grown our support for Indigenous programs across Australia. We have added the Philippines to the expanding list of countries where we now partner with new projects. You'll also find a Mercy Connect volunteer's story of compassion and insight as they reflect on their past years of teaching.

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

Sally Bradley RSM
Executive Director

RESPONSE TO THE COVID PNG APPEAL LETTER

The difference your generosity has made!

BY SR SALLY BRADLEY RSM

In April this year, Mercy Works asked for your help and the response we received far exceeded our expectations. I had received an urgent letter from Sr Maryanne Kolkia RSM, our In-Country Coordinator for Papua New Guinea, updating me on the escalating COVID situation in PNG and requesting emergency assistance.

Maryanne wrote that 'the outbreak of COVID-19 has highlighted the weaknesses in the country's human rights protection' which has led to an extremely fragile health care system unequipped to deal with this situation. She had already organised teams of people to make face masks and increased her public health messages during her far-reaching radio sessions. As cases began rising rapidly, the Government called for a country-wide lockdown. This meant that usual movement between towns ceased. The restriction in movement resulted in some food and water shortages. As hunger became a bigger issue, the level of violence also increased.

The response to our appeal for help went beyond what we all expected, so a very big THANK YOU! Stay tuned for more updates. ■

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Sr Maryanne Kolkia RSM

NEW PROJECTS

Expanding our work

For some time now, Mercy Works has been looking to support new projects that focus on improving the lives of vulnerable people in our global community. We are now supporting five new Indigenous projects, three located in South Australia, two in Queensland and two new projects in the Philippines.

In South Australia, most women in the remote and rural regions of the state are forced to travel to hospitals in towns to deliver their babies. This leads to long periods of separation from their families, Country and critical support networks. *The Adelaide First Nations Advocacy* project works with Elder Aboriginal women to provide outreach support to Aboriginal mothers as they deal with child protection issues. *The Miewi (Spirit) and Cultural Matters* project is also located in Adelaide. Mercy Works is supporting two special activities to continue their work to build a sense of hope and direction for the future of our First Nations people. *Salt n' Pepper*, the third Mercy Works project in Adelaide, is a volunteer program run by the Elder women. It aims to support Aboriginal women who have experienced the

prison system to bridge the equity gap by providing culturally appropriate support.

In Queensland, the *Special Measures* project, located in Brisbane, has been designed by the Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action (FAIRA). They will establish a training and awareness centre to educate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to overcome the racial discrimination they face every day. *The Cape York Girl Academy*, located in Cairns, gives Indigenous teenage girls a second chance at completing their education by working to break the vicious cycle of high risk and anti-social behaviour.

In the Philippines, human trafficking for sexual exploitation affects both genders, however, it is most prevalent amongst young women and girls. In Cebu city, the *Creating Change for Women Through Advocacy* project through the Good Shepherd Welcome House aims to train women who have left prostitution. They will be trained to become advocates against human trafficking and to help them address deep seated trauma and

restore their self-esteem. *Balay Banaag* is a residential centre located on the island Mindanao, providing care and support for the daughters of women working in prostitution. This centre exists to give these girls a protective and caring environment whilst also providing emotional and psychological support to help them overcome their painful abuse experiences. ■

MERCY CONNECT, MELBOURNE

Educating with impact

A Mercy Connect volunteer reports from the front line:

For 42 years I was a driven, 'stand and deliver', 'chalk and talk' teacher. Middle and lower school history and geography classes typically had 25-20 students. I was very conscious of the need to complete the set curriculum, get all the assessment tasks done, if we went at the students pace, we would never get anywhere.

But there were students with special needs, and frequently I did try to adjust tasks to make it easier and achievable.

However, the chance to sit one-to-one with them, or with any student was virtually impossible. It would take one student to cause a disruption for the whole class to lose focus. Such is the tyranny of large class sizes – you pitch to the middle and hope for the best – that the weaker students can be gathered and carried and the highflyers won't get bored.

That's why the senior classes were cherished – you could relate one-to-one. The class could work on a set task with limited supervision, and you could take the time to tutor 2 or 3 students on an individual needs basis. It was real teaching.

This work, with refugees and asylum seekers, is so different and reaffirming to me. I'm not driven by a relentless syllabus. I just have to be there and help, and sometimes, I do some good. ■



Aunty Pat Waria-Reid, First Nations Advocacy & Sr Anne Foale RSM during her visit to Adelaide



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