

# mini MercyWorks Bilum

Sisters of Mercy in Australia & Papua New Guinea JUNE 2022

Catherine McAuley (founder of the Sisters of Mercy) was anchored by deep faith in the mercy of God, bold vision and self-reliance.



In this same spirit, a key value for us at **Mercy Works** is to build the capacity and **self-reliance** of all our staff and the communities we serve.

Our 'Cashing in on Cocoa Crop' is a moving story. In the remote lowara community, east of Kiunga in the Western Province of Papua New Guinea, we are working with local people to establish cocoa plantations for cash crop.

"Mercy Works is keen to encourage our people to be more self-reliant to meet their daily needs," says our **MW** Kiunga Coordinator, Steven Dude.

'Transporting Hope in lowara' highlights how it can take two days to travel 45 km on foot, yet only two hours to drive by car between lowara and Kiunga! At the end of this story, we **boldly appeal to any generous donor who may be able to donate a vehicle to Mercy Works for the people of lowara. Can you help us? Email: [mercyworks@mercyworks.org.au](mailto:mercyworks@mercyworks.org.au)**

"We have ever confided largely in Divine Providence and shall continue to do so." (Letter from Catherine McAuley to Mary Ann Doyle September 24, 1841)

'Finding Peace in Ballarat' is a beautiful story. A strong bond has grown over the years between Peace, a young woman from West Africa and our **Mercy Connect** volunteer, Margaret. Margaret's kindness has been a vital part of Peace's growth in self-confidence. I think Catherine McAuley would encourage Peace with these words –

"Speak as your mind directs and always act with courage." (Letter from Catherine McAuley to Mary Ann Doyle, July 1841)

As you read each of these stories, I hope you will see the gift of **self-reliance** shine forth!

**Sally Bradley RSM**  
Executive Director

## Cashing in on Cocoa Crop

### SOWING SEEDS OF JOY IN PNG

Mari-Mari is the Tok Pisan word for Mercy. It's also the name of a newly formed voluntary committee named after **Mercy Works** which hopes to serve the community through sustainable development in lowara, located in the North Fly district of Western Province in Papua New Guinea.

For this remote and disadvantaged rural population, which lacks basic services like clean water and food, hope and mercy is often all there is.

Which is why the latest Cocoa Cash Crop initiative, which began as a tiny bud of an idea by our **Mercy Works** Project Coordinator in Kiunga, Steven Dude, is generating much excitement.

"People are full of joy when the **MW** Kiunga team is in their villages... They feel our presence brings hope and satisfaction," Steven says via zoom from Kiunga.

With cocoa bean production in PNG reaching 35,000 tonnes in 2021- and it being one of only 23 countries recognised by the International Cocoa Organization for its fine flavour, Steven is promoting cocoa as an alternative cash crop to support families.

His goal is to see 800 cocoa farmers in lowara, each with between 300-500 cocoa trees on a two to three hectare cocoa plantation, within a few years. So far they have introduced 18 varieties of cocoa buds, created from a clone seed in a mini-nursery, which will be planted every Tuesday and Friday.

The buds are ready to be distributed for cultivation, with Steven anticipating 10,000 root stock will be planted. The aim is to create a whole new economy for the impoverished area which faces many challenges including climate change, geographic limitations and difficulties accessing markets.

"We want to encourage our people's participation meaningfully to make a positive living in a friendly and peaceful environment," says Steven.

"If people respect themselves and each other and work together to reduce poverty, we can work in partnership towards social prosperity."

Steven says **Mercy Works** is helping to empower people to identify resources and strength within themselves, which enables them to sustain their living.

"We provide guidance and technical support to assist people, as they already have the potential but only need the skills and knowledge to transform to a better way to utilise resources within themselves. Here we encourage people to be more self-reliant to meet their daily needs."



▲ Villagers transport Cocoa seedlings on the river.

Stuck in the mud!  
Pushing cocoa seedlings uphill. ▶



Peace and prosperity were not always words associated with this region. It is home to over 10,000 West Papuan refugees who fled strife and sought protection in PNG territory in 1984 when the Indonesian military took occupation. It has been a place of much civil unrest.

According to Steven, himself a West Papuan Refugee, people were given land to cultivate and sustain their living.

Cocoa is farmed across the entire of PNG with at least 150,000 families relying on cocoa farming for their livelihood since it was introduced in the 1800s.

A cacao tree takes up to three years to produce its first fruit known as a cacao pod. Once their first pods are produced, farmers can harvest, process, and sell for cash.

\*Tok Pisan is the local language in Papua New Guinea.

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# Finding Peace in Ballarat

## A BRAVE HEART AND A BOLD MIND



When Peace Aziawor, 19, arrived in Ballarat in Victoria in 2011 from Togo, West Africa, she was scared, painfully shy and didn't want to be seen as different.

So worried was she about standing out, she asked to not be removed from the classroom at Phoenix College for her one-on-one sessions with her *Mercy Connect* volunteer, Margaret Adams.

It took her a whole year before agreeing to work together with Margaret in the library.

Fast forward five years, and there is little chance Peace does not stand out. In fact, the full-time dentistry nurse studying for her Certificate III is a star soccer player and has just completed the Rotary Youth Leadership Award Program (RYLA) after being nominated by the Rotary Club of Wendouree Breakfast.

The program is for inspired young adults to unlock their leadership potential, set goals for the future and to challenge themselves personally. Peace says she overcame one of her biggest fears while at the camp.

*"RYLA has really taught me what it means to be a leader, not just to a group of people but how to lead yourself on the right path,"* says Peace.

*"I learned how setting goals is really important and mostly I learnt - and had the courage - to get up and speak in front of a group of people, which is a fear of mine. I will be taking that step with me if there ever comes a time I have to speak in public!"*

In fact, last week she spoke beautifully sharing her personal story as a guest RYLA participant speaker at a Rotary Club Event in Ballarat.

She still catches up with her mentor Margaret at least once a month. *"I call if I need help or just to chat about life,"* she says. *"After just a few minutes of talking to her I realised how great a mentor she already was. She was so helpful."*

Peace credits Margaret with many of her achievements.

*"Without Margaret in my life, I honestly wouldn't be where I am today, in my career and just mentally, from helping me with my studies and just being there for me when I needed her."*

Margaret, a semi-retired teacher, says mentoring is a two-way street and that Peace has "enriched" her life.

Up next, Peace hopes to travel as much as she can "and be happy in my life and my career".

Her advice for any refugee or asylum seeker students arriving at a new school "would be cliched!" she laughs: *"Be Brave, have an open mind and trust it will turn out for the best. Just never give up, to never doubt yourself - even though your mind tells you otherwise."*

△ Photos L-R: Peace giving the peace sign; Gitte Lindgaard (President RC of Wendouree Breakfast) Huy Nguyen (Youth Director), Peace Aziawor, Margaret Adams (Mercy Connect mentor) and our Mercy Connect Project Manager, Clare Bennett at the breakfast meeting; Inset tilted shot of Peace and Marg on the cover of the 2017 Bilum.

If you would like to volunteer and become a mentor with Mercy Works and our Mercy Connect Program - then please scan the QR code here



## TRANSPORTING HOPE IN IOWARA

The major issue in Iowara is its remoteness, says Steven Dude, our MW Kiunga Project Coordinator.

Transport is desperately needed for *The Mercy Works Kiunga Program* - which includes Village Health, non-violence Family Enrichment, Senior Teachers Training, The La Sagesse Remote Girls Hostel, Literacy support for women and girls, Support and Capacity Building and the newly emerging Cocoa Crop activity.

Iowara is 45 kilometres from Kiunga, where the MW offices - and daily markets are based. It takes two days to travel on foot, yet only several hours to drive by car between Iowara and Kiunga. It's a one-hour trip in a canoe upstream on the Fly River when the tide is up.

*"Access to transportation would boost the interest of the people to make gardens and sell their products at Kiunga Market as well as to transport cocoa to Kiunga Port for shipment,"* says Steven.

*"It would mobilise people to cultivate their land and plant cocoa trees. Access to the markets and ports is integral to the project's success to capitalise on international demand,"* he explains.

*"Both men and women are hardworking people, but people walk over 12 hours with enough loads to market their goods, which is limited."*

Better transport would also help the village health volunteers move faster from one village to another when doing health awareness.

*"The volunteers also have the opportunities to support interested farmers and enhance the productivity of the cocoa project,"* says Steven. *"Once at the production stage farmers can bring their produce to Kiunga and then ship it to the nearest port to supply cocoa buyers."*

Steven Dude, travelling on the Fly River. ▽



**MercyWorks**

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