

# mini Bilum

Sisters of Mercy in Australia & Papua New Guinea MARCH 2023

## Building Bridges

For over 40 years children and adults from Kup village in Simbu, Papua New Guinea, have struggled to cross the mighty waters of the Wahgi River to get to the nearest town of Kundiawa.

One way is to walk on the pot-holed dirt main road for three to four hours to the town of Mingende, then travel on the Public Motor Vehicle (PMV), a 12-seater bus, for 30 minutes to Kundiawa town. The only fast way is dangerous, yet vital, for the 5,000 people who live in the village of Kup.

Currently, the villagers swim across the river's fast-moving waters or sit on large black rubber tyre tubes and propel themselves across. This takes about 15 minutes, and they inevitably get soaked. School teachers make their way to work this way, families get to the markets and to buy supplies and villagers to churches.

So the locals are taking action themselves and advocating to their local government to build a bridge to make the crossing easier and safer for future generations.

At a local meeting of the villagers in February, they explained to **Mercy Works** staff, Sr Sally Bradley RSM (Executive Director) and Maria Prescilla (Overseas



Villagers carry rubber tubes to the river

Program Manager), their hopes to raise a sum of money by June. They will contribute a small part of their **Mercy Works** Leave No One Behind Village Savings and Loans Association (LNB-VSLA) business activities.

The LNB-VSLA is the initiative of our Project Coordinator in Simbu, Sr Maryanne Kolkia RSM and staff, where villagers are encouraged to form savings and loans groups. Here they can save their hard-earned money from selling their products to the markets. The LNB-VSLA is building community capacity, ownership and empowerment.

*"The dream is to take a part of the small sum of money they have raised themselves to the local government as a contribution from the people themselves,"* says Sr Maryanne.

*"Such advocacy would hopefully urge the local government to build a long overdue bridge for the people of Kup village. There will be a risk in taking this initiative, but we believe God will bless our generosity and the government will hopefully hear our long-overdue need. The local people will then cheer 'wakai' (which in the local*



*Kuman language means to 'cheer loudly' for our success."*

Local priest, Fr Anton Kuman, explained the clan's local traditional custom of pinning money notes on bamboo poles.

*"This is a powerful image for the people,"* says Sr Sally fresh from her recent visit to PNG, who admitted she didn't brave the river on a rubber tube herself! *"Some people will also be encouraged to give a small personal financial contribution if they can."*

Fr John Bige, Vicar General of Kundiawa Catholic Diocese, says the dream is to *"literally leave no one behind on the riverbank."*

*"With 2023 being the Year of the Children – we can't think of better community advocacy for the well-being of future generations,"* said Sr Maryanne.



Welcome to our first edition of the Mini Bilum for 2023.

Maria Prescilla, our Program Manager – Overseas and I visited

Papua New Guinea for two weeks in February. We experienced first-hand the theme of this edition – "Leave No One Behind" and are pleased to share these stories with you. It was a challenging, inspiring and busy trip. We had not been able to visit PNG since 2019, due to Covid. We were warmly welcomed by the local people, leaders and our two **Mercy Works**

Coordinators, Sr Maryanne Kolkia RSM in the Simbu province, and Steven Dude in the Daru-Kiunga Diocese.

The story 'Building Bridges' is a wonderful story which captures the impact of **Mercy Works** presence in Simbu province. Maria and I gathered on the banks of the Wahgi River with a group of passionate villagers from the village of Kup near Kundiawa town. The Chief of the village and others spoke with determination about their advocacy dream to literally "leave no one behind on the Wahgi River bank".

'Dhiel's Destiny' is a beautiful story of a young mother in Kiunga. Dhiel shared with

us the importance of receiving a **Mercy Works** Tertiary Scholarship. She spoke with gratitude, enthusiasm and compassion and her future hopes to find employment.

'A Refugee Role Model' is the moving story of Janu who has been supported by **Mercy Works** in Kiunga in the Senior Teachers program. Janu shared his story with sincerity, hope and generosity of spirit.

I invite you too to 'leave no one behind' in your world, especially those who are struggling most, and in need of mercy.

**Sally Bradley RSM**  
Executive Director





# Refugee Role Model

For six years, Janu Amuan, the principal (head teacher) at West Montford Primary School in the remote lowara region, struggled to see his village school shut down.

Janu, who considers himself a pioneer refugee, was desperate to see his old school re-open. As locals became angry, he spent two years working hard to make sure the school – which was started by the Montford Missionaries in 1991 – would open its doors once more.

The West Papuan refugee (he was born in the village of Erecta on the Fly River and was relocated by the PNG government in 1987, receiving permanent residency in 2015) is now proud to say, as of 2023, 141 students have enrolled in the school, with 96 students attending. There are now four teachers on staff, including himself.

*"It was very run-down, with empty school buildings – no blackboards, no desks, all past records were gone,"* the married father of six boys says of the school in the remote village which closed its doors in 2016.

*"The livelihood of the people is very poor,"* he explains of the struggle to keep the school open. *"The condition of the road from lowara is also very poor – it is 45 km and takes one to two days walking on the muddy clay road. Some people walk this road carrying packs on their backs to the market in Kiunga in the extreme heat. If they travel by the Public Motor Vehicle (a 12-seater bus) it takes four hours on the bumpy, boggy road. If it rains heavily the bus has to pull off the road and stop."*

Many of the young people from the area who train and qualify as teachers move away from lowara looking for a better life. Not so for Janu.

After completing Year 12 at Kiunga Secondary School and then working as a volunteer with Sr Maureen Sexton RSM, a Mercy Sister, at the Kiunga Mercy Works office in 2005, Janu decided he wanted to become a teacher. Sr Maureen helped him obtain a government scholarship at Divine Word University, where he graduated with a Diploma of Primary Education.

He taught at two schools on the down Fly River when our Mercy Works Kiunga Project coordinator, Steven Dude, identified him for the MW Senior Teachers Academy Program. Here he learned how to manage subsidised tuition fees, school funds and banking requirements, which he says has enabled him to become more accountable and competent in the head teacher role. Janu has since returned to West Montford Primary School in lowara.

While rebuilding the school has been incredibly challenging, re-opening will rebuild some sense of community, he says.

*"I've gained a lot of self-confidence, and this makes creativity!"* he smiles. *"Some people were very angry about the last six years...I'm satisfied to see new life return to my old school. It helped me to become the person I am today."*

TOP: Refugee pioneer Janu Amuan is now head teacher at his old school in lowara.

BOTTOM: Janu and Mercy Works OS Project Manager Maria Prescilla on her recent visit to PNG.



## DHIEL'S DESTINY

*Dhiel Yen has found her destiny thanks to Mercy Works.*

**Dhiel Yen, a young mum who is the beneficiary of a Mercy Works Tertiary Scholarship Program, believes she was always destined to work with children and adults with a disability.**

Currently volunteering with Callan Service for the Disabled, Dhiel, 26, is hoping to secure a future in a paid position as a Community Health Worker.

When she was a baby, a local woman with a disability, who she grew to love very much, minded her while her mother worked full time as a schoolteacher.

*"I think I enjoy working with children and adults who have special needs because of my own story,"* Dhiel says.

*"I really enjoy the work. Some people have Down syndrome, learning difficulties, blindness and cerebral palsy and I assist them with physical exercises."*

*"They so often laugh and are very happy people! I especially enjoy visiting the homes of those who cannot go out. Often family members are really shy about their loved one's special needs."*

Dhiel attended St Gabriel's Technical Secondary School in Kiunga and completed Year 12 before applying for a scholarship to study to be a Community Health Worker at Rumginae Tertiary College on the advice of Mercy Works Kiunga Coordinator, Steven Dude. She proudly graduated in 2022 and is currently waiting to receive her licence.

One boy, who is blind that comes to Callan Services, has especially captured her heart. The boy's grandfather looks after him as his mother died and his father left, taking his twin abled sister with him.

*"He loves singing, and given that he cannot see, I find it amazing that he can catch a ball! His sense of hearing often compensates for his lack of sight."*



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