

INDEPENDENCE DAY DINNER

On 18 May 2023 Geelong-Viqueque Friendship Schools held a very successful fundraising dinner in the Gordon TAFE's recently renovated Davidson Restaurant, with a full house comprising students, teachers and other supporters from the Geelong community.

Able hosted by Heather Wallace, Alola Australia Board Director, over \$3,000 was raised through ticket sales, raffles and auctions. There was a lovely supportive buzz and camaraderie by those committed to furthering education in Viqueque schools.

The 'hippy consul' Andrew Mahar AM, who grew up in Geelong, was an excellent speaker who shared some insights from the perspective of his role as Timor-Leste Honorary Consul in Victoria and also his experiences prior to that leading various social enterprises over 20 years. As founder of social enterprise 'With One Seed' (<https://withoneseed.org.au/>), Andrew spoke about his long time commitment to Timor-Leste's sustainability through this project which works with subsistence farming communities to establish environmental initiatives in villages, so supporting reforestation and helping to end poverty and hunger by generating income.

Andrew spoke of the development of the first internationally certified carbon farming program in Baguia, Timor-Leste, and plans to take the program further afield to Viqueque. His daughter Alice, founder of the Corner Store Network, spoke with great passion about her advocacy for environmental and food justice (<https://cornerstorenetwork.org.au/>).



CLONARD'S TRIP TO VIQUEQUE

During the last week of April 2023 Luci Quinn (Principal), Michael McCallum and Carmel Brown went on a reconnaissance trip to East Timor to reconnect with the people in Viqueque and see our sister school whom we have supported over the years. The result was overwhelmingly positive.

It was great to see the return of many businesses, although some had to close their doors, the establishment of new businesses and the construction of a better road system connecting the region of Viqueque to the main city, Dili. As this was Luci's first trip, it was important for her to see how the school manages when in East Timor.

We looked at a number of transport, accommodation and eating options to ensure that future trips would be viable. In saying this, the final go ahead still awaits the approval of the College Board. It was a fantastic experience to reconnect with people we had met and stayed with along the road from Dili to Viqueque during previous visits, meeting Br Paul Gilchrist, from the CTID centre in Baucau (whose sister lives in Geelong – what a small world!), be welcomed with open arms and hugs by the staff at the Good Crocodile Medical Centre and most importantly seeing Mariano, Paulina and their family.

Our sister school Uaimori is going strong and the English program which the students at Clonard support is making a difference. Ninety two students graduated from the last program. Returning home and to our lives educating young people here are our thoughts will never be far from those in Viqueque as we will continue to offer support in every way we can. We look forward to our return soon. Atè logu Viqueque

Carmel Brown, teacher Clonard College

Having supported students and staff to partner with Timor-Leste for over 10 years, it was with great anticipation that I landed in Dili with our Clonard team for my very first visit. I was struck by the beauty of the people and the landscape, yet the reminders of their turbulent past are never far away. We were welcomed as friends everywhere we went and most generously in Viqueque.

The strength of the connection and the value that the people of Viqueque place on the friendship with Geelong made our stay there something beyond simply a visit. To see the influence and the impact of our partnership sustained, despite the challenges of COVID and the lack of face to face interaction, speaks to the strength of what we have with the people and in particular the schools of Viqueque.

I often think about the liberation that education offers, and we were privileged to hear the stories of young people from Viqueque who have used the gift of education to create purposeful pathways for their lives. This is what inspired me and caught my imagination and desire to ensure our College stays connected and a part of this life changing work.

I was extremely grateful for the expertise, wisdom and support of our staff Carmel Brown and Michael McCallum who have been great advocates for this immersion experience for our students and staff.

Luci Quinn, Principal Clonard College



THE AUSTRALIAN SEASONAL WORKER PROGRAM - a personal story by Chris Hansen

"The program was set up by the Timor-Leste and Australian Governments to provide Timorese with opportunities to gain new skills and save money by working for short periods in Australia's horticulture and hospitality industries. It also provides Australian employers with labour when they cannot find local workers to meet their needs." **Australian Seasonal Worker Program**

Octaviano is a young man from the Viqueque district. A graduate of St Estevao Catholic High School in Viqueque and a Civil Engineer graduate of Universidade Da Paz (University of Peace) in Dili, Octaviano is now working for Greenview Farm Pty Ltd in Douglas Daly in the Northern Territory.

In April 2023, Octaviano was working as a Civil Engineer for a Chinese company constructing the roads between Baucau and Viqueque. Even though he was only paid US\$6 a day, he was happy to at least be working as a Civil Engineer. The days were long and some of the work was dangerous. Living at home in Beloi (Viqueque district), Octaviano said the US\$6 paid for some of his living expenses but there was no way of improving himself and building a future on US\$6 a day.

Octaviano had lodged an application (in Dili, East Timor) with the Australian Seasonal Worker Program in 2019. The application involved supplying documentation, completing tests and attending an interview. Octaviano got on with his life not knowing if he would ever be lucky enough to become an Australian Seasonal Worker. In the meantime, Octaviano had heard via his friends and family that, after a stint working in Australia, some East Timorese had returned home with enough money to buy a new motorbike, help pay for their siblings' (or children's) education and, in some cases, even build a house!

On Monday 24 April, Octaviano got the call he had been waiting for! He was required to attend the Stamford Clinic in Dili on the next afternoon (Tuesday) for his medical examination. Thanks to an overnight bus trip from Viqueque, Octaviano arrived on time for his medical. At a cost of US\$295, the medical had to be paid for 'up front' or could not proceed. Twenty-four hours later (Thursday), Octaviano received a positive medical report and confirmation his Australian visa had been 'Granted'. On the next day (Friday), his team of 17 men participated in a special orientation program designed to introduce the Seasonal Workers to life in Australia. At the end of the day and on the way out the door, Octaviano found out he was one of six men selected to fly to Darwin on Monday, 1 May to work for Greenview Farm in Douglas Daly. There was barely enough time to gather and pack what he needed and to say goodbye to family and friends.



Darwin NT airport 1st May 2023: Octaviano is third from the left

Skip ahead 6 weeks and Octaviano loves Australia. He has already moved from lemon and mango farms to a watermelon farm. Ten and a half hour working days begin at 6am. The work is back-breaking and spent in the sun. The cost of Octaviano's flight to Australia, his accommodation in Darwin on arrival, visa, rent and meals are all deducted from his pay but he still cannot believe how much money he has in his Australian bank account! Octaviano said it was hard being two and a half hours from Darwin. He has travelled to Darwin once on an overnight visit and loved everything! He even saw the Gold Coast Suns defeat Adelaide! Octaviano said the city was very clean, quiet, friendly, colourful and there was so much to see and do. He was especially impressed with the safe condition of the roads.

Back at Douglas Daly, Octaviano's accommodation is a converted shipping container with an air conditioner and there are shared bathrooms and kitchens. The electricity and water supplies are a little unreliable, including the internet and mobile phone coverage. Although there are about 40 young men from East Timor, Samoa and Vanuatu in his group, Douglas Daly is miles from anywhere and totally different to life in East Timor. Octaviano also misses being able to go to church on Sunday.

Octaviano is very grateful for this new experience and is determined to work hard for his employer. He sees Australia as an important step in his life journey to achieve his dream of full time work in his chosen field as a Civil Engineer and financial independence.

"KICKIN' FOR VIQUEQUE"

The famous “**Parish Twinning Cup**” is a round robin soccer competition for under 20s held in the Viqueque parish. It was last held in 2019/20 and has grown significantly in popularity over the years. Teams come from far and wide across the Viqueque district to compete for the Cup. The Cup is sponsored by **St Mary of the Angels, Geelong** with some support from **Geelong Viqueque Friendship Schools**.



On Thursday 1 June, **Christ the King school** combined a whole school liturgy with their own beloved version of the “Parish Twinning Cup” known as “Kickin’ For Viqueque” to raise funds for Mary Immaculate Parish in Viqueque. The school raised an amazing \$1300 for Viqueque. A very special **thank you** to the whole school community!



HEADING BACK TO TIMOR-LESTE



16 June 2023 at 1:43:12 am AEST

Timor with students again! It feels very nice to be sitting in Darwin Airport with 19 Kardinia students and 2 staff. Even with the bleary eyes from lack of sleep, the excitement among the students is irrepressible. From the other side of the Timor Sea my phone has been going continuously with our friends on the other side awaiting our arrival. AFL and futsal games, classes, English, Science and a solid adventure for young people which has been 7 months in the making.

This is how it is in the wee hours at Darwin International, the first of 2 Kardinia student trips and the prospect of reconnecting with the Viqueque community.

Ate logu.

Jonathan Chapman, teacher, Kardinia international College

AETA INDEPENDENCE DAY DINNER

Patrice Hall attended the AETA (Australia East-Timor Association) celebratory dinner for Independence Day in Melbourne on Friday 19 May.

The first guest speaker was Ego Lemos from Dili who spoke of environmental and social issues in Timor-Leste. He sees a need for a shift from passive classroom learning to outside learning, finding nature based solutions to water restoration, catchment management, slowing down water flow and reforestation, all influenced by climate change.

The other speaker, Michael Leach, spoke about President Ramos Horta presenting the Order of Timor-Leste Medal to Ego Lemos, Steve Bracks, Bernard Collaery and others earlier that day. Bernard Collaery received a hero's welcome for his role in the Maritime Boundary dispute.

Michael spoke of a quiet election campaign with a public holiday on Saturday and Monday to allow people to return to their village to vote on Sunday. He sees this election going towards a political transition to younger leaders in future elections. With so many new voters, political parties are very aware of the significant role the youth play in the future with a strong focus on economic diversification, jobs and training opportunities.

At the dinner Patrice met Timorese students studying community development and cyber security in Melbourne. Tony Castro was affected by polio as a child and has a strong wish to contribute to village disability development policy on his return to TL. The students have a sense of commonality, recognising the challenges faced and the important role and contribution international students can have in the future development of TL on their return.



BRICKS FOR BUIKARIN by Lee Stringer, Christian College

On May 18 and 19, staff and students at all five campuses of Christian College Geelong enthusiastically participated in a range of activities with a focus on our second-closest neighbour, East Timor.

The College recognises East Timor's May 20th Independence Day every year. This year students were encouraged to dress in Timorese colours and bring in a donation for our "Bricks for Buikarin" fundraiser. The CCG staff who visited the Buikarin kindergarten over the Easter holidays felt that this was a fantastic and worthwhile initiative. The Buikarin kindergarten operates out of one room, roughly 6 x 8 metres wide, accommodating 64 students and up to three staff at a time. The kinder teacher, Natersia, expressed to us her desire for another room so that the children can be more comfortable and be safe (as the building is on a main road and has no gates or fences). We felt that fundraising for concrete besser blocks and cement was a great cause so "Bricks for Buikarin" was born, with different activities held on the different campuses.

At the Surf Coast Campus (Prep – Year 5 currently), students participated in a ceremony, symbolising East Timor's rise to be an independent country. Local hand-woven fabric called tais were used to symbolise the continued friendship between Viqueque and CCG.

At Junior School (Prep – Year 4), Year 3 and 4 students and staff took part in a special service to recognise East Timor Independence Day. Led by the Year 4 Student Leaders, the service also included a visit by Mr Graham Barton from Middle School, who answered thoughtful student questions and provided a real insight into life in Viqueque, ranging from "What cars do they drive?" to "What are the schools like?". In addition, Junior School students physically built a kindergarten, sticking a 'brick' to a 'building' to visually understand and recognise what their gold coin donation would be supporting.

At both Middle School (Years 5-9) and Bellarine (Prep – 9), Year 8 Project Care student representatives organised a flag-raising ceremony for the entire campus, with tais tied around the flagpole to symbolise friendship with Viqueque.

At Senior School (years 10-12), an incentive was offered in the form of free coffees/hot chocolates from the coffee van for the House Group that raised the most money, since East Timor is known for its coffee. A Senior School staff member, Luke Feldman, is currently teaching at the Dili International School. He recorded and interviewed his colleague Silvano about living under Indonesian rule as a child, the 1999 referendum and the rebuilding since, which continues to this day. This video was then shown in House Groups.

Thanks to the amazing generosity of our students, parents and staff, we raised over \$5,000 for the Buikarin kindergarten. We are so pleased that this money can go to such a worthwhile cause.

Graham Barton, Samantha Bett, Claire Deretic, Carla Dunlop and Lee Stringer, on behalf of all campuses

