



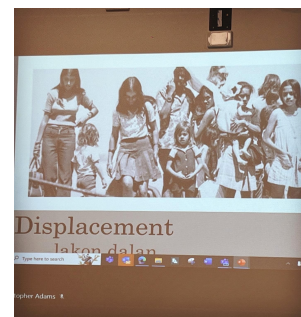
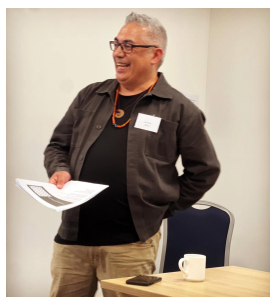
Australian Timor-Leste Friendship Network *by Julie Whelan*

A forum was held at the Brunswick Town Hall Saturday 16th of March attended by Chris Hansen, Patrice Hall, Aisha Kristiansen, Jonathan Chapman and Julie Whelan. The theme was 'Connecting with Timor-Leste!' and we all walked away inspired and energised by what we heard.

Jose Pires

Jose Pires from METAC (Melbourne East Timor Activity Centre) told his story as an 8-year-old 'twin boy' boarding a cargo ship at the Dili harbour in 1975 heading to Australia where he would spend his formative years in inner Melbourne with his family. Jose spoke of remembering the excitement as a child but also recognised the difficulty for his parents and the struggles to maintain ongoing connection with 'culture' while living in two worlds, particularly for young Australian East Timorese.

It was an inspirational story full of positive messages and that genuine, gentle warmth that we see in our Timorese friends. You can follow the work Jose is doing on the Metac Facebook page. Metac hosts a dinner the first Friday of each month in Richmond.



Jose is the little boy in the middle

Kirsty Sword-Gusmáo

The second speaker was Kirsty Sword-Gusmáo who continues working with the TL Education Department writing language and context appropriate curriculum for the schools. Kirsty talked about a multi-lingual education 'pilot' program for students from Grades 1 to 6 that has been running for the past 12 years in several district schools. Students in the program are now learning literacy, oral, reading and writing in their mother tongue, Tetun, rather than the mandated Portuguese. A series of materials has been developed to support this with small and big books etc. The results of this are not surprising - the teaching and learning is much more effective. An independent evaluation is about to be carried out by DFAT and the program is set to be expanded.

Some discussion was had on the importance of the teachers having appropriate qualifications and how the government is now enforcing guidelines for employment.

Stay tuned for further resources, a new curriculum for years 7-9. More 'Books for a New Nation' are being developed and a movie based in Timor-Leste during the second World War by the crew who filmed *Rabbit Proof Fence*, a great boost to the TL film industry. It was an informative and positive talk from Kirsty outlining the importance of education in the future of Timor-Leste.



Friends of Ermera

The final speaker was Debora Cummins. The City of Casey has been friends with the district of Ermera, a coffee growing area, for more than 20 years during which time they have worked to empower the people of the area through education and training programs.

In particular, the women of Ermera are emerging as strong leaders in the community through such initiatives as a 'Women's Business Co-operative' fully run by the women for the women. The personal stories shared showed how the women have managed to rise up with a strong voice in not just their community but in the district and in one woman's case, at a seat in the parliament! It was truly inspirational to have heard of the success happening in Ermera.

The Friends of Ermera still have ongoing support from the Shire of Casey and there are a large number of Timorese resident in the shire, some going back to 1975. The Timorese community is very active in promoting their culture, supporting traditional cultural arts including singing and dancing.

Conference 2025

Finally, there was a discussion around the possibility of a conference in Dili around June 2025. What would we like to see/hear at this conference? There was much talk about 'engagement' of youth and what the future will look like for them. Updates to come!

If you are interested in keeping up to date with AusTimor Friendship Network news, you can subscribe to the emails at the following link or follow them on their Facebook page **Australian Timor-Leste Friendship Network** <https://www.austimorfn.org/subscribe/>

Timor-Leste Twenty Years On by Jocelyn McMillan

In 2024 I celebrate twenty years of travelling to Timor-Leste, and find myself reflecting on the changes those years have brought. I had never witnessed the ravages of such a brutal occupation, nor the remnants of a "scorched earth" policy until I arrived in Dili in 2004.

These days, multi storey buildings dot the sky-line, and market places sit alongside new shopping centres and plazas, offering a vast range of mostly imported goods. Motor cycles, microlets, cars and commercial vehicles clog the roads, enabling people to get across town, and new roads and bridges allow people to access the districts, bringing people and goods to larger towns and cities. Natural forces still take their toll – heavy rains wash out roads and bridges, landslides and mudslides close roads and sweep bridges away, earthquakes and tremors render roads impassable, all adding to a heavy maintenance schedule.

Preventable diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis and dengue fever continue to take a deadly toll, particularly on the very young and very old, but access to health programs improves slowly. Access to education is also on the rise, as more people attend school for longer. There are now several universities for graduates to choose from, offering a full range of courses and qualifications.

One thing hasn't changed – the smiles. From the toothless, betel nut stained smiles of the older generations, to the broad, white, innocent smiles of the young children who have not known the oppression of the past, and the grateful, wise smiles of those who remember the fight for independence and value their freedom.



2024 Trivia Night

The GVFS Trivia Night will be held on **Friday 10 May** at Clonard College and is the major fundraiser and major social event for GVFS for 2024. Presenters Mick and Erin Nunan, who ran the last very successful evening in 2022, are happy to donate their time again. Bookings are open through Trybooking, so plan your tables now. If you cannot get a table together there are plenty of tables which do not have full numbers so you and your friends would be welcome to join - a good opportunity to meet new people. Donations of raffle and auction prizes most welcome – we can pick up!



Geelong-Viqueque Friendship Schools

Invite you to the 2024 Trivia Night



To be held at Clonard College May 10

Entrance via Murphy's Lane Herne Hill

ABOUT

Trivia Night celebrating the ongoing friendship between Geelong and Viqueque in Timor-Leste, our major fundraiser to support education in Viqueque.

Once again, professional quiz masters Mick and Erin will lead the fun and the trivia.

BYO drinks, glasses and food.

\$35 per adult/\$20 per student

Live Auction and raffle.

DATE

Friday 10 May 2024 7:00 PM - 11:00 PM

Book online now at:

<https://www.trybooking.com/CPMDA>



juliew@geelong-viqueque.com.au (GVFS Secretary)

Cash in your “Cans for Scholarships” Timor-Leste by David Whelan

Many of you will be aware of the new State Government initiative re the recycling of bottles, cans, and some tetra packs. For every eligible container \$0.10 cents can be donated directly to the nominated charity. This is a simple and easy way for us to boost our bank balance while supporting a greener world. We've nominated the month of May as our fundraising month with a set target of \$5000. But we are open and online now for the next 12 months. Donations have already started.

Remember every dollar raised will go directly towards supporting a young person in their education.

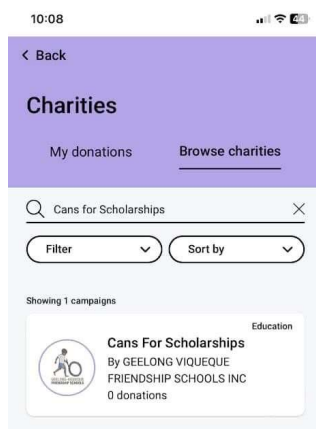
The CDS-VIC West AP is simple to use. Instructions are included below.



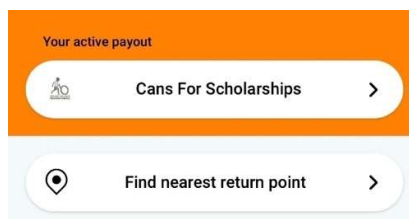
1. Download the CDS-Vic West App from the App Store on your phone. Ensure you download the West App. **DO NOT** download the East or North version of the App.



2. Click on 'Charities' and search 'Cans for Scholarships'



3. Set this as your favourite and start raising funds to help keep kids at school in Timor-Leste



4. At the recycling station open the AP and scan the barcode and feed in your bottles, cans, and eligible tetra packs.

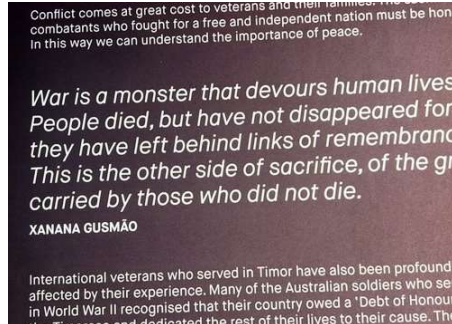
It's really that easy. Spread the word to friends and family and get recycling

Balibo Visit April 2024 by Patrice Hall

For many Australians of a certain age Balibo, Timor-Leste, has a strong connection and this year I was able to visit Balibo for the first time.

We arrived at the Balibo Fort Hotel just as the sun was setting over the sea where the Balibo Five observed the Indonesian ships in 1975 just before the invasion. In the morning we were able to visit some of the important sites including a new Veterans Musuem.

I was amazed at how strong my feelings were and felt a heavy sadness . The history will never be forgotten, but watching the students head off to school with smiles and greetings of Bondia helped me to see that they are the future for Timor.



School Garden Projects in Viqueque by Patrice Hall

The school garden project at Uamori school continues to thrive and grow. Further crops have been harvested and new seeds sown. The development of school gardens at Buikarin and Bibileo also continues with the lessons learnt from the Uamori project. Volunteers and teachers have an important role in the future development of these projects.

Jaime de Jesus still plans to have a mini Permatil training camp for the students working around exam timetables and school holidays. His enthusiasm and passion for the projects is vital and important for the continued success of the projects. He is aware of the knowledge and skills he has obtained and is intent on sharing this with his community, both students and teachers.

The students benefit from the fresh produce as well as gaining the understanding of the principles of permaculture which can also be used at home.



Days for Girls (DFG) Update *by Patrice Hall*

The 483 Days for Girls kits provided by the Waurm Ponds DFG group arrived in Dili just before Easter and was transported to Viqueque. We also had our own copies of the DFG training flipcharts in Tetum and the flyers in the kits were also in Tetum. We were able to visit five schools for seven sessions with times arranged by Mariano as it was exam week and we had been asked not to visit during the morning exam timetable.

Once again we were warmly welcomed at each school, meeting the Directors, teachers and students. Marina, the teacher who ran some of the sessions last year, was also available for some of the sessions. I also ran some of the sessions with Octaviano filling the role of interpreter. There were no gender issues as Octaviano held up the undies and said in Tetum, "In Australia they call these undies"! At our last school O1 Viqueque the class stood up and sang the National Anthem 'Pro patria'. It was powerful and moving.

Over 150 kits were distributed last year along with the training sessions on reproductive health. One of my goals was to get some feedback from some of the students who received the training and kits last year.

We asked the question 'What was the most important aspect of the training session last year?'

The replies were unanimous - 'we don't have to go the shop to buy disposable sanitary items, we love the kits, they are very comfortable, we use the kits and we come to school'. The next question was 'Have you shared the information with others?' with the responses being 'Yes, family, friends and fellow students'.

Over 500 girls and teachers in Viqueque have now received the reproductive health training and the DFG kits. As we reflected afterwards, we felt relieved that the sessions have gone so well, also very proud to have offered the girls the reproductive health training otherwise known as Days for Girls and the kits. The goals of DFG are to give back to the girls the days that they miss school due to issues around menstruation, and this we are achieving!

With special thanks to Marina, Chris, Octaviano, Jocelyn in Viqueque and others in Geelong who have supported this project. The students are the future of Timor Leste.



Reflection by Volunteer Jocelyn Mc Millan

To be honest, I'd never thought too much about women's access to sanitary products in developing countries. It simply wasn't on my radar that something women in Australia take for granted was simply not available to all women. Until now. Until I had the opportunity to attend several "Days for Girls" sessions with Patrice Hall in Timor Leste recently. Participating in the delivery of reproductive health information to young women in their own language, and distributing re-usable sanitary kits – made with love by volunteers all over the world and in this particular case, in Geelong – was a highlight of my recent trip. In the space of five days, approximately four hundred young women received Days for Girls kits. Their positive feedback ticked all the boxes, and their smiles and "hellos" when we met around Viqueque in the days following confirmed the program has made important changes to their lives.

Viqueque: Community Empowerment and Development *by Chris Hansen*

In 2023 Chris Hansen, GVFS committee member, was appointed to the Board of Viqueque Community Empowerment. The Board's Mission is the protection of women and children from domestic violence, building the capacity of young people for the future, developing strategies for disaster risk reduction and promoting and modelling sustainable agriculture.

Members of the Board are required to consult and network widely on all topics and participate in the development of policies, guidelines and programs.

The Board met on the Thursday 4 April and discussed the following items:

1. **Special Projects:** Over 400 **"Days for Girls"** kits were distributed in April 2024. Schools involved in the program included St Estevao, 4 Setembro, 01 Viqueque, Calixa and Cabira Oan. Students who received the DFG kits in 2023 reported the kits had enhanced their lives in many ways. They no longer had to find money to buy sanitation products at the shop and now felt confident coming to school! Chris reported that, in addition to the DFG kits, clean sanitation facilities at schools was a priority. A further 300 kits will be ordered for distribution in 2025.
2. **Community Development:** The **"Parish Twinning Cup"** will be held later in the year with the final played in December 2024. The competition will be sponsored by Geelong-Viqueque Friendship Schools and St Mary's Parish Geelong. Parish Priest, Fr Tom Cruz, is also looking for ideas on how to involve young women in the life of the community.
3. **Networking:** The Board is very keen for **school groups from Geelong** to visit their office in Beobe and learn more about Community Empowerment and Development. This would be an excellent opportunity for staff and students to learn about local issues in Viqueque (agriculture, sustainability, protecting the environment, reducing domestic violence and disaster risk reduction) and how the community is working together to improve the quality of life for all people in Viqueque. At this stage, staff and students from Clonard College and Christian College will visit the Viqueque district in the next school holidays.
4. **Education:** The Board is in the process of constructing a new **Training Centre** at the back of their office building. The new Centre will be used for a variety of purposes, including the **teaching of English**. The Board will be looking for support in the future with furniture, computers and other teaching aids. They are still looking for an overseas volunteer to join their organisation. There is no expectation that a future volunteer is a teacher!
5. **Agriculture:** Board member, Jaime De Jesus, has developed **a sustainable and productive garden** at Uamori school in Beloi. He has now begun to establish a similar garden at the Beobe office in order to educate visitors and showcase the ideas and skills involved in growing plants.

*Days For Girls
Viqueque team*



*Beobe Board
meeting April 2024*



New garden underway at the Beobe office

Octaviano and Friends *by Chris Hansen*

Octaviano has been home in East Timor since the 25th January following his 9 months spent picking fruit in the Northern territory and Western Australia in 2023. Although he had an amazing time in Albany on the strawberry farm (September 2023 - January 2024), Octaviano was adamant he was not going back to the watermelon farm in the Northern Territory. It wasn't about the hard work or even the climate in the Northern Territory but the poor living conditions and the intolerable way the workers were treated.

Octaviano has loved spending time with family and friends but, in his own words, "it's time to get back to work!" Job Shop, the recruitment agency based in Western Australia, recently announced there was probably no further work in Australia in 2023. As a result, many of Octaviano's friends have now changed recruitment agencies and are working in Queensland. Octaviano, on the other hand, has decided to stay with Job Shop because he wants another opportunity later in the year (September) to go back to Albany!

In the meantime, Octaviano has bought a yellow "Dili' taxi! He wanted to work and this was something he could control himself. No air conditioning in his taxi is a challenge, not to mention negotiating the busy traffic, but Octaviano knows his future is bright!



Octaviano and his new yellow 'Dili' taxi!

Science and Technology Centre and Educational Support for Viqueque Update

by Jonathan Chapman

Progress in community empowerment and technology in education has been made at the Science and Technology Centre with the arrival of equipment and school chemicals, along with mentoring for lab technician Cezar by Dili International College.

Five more boxes of science equipment from SJC and 22 laptops donated by KIC were sent to Viqueque via Rotary's Donations in Kind. The donated items are highly valued by 4 September School and are helping to help create a functional science laboratory.

While aiming to create a genuine and sustainable community science and education centre accessible to all Viqueque schools, there are some challenges. These include maintaining technology, defining its purpose in the curriculum, continuing a reliable supply of equipment and resources and supporting staff.

I look forward to evaluating the achievements so far and seeing where this project is headed on my visit in July.

