

Friends of Suai/Covalima

May 2020

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Friends

As I am sure you will understand, we have had to change our plans to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of Friends of Suai/Covalima (FoSC) due to the onset of COVID-19. We had planned to mark this significant milestone with a series of events here in April and May, as well as in Suai later in the year. The April exhibition in the Town Hall gallery has been postponed, hopefully until early in 2021 and we will have some online and virtual celebrations soon. More information about these will be



A student receiving training on thorough handwashing.

shared with you and we hope you will participate with us in marking the occasion.

Both here and in Timor-Leste, we are adapting to living with restrictions imposed due to the current state of emergency that has been declared. Like our most vulnerable communities here in Port Phillip, our Timorese friends face many challenges during this difficult time; including lack of adequate conditions for social isolation and access to the resources and information that they need to remain safe and well.

We are proud of the role that the Covalima Community Centre (CCC) team are playing to protect vulnerable communities by raising awareness during the global pandemic. For many years Friends of Suai/Covalima have encouraged and supported the CCC to develop skills in community engagement, program planning and health & hygiene, so they are well placed to work with communities and collaborate with other organisations during this challenging time.



The CCC have been formally invited to participate in the District government COVID-19 taskforce. This is great recognition for the CCC on their proactive response to the pandemic and their capacity and drive to support their community. As part of this district taskforce, the CCC staff will be able to travel freely throughout the district.

We are all aware that the impacts of Coronavirus in Timor-Leste could be devastating due to the lack of resources and facilities for treatment and testing. This immediate response to raise awareness to prevent the spread of Coronavirus is vital.

On behalf of FoSC, I would like to thank you for your ongoing involvement and support with our enduring community to community partnership with friends in Covalima.

We hope you and your families remain safe and well during this difficult time.

**Megs Alston, Chair of FoSC
Community Reference Committee**

Make a donation

Donations to our programs can be made via the following methods:

- A cheque payable to City of Port Phillip sent to Friends of Suai Covalima, City of Port Phillip, Private Bag 3, St Kilda Vic 3182
- Direct deposit into our Commonwealth Bank account.
Acct Name: Friends of Suai donations BSB: 063 243
Acct Number: 1034 3552
- On-line via the Friends of Suai Covalima Give Now webpage:
<https://www.givenow.com.au/foscscarships>

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Covalima Community Centre COVID-19 taskforce

The CCC team have created a taskforce to raise awareness on COVID-19 and health & hygiene practices. Working in small teams, they have developed a plan to share information, resources and training in 125 aldeias (sub-villages) in 25 sucos (villages) in Covalima. Through their program partners, they have received training on clear messaging, including WHO infographics to distribute.

When creating their plan, the CCC have given consideration to which team members will visit each sub-district, based on their already existing relationships within the villages and knowledge of local dialects. This is important to ensure that communities understand the WHO posters and can receive information and ask questions in the language with which they are most familiar.



Hand washing 'tippy tap' stations at the CCC.

The CCC are also sharing information and collaborating with other NGOs and municipal government through the District COVID-19 taskforce. As part of this collaboration, the CCC will work with four other NGOs to install a plastic water tank near the Suai market. These shared activities are expected to continue.

FoSC will support our friends at the CCC with their plans and priorities and can contribute by providing funds for their activities. This includes the purchase of items such as soap, water containers, etc. If you can donate to support this program, we would be extremely grateful. ●



The CCC team with WHO posters on the prevention of COVID-19 transmission.



WHO posters are displayed at the CCC entrance.



The team are building water stations with running water for handwashing.

Scholarship update

Twenty-two FoSC scholarship recipients have commenced or continued their studies in 2020. The cohort includes 16 young women and six young men, and areas of study include nursing, community development, primary school teaching, electrical studies, agriculture, hospitality and general construction.



Silvina Maria de Fatima

There are also five nursing students, who have completed four years of study at the National University in Dili and are now finalising their studies to specialise in midwifery.

One of the teaching students, Silvina Maria de Fatima, had her graduation ceremony in early March, after completing three years of primary teaching. Silvina is now continuing in the fourth year (post-graduate) program to attain the Licenciatura; the equivalent of a Bachelor of Education in Australia. She is doing intensive classes and in March she started her practical placement at a school in Suai.

All schools in Timor-Leste are currently closed due to the State of Emergency declared by the National Government. Most students have returned to their homes in Covalima, although some of the students at Baucau Teachers College have remained there to continue their study online. The Education Program Coordinator at the CCC is maintaining contact with all scholarship recipients during this time. ●



New scholarship students for the 2020 school year.

Handwashing and hygiene training for students

The CCC are continuing to work with the Sisters from Maucatar Health Clinic, to facilitate health and hygiene training and distribute Days for Girls (DFG) menstruation kits to students at secondary schools in Covalima.

On March 14, 163 students and five teachers at EBC Sandalo school participated in the training and 98 girls received DFG kits including soap and small towels. With a strong focus on handwashing, the training was well timed as it incorporated awareness of the global pandemic and ways to prevent transmission of disease. ●



Sister Gilbert provides training to students on the use of DFG menstruation kits.

COVID-19 education from students

Students who are studying nursing, agriculture and community development have all reported to the Education Program Coordinator at the CCC that they are using their skills and knowledge to help their families and communities during their time at home. They are:

- reminding people to wash their hands
- sharing information from social media
- helping to establish handwashing stations
- talking about the importance of nutritious food for immunity
- explaining information from posters for those who cannot read

It is wonderful to hear stories of students sharing the skills and knowledge they have attained through education, to benefit their families and communities. ●



With One Seed tree planting in Tilomar

Friends of Suai/Covalima have made a long-term commitment to establish the With One Seed community carbon forestry program in Tilomar sub-district in Covalima. In 2019, staff were employed to coordinate and implement the program, and a nursery was built to house mahogany and sandalwood seedlings for planting in 2020.

The 10,000 seedlings in the nursery have been growing quickly and many are now ready for planting! From the end of March 6,280 mahogany trees and 100 sandalwood trees have been distributed to farmers in four sub-villages.

Thank you to the many people who have supported this fantastic initiative and we look forward to sharing photos soon of the trees in the ground! ●



Seedlings in the With One Seed nursery are ready for planting.

CCC programs and activities

There are now many programs and activities operating from the CCC, with funding received from international NGOs, FoSC and income generated through training and computer sales at the Centre. Over 820 individuals and their families are directly involved in CCC programs, in areas including education, health, advocacy, reforestation, agriculture, disaster risk reduction, women's leadership and economic empowerment.

Many activities have been put on hold during the State of Emergency due to the Coronavirus pandemic but the CCC team, with support from all partners and donors, have modified activities to continue to engage with communities and will return to regular program support in the future. ●



Disaster Risk Reduction activities March 2020.

Please contact the Friends of Suai/Covalima Coordinator if you would like any further information on our friendship program.
Phone: 9209 6598 Email: friendsofsuai@portphillip.vic.gov.au