



13.1 **FRIENDS OF SUAI/COVALIMA ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21**

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: **TONY KEENAN, GENERAL MANAGER, COMMUNITY WELLBEING AND INCLUSION**

PREPARED BY: **CARLENE HARLOCK, COORDINATOR FRIENDS OF SUAI/COVALIMA**

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To present the Friends of Suai/Covalima (FoSC) 2020/21 Annual Report (provided at Attachment 1) and inform Council of the achievements of the program over the last financial year.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 Council's 21-year friendship with Covalima district in Timor-Leste is an international program for the City of Port Phillip. The program has a community development focus with an emphasis on strengthening the Covalima Community Centre (CCC) in Suai and engaging Port Phillip and Covalima communities in cultural exchange, mutual learning, and development activities.
- 2.2 In September 2020, Council reaffirmed its Friendship with Covalima district, Timor-Leste through our third ten-year Friendship Agreement, and endorsed the 2020-25 Strategic Plan (Attachment 2), which has a strong focus on the sustainability of the Community Centre and support for future financial independence.
- 2.3 The FoSC 2020/21 Annual Report is aligned to the FoSC Strategic Plan 2020-25 and details the activities and achievements of the Friendship. These include fundraising and events in Port Phillip and successful community development initiatives implemented in Covalima district.
- 2.4 In setting out the achievements of FoSC over the last 12 months, the Annual Report recognises the increasing capacity of the Community Centre in Suai and the contribution of the Director, Vice Director and leadership team. They have worked strategically to develop sustainable programs and activities to meet basic community needs and promote training opportunities. This has been demonstrated with the Community Centre's response to engage with communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2.5 The Friendship has continued to deliver outcomes aligned to the guiding principle to develop productive and sustainable relationships based in dialogue, trust, and strategic vision. Through the work of the FoSC Community Reference Committee (CRC), City of Port Phillip has responded to needs and priorities expressed by the Covalima community and has helped to build a thriving, self-determining community through democratic processes.



3. RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 3.1 Endorse the 2020/21 Friends of Suai/Covalima (FoSC) Annual Report (Attachment 1).
- 3.2 Acknowledge the work of the FoSC Community Reference Committee and thank the Committee for its efforts.
- 3.3 Acknowledge the work of the Covalima Community Centre throughout 2020/21 and the role it has played in enhancing the lives of the Suai / Covalima community.

4. KEY POINTS/ISSUES

- 4.1 The City of Port Phillip established a relationship with the coastal town of Suai in Covalima district, Timor-Leste 20 year ago. The relationship was formed in response to the mass destruction and killings that occurred after the Timorese people voted for independence in 1999. In response to great concern from the Port Phillip community, a friendship was developed with Suai and the district of Covalima.
- 4.2 The Friendship has been formally recognised through three ten-year Friendship Agreements, initially signed in 2000 and renewed in 2010 and 2020. The first agreement was signed by Council and Xanana Gusmao, former Prime Minister of Timor Leste, in response to the violence following the independence vote in 1999.
- 4.3 The Friendship Agreement comprises a Statement of Friendship and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The Statement of Friendship outlines the nature and intent of the friendship to utilise the skills and knowledge in both communities and in doing so, empower both to manage their shared future. The supporting MOU maintains a formal arrangement for Council's relationship with government representatives in Suai.
- 4.4 The Friendship Agreement does not make commitments in relation to Council funding, which has occurred each year through the annual budget process. Council has resolved to prepare a Transition Plan in 2021 that would remove direct Council funding for the program within a reasonable timeframe.
- 4.5 The Friendship Agreement is complemented by a Municipal Cooperation Agreement of which the City of Port Phillip is a signatory, along with 14 other local councils in Victoria. This agreement, signed by the Mayor and CEO of Port Phillip in April 2016, provides a framework for building local government in Timor Leste.
- 4.6 In September 2020, Council reaffirmed its Friendship with Covalima district, Timor-Leste through a third ten-year Friendship Agreement, and endorsed the 2020-25 Strategic Plan (see Attachment 2). This plan has a strong focus on strengthening capacity at the CCC and support for its future financial independence.
- 4.7 The FoSC 2020/21 Annual Report is aligned to the FoSC Strategic Plan and details the activities and achievements of the Friendship during the last financial year. These include fundraising and events in Port Phillip and successful community development initiatives implemented by the Community Centre to benefit communities in Covalima. Highlights include:
 - FoSC fundraising activities and community donations contributed \$64,000 to support community development programs facilitated through the Covalima Community Centre in Suai. This included a successful Trivia Night fundraiser



held at Middle Park Bowls Club in April 2021, with more than 95 people attending and raising over \$10,000.

- In 2020, the 20-year anniversary celebration of the friendship was successfully adapted to online events due to COVID-19 restrictions. They included two book launches involving the community in Covalima district, and a documentary film about the Friendship screened as part of the St Kilda Film Festival online program.
- The Covalima Community Centre played a pivotal role in the District with both the administration of the COVID-19 response and the devastating floods that occurred in April this year. Community Centre staff visited many villages to provide resources and demonstrations on hygienic practices and information on vaccination, to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in vulnerable communities. They also worked with the Disaster Management Taskforce to coordinate the emergency response after the severe flooding.
- A further 10,000 trees have been planted in Covalima as part of the With One Seed carbon reforestation project funded by FoSC. This project involves working with subsistence farming communities to plant thousands of trees on deforested land over the coming years

4.8 The establishment and growth of the Covalima Community Centre in Suai is one of the primary legacies of the Friendship. In the 2020/21 financial year, the Centre employed 30 people, and offered programs and services throughout the district of 70,000 people. The programs at the Centre are based on a community development model through which FoSC provide support for organisational development for democratic structures and good governance.

4.9 The Community Centre is growing in capacity and through the support of the City of Port Phillip is now a registered Non-Government Organisation, an accredited training organisation and has formal partnerships with international Non-Government Organisations.

5. CONSULTATION AND STAKEHOLDERS

5.1 The 2020/21 FoSC Annual Report has been prepared with FoSC Community Reference Committee Chairperson, Megs Alston; Treasurer, Michael Henry and Covalima Community Centre Director, Alberto de Jesus Barros.

6. LEGAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no legal and risk implications.

7. FINANCIAL IMPACT

7.1 The FoSC 2020/21 Annual Report is drafted and produced by the Coordinator FoSC. There is no expense other than officer time associated with the production.

7.2 The budget allocation for the FoSC program for the 2020/21 financial year was \$60,000 and a 0.6 FTE position to coordinate the program and relationship between the Port Phillip and Covalima communities.

7.3 The FoSC program funding for the Community Centre is used for core operational costs including staffing, communication, transport, and administration. This funding has allowed the CCC to form partnerships with local and international development organisations to implement programs.



- 7.4 Council funding for the Friends of Suai program is considered on an annual basis. The requested Transition Plan will inform the 2022/23 budget.
- 7.5 FoSC fundraising activities and community donations contributed \$64,000 to support community development programs facilitated through the Covalima Community Centre in Suai. Donations provided funds for the scholarship program, resources for the Suai Secondary School library and establishment of the With One Seed carbon reforestation project.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 8.1 FoSC is committed to sustainable practices and has supported the establishment and expansion of a new reforestation initiative called With One Seed. Now in its second year, this project involves working with subsistence farming communities to plant thousands of trees on deforested land over the coming years. Farmers are receiving education and training on planting and maintaining the trees. With One Seed is the first internationally certified carbon program in Timor-Leste and income will be generated for farmers through the sale of carbon credits. FoSC has raised funds to employ four local staff and establish a nursery in which more than 20,000 trees have now been grown and distributed.
- 8.2 The FoSC funded water, sanitation and hygiene project at Suai Secondary School is providing running water and toilets for 2,000 students, and local families in nearby communities are now connected to the community water tank providing fresh water. With support from the Covalima Community Centre, the school has established a management committee to ensure the sustainability of the water supply and facilities.
- 8.3 The CCC is working with rural communities to increase food security and to develop resilience to the changing climate by encouraging land and water conservation, risk assessment and reforestation.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 9.1 The FoSC is a community-initiated commitment that supports an enriching relationship for both Port Phillip and Suai/Covalima communities. The friendship has enabled Port Phillip residents the opportunity to engage in international relations with one of our closest neighbours, Timor-Leste, and experience mutual learning and understanding through acting locally and thinking globally.
- 9.2 The FoSC program provides the opportunity for understanding good governance, community participation and sharing of best practice in civil administration, both in Timor-Leste and in the Port Phillip community.
- 9.3 The FoSC Community Reference Committee (CRC) is a formal advisory group to Council and is supported and resourced by the FoSC Coordinator. More than 15 residents regularly attend meetings and organise events in City of Port Phillip. The CRC also assess project initiatives to ensure the Friendship pursues best practice in international development.
- 9.4 Port Phillip residents have provided time, skills, money and friendship, ensuring the relationship is based on community-to-community links. The Friendship engages residents, service clubs, churches and educational institutions in Port Phillip to connect with and support our friends in Timor-Leste.
- 9.5 Fundraising, cultural events and public meetings have ensured participation and engagement in the community, attracting residents, City of Port Phillip Councillors and



staff, and the Timor Leste network in Victoria. Port Phillip residents also engage with the friendship through program updates, social media, attendance at events and through donating to programs.

- 9.6 In 2020/21 the total volunteer hours from FoSC members exceeded 800 hours with a further 500 plus hours for special projects contributed by local academics and artists to promote the friendship.
- 9.7 Donations of second-hand computers by City of Port Phillip, supplemented by community donations, ensure the continuing operation of the IT social enterprise at the Covalima Community Centre. Income is generated through the delivery of training programs and the computers are sold at affordable prices to students and families.
- 9.8 Scholarships funded through community donations have provided over 165 scholarships since 2012 to students from Covalima district to further their education at senior secondary, vocational and tertiary levels. Covalima district is one of the poorest in Timor Leste and the scholarship program is providing access to education and preparing students for future employment.
- 9.9 The Covalima Community Centre has an excellent reputation for their work in promoting gender equality, social inclusion and advocacy and the Centre Coordinators incorporate this into all programs. The Rural Women's Development Program at the Centre supports income generating activities for more than 100 women and provides leadership and empowerment training for women elected in village councils.

10. ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICY

- 10.1 Since 2000, the FoSC Friendship Agreement and program have been guided by and aligned with the strategic goals of each Council Plan.
- 10.2 This program aligns with two of the Strategic Directions in the 2021-31 Council Plan:
 - Strategic Direction 1 - Inclusive Port Phillip, Initiatives:
We will provide:
 - delivery of services and programs that support inclusive and accessible activities including people who identify as LGBTIQ+, people with a disability, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Indigenous backgrounds and people experiencing homelessness.
 - Strategic Direction 5 - Well Government Port Phillip, Initiatives:
We will provide:
 - opportunities for our community to participate in civic life and help shape Council policy, services, programs and decisions by facilitating engagement in line with Council's Community Engagement Policy.
- 10.3 The FoSC Community Reference Committee (CRC) is a formal advisory group to Council, providing community members the opportunity to participate in civic life to inform Council decision making. The CRC work with the CCC and local government in Suai to provide good governance for the benefit and wellbeing of its community.



MEETING OF THE PORT PHILLIP CITY COUNCIL 3 NOVEMBER 2021

11. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

11.1 TIMELINE

11.1.1 The FoSC Annual Report will be presented at the FoSC Annual Meeting in November 2021.

11.2 COMMUNICATION

11.2.1 If endorsed by Council, the FoSC Annual Report will be distributed to FoSC members, donors, partners and supporters, and will be made accessible on Council's website, FoSC webpage.

12. OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT INTEREST

12.1 No officers involved in the preparation of this report have any material or general interest in the matter.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Friends of Suai Annual Report 2020 - 2021  [Download](#)
2. CoPP Friends of Suai/Covalima Strategic Plan 2020-25  [Download](#)