



9.1 FRIENDS OF SUAI/COVALIMA 2019-20 ANNUAL REPORT

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 to Council the Friends of Suai/Covalima (FoSC) 2019-20 Annual Report and updated FoSC Community Reference Committee Terms of Reference for endorsement.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 The 20-year friendship with Covalima district, Timor-Leste is an international program for the City of Port Phillip. The program is community development focused 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 a third ten-year Friendship Agreement, and endorsed the 2020-25 Strategic Plan, which has a strong focus on strengthening capacity at the CCC and support for future financial independence.
- 2.3 The Friendship has delivered on our agreement and remains aligned to the guiding principle; to develop productive and sustainable relationships based in dialogue, trust and strategic vision. Through Friends of Suai/Covalima (FoSC), City of Port Phillip continues to respond to needs and priorities expressed by the Covalima Community and to help to build a thriving, self-determining community through democratic processes.
- 2.4 The FoSC Community Reference Committee is an advisory group to Council and is resourced and supported by the FoSC Program Coordinator. An updated Terms of Reference for the Committee is provided for endorsement as part of this report. Resourcing of activities and projects for the FoSC program in 2019/20 was endorsed through allocation in the annual budget.
- 2.5 The program budget provided core funding to the Centre for staffing, communication, transport and administrative costs. Continuity of this funding has allowed the CCC to form partnerships with local and international development organisations.
- 2.6 The FoSC 2019-20 Annual Report is aligned to the FoSC Joint Strategic Plan (2010-2020) and details the many activities and achievements of the Friendship. These include fundraising and events in Port Phillip and successful community development initiatives implemented in Covalima district.
- 2.7 In setting out the achievements of FoSC over the last 12 months, the Annual Report recognises the increasing capacity of the CCC in Suai and the contribution of the Director, Vice Director and leadership team. They are working strategically to develop programs and activities to meet basic community needs, promote training opportunities and sustainable development. This has been demonstrated with the CCC response to engage with communities during the COVID-19 pandemic and has strengthened its standing in the district.



3. RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 3.1 Endorses the Friends of Suai/Covalima (FoSC) 2019-20 Annual Report (Attachment 1).
- 3.2 Acknowledge the contribution of the FoSC Community Reference Committee.
- 3.3 Acknowledge the work of the Covalima Community Centre and the role it plays enhancing the lives of the Suai-Covalima community.
- 3.4 Endorses the 2021 FoSC Community Reference Committee Terms of Reference (Attachment 2).

4. KEY POINTS/ISSUES

- 4.1 The City of Port Phillip's longstanding relationship with the coastal town of Suai in Covalima district, Timor-Leste was formed in response to the community's concern around the mass destruction and killings that occurred after the vote for independence in 1999. In response to this concern, a friendship was developed between the Port Phillip and Covalima communities.
- 4.2 The Friendship has been formally recognised through two ten-year Friendship Agreements, signed in 2000 and 2010. The initial ten-year Friendship Agreement with the coastal town of Suai, Timor Leste was signed by Xanana Gusmao (former Prime Minister) and Council in 2000, in response to the violence following the independence vote in 1999.
- 4.3 The agreements governing the work of Friends of Suai/Covalima (FoSC) are based on friendship and mutual respect.
- 4.4 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 proper and formal arrangements for Council's relationship with the government representatives in Suai.
- 4.5 Further Memorandums of Understanding with the Covalima District Administration were signed in 2005 and the Friendship was renewed for a further ten years at a celebration at St Kilda Town Hall in 2010.
- 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, which has a strong focus on strengthening capacity at the CCC and support for future financial independence.
- 4.7 The Terms of Reference for the FoSC Community Reference Committee have been updated to reflect the newly endorsed 2020-25 Strategic Plan and Council's decision to extend the Friendship Agreement (Attachment 2).
- 4.8 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 support framework for building local government in Timor Leste.



- 4.9 The work of FoSC has been guided by the FoSC Joint Strategic Plan 2010-2020. This plan has set a solid base for ongoing community development through 20 years of the community-to-community partnership.
- 4.10 The FoSC 2019-20 Annual Report is aligned to the FoSC Joint Strategic Plan (2010-2020) and details the many activities and achievements of the Friendship. These include fundraising and events in Port Phillip and successful community development initiatives implemented by the CCC to benefit communities in Covalima.
- 4.11 The establishment and growth of the CCC in Suai is one of the great legacies of the Friendship. In the 2019-20 financial year, the CCC 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.
- 4.12 The CCC is growing in capacity and, with 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 NGO's.
- 4.13 Achievements highlighted in the FoSC Community Reference Committee 2019-20 Annual Report include:
- The successful implementation of the With One Seed carbon reforestation project, with 10,000 trees distributed to subsistence farmers.
 - Implementation of a third village lighting project, to install solar lights in 48 homes in a remote off-grid village.
 - Raising more than \$52,000 through fundraising and community donations for programs in Covalima district, including funding 47 scholarships.
 - Construction of a basketball court at the Suai Secondary School, with funds provided by Albert Park College and the Port Phillip Basketball Association.
 - The flag-raising ceremony held at St Kilda Town Hall on 6 September 2019, to commemorate the 20-year anniversary of the Suai Church Massacre.
- 4.14 In addition, the CCC has played an important role in the District Administration COVID-19 Taskforce. Staff members have visited many villages to provide information, resources and demonstrations on hygienic practices to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in vulnerable communities.

5. CONSULTATION AND STAKEHOLDERS

- 5.1 The FoSC 2019-20 Annual Report has been prepared by the Coordinator Friends of Suai/Covalima in collaboration with FoSC Community Reference Committee Chairperson, Megs Alston; FoSC Treasurer, Michael Henry; and Covalima Community Centre Director, Alberto de Jesus Barros.

6. LEGAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no legal or risk implications.



7. FINANCIAL IMPACT

- 7.1 The budget allocation for the resourcing of activities and projects for the FoSC program for the 2019-20 financial year was \$87,900. This is in addition to allocation of staff resources.
- 7.2 The FoSC program's fundraising activities and community donors contributed over \$52,000 to support project outcomes. Donations provided funds for the scholarship program, the newly established With One Seed carbon reforestation project, resources for the Suai Secondary School library and reconstruction of the school basketball court.
- 7.3 In recent years, the value of donations has exceeded the City of Port Phillip budget allocation for the program, however this year fundraising activities were limited due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 8.1 FoSC is committed to sustainable practices, this includes supporting the establishment and expansion of a new reforestation initiative called With One Seed, which 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 establish a nursery, employ four staff and distribute 10,000 trees in 2020.
- 8.2 In 2019 a third Village Lighting Scheme was implemented, bringing solar lighting to 48 homes in a remote off-grid village in Covalima. The installation of solar panels provides lighting in the evening and removes the need to purchase and use kerosene, bringing social, economic and health benefits to families. There are now 127 households in Covalima that have received solar lighting as part of this project supported by FoSC, Renew and the CCC.
- 8.3 The FoSC funded water, sanitation and hygiene project at Suai Secondary School is providing a sustainable water supply and toilets for 2,000 students, and local families in nearby communities are now connected to the community water tank providing fresh water.
- 8.4 The CCC are working with rural communities to increase food security and to develop resilience to the changing climate by encouraging land conservation, risk assessment and reforestation.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 9.1 The FoSC is a community initiated, longstanding commitment that supports an enriching relationship for both Port Phillip and Suai/Covalima communities. The friendship has enabled residents to engage in international relations with our near neighbour Timor-Leste, and experience mutual learning and understanding through acting locally and thinking globally.
- 9.2 The FoSC program provides rich opportunity for understanding good governance, community participation and sharing of good practice in civil administration, both in Timor-Leste and in the Port Phillip community.
- 9.3 The FoSC Community Reference Committee (CRC) is an advisory group to Council and is supported and resourced by the FoSC Coordinator. Over 20 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 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.
- 9.5 Port Phillip residents are providing 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 friends in Timor-Leste.
- 9.6 In 2019-20 the total volunteer hours from FoSC members exceeded 1,000 hours with a further 1,500+ hours for special projects by local academics and artists to promote the friendship.
- 9.7 Since 2012, community donations have provided 161 scholarships to students from Covalima district to further their education at a senior secondary, vocational and tertiary level. 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.
- 9.8 Over 60 students have now found employment after receiving a FoSC scholarship to undertake vocational or tertiary education in Timor Leste. This is a significant outcome, given the constraints on employment in Timor Leste.
- 9.9 Donations of second-hand computers by City of Port Phillip ensure the continuing operation of the IT social enterprise at the CCC. Income is generated through the delivery of training programs and computers are sold at moderate prices to students and families. The provision of laptops has enabled the delivery of training in rural village centres.
- 9.10 The CCC has an excellent reputation for promoting gender equality and supporting women in leadership. The Rural Women's Development Program at the CCC 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 Council values and aligned with the strategic goals of each Council Plan. This report aligns with the 2017-27 Council Plan and Strategic Direction 1: We embrace difference and people belong.
- 10.2 The Suai-Covalima Timor-Leste partnership is an engagement and partnership priority that supports Direction 1 along with the FoSC Strategic Plan.
- 10.3 The annual contribution to the Covalima Community Centre in Suai is a major financial investment by Council to support its Council Plan direction and the long-term friendship with Covalima district.

11. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

11.1 TIMELINE

- 11.1.1 The Annual Report will be presented at the FoSC Annual General Meeting scheduled for March 2021.

MEETING OF THE PORT PHILLIP CITY COUNCIL 17 FEBRUARY 2021



11.2 COMMUNICATION

11.2.1 The Annual Report will be distributed to FoSC members, volunteers, donors, partners and supporters.

11.2.2 The Annual Report will be accessible from the FoSC page on the City of Port Phillip website.

12. OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT INTEREST

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

TRIM FILE NO: 10/08/02

ATTACHMENTS

1. CoPP Friends of Suai Covalima Annual Report 2019-20
2. Terms of Reference 2021 - Friends of Suai Covalima Community Reference Committee