

Mary's News *today*



SPRING 2021

- The uplifting power of self-determination
- Supporting women as community leaders
- Taking steps towards financial wellbeing
- Helping families heal and more...

MARY MACKILLOP
today



Dear Friends and Supporters

As we continue to battle the impacts of the pandemic, I am mindful of how much I appreciate your support. You have stood by the communities we work with through thick and thin – ensuring vulnerable people are not forgotten. I can't thank you enough!

For this issue of Mary's News Today, we have chosen to focus on the theme of 'Dignity through self-determination'. We strive for all people to have the opportunity to live a full and healthy life. And we know having choices is vital to achieve this. This is key to all our programs at Mary MacKillop Today and you can find out more on page 3.

You can read about how you're supporting women to overcome inequality and pursue leadership in Peru and Fiji (page 6). Or see how you're providing livelihoods to help set families up for the future (page 4).

Every day I see inspirational changes occurring for the individuals, families, and communities we work with – and this is only made possible because of you. Your compassionate generosity is giving people the opportunities they need to realise their self-worth, make their own choices, and achieve their aspirations. Thank you!

With gratitude,

Jane Woolford

Chief Executive Officer

Celebrating Saint Mary's Feast Day 2021

In many parts of Australia, we weren't able to gather to celebrate Saint Mary MacKillop's Feast Day on 8th August. During these troubled times, we take comfort in knowing Mary drew strength and hope from faith to persevere during her own hardships - just as we will too.

Mary MacKillop Today created a commemorative prayer card to share this hope with you and inspire you to take fresh courage through Mary's incredible legacy.

This prayer, by Sister Annie Bond,

speaks of Mary's amazing compassion for those in need. If you would like a copy of our Feast Day Prayer Card, please call Katie on 02 8912 2763, or email her at katie.maxwell@marymackilloptoday.org.au



Inspired by Australia's first saint, Mary MacKillop Today empowers communities in Australia and overseas to realise their dignity through education, health, financial inclusion and livelihoods. All photos Mary MacKillop Today unless otherwise stated. When necessary, names have been changed for privacy. Front Cover: Adolfo - Vanilla Farmer in Timor-Leste



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The uplifting power of self-determination

CEO Jane Woolford shares how the work of Mary MacKillop Today is built on honouring dignity through self-determination.

Being worthy of respect – from yourself and from others – is inherent to every person. I know Saint Mary MacKillop believed this too, and that's why she worked so hard to reach marginalised communities. Dignity cannot be given or taken away. But poverty can make a person feel powerless.

Self-determination is key to maintaining a sense of one's own dignity. People must have the opportunity to become architects of their own futures. They need to feel they have a voice. When a person has control over their own life, it means they can have the confidence to make choices that matter to them.

Being able to make decisions is profoundly important for a person's healing, motivation, and their ability to gain equal access to possibilities in life. It plays an enormous role in psychological health and wellbeing.

At Mary MacKillop Today, when we plan our Learning for Life programs, we do it with our core values in mind. We ask ourselves – will this help people in the way they need it? Will this empower people to realise their aspirations?

Empathy, listening, and understanding are essential to develop successful, life-changing programs. It's not about saying to people, 'This is what we think you need.' Participants in the community understand their culture best and are therefore in the best place to



Students in Timor-Leste

Education is an essential pathway out of poverty. It uplifts people with the knowledge, skills, and tools to become self-reliant – which ultimately paves the way for people to fulfil their rights.

know what works. For that reason, so much of the work we do is designed in partnership with communities to ensure it is relevant. We are driven by the solutions that people decide for themselves. This approach is the heart of what shapes our development work around the world.

I think of Mary and how she responded to the reality of her time. She saw children without access to education, and she felt it was their right. She and the Sisters of St Joseph took a very difficult, uncomfortable

path to ensure this right was met.

Mary saw the power of education to provide people with choice and control over their circumstances. This motivated her to help children get the schooling they needed to access opportunities in life and create brighter futures for themselves.

And today, you are helping us continue Mary's legacy by supporting people facing disadvantage to stand up and have a say in their own lives – as individuals, families, and communities. Thank you!



Support life-changing work

by including Mary MacKillop Today in your will

A gift in your will, of any size, is a powerful way to leave a legacy for future generations. Your gift will help vulnerable communities and continue the vital work of Saint Mary.

Call Elizabeth on 02 8912 2712 to find out more.

Helping Families Heal – Make a Change

Thanks to generous people like you, our Community Grants can support grassroots initiatives like 'Helping Families Heal – Make a Change' which is run by Sister Alma and clinical psychologist, Christabel Chamarette.

The program is based in a remote, predominantly Aboriginal community in the Kimberley. First

Nations people have experienced generations of trauma with the impact of colonisation. There

is a lot of hurt with high levels of unemployment, poverty, incarceration, and domestic violence.

Sr Alma and Christabel have set up a safe, welcoming place for those seeking to heal from their childhood trauma by providing one-on-one and group counselling, workshops, and events.

People who join the sessions come away in a better position to return to the work environment, care for their families, get involved in their community, and keep themselves safe. Taking this process into their own hands and deciding to make such important changes in their lives is a wonderful way for people to reclaim their dignity.



Sr Alma leading a group session

“I’ve been out here a long time, so people know me well enough to come to me and say, ‘I need help.’ It’s only when they decide this for themselves that they make themselves available to be comforted. It is so rewarding to see people coming alive. Sharing in the lightbulb moments.” – Sr Alma

Livelihoods to set families up for the future

Thanks to supporters like you, our livelihood projects can empower people like Adolfo with the self-determination to earn a living that can provide long-term, lasting impact for them and their families. For Adolfo, that means putting food on the table and paying for schooling for his growing children – not just right now, but into the future.

Adolfo lives in a small, remote village in Timor-Leste with his wife and eight children. Like many of the families in his community, Adolfo’s household depends on farming to make a living. That means relying on physical abilities to work the land, having the know-how to harvest in the best possible way, accessing essential resources, and good weather to grow crops.

Adolfo has been receiving education, mentoring, and resources through our Vanilla Livelihoods project

which helps community members get set up with everything they need to successfully grow vanilla. This includes a supply of vanilla seeds plus practical training in areas such as planting new trees in empty spaces, and effective and safe pesticide management.

“In the years coming, I could harvest my vanilla to sell in the market and earn some money to support our children’s needs.”
– Adolfo



Taking steps towards financial wellbeing

Having financial independence is crucial for people to feel they have control of their lives. Money management tools assist in increasing one's dignity and wellbeing.

But sadly, in Australia, there are many people facing enormous financial barriers that prevent them from having the life choices they hope for.

Thanks to the generosity of funding partners, we can set up education programs for financial inclusion such as our Money Talks training in Central West NSW. We run financial wellbeing sessions designed for people looking to create a budget, reduce debt or learn more about



saving, tenancy, choosing financial products or understanding credit. When people complete their training, they can walk away with the knowledge and skills they need to feel confident about their financial future.

“Our goal is to empower people to have control over their own money. Everyone is an individual – every situation is unique. One of my recent clients had never been on a holiday. His dream was to save up enough money to go see the dolphins in Queensland. We worked together... He eventually saved enough to go on his holiday!”

– Julie, Financial Inclusion Officer

The Financial Literacy Program in Central Western NSW is funded by the generosity of the Ecstra Foundation.

Empowering parents to support children's education

Education is a pathway out of poverty and key to dignity through self-determination. Many parents wish to see their children accessing the education they need for a bright future.

But for those parents who didn't have the opportunity to receive a quality education themselves, it is incredibly difficult to know how to support their children's learning.

24-year-old Ivana lives on a small island in Timor-Leste with her husband and 5-year-old son who is in pre-school. When Ivana shared



her challenges facilitating her son's learning at home, the generosity of supporters like you put us in a position to help. Ivana joined our

Parents Training Program to build her own skills in basic education, such as literacy and numeracy, plus receive training to confidently engage her child in his home learning.

“This training encourages me to teach and help my child at home. I learn how to write letters, numbers, read a story, tell imagination story to my son, count numbers by using local materials, draw a picture, sing kids songs, and play games...I have learned a lot and I would like to help other parents in my village.”

– Ivana.

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Supporting women as community leaders

It's important for women experiencing vulnerability to gain the confidence to realise their inherent value and vital role in uplifting their entire community. Your support helps provide the opportunities women need to overcome marginalisation, take their lives into their own hands, and build better futures – for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Achieving self-determination can be especially hard for women facing entrenched inequality across all levels of their community. At Mary MacKillop Today, we see this as a crucial area of focus for our programs. That's why we have set up specific projects in Peru and Fiji to support women in leadership.

Our Enhancing Women's Civil Participation in Rural Peru Project aims to build the skills

and confidence of women leaders to participate fully in community decision making. As part of a women's leadership group, female government representatives and civil society leaders attend training workshops on human rights, ethical leadership, the functions of Municipal Governments, and influencing public policy. The project empowers leaders to submit proposals to government and for

Councillors to gain approval for gender equity initiatives.

Our Women's Leadership in Rural Fiji Project builds the confidence and capabilities of young women to become agents of change. Women facing marginalisation, particularly in rural areas, can join training workshops on human rights, financial literacy, women's health, and leadership. The women's empowerment group meets regularly, together with mentors, so women can be encouraged to make positive contributions as citizens and custodians of their communities.

“I am now looking forward to developing my small business in the village. The project has allowed me to dream bigger!”

– Ema, Fiji

With the generosity of people like you, we can continue offering training programs and support groups to encourage women in community leadership in Peru and Fiji – helping them to better understand and leverage their political, social, economic, and cultural power.

Thank you for your support!

Enhancing Women's Civil Participation in Rural Peru and Women's Leadership in Rural Fiji both receive support from the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).



Jeaneth

“From a young age I have participated in public life. In my personal experience as a former Councillor, we were very few women.

Through taking part in the Enhancing Women's Civil Participation in Rural Peru Project, I can say that it is very valuable, because as a woman I feel strengthened in my political and social capacities.

Now I am very interested in continuing in politics, because, through the workshops that I have been attending, I see that it is possible to assume responsibilities in Public Governance. Let's get out of our houses and seek this opportunity.”

– Jeaneth, Peru

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