

Mary's News *today*



SPRING 2022

- You're reaching more rural Australian in need
- "I owe the Timorese people my father's life..."
- Thank you for creating life-changing opportunities for people in Fiji and Peru and more...

MARY MACKILLOP
today



Dear Friends and Supporters

A message from our CEO

The impact of the pandemic, conflict, and the rising cost of living around the world has been catastrophic for people living in poverty. With you by our side, our focus is to help people flourish in the face of hardship and poverty. We are always looking at the best ways to respond to areas of dire need to take Mary's 'can help' legacy forward in today's world.

Here in Australia, we are speaking with the Sisters about how we might help continue the Josephite presence in the East Kimberley (see page 3). Looking abroad, kind people like you are supporting incredible work with communities in Fiji to help women become strong leaders (page 5) as well as our wonderful Mobile Kindy for children who might otherwise miss out on early education (page 5). And in Peru, your generosity is helping women pursue political leadership opportunities (page 6) as well as supporting parents to become actively involved in their children's schooling (page 6).

I'm so encouraged by the generosity and compassion of supporters like you who make our work possible. Giving is an act of solidarity that allows us to make real change for people - and persist no matter how hard it is. On behalf of our supporters, we can learn from our long history since the humble beginnings of Mary's work in the early 19th Century. And we can think long-term towards a future where people flourish.

With gratitude,

Jane

Jane Woolford

Chief Executive Officer

Supporting Australians towards financial wellbeing

Thank you to the generous people who recently donated to help expand our Financial Inclusion program. With the cost-of-living skyrocketing, there is an enormous need for everyday financial services to be available to everyone at a reasonable cost.



Bishop McKenna and Deacon Josh with Sisters Alice and Mary at the blessing of our new office in Bathurst

You are helping us to walk alongside more people to break the cycle of debt and flourish through financial wellbeing — whether it's through the immediate relief of our no interest loans or our education workshops to help people improve their financial management into the future.

Our dedicated Financial Inclusion team has been busy extending our reach into new parts of regional NSW. Last year, we expanded to provide our no interest loan support services in Condobolin, Mudgee, and Kandos. And more recently, we began serving Western Sydney (Penrith, the Blue

Mountains and surrounding areas) as well as the Hawkesbury communities.

To make room for our growing team and to help us accommodate even more people seeking our help, we recently, with the support of the Bathurst Catholic Diocese, moved into a new office. Having this larger space allows us to run education groups directly from our office. The new space also has private offices for us to have personal, confidential conversations with people about their situation.

Thank you for your support to help more people create a better tomorrow — today!

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 by Mary MacKillop Today unless otherwise stated. When necessary, names have been changed for privacy. Front Cover: Our Mobile Kindy in Fiji



Mary MacKillop Today acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of the land, past, present, and emerging, on which our offices are located.



Mary MacKillop Today is fully accredited by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. To maintain accreditation, Mary MacKillop Today's systems, policies and processes are rigorously reviewed by the Australian Government.



Mary MacKillop Today is a member of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) and complies with industry standards of good practice, transparency and accountability.



Mary MacKillop Today is a Registered Charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC), the national regulator of charities.

The heartbeat of the Josephite Sisters in the East Kimberley

Nearly 60 years ago, the first Sisters of St Joseph arrived in the town of Wyndham in East Kimberley, Western Australia. The Sisters immediately started teaching eager students, using the Church as a classroom until a school was constructed. In the decades following, the Sisters built strong connections with generations of people from all walks of life and expanded their work to many surrounding communities.



Maria, our Australia Programs Group Leader, and Jane, CEO, were invited by Sisters Alma, Theresa, and Julianne to visit and talk about the future of the Josephite presence in the East Kimberley. Their experience and reflection was focused on potential opportunities for Mary MacKillop Today to support a Josephite legacy amongst communities in the region. Maria shared, *"We went on this trip with the intention of being present and listening to the heartbeat of the Sisters in the East Kimberley. And listening to the voices of the community. The Sisters are incredibly strong women. They are truly part of the community. They walk alongside the people in the community. We learnt a lot about what the word 'leadership' really means here. Community members explained that it's about having a voice. And being able to make decisions for themselves as individuals, families, and whole communities."*

During their trip, Maria and Jane were able to see the Sisters at work across a variety of activities including education and leadership. They had the chance to visit some of the dynamic schools which have flourished since their humble beginnings when Sisters started teaching local students under a tree.



The Sisters set up these schools with the community at the forefront of their minds. Today, where possible, the lessons are taught in both the local Aboriginal language and English. There's a real focus on authentic connection with students and families that is culturally safe, and trauma

"We went on this trip with the intention of being present and listening to the heartbeat of the Sisters in the East Kimberley. And listening to the voices of the community."

informed. A sign out the front of one school reads *'We connect before we correct... We see you, we hear you, we are with you.'*

Sr Julianne travels, from time to time, to the schools with a special Mary MacKillop puppet to tell stories about her life. The children love it! It's such a fun and interactive way for students to

learn about who Mary is and what she did.

Maria described, *"The schools were just so full of energy. The kids were so alive! They were engaging with the teachers, who were clearly committed and passionate, and learning in creative ways. There was real excitement and enthusiasm in the classrooms."*

The schools operate now with the support of Catholic Education Western Australia and the Sisters focus their presence on strengthening community life.

One of the best things about the way the Sisters work is their genuine presence. They are right there with people, listening to people, just as Saint Mary envisioned.

Mary's legacy is truly alive today. Mary MacKillop Today now has the challenge of planning for what this legacy will become into the future in communities like those in the East Kimberley. We ask for your prayerful support as we undertake this journey and all its possibilities.

“I owe the Timorese people my father’s life.”

We recently spoke with one of our supporters, Mary Haire. She told us the incredible story of her father, Jerry Haire, who served in Timor Leste in 1942. Mary will never forget the Timorese people who saved his life.



“We, as children of those commandos owe the Timorese people our fathers’ lives. Nothing we could do could ever repay them, but we need to do what we can.”

My father was one of the commandos in the only group of Australian soldiers in Timor-Leste who refused to surrender despite being outnumbered by Japanese soldiers. The commandos asked the Timorese people to help them — to be their ears and eyes and provide them with food. Those families who assisted them later described the Australian soldiers as being kind to them. The people responded in kind.

Families offered their sons as ‘criados’. They were boys, some as young as 14 or 15 years old. Every Australian commando was assigned one criado and those boys took the soldiers’ lives into their hands every day. It was a huge risk for the boys to take. If they’d been caught by Japanese soldiers, they would’ve been murdered. Some were. Without the criados and the support of their villages, the Australians would not have survived. Australia has an enormous debt of gratitude to Timor-Leste. And for me, a personal debt because of what the Timorese people did for my father. But Australia has never compensated Timor-Leste. It’s been 80 years and the Timorese people are yet to be recognised formally.

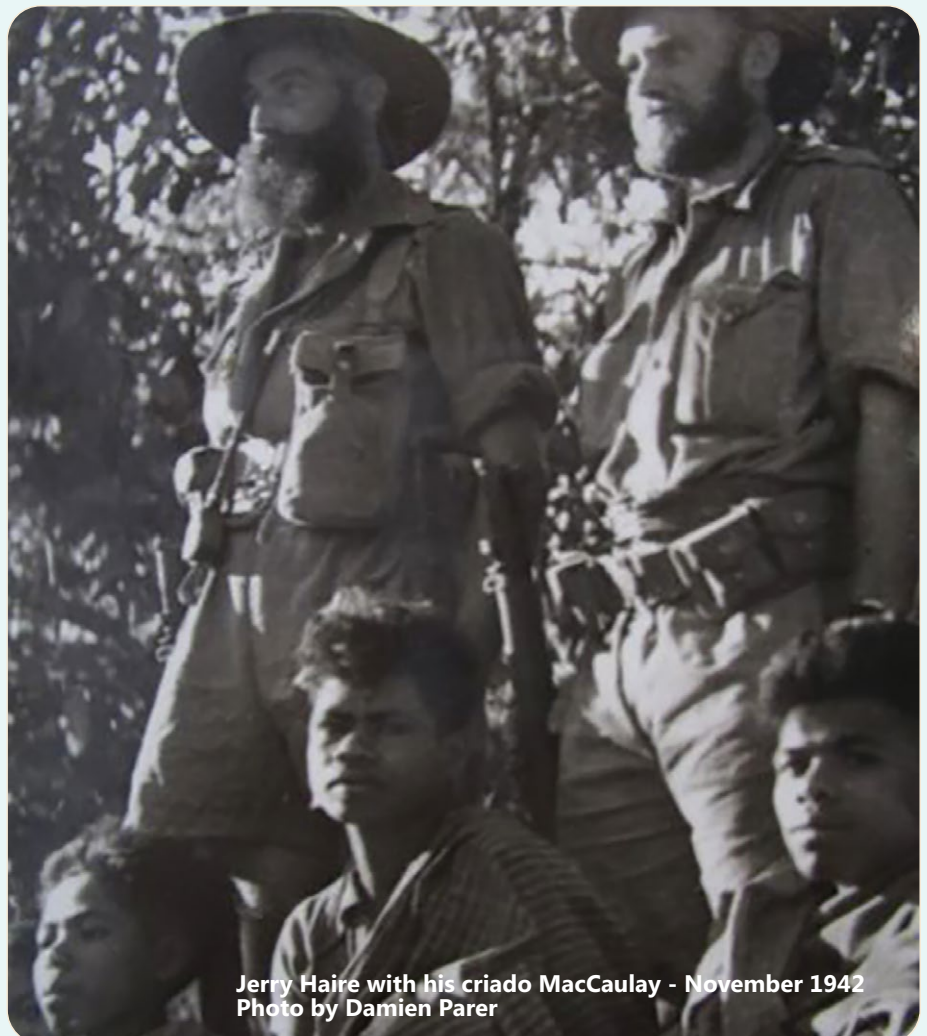
The inspiring influence of my father and knowing what he went through in Timor-Leste made me want to support Mary MacKillop Today. I decided straight away to include a gift in my Will. I want my money to go to good charities that I believe in. And helping the Timorese people is at the top of my list. I feel that the country is so poor and so deserving.

The Timorese people hadn’t had enough access to education, so I was really excited by the work of Sr Josephine and Sr Susan who were part of the beginnings of the

Josephites’ teaching in Timor-Leste. Those two women are outstanding human beings and eloquent leaders. I just felt compelled to get involved. When you educate the kids, the parents get educated as well. It’s a flow-on effect. And for people in Timor-Leste to be educated in their own language is crucial. The next generation will benefit from this work. I’d encourage others to consider donating or leaving a bequest. Mary MacKillop is a unifying figure

who went out of her way to help people experiencing poverty. I know that my late father would’ve been extremely happy to support Mary’s work to this day.

We are incredibly thankful for Mary’s thoughtful generosity to support our work in memory of her father and the amazing people who helped keep him alive in Timor-Leste. Including Mary MacKillop Today in your Will is a wonderful way to help people in some of the most vulnerable situations around the world to flourish. If you’d like to know more, please contact Philippa Martens on 02 7906 2496 or pip.martens@marymackilloptoday.org.au for a confidential conversation.



Jerry Haire with his criado MacCaulay - November 1942
Photo by Damien Parer

Mereoni found her voice through new skills

Mereoni is 22 years old and lives with her three-year-old daughter in a rural village in Fiji. Mereoni recently joined our Women's Leadership training and shared, *"For many of us living in village communities as women, our voices are not likely to be heard in meetings. Through this training, I have been able to speak out and have courage. I am honoured to be given the opportunity to learn. To be empowered and recognised for my full potential, so I can help other young women who need help."*



Thanks to the generosity of people like you, aspiring women like Mereoni can come along to our training workshops to gain vital knowledge and skills around leadership, human rights, women's health, and financial literacy to manage their own resources. You are helping to build the confidence and capabilities of young women to

overcome deep-set barriers and make positive changes in their lives.

"This training has helped me and my sisters to give back to the community and our families to make a difference in our lives. Through the training, I'm learning skills to invest and save to provide for my daughter and support her education. That is my priority." –

Mereoni, recent participant in Project Talitha, Mary MacKillop Today's leadership training in Fiji delivered through our local partner, Ola Fou Fiji.

Women's Leadership in Rural Fiji receives support from the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

The importance of early education in Fiji

We spoke with Kata, whose family owns the land in one settlement that our Mobile Kindy is run from with local partner Child Benefit Fiji.

Kata told us about her son who passed away and how, during his life, he was passionate about using their land to provide the local children with a place to learn.

Kata shared:

"He wanted to keep the children all together. That's why we built up

this kindergarten. I think the school means a lot. He has left a good thing for us to continue on now – myself and my grandchildren.

These families are coming from all parts of Fiji, mostly islanders. Some come to look for jobs or education in Suva. But they have nowhere to stay. They are 'bunking'. It's hard... If our school wasn't here, some children would have to travel by bus or walk far to learn. They are much happier having us close by.

I listen to what our teachers are teaching. I think what we have now is really helpful. It will be much, much easier for the children to get into school after coming here."

Thank you for your support to provide early childhood education to children in vulnerable situations. You are helping whole communities to work together to overcome disadvantage and provide positive futures for their children to flourish.



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 Philippa on 02 7906 2496 to find out more.

Peruvian women in community leadership

In rural Peru, there are very few women working in government positions — and those who are, have often not been trained to do their role effectively. Together with our local partner CCAIJO, our Enhancing Women's Civil Participation project has been working successfully with women who are interested in pursuing leadership across 12 districts.

We recently conducted an external evaluation of the last three years of this project, which gave us valuable insights and learnings to help shape what this program could look like over the next three years — and, ultimately, maximise the impact of your support so women in Peru can flourish.

Following the evaluation, we are working with CCAIJO to develop a new three-year project design with the aim to continue to build the skills and confidence of women leaders to get involved in community decision making. As part of a women's leadership group, female government representatives and civil society leaders attend training workshops on issues such as leadership, human rights, the functions of Municipal Governments, and influencing public policy. Although the pandemic forced



“Before I came here, I did not know about my rights.”

- Participant in our Enhancing Women's Civil Participation project

us to move from face-to-face to virtual meetings for a period of time, we have still seen wonderful outcomes for such a resilient group of women and,

together, seen their aspirations grow.

“I am running as a candidate for Councillor of the province... After that, I want to be a candidate for Mayor of my district. Maybe I can be the first female Mayor.” - Participant in our Enhancing Women's Civil Participation project.

Enhancing Women's Civil Participation in rural Peru receives support from the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

Education beyond the classroom in Peru

Education doesn't just happen in the classroom, but also in the home and within the community.

Students have the best chance at flourishing at school and achieving brighter futures when their parents take a positive interest in their learning. When parents are not involved in their children's education, it can affect a child's ability to finish their schooling and realise their full potential.

Through our local partner in Peru, the Civil Association Center for Education, Organization and Promotion of Development Ilo (CEOP Ilo), we have taken a holistic approach to enhancing parental involvement in education — especially in rural areas. We recently conducted an external evaluation into the past three years of our program to measure its impact on the students and their families, with the goal of taking this learning into the next project we design with CEOP Ilo. Thanks to the generosity

of supporters, and the excellent outcomes of this evaluation, our workshops will continue to assist teachers and parents to confidently play an effective role in their children's learning into the future.

A snapshot of our Parents Training program in Peru over the past year...

- We worked with **116 teachers across 7 schools** in rural parts of Peru on how to strengthen the relationships between family, community, and teachers.
- These workshops have supported **349 parents** to take an active role in their children's learning.
- **96%** of the teachers and students consulted have seen an increase in parents' participation and concern for their children's wellbeing.



Enhancing the Educational Environment for School Students in rural Peru receives support from the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

STAY CONNECTED

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