

Mary's News *today*



AUTUMN 2024

- See how Rosita flourishes in Timor-Leste
 - Read about brave women in Fiji like Ana
 - Meet Kaylah, a young Warrior Woman
- ... and many more stories about the impact you make possible!

MARY MACKILLOP
today



Dear Friends and Supporters

A message from our CEO

I'm delighted to welcome you to the Autumn 2024 edition of Mary's News Today, centred around one of Mary MacKillop Today's core approaches, 'Women at the Heart.'

Inspired by a woman and guided by the Sisters of Saint Joseph, our organisation continues to recognise women as central to helping people reach their full potential and flourish. This is why we have selected stories to share with you that highlight the impact of our women's programs and women telling their own story.

You're supporting young women like Kaylah here in Australia, who says she can finally feel proud of herself (page 3).

You're helping women like Rosita in Timor-Leste, who joined a cooperative group to access resources and learn skills to run her own business.

And you're giving women like Ana in Fiji the leadership skills she seeks to reach her goals (page 4).

"I'm pleased to share with you that we have a new strategic plan. To view this, please visit www.marymackilloptoday.org.au/who-we-are/publications-and-reports".

You'll help amplify our voice in advocating for change — with a particular focus on girls and women, often overlooked when it comes to education.

Thank you for continuing Mary's extraordinary legacy. Together, we will help people create better life opportunities – for today and tomorrow.

With gratitude,
Jane Woolford
CEO

"I feel like I am starting a new life in a good way."

One of the greatest challenges women face in Timor-Leste is achieving financial independence.

The Cooperative BEHAFU is a credit union supporting group members, who are mostly women, in remote areas of Timor-Leste. Members access workshops, mentoring, and financial resources to earn money through businesses they run themselves.

Meet Rosita, a member of the BEHAFU Cooperative group.

"With the training I have received through the BEHAFU Cooperative group, I can solve my problems because I understand how I should manage my money."

One of the advantages of being a member of the Cooperative is that all

members can save money and take money to do business.

I have taken money and bought flour, oil, sugar, and made cakes to sell. Some of the money is also used to buy vegetable seeds to be replanted during the rainy season. From vegetables I can sell and pay for the needs of the house and children's schooling, such as laptops.

There will always be money if suddenly my children need to buy books and shoes.

The cooperative helps to alleviate our difficulties.

I feel like I am starting a new life in a good way."

This project is supported by the Terrace Timor Network (TTN).



Rosita, a proud member of BEHAFU

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 Women's Empowerment Project in Peru is creating new political leadership. Some content in this newsletter has been translated.



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 accredited by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), responsible for managing Australia's development program. To maintain accreditation, Mary MacKillop Today's systems, policies and processes are rigorously reviewed by the Australian Government. Mary MacKillop Today receives support through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).



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.

20 years of Community Grants and counting

Chrys, Mary MacKillop Today's Australian Programs Coordinator



Chrys Fernando is our Australian Programs Coordinator and is responsible for managing Mary MacKillop Today's Community Grants program.

This job really is a gift to me. I am constantly amazed to witness the changes happening in people's lives.

Saint Mary MacKillop and the Sisters of St Joseph saw something that nobody was able to or willing to deal with. People were falling through the cracks of society, missing out on receiving an education. Especially women and girls.

But something I've always appreciated about the Sisters is that they rolled up their sleeves and got beside people. They lived and taught in communities. Like Mary, I believe education is the catalyst to changing people's circumstances for the better.

Over 20 years old now, Mary MacKillop Today's Community Grants program is based on the 'seeds' planted by the Sisters in those early years. We work in partnership with grassroots initiatives, often with a particular focus on supporting women through education opportunities. It's such a privilege to be part of that process, walking alongside people in their journey.

A recent example of a community grant in action is The Warrior Woman Foundation. Thank you to the kind people who support Mary MacKillop Today, as your generosity has made it possible for The Warrior Woman

Foundation to run their Young Warrior Woman Program. This program supports the safety and wellbeing of young Australian women in some of the most vulnerable situations, like Kaylah.

Meet Kaylah, a Young Warrior Woman

Turning 18 is supposed to be a happy milestone to remember. I had to leave foster care just days after my 18th birthday because my foster carer had to make room for another young girl needing a place to stay. I was couch surfing, and although I had people around me, I had no-one to trust. I felt alone. I had no idea how to get a job and didn't think I could anyway as I didn't finish school. After exhausting all options, I ended up in a crisis refuge for young women, homeless and desperate.

I was given a case worker who suggested I do the Young Warrior Woman Program. It was an amazing program. I met other young women like me who were in out-of-home care who were going through similar things. **The program was exactly what I needed to build confidence in myself.**

**"I had little hope for my future...
But now, I'm finally proud of myself."**

I was matched with a really nice mentor who helped me get a part time job and helped me to work out what I wanted to do as a career. Our weekly Zoom catch ups really helped me to keep going towards my goals. All of the talks we went to were inspiring and we also did a six-week money management course which helped a lot. Now I know how to do my tax and how to spend my money wisely. Thanks to the help of my mentor who didn't give up on me, I'm now enrolled in TAFE to begin the process of becoming an Early Childhood Teacher. I've learnt so many skills to be independent and I'm finally proud of myself. I don't feel alone anymore.

**Name changed to protect privacy*

I was encouraged to know that I am “still something...”

In rural Fiji, traditional community structures often do not allow for women to play an active role in decision-making.

Led by our local partner Ola Fou Fiji, Project Talitha helps young women become strong leaders in their communities — because we know from experience that this benefits the community at all levels. Women participate in training workshops where they learn important skills, like how to lead, earn an income, manage their money wisely, understand human rights, and take care of their health.

Meet Ana, an inspiring participant of Project Talitha.

“With Project Talitha, I have learned a lot of things.



After learning new skills, especially mat weaving, I can now sell mats. I can make money to support my family. I can also dye mats so I can sell them as pillow covers.

I have learned how to save money for the future.

“Sometimes people tell us that as women in the village, we are nothing. ... We can’t do this; we can’t do that. But from the first time I attended this project, I was encouraged to know that I am still something. That I can do better.

I can support my family. I can support my life.

Through this project, I can move forward.”

Thank you for your generous support to walk alongside brave women like Ana!

This project is supported by the Australian Government via the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

Janette and Austin’s twelve years of generosity

Janette and Austin have been making regular monthly donations to support our work since 2011!

Janette tells us, *“We’ve had a very close connection to the Josephites over many years. I see this as a way to help fulfill their mission in our lives today. By giving a regular donation, we’ve got some permanence of connection.*

“Life for women in some societies is brutal. Through Mary MacKillop Today, we’ve enjoyed seeing the progress that women have been able to make and how they have been empowered to make changes

in their communities and to develop into leaders in their communities. I think for women in impoverished communities, that’s pretty amazing.”

Austin adds, *“We look at our family and think about the benefits we have. We realise not everyone has those benefits. We are happy to keep giving to Mary MacKillop Today because we see the changes happening at a grassroots level — like people who’ve trained as teachers going on to teach in their village and improve life there. That’s been really helpful for us to see.”*

Thank you, Janette and Austin, for your incredible commitment!



If you’d like to become a regular giver, just like Janette and Austin, visit www.marymackilloptoday.org.au/give-regularly/. Your kindness will help create a better tomorrow — today!

Calling all **INDEPENDENT SPIRITS**
Mary MacKillop Today’s Monthly Giving Program

When Mary MacKillop saw a need, she acted. She believed in her vision of bringing charity to all people in need.

By joining our monthly giving program, you too will help transform the lives of the most marginalised people in the world.

Call Marijana on (02) 8912 2763 to find out more or scan here →



“This scholarship has truly changed the way I study.”

The incredible First Nations students who approach us are full of determination.

But the dream of achieving university education can feel unattainable when students are facing financial challenges. Your support helps to provide much-needed scholarship access to tertiary studies.

We know that educated women lift families and communities out of poverty. Our hope is that these scholarships are helping to achieve equity in leadership for the First Nations women who are accessing them.

Meet Shantaya, who is studying for a Bachelor of Nursing at Deakin University. Shantaya received a Mary MacKillop Today's First Nations

Tertiary Scholarship, supported by kind people like you. Thank you!

“This scholarship has given me the ability to work part-time while I study, which has left me with more time to prepare for classes, assignments, and exams.

I originally chose to study a Bachelor of Nursing because I wanted to help people who needed it most. There is such a need for good nurses, and I want to go out into the field and really make an impact on the community.

So far, I have really enjoyed my placements. They have been a big eye-opener and have helped me understand what nursing is really like in the real world. I'm really excited about what the future holds in my area of work.



Shantaya, First Nations Scholar

This scholarship has truly changed the way that I have been able to study. I honestly don't know how I would manage without this scholarship, so I am eternally grateful for your kindness and generosity.”

Lucinda has been inspired – she wants to be just like her teacher!

There's nothing quite like hearing a child talk about what they want to be when they grow up.

Seven-year-old Lucinda says, *“I would like to be a teacher! Just like my teacher. Because I like to teach children.”*

Lucinda lives in a remote village in Timor-Leste. Her school is part of our Inclusive Early Education Project (formerly known as the Mobile Learning Centre). This project focuses on ensuring that education is inclusive for all – including children with a disability.

Our colourful bus brings a variety of fun and interactive learning experiences to Lucinda and her classmates.

Hear what Lucinda has to say about learning:

“I like going to school because I have many friends. We can read together, sing together, draw together, count together, and play together.

The teacher taught us to sing, “Nabilan-Nabilan” (Nabilan means



Lucinda loves going to school!!

“bright” in Tetun). Another song we sing is “A, E, I, O, U”. We sing while swaying to the words. We dance!”

The difficult reality is that girls like Lucinda in Timor-Leste tend to become less involved in educational activities as they grow older. This becomes even more of an issue in

remote and rural communities. If learning is nurtured during early education however, it can boost the likelihood of girls like Lucinda continuing to higher education.

Thank you for your support in bringing the love of learning to children like Lucinda!

“Now, people call us to be part of community actions.”

Deysi is a vegetable farmer and President of the District Women’s Organisation in Quispicanchi, Peru.

Deysi was happy to talk about her involvement in the ‘Enhancing Women’s Civil Participation in Rural Peru’ project, led by our local partner CCAIJO.

“We heard on the radio that there was an institution working with women, and it was CCAIJO. We were very happy!

Women have been fighting for respect and recognition of our rights. We did not have a women’s organisation representing us in society. When CCAIJO came along with the Political Empowerment Project, it helped us a lot. They helped us develop a district meeting of women. I was elected as President, and in the Executive Board, there are women from different communities in my district. Since that date, we have been



Deysi has become a leader in her community!

participating in the activities carried out by the municipality. People now know that there is a women’s organisation, and they call us to participate and be part of community actions. We go out to defend the rights of women against violence. The workshops that CCAIJO gives

us help us to know more about our rights. Many of our fellow members have now participated in municipal elections.”

This project is supported by the Australian Government via the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

“I can make money for my children to study.”

The Vocational Training project was established after seeing the skills gap in rural Peru.

The training is run by local partners CCAIJO and the Quispicanchi Centre for Technical Productive Education (CETPRO).

Meet María, one of our inspiring participants.

“Before, I always followed my husband’s decisions, taking care of the house and our sheep. I never got any training in anything.

But then, my sister-in-law invited me to join the training at CCAIJO. She said women can do it too. So, I started at CETPRO CCAIJO last year.

In these trainings, I learned how to set up a horticultural garden with help from the CETPRO teacher. Now, I have different vegetables and flowers that I grew myself.



María, a Vocational Training participant

I take some to the market every Sunday during the district fair. I make around 150 to 200 sales per

week. Also, the teacher helped me set up a guinea pig shed, and now I have 120 guinea pigs that I sell at the market. I found out that with vegetables and guinea pigs, I can help feed my family and make money for my children to study.

I want to get my Degree of Technical Auxiliar in Sierra Agriculture. I also dream of having a stand in front of my house to sell my products regularly.”

This project was supported by the Australian Government via the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

STAY CONNECTED

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