

AUTUMN 2026

MARY'S NEWS

today

*Equity in
Education*



- Strengthening health knowledge in Timor-Leste
- A lifelong commitment to education is opening doors for children
- Building confidence, creativity and leadership in Peru

MARY
MACKILLOP
today



Welcome to the Autumn 2026 edition of Mary's News Today. I am pleased to share this update and reflect on the difference your support continues to make.

This edition focuses on the belief that every child deserves access to a quality education, no matter where they are born or the circumstances they face. Equity in education is at the heart of our work and guides everything we do.

I am deeply grateful for the generosity of supporters like you. Together, you helped raise more than \$200,000 through our Christmas Appeal, enabling us to extend inclusive early education to children and communities facing the greatest barriers to learning.

The appeal highlighted Marcia and her community in Timor-Leste, showing the vital role inclusive early education plays in shaping a child's future. Through our Inclusive Early Education project, children are gaining access to books, learning resources and creative tools in their own language.

While this support is already making a meaningful difference, many children are still waiting for the chance to learn in inclusive, safe and culturally appropriate environments. With your

continued support, we can keep moving toward a more equitable future for every child.

In this edition, you will also meet Laurenzia, a First Nations Scholarship student at North Regional TAFE, and learn about our EdTech for Early Learning project in Timor-Leste, now expanding to 100 schools and reaching around 9,000 children, teachers and families. You will also read about Juan in Peru and meet Maureen, one of our dedicated monthly supporters.

Thank you for walking alongside us and for your commitment to creating a more just and equitable world through education.

Jane Woolford
Chief Executive Officer

Thanks to Your Support, Marcia Is Thriving

Thanks to supporters of our Christmas Appeal, Marcia now has the chance to learn, grow and dream of a brighter future.

For children in remote villages across Timor-Leste, education is often one of the few ways out of poverty. Yet many families still lack access to quality learning. Your generosity is helping change that, opening doors at a crucial stage in a child's life.

Through the Inclusive Early Education project, children like Marcia are accessing learning resources, safe spaces and supportive environments where they can grow with confidence.

Guided by Saint Mary MacKillop's legacy, your support ensures children and families facing disadvantage are not

overlooked. Because of you, Marcia and others are gaining more than education. They are gaining hope, dignity and the belief that a brighter future is possible.

Thank you for making a lasting difference in their lives.

"I want to go to school because when I grow up, I want to get a good job and help my parents."

– Marcia



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. Some content in this newsletter has been translated.
Front Cover: Laurenzia, First Nations Scholarship student.

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



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 NGO 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).

Creating Opportunities for Every Child in Timor-Leste

In Timor-Leste, one of Australia's closest neighbours, many children miss out on the education they deserve. Only 20% of preschool-aged children are enrolled in early learning, and by Grade 1, 70% of students are not meeting basic learning outcomes¹. Many are left behind before they even begin school.

In 2022, the Noel and Carmel O'Brien Family Foundation asked Mary MacKillop Today a bold question: could technology help close this early learning gap?

With their support, we partnered with World Mosaic to develop two innovative apps: one to help preschool teachers deliver fun, curriculum-aligned activities, and another to support families in continuing learning at home. Created with the Timor-Leste Ministry of Education, the tools reflect the national curriculum, are culturally relevant, delivered in Tetun, and promote interactive learning between adults and children.

After a successful pilot, the EdTech for Early Learning Project is expanding to 100 schools, supporting around 9,000 children, teachers, and families.

Our International Programs team joined communities for the official launch last year, attended by students, teachers, parents, and national authorities, including Minister of Education Mrs Dulce de Jesus Soares, who



praised the collaboration and highlighted the app's potential for national expansion.

Mary MacKillop Today has supported education in Timor-Leste for over 30 years, ensuring projects meet community needs and strengthen the national system. By improving early learning access, we are helping create brighter futures.

We extend sincere thanks to the Noel and Carmel O'Brien Family Foundation for their visionary support.

¹UNICEF Timor-Leste, Early Childhood Education Data, 2022

Championing Education and Opportunity for Young First Nations Women

Laurenzia is a proud Yawuru Nyikina woman and devoted mother to two young daughters. She grew up in the small community of Pandanus Park, south of Derby near Willare Bridge, and has carried the strength of her culture and family into her vocational journey.

While studying beauty at North Regional TAFE, Laurenzia received the Mary MacKillop Today First Nations Tertiary Scholarship. Since 2021, this scholarship has supported students facing financial hardship and barriers to education. Laurenzia says the support has been a powerful motivator as she works towards her goals.

She hopes her story encourages other young mothers to pursue their aspirations with confidence, sharing that it is never too late to work toward something meaningful.



Laurenzia recently completed her Certificate IV in Beauty Therapy, gaining skills in skincare, makeup, waxing, nail care and salon operations. Passionate about empowering other First Nations women, she is also building professional experience through Leadership and Business qualifications and her current administration work. Her long-term goal is to secure a great job and eventually open her own beauty business.

She encourages other students to apply for the scholarship, noting the incredible support she received from lecturers, the Aboriginal Training Services team, and the wider TAFE community.

Mary MacKillop Today congratulates Laurenzia on being named WA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year 2025.

To learn more about our First Nations Scholarship program, visit: marymackilloptoday.org.au/.../scholarships/

Supporting Teachers to Build Healthier Futures

In the rural municipality of Ermera in Timor-Leste, teachers play a vital role in improving community wellbeing. One of those educators is Jose, who teaches Natural Physical Sciences and Health while raising six children. His commitment to supporting young people has grown since completing a 15-day health literacy training delivered by Mary MacKillop Today.

The program covered essential topics including eye health, nutrition, environmental and reproductive health, skin health and disease prevention. Jose says the training deepened his understanding of the human body and strengthened his confidence to teach health more effectively. Lessons on mosquito-borne diseases encouraged teachers and students to think carefully about prevention at home.

Nutrition was another key focus. Families in Ermera have access to many traditional foods, and the training highlighted their nutritional value, encouraging teachers to promote them as healthy, chemical-free options. Jose is already sharing this message with students and their families.

Aligned with the national curriculum, the training can be applied directly in classrooms. Mary MacKillop Today also provides practical support; Jose's school recently received rubbish bins to improve hygiene and environmental health.

Jose describes the training as highly beneficial and is grateful for donor support. Teachers like him are helping build healthier, more informed communities by equipping students with knowledge to shape their futures.

The Health Literacy project received support from the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).



Inspired by Saint Mary MacKillop



Service and community have always been central to Maureen's life, guiding how she has lived and supported others. Born in Victoria Park, Western Australia, in 1941, Maureen married her husband Patrick in 1966. Together they raised four children and shared 49 years of marriage before Pat passed away in 2016.

Pat was a dedicated Rotarian, and Maureen became involved with the Inner Wheel Club, supporting the spouses of Rotarians and building strong connections through shared service.

A visit to Penola in South Australia proved a turning point. While exploring the local museum, Maureen learned about the life of Saint Mary MacKillop and her work with the Sisters of Saint Joseph. This sparked a deep and lasting appreciation for Saint Mary's legacy and the values guiding the

Sisters' work today.

More recently, Maureen discovered Mary MacKillop Today and was inspired to become a committed monthly donor. She also chose to include a gift in her Will, reflecting her trust in the mission and the care shown to communities in Australia and overseas. Maureen values how Mary MacKillop Today keeps supporters connected through regular updates, including the Mary's News Today newsletter.

Her story reminds us that ongoing support helps ensure this important work continues to create lasting impact for generations.

To include a gift to Mary MacKillop Today in your Will like Maureen, contact April on (02) 8912 2720.

Creating Opportunities for Young Entrepreneurs in Peru

Juan is a fourth-year secondary student from the Ilo Province in Moquegua. He recently participated in a project run by Mary MacKillop Today's partner, CEOP Ilo, designed to strengthen school entrepreneurship skills which was an experience that has been both inspiring and transformative.

From the start, Juan was motivated by the project's objectives. With a long-standing interest in entrepreneurship, he was eager to explore the world beyond school and gain insight into different ways of thinking and acting. The project helped him develop new skills while emphasising teamwork, exchanging ideas, and learning from others' perspectives.

Practical internships allowed Juan to apply his knowledge in real-life situations, showing how classroom lessons could become tangible outcomes. "One of the skills I developed most was creativity and innovation," he reflects. "I contributed ideas and

helped my colleagues find different solutions, which boosted my confidence and motivation."

The project followed a structured methodology including identifying problems, planning solutions, prototyping, implementing, and evaluating results using Design Thinking and Lean Canvas. While the final outcome didn't fully match initial ambitions, Juan and his team were proud of their effort and teamwork.

He also credits his teachers and family for guidance on teamwork, confidence, time management and financial planning.

Juan's experience demonstrates how nurturing entrepreneurship builds confidence, creativity and practical knowledge, preparing young people to navigate challenges and opportunities. Mary MacKillop Today is proud to partner with CEOP Ilo to support students in Moquegua.



I contributed ideas and helped my colleagues find different solutions...

– Juan

Growing Knowledge, Connection and Equity Through Community Learning

Equity in education extends beyond formal classrooms. For many communities, learning happens through shared experience, cultural exchange and connection to Country.

In regional Queensland, the Eidsvold Garden Community Connect Project demonstrates how community-led learning builds understanding, confidence and opportunity. Delivered by North Burnett Community Service and supported by a Mary MacKillop Today Highways and Byways small grant, the project brought people together through culturally informed gardening and land care activities grounded in First Nations knowledge.

Over 12 months, four workshops explored bush tucker, native plants and traditional land care practices, helping participants deepen their understanding of Indigenous knowledge and sustainable environmental care. The project also addressed social isolation, encouraging friendships, strengthening community pride, and creating a strong sense of shared ownership. More than 50 volunteers contributed, supported by 11 local donations.

A bush tucker garden with 30–40 native plants and a yarnning circle was established as a lasting resource for storytelling and gatherings. Its opening, held with Central Queensland Indigenous Development, doubled as a NAIDOC celebration attended by 60 people.

By supporting initiatives like this, the Highways and Byways Small Grants Program ensures education is inclusive, culturally grounded and accessible, creating lasting change beyond the classroom.



A Lifelong Commitment to Education

Our long-time supporter Mary Williams has dedicated her life to education and helping communities on the margins, inspired by her Catholic upbringing and the values of Saint Mary MacKillop. From her early days at Josephite schools in Tasmania to a 42-year teaching career, she has carried these principles into every part of her life.

Growing up in Smithton, North-West Tasmania, Mary attended St Attracta's parish school and later boarded at St Thomas More's in Launceston. She trained as a Home Economics teacher and went on to teach at ten government schools across the state. "I tended towards the 'be fierce for fair' approach championed by Saint Mary MacKillop, although I didn't know that caption at the time," she reflects.

Her support for Mary MacKillop Today reflects her belief in the power of

education to create opportunities for all. She focuses on First Nations programs, helping children and communities overcome barriers to learning. Initially giving larger, irregular donations, she later switched to regular monthly giving to provide sustainable impact. "The updates from Mary MacKillop Today are heart-warming and filled with hope," she says.

Mary also has a long-standing connection to the Missionary Sisters of Service (MSS). She first encountered the MSS during Teachers College and later joined their Hobart support group, now called Highways and Byways. With MSS donations now redirected to Mary MacKillop Today, the Small Grants Program continues to support grassroots initiatives expanding educational access.

"I am delighted that these two congregations, formative in my faith,

have joined forces to expand the reach of the Sisters of Saint Joseph," she says.

Mary's story shows how a lifelong commitment to education, faith, and community creates real change. By choosing regular giving, supporters like Mary help ensure children and communities facing barriers have the tools and opportunities they need to thrive.



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