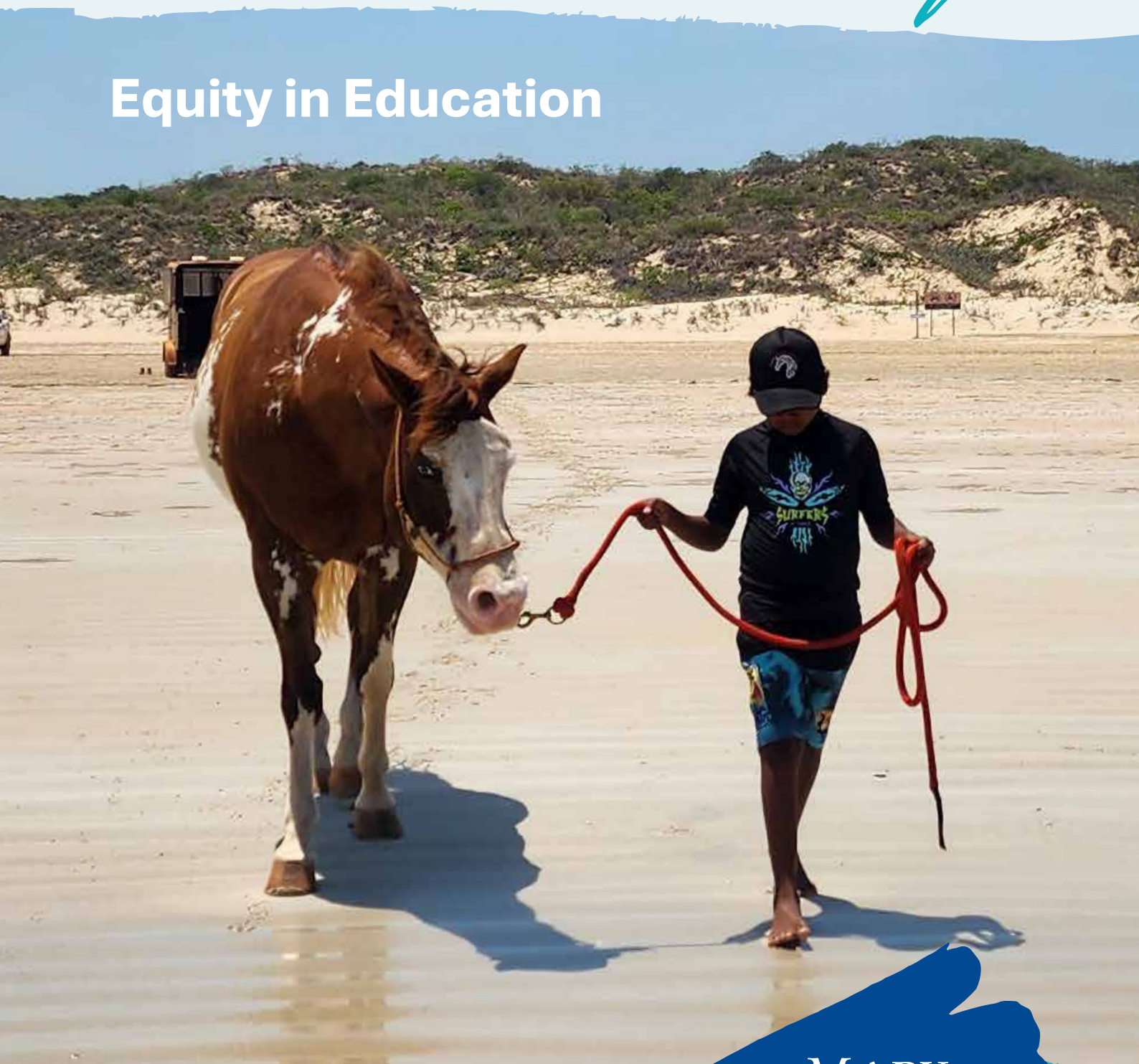


WINTER 2026

# MARY'S NEWS

*today*

## Equity in Education



Supporting students with disabilities  
Horses helping youth to thrive  
Learning and leadership in Peru

MARY  
MACKILLOP  
*today*



WELCOME TO THE WINTER 2026 EDITION OF MARY'S NEWS TODAY.

I am pleased to share this update and reflect on the difference your support continues to make in the lives of individuals, families and communities around the world.

This newsletter shares stories of how education and wellbeing are strengthened through inclusion, respect and connection.

In Timor-Leste, Agostinho is learning alongside his students and through his own family experience. As a father to a child with disability, he is seeing more clearly what equity in education means. It is not about treating every child the same, but about giving each child what they need to learn and grow with confidence and dignity.

In the Kimberley, Aboriginal young people are finding support through Yawardani Jan-ga. In a culturally safe environment, connection with horses is helping young people to feel calm, build trust and begin to heal from experiences that have carried through generations.

In Peru, Lourdes is showing that learning has no age. By returning to study later in life and stepping into

leadership, she is helping create opportunities for other women to learn, participate and lead in their own communities.

These stories are diverse, but they are connected by the belief that every person deserves the chance to learn, belong and thrive. They are also a reminder that lasting change happens when communities are supported with compassion, partnership and hope.

Thank you for walking alongside these communities and helping make this possible.

With gratitude,

Jane Woolford  
Chief Executive Officer

## Agostinho Learns from His Experience

Agostinho, a school coordinator in Timor-Leste, has spent his life teaching. But it is his experience as a father that has transformed how he understands education.

Through a Mary MacKillop Today training program, Agostinho has strengthened his approach to inclusive education, learning that every child deserves patience, understanding and a teaching style that meets their individual needs. For him, this is not theory. It is deeply personal.

His son Hilario lives with a disability. At times, learning can be challenging, but with care and

guidance, Agostinho sees his son's ability and potential shine through. This has reshaped how he supports every student in his school.

Agostinho now encourages teachers to slow down, listen and adapt, ensuring no child is left behind. He believes true equity in education means recognising each child's strengths and creating space for them to succeed.


With ongoing support and shared learning, he is helping build a more inclusive and compassionate school community.



*“Every child learns differently, it is our responsibility to meet them there.”*

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: Equine Assisted Learning client in session on beach.

 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.



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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).

# Healing Through Connection: HORSES HELPING KIMBERLEY YOUTH THRIVE

Across the Kimberley, too many Aboriginal young people are growing up carrying the weight of trauma, disconnection and loss. These experiences can shape how they see themselves and their future. Yet when healing is led by community, grounded in culture and built on trust, change becomes possible.

Yawardani Jan-ga, meaning horses helping in the Yawuru language, offers a powerful and deeply human pathway to wellbeing.

Through Equine Assisted Learning, young people are gently supported by Aboriginal mental health practitioners and equine specialists in a safe and culturally respectful space. With the quiet presence of

horses, they begin to build trust, regulate emotions and reconnect with their own strength.

Since 2020, more than 3,000 young people have taken part, many finding a renewed sense of confidence, belonging and hope. One young participant shared, “When I am with the horses, I feel quiet inside.”

Demand continues to grow, with many young people still waiting for support. Through partnership with Yawarda Services, Mary MacKillop Today is helping to expand this vital program so more young people can access healing, reconnect with culture and build confidence for the future.



## A Legacy of Care and Opportunity

For Judith, the connection to the Sisters of Saint Joseph began in childhood and has shaped her life ever since.

In 1964, Judith and her younger sister were placed in boarding care at St Martha's in Leichhardt during a difficult time for their family. Raised by the Sisters of Saint Joseph, she remembers feeling deeply cared for, supported and encouraged.

“The sisters became like parents to us,” she says. “The values they gave me stayed with me for life.”

Today, as a mother of three and grandmother, Judith continues to carry those lessons forward. Inspired by the importance of education, especially for girls, she remains passionate about creating opportunities for children and families facing disadvantage.

Her connection to Mary MacKillop Today is deeply personal. By leaving a gift in her Will, Judith hopes future generations will have the same chance to learn, grow and build a better future.

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



*It is my way of saying thank you and helping others access opportunities they may otherwise never have.*

# From Barriers to Belonging: Lourdes' Path to Learning and Leadership

At 50 years of age, Lourdes, from a small rural village in Peru, is proving that the door to education should never be closed.

As a mother of two daughters, she once had to set aside her dream of university due to financial hardship. But that dream never left her. Years later, she returned to study, first in agriculture and now in primary education through online learning, determined to build a different future for herself and her community.

Her journey did not stop there. Lourdes co-founded a women's organisation, Hijas

del Ausangate, where early challenges were many and support was scarce. With guidance from a CCAIJO leadership program and Mary MacKillop Today, the group grew stronger, creating new opportunities for women to learn, lead and be heard.

Lourdes later led a provincial women's network, building confidence, advocating for change and opening pathways for others.

Today, she is helping ensure that education is not a privilege, but a right shared across generations.



*Education gave me courage to dream again and lead others forward.*

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\$25  \$50  \$100  My Choice \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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Suburb: \_\_\_\_\_

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