



SEASONAL WORKER PROGRAM



Octaviano & friends

Last year, I introduced you to a young man from **Viqueque** who was in Australia as part of the Seasonal Worker program. Octaviano returned home on the 25th January after 9 months in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. There are currently 50000 Timorese waiting to become seasonal workers in an overseas destination.

Earlier this year, I had the pleasure of spending 8 days with the Timorese seasonal workers, including Octaviano, on a strawberry farm in Albany WA. Work would begin at 5.45am and was labour intensive! Workers were paid according to the volume of strawberries they picked and packed. Some days were devoted to “weeding” and most days finished with time spent in the cafe on the farm preparing fruit for making jams and relishes.

Picking strawberries in Albany was a totally different experience to farming watermelons in the Northern Territory! The strawberry farm was on the outskirts of Albany which meant accessing supermarkets and local services was possible throughout the week. The watermelon farm was over two hours by road from Darwin! Overall, the Timorese visitors spoke very highly of the local community. Octaviano loved the opportunity to go to Mass on Sunday.



Arriving in Darwin 1/5/23



Ready to leave for home 23/1/24

Arriving home for Octaviano was a very emotional time. Although he was very excited to see his family and friends, he still faced an uncertain future in **Timor-Leste**. Unemployment (and all its implications) is still the most critical issue affecting young people in East Timor. No job means no money. Octaviano has already put his hand up to come back to Australia as soon as possible!

Chris Hansen



Octaviano at work on the strawberry farm near Albany WA



A celebration of Timorese culture for the local community in Albany



Sightseeing on the south-west coast near Albany



Christmas lunch organised by the local community in Albany