



President's Report

It has been a busy and exciting time since I last wrote in November!

Over the summer break, our Social Committee has been working tirelessly to organise our first ever joint fundraising dinner with Deakin University at the Waurm Ponds Estate. With guest speaker Ornella Byak, an expert panel, displays from our various interest groups and Timorese music by Fikki, the evening promises to be a wonderful celebration of partnership and purpose. Tickets sold far faster than we anticipated, almost selling out within two weeks. There are only two tickets remaining at the time of writing, so if you are planning to attend, get in before they are sold out.

We have recently awarded 40 scholarships to high school students across the Viqueque district, with the presentation ceremony currently being planned. We are also thrilled to share that two IT scholarships have been awarded to young women who will travel to Dili for specialised training. This is an exciting development for our Starlink-powered computer hub at the Community Centre, as these graduates will play a key role in supporting digital literacy lessons for local students. Investing in local capacity remains central to our long-term vision of sustainability.

The Committee is currently working on our 2026 Strategic Plan, and we look forward to sharing our objectives as the year unfolds. There are many wonderful initiatives progressing, including our librarian training program (which you can read more about in this newsletter) and the construction of new buildings by the Ministry of Education in Viqueque across several of our partner schools.

Across Geelong, preparations are well underway for upcoming school visits. This year, Christian College, Kardinia International College, Clonard College, Iona College, Geelong Grammar School and St Joseph's College are all preparing to travel. Sacred Heart College will return to Bacau this year, with plans to visit Viqueque again in 2028. These exchanges remain one of the most powerful expressions of our friendship by deepening understanding, strengthening relationships and building shared purpose.

It continues to be a privilege to work alongside our colleagues and friends in Timor-Leste. I look forward to another wonderful year of shared friendship, partnership and community.

Aisha Kristiansen
President



An Evening Celebrating Timor-Leste

Geelong-Viqueque Friendship Schools, in conjunction with Deakin University, invites you to come along to a special evening at Waurm Ponds Estate on **Friday 13 March** 6.00 – 10.30pm to listen to Keynote Speaker **Ornella Byak**, Founder and CEO of BETTER Timor and Bakhita School of Excellence and Same Order of Timor recipient. This event will bring together schools, universities, community organisations and individuals who are committed to strengthening education, opportunities and partnership in Timor-Leste.

Tickets \$85 adults, \$60 students (under 18). Price includes dinner and dessert. Drinks at bar prices.

Visit <http://www.trybooking.com/DIXRV>

Vale Rae Kingsbury and Pat Walsh

We acknowledge the enormous contribution of two great friends of Timor-Leste, Rae Kingsbury and Pat Walsh, who died in 2025 on 9 and 29 December respectively.

Rae Kingsbury

Amongst many activities in her remarkable life, Rae founded the Friends of Baucau, coordinated the Australia Observer Mission to Timor-Leste's ballot for independence in 1999, co-founded the community-based Australia Timor-Leste Friendship Network in 2012 following the vote for independence and was Honorary Consul for Timor-Leste in Victoria 2012 -18. Rae was recognised with the Order of Timor-Leste Medal on 13 August 2025. She will be remembered for her guidance, strong convictions, enormous energy and belief in the power of local communities.



In February 2002 when Rae addressed the fledgling Geelong-East Timor Committee established by the City of Greater Geelong (later Geelong Friends of Viqueque), she urged CoGG to send representatives as part of an official delegation of Local Government observers to witness the historic election of Timor-Leste's first president, Xanana Gusmão, on 14 April 2002 prior to the transition to independence on 20 May 2002. Committee members were dubious that there was enough time to organise this, but with Rae's encouragement and offer of support, it happened! The delegation, which was registered with the United Nations Independent Electoral Commission in East Timor, included Geelong councillors Barbara Abley and Linda Ristevski plus community representative, Dirk Stobbe.



Pat Walsh

Pat was an Australian human rights activist and long-time friend of the Timorese. Over several decades, he maintained a steadfast commitment to Timor-Leste's cause, playing an important role in defending the right to self-determination, denouncing human rights violations from the outset of the occupation, and supporting the process of national reconciliation after independence was restored.



He also stood out for his contributions to the Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation (CAVR - acronym in Portuguese) and for his work in preserving and promoting the legacy of the important *Chega!* Report. In recognition of his career and dedication to the Timorese, Pat Walsh was honoured by the Timorese State with the Insignia of the Order of Timor-Leste.

Community Centre Update

The Starlink technology and headphones funded by the Hall family and the laptops provided by Geelong Viqueque Friendship Schools in use in the Beobe Community Centre provide these children with opportunities to extend their learning beyond the classroom. Their engagement with the new resources is very clear to see.

The Hall family is very pleased to see such progress in the student's education.

"Our Dad and Grandpa would be amazed and thrilled to see the young students so engaged and enjoying this learning experience."

"Beautiful smiles discovering the online world with funky headphones, love, love them!"

Beobe Community Centre (BCC) Report January – February 2026 by Jaime de Jesus

There was successful implementation of three key learning programs, English course, music class and computer class aimed at improving youth and community skills. The programs were delivered consistently and showed strong participation.

Also 4 students attended the IT training course at HADOMI in Dili and so far they have covered IT Smart Introduction, ITC theory, graphic design and Microsoft Word.

The class at BCC has 24 students for English and Computer, everyday Monday to Friday, using the Starlink IT connection.

English class has covered self introduction, alphabet and numbers.

Computer topics covered so far - introduction to computers, typing, opening and closing a document, saving a document, creating a column and inserting shapes.

Challenges

- some students did not attend due to raining and crocodile in the river
- only one toilet so staff and students use interrupting the staff at work
- using the projector from the office

Solutions

- support to build another toilet
- projector for Community Centre to support the classes



Funding of New Classrooms

A new Timor Government initiative has seen 6 new classrooms constructed at both VQQ1 and Uaimori. Each school has elected to use one of those rooms as a dedicated library, reinforcing the success of the program we introduced a number of years ago. Both schools are part of our library support program along with Mundo Perdido and Cabira. Featuring new blackboards, display boards and furniture, this is a major update, and one which the schools had requested. The photos show the move to the new facilities in progress.

Uaimori



VQQ1



2025 National Science Competition

In November, three Year 12 students Febiana Gosmão, Leonardo Soares and Martinho Carvalho from the Viqueque senior campus at 4 September school, participated in the 2025 Timor-Leste National Science Competition at Liqueta, an event supported by UNESCO, the Ministry of Education and associated friendship groups. Their impressive project demonstrated the complex process of paper making from natural (banana) timber and recycled materials using school grade chemical supplied by our committee.

It is encouraging to see students interested in practical science and engaging in science projects as a co-curricular activity beyond school. The event is an opportunity for students from different districts to connect and reflects the commitment of the Viqueque teachers at 4 September school and their dedication to developing their students' potential with limited resources.



Martinho and Leonardo preparing bamboo



Paper product in preparation



Students at the competition in Liqueta

Retired Senator Ron Boswell RIP

Former Senator Ronald Boswell died in January 2026. He was 85 years old. For many in Australia, he was known for his years in the Federal Parliament. For others — especially in East Timor — his legacy is far more personal. St Estevao Senior Catholic High School, in the Viqueque parish, was named in honour of Senator Ronald Boswell's son, Stephen Boswell. Unfortunately, Stephen died tragically and suddenly in 1999.

Senator Ronald Boswell and his son, Stephen, were former students of St Joseph's College, Gregory Terrace, in Brisbane. St Joseph's College founded the Terrace Timor Network (TTN) in 2006 to support the vision of the Christian Brothers who were working in Timor-Leste. Through the TTN, Senator Boswell had visited Timor-Leste and supported a number of projects. The TTN still functions today as part of the social justice program at St Joseph's, connecting the college community with local initiatives in Timor-Leste.

Senator Ronald Boswell officially opened St Estevao Senior Catholic High School in honour of his son, Stephen, on the 7th July 2008 during a ceremony attended by local leaders and his grandson, Tom Beasley, also a student of St Joseph's. Each year, the anniversary of the opening of St Estevao Catholic High School is a very big celebration in Viqueque.



Display of school shield in the entrance to the new office administration building in Viqueque
