

# Indigo Shire Atauro Island Friendship Incorporated

Newsletter – December 2020

What a different year it has been.

Firstly, a new president for the committee. Following Rob Porter has been made that much easier as he has great records and made great contacts. He led the committee through a number of challenges, so my role is that much easier. Thanks again Rob.

Secondly, it is 20 years since the vote for independence, the visit of Australia' Prime Minister and the public declaration of AusAid initiatives in East Timor. This was basically the start of most friendship groups in Australia. There are still numerous groups in existence (over 40 I believe) and most are doing similar activities to us.

Thirdly, we have had various problems due to COVID – 19, again similar to most organisations. Two members of the committee had to cancel their trips to Atauro which is disappointing for all concerned as the personal contact is very important to us all. For our committee, learning to “zoom” has been interesting but means that our “cup of tea or coffee and cake or sandwiches” has been greatly missed. We have some good cooks in the group. Our fundraising opportunities have greatly diminished but it is very pleasing that our regular donors keep on making their donation to this worthy cause.

On Atauro island and mainland Timor Leste, there have been some challenges and thus some of our projects like the construction of composting toilets, have not proceeded as planned. Our students have also been kept out of university and at times, revert back to living at home again for a short time. However, most are now doing well and are back at the university.

Fourth, the on-going prosecution of Witness K and his lawyer Bernard Collaery by the Australian Government, for their role in exposing the Australian Government's illegal behaviour in the Timor Sea negotiations has and still is a matter of concern. We have written to our Federal member and also the Attorney General calling out this behaviour and requesting that charges be dropped. We have not heard anything official yet other than receipt of our letter by the government.

Fifth, the committee is now no longer a section 86 committee of council. We are now an incorporated association, called Indigo Shire Atauro Island Friendship Incorporated. This has included the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Shire. The changes requires all donors etc to become members and this will be simply completing an online /written membership form and returning it to the membership secretary. We have 16 members under this new scheme and expect those numbers to continue to rise due to our strong relationship with East Timor and Atauro Island in particular. This friendship is something the people of Indigo Shire still highly value. Specific projects allow the citizens of Indigo to be part of the lives of the people of Atauro. The on-going nature of many of these the programs means the relationship is growing and sustainable.

## Update on Projects

**Student Scholarships:** The Indigo community currently supports 8 students with tertiary scholarships and living allowances to study in Dili.

The current students are: Josefino (Engineering), Arabela (Accounting), Crizanio(Agriculture), Ratna(Nursing), Martinho (Agriculture/Animal Science), Herminia (Hospitality) .Germano will graduate in his Geology studies this year. Asminar has deferred her hospitality course because of ill health.

We continue to have new students as the current ones become qualified. Most of the students have a direct Indigo sponsor. If you are interested in fully /partly sponsoring a student please contact Jess Johnston at the Shire Office or committee member Libby Hosking. Sponsorship donations are fully tax deductible.

**Composting Toilets:** Currently it is the dry season in Atauro and this is the ideal time to construct new composting toilets . Our facilitator on Atauro has plans for 5 toilets to be built this year in Makadade and Makili. The drought and pandemic has delayed the completion of these toilets. Thanks to those who are sponsoring the construction of these toilets.

**Indigo Youth Ambassadors:** At the end of 2019, I attended the graduation of the Indigo Youth Ambassadors. These students undertook some great fund raising and via their respective Primary Schools have donated over \$5000 in the past two years towards projects sponsored by the Indigo Atauro Friendship Committee. The commitment by the young people of Indigo Shire to support the communities of Atauro Island is fantastic.

### **Incorporation Process**

The transition from a Council S86 Committee to an independent incorporated community organisation is now completed. The only outstanding issue relates to being insured. We shall continue to find the best method.

The Purposes of the Association are:

- To collaborate with the people of Atauro Island to:
  - Identify and prioritise the needs of the communities on the island
  - Support the leaders of the communities in developing skills in governance and economic management of the Timorese National Program of Community Empowerment (PROGRAMA NASIONAL DEZENVOLVIMENTU SUKU)
  - Develop collaboratively with community leaders long term and short term goals for the areas of health, education and economic development that will advance the self-sufficiency of Atauro's communities.
  - Strengthen the communities of Atauro Island with initiatives consistent with principles of environmental, social and cultural sustainability.
- To liaise with the communities of Indigo Shire to build awareness and understanding of the culture, values and development needs of our friends on Atauro.
- To support Indigo communities in raising funds for the projects and initiatives identified by the people of Atauro.
- To provide accurate, timely information to the Indigo Shire Council about matters related to Atauro Island with recommendations for Shire support of identified projects.

### **Communications**

We are currently trying to improve the flow of information between all those involved in the Friendship relationship. At the moment we rely on newsletters and specific email contact. We have recently developed our own independent website – [www.indigoataurofriendship.com.au](http://www.indigoataurofriendship.com.au)

### **Finances**

Bank Balance as of 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020 was \$23,718.61 and again we thank all sponsors and donors and council. Reduced scholarship holders and a steady donation/sponsorship income sees the Association in a sound financial position. We teamed up with Amaranth Foundation and they provided over three pallets of wheel chairs, wheelie walkers, walking sticks, medical supplies, teddy bears and other gifts which helped fill a shipping container.

### **Thank You**

Once again thanks to all the Friends of Atauro for their on-going support. A special thanks to the Indigo Youth Ambassadors, their schools and program co-ordinators Sal Kimber and Jess Johnston. To Council Officers Jess Johnston and Greg Pinkerton thanks for all your work in moving us into a community based incorporated association.

To all the committee members thanks again for your contributions and I look forward to a productive 2021, hopefully without the constraints of COVID – 19.

Mark Verbaken

Chair, Indigo Shire Atauro Island Friendship Incorporated



ABOVE: Youth Ambassadors from Indigo Shire Primary Schools have raised over \$5000 in the past 2 years to help fund projects on Atauro. In 2020 they funded the transport of mobility aids to Atauro and the construction of a composting toilet.



ABOVE: Marcelo and the recently arrived aids in Dili, May 2020.



LEFT: This lady was the first to receive a walker on the day the mobility aids arrived.



LEFT: The newly formed Indigo Shire Atauro Island Friendship Incorporated.

Current members are (L to R) Libby Hosking (Sec.) ,Mark Verbaken (Chair), Irene Cracknell (Tres.), Rob Porter, Frances Walsh , Lesley Milne and Peter Croucher. Absent are two Council members Jess Johnston and Councillor Jenny O'Connor.





ABOVE: The Roman Luan team of Marcelo Belo Soares, Duarte Soares and Avelino Fernandes were some of the first new members of Indigo/Atauro Friendship(IAF) Inc. Marcelo Soares is IAF's facilitator on the island of Atauro. Roman Luan is a Non-Government Community organisation that works closely with the Government administrator of Atauro and the Chefes (similar to a mayor) of the villages to identify the community's priorities and work towards positive change in priority areas. Current priorities identified are developing eco-tourism on the island and preparing for climate change.



The new scholarship students for 2020.

LEFT: Anabela Cuti is studying accounting

RIGHT: Josefino Emmanuel da Coata Gusmao is studying engineering.

Josefino is sponsored by Indigo Shire Council.

The committee is looking for somebody to sponsor Anabela. If you are interested please contact Libby Hosking (email: [libbyho55@gmail.com](mailto:libbyho55@gmail.com))