

**Indigo Shire
Atauro Island Friendship Inc.**



Newsletter January 2025

We welcome members and supporters to the belated 2024 Christmas newsletter for Indigo Shire Atauro Island Friendship Inc. We wish all readers a happy new year.

Committee Members: there has been significant changes to our committee this year. Long-term serving members **Frances Walsh** retired in February along with **Peter Croucher** and **Mark Verbaken** later in the year. Peter is an original committee member, and Mark has served as President as well as being on the committee for many years.

Another long-time passionate, hard working committee member and past president **Rob Porter** passed away in May. Rob's passing affected us all greatly. He and Ro, together with their family, have contributed financially over the many years of their involvement. Among other talents, Rob wrote our newsletter, was our Compost Toilet Co-ordinator and a past President. He was tireless in the process of incorporation. A tribute for Rob was read at his memorial service by his sister Jenny who visited Atauro with Rob & Ro, about the wonderful work he has contributed to on the island.

Early in December, another sadness swept our committee with the sudden passing of current committee member **Gail Plowman**. Gail visited Atauro Island earlier this year and sponsored two students. She was also in the process of updating our committee's brochure. Her wisdom and experience were greatly valued and admired. Both Bob and Gail's families acknowledged their commitment at their memorials by accepting donations to our programs in lieu of flowers.

Another huge change was the retirement from the Treasurer's position by **Irene Cracknell**. Irene has been the committee's Treasurer since its inception in 2008, has visited the island many times building lasting relationships and has donated regularly over many years. The good news is that Irene will remain on the committee. Her knowledge and experience are invaluable.

We thank all past committee members for their contribution over many years. Their commitment and passion mean that our programs have continued and grown in strength along with our friendships and relationships with the people of Atauro Island. Our current committee is:

- President Libby Hosking
- Vice President: Jenny Ryder
- Secretary: Roberta Baker
- Treasurer: Lyn Clark
- General members: Lesley Milne, Stephen Lane and Isobel Lamont. We would welcome interested folk to our committee.

Donors: Friends of Indigo could not function without the generous donations of members of our community, far and wide. Our committee sincerely thanks all our donors, whose generosity and kindness are without doubt what keeps our small group going. The regular donations, however large or small, are greatly appreciated. As you are aware, all donations for Indigo Shire Atauro Island Friendship Inc are tax deductible. For the 2024/2025 financial year, all donors will receive one receipt from Alola, Melbourne. This is the first time donors will receive one receipt, which will be delivered before the financial year end. *Donations can be made to the following Bendigo Bank account. BSB 633000; Account Number: 177831518; Account Name: Indigo Shire Atauro Island Friendship Inc*

Student Scholarship program: In 2024, two new students were selected by the panel on the island - Ester de Conceicao and Marculino duate Salandah who is studying nursing. Ester has since relinquished her scholarship, and her place has now been taken by Carafina Larasmini de Araujo and she is studying nursing at Crystal Institute.

We have 11 students, with Crizanio (agriculture studies) and AnaBela (hospitality & tourism) graduating in 2024. We also congratulated AnaBela on her marriage. The Committee continues to fund their laptop, extra curricula activities and their graduation costs. Costs of tertiary courses and materials for toilets have increased and the Australian dollar is in decline, so our money does not go as far as it used to.

Toilets: This year 4 toilets were built in a remote village on Atauro Island. They were funded by Kiewa-Tangambalanga Lions Club, Jen Porter, Robert Bellhouse and Patricia Lowe. A big thankyou for these much-needed constructions!

Youth Ambassadors Program: Once again, the Indigo Shire has sponsored the Youth Ambassadors Program, where two Year 5 students from each Indigo Shire primary school participates in a leadership program and together with their school communities raise money for Atauro Island. Jenny Ryder and Libby Hosking gave a 40-minute power point presentation showing life on Atauro Island. The students were attentive and raised some interesting questions. They were asked to note the similarities and differences between life in Indigo and on Atauro. Thanks to the following who have deposited their funds – Montessori, Wahgunyah, St Mary's Rutherglen, Middle Indigo, Chiltern and Rutherglen primary schools.

Tour of Atauro:

Three committee members, Gail Plowman, Roberta Baker and Libby Hosking visited the island this year together with Ross Taylor and Peter Matthews. All trips to the island are self-funded. We met with students in Dili together with our liaison team from Alola, who support our students and our committee.

While on the island we met with both the Directors of Health and Education which was very beneficial, planning for future support. The Municipal Director was not on the island at the time of our visit.

We delivered five blood pressure monitors to the health clinic in Vila and much needed resources (pens, textas, soccer balls and netballs etc) to the 3 district education co-ordinators for distribution. We visited several villages and had meetings

with Marcelo from Roman Luan, our liaison on Atauro. Marcelo co-ordinates our student program and toilet programs.

An electric sewing machine and other donations were delivered to Boneca, the Women's Cooperative. While there we purchased some craft items for re-sale at our open garden fundraiser in November.

We visited the **AHHA English** teaching school on the island. For the first time this year we funded four students to attend and learn English at a minimal cost. It was a trial, and we will continue to fund four students as we have an ongoing donation from Gabby and Declan Kennedy. English is the international language of tourism and vital for the island's continued growth in tourism.

Visiting Atauro Island strengthens our relationships and provides valuable insights as we see old friends and make new ones. We have responded to requests from our liaison people and individuals on the island.

Open Garden: After many years we organised an open garden day as our major fundraiser for 2024. Special thanks to Valerie Crosse, Joan Simms and John Hennessy, Roberta Baker and Peter Matthews, Ross Taylor and Libby Hosking for opening their gardens to the public.

Between 150-200 people visited. As mentioned Boneca craft items were on sale. Ovens Landcare Network organised a stall selling plants and Karen Retra presented an inspirational talk on pollinators. With morning & afternoon tea, and the raffle (thanks Chris Robinson for organising) over \$5600 was raised. We were blessed with a perfect day, and all agreed it was a great thing to do. We had a willing band of volunteers on the day, selling tickets, making & serving, checking tickets at the gate... and so much more.

Christmas Market: Lesley Milne organised a stall at the Quercus annual community Christmas market. Once again our supporters rallied providing home made goods and their time. We raised \$400.

Apology re Donations: Our sincere apologies for publishing personal information about the amounts that individual donors gave our friendship group. It was a misunderstanding and will never happen again.

Reflections: *In July, Peter Matthews and I (Roberta Baker) travelled to Atauro Island with Libby, Ross and the amazing Gail Plowman. It was our first visit and it was both eye-opening and extremely rewarding. It seems that the less material possessions people have, the greater their warmth, sincerity and generosity. To a person, everyone we met was all of these things and more. To see teachers in a remote village school sitting at children's desks and handwriting reports was a shock. We assume schools would have at least some of the basic equipment our schools in Australia have. To see hot lunches provided to school children each day as their main or only meal, was a shock. To see a round of joyful kids playing soccer on a ground that had once been a tip and still bore the telltale signs, was a shock. The laughter, energy and unmitigated excitement was contagious. The islanders made us feel so welcome. We feel enriched by their spirit.*

Photos of our experiences on Atauro Island



Above left: Students we sponsor - Abrau, AnaBela, Eva, Crizanio, Pascoal, Josefino.

Above: Gail and student Eva, who she sponsored.

Left: Gelasio, Gail and Libby. The Committee upgraded his computer for his civil engineering - building course.

Bottom left: Gail and the second student she sponsored, Crizanio.



Above left: Libby presented the head teacher at Ili Timur - a remote rural school 4 hours walk from Beloi - with school items donated by Yackandandah PS.

Above right: Ross and children from Rita Hatu school, a small school near the village of Makili.

Left: Presenting an electric sewing machine to the Boneca Women's Collective at Vila, on the island.

Left: Sorting out items at the Roman Luan office for distribution to schools.



Above left: Climbing into the truck, which took us up a rough road to Rita Hatu School.

Above: Lunch for the kids at Rita Hatu school.

Left: Libby with Ruth's family at Vila.

Bottom left: A joyful and energetic soccer match at the Bekili soccer ground.