



# STARFISH NEWS

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## LASALLIAN EDUCATION MAKING POSITIVE CHANGES IN PNG

PATRICIA HURLSTONE



I have been a committed Board member of the Lasallian Foundation for over three years. I became a supporter as I believe that education provides a fundamental foundation for capacity building and sustainable positive change within developing countries. The Lasallian Foundation is committed to providing access to education and other related support projects to children who would not otherwise be able to go to school or have access to life's basic necessities.

I recently joined the Lasallian Foundation's CEO, Miranda Chow, on a monitoring visit to Papua New Guinea. We visited many De La Salle projects including Lasalle Hohola Youth Development Centre, Jubilee Secondary School, Sacred Heart Teachers College, Keaga House, and De La Salle Secondary School in Port Moresby, and Rebiatul Youth Centre and Holy Trinity Teachers College in Mt Hagen. We were also fortunate enough to visit and see some of the vital work being done by WeCare, an organisation supported by the Lasallian Foundation. These visits provided me with the opportunity to spend time with the inspirational De La Salle Brothers who are Principals, teachers and mentors in these schools.

Upon arrival, I was immediately overwhelmed by the incredible poverty and lack of resources in Papua New Guinea. The Government had announced free education for children, however funding and basic resources for education are seriously lacking. Class sizes in primary schools have expanded from around 25 up to 80 per class. This means students are missing out on vital one on one time with teachers. They have also cut the primary school student teaching course from an initial three years down to two years in an attempt to churn out more teachers, some of whom are barely literate themselves.

I saw some amazing work that has been undertaken by the Lasallian Foundation over the past few years. Lasalle Hohola Youth Development Centre (LHYDC) is a great example. This school has gone from strength to strength and is now relatively well resourced and has an excellent technical stream which is awarded commercial contracts regularly for production of items such as desks, fences, metal ovens, metal/wooden furniture and other items. Brother Antony Swamy, Principal of LHYDC, is a passionate and dedicated Principal who

has enormous vision for the centre's growth. This school is currently providing opportunity and placement to young people who have dropped out of the education system or been refused admittance to further education.

Sacred Heart Teacher's College is a new College that is on track and running well. This college offers training to students from remote areas to gain qualifications in primary school teaching. Once completed they then return to remote areas to teach local children. Often these communities have no access to basic medical care, no running water, no electricity, and no operational school. This college is empowering remote communities to improve literacy and education outcomes with sustainable educational practices. Reaching communities that would not otherwise be reached. This college is in desperate need of expansion to respond to rising needs.

I was particularly inspired by our visit to WeCare, a program that works with settlement (slum) communities in Port Moresby. They identify 'Care Mothers' within the community and build makeshift learning centres (schools) that are run by volunteer Care Mothers. The children in these schools are aged



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from 3 – 13 years old. These children would not otherwise have access to any sort of education. They are the very poor children, many of whom are orphans or have parents dying of HIV, or suffering from other preventable diseases due to lack of proper healthcare resources. These settlement areas have no running water or electricity. The schools lack even the most basic resources. However, the lack of resources is more than made up for by the passion, commitment and enthusiasm of the volunteer Care Mothers. We are supporting these centres by supplying books, learning aids, furniture, toys, clothing and blankets.

One of the WeCare schools we visited, run by Pauline, a Care Mother, has no running water. Everyday Pauline goes to the one tap in the entire settlement. This tap is only turned on twice a day - in the morning and the night. Pauline has to collect water for a group of up to 150 children. Pauline lives with 12 other people in a tin shed next to the school. This shed is smaller than most people's lounge room. The children that attend this school are very small for their age, most are incredibly malnourished. I was distressed by the conditions that the children and Care Mothers are living in. However, I was inspired by the perseverance and dedication of the community members involved.

The highlight of my trip to PNG was the Rebiatul Youth Centre (RYC) in Mt Hagen. Around 150 children, between 3 and 8 years old attend this centre. Their backgrounds are similar to the children from WeCare in Port Moresby. This centre is supported in its entirety by the Lasallian Foundation. The children, teachers and families were overwhelmingly grateful for the support that the Lasallian Foundation and our donors provide. For our visit, many of the children dressed in traditional dress. They put on a performance with singing and presented us with traditional bilums, wool hats and wool leis. We visited the classrooms, built by the Lasallian Foundation in 2012. I was surprised that around 80 students were accommodated in each room. Although RYC have very limited resources, the teachers are innovative and have made the classrooms a welcoming and fully functioning pre-school. The walls are decorated with drawings, posters, charts and other items that the children make. I believe that early childhood is a vital time for developing a strong foundation for future learning. These students have been given the opportunity to learn basic literacy and numeracy skills which is providing them with the platform to live fulfilling and self-sustaining lives.

In conclusion, I saw firsthand how the Lasallian Foundation projects in PNG are



making an enormous, positive change to the lives of so many children and community members.

Everyone we encountered within our projects was so welcoming and thankful for the contributions the Lasallian Foundation is making. It was very humbling. But there is still so much more that needs to be done. There is a desperate need for continued improvements in basic nutrition, teacher and student resources, access to safe water and sanitation facilities.

My visit to PNG made me realise how fortunate I am to live in Australia where access to basic living needs and education are a given rather than a privilege. I was humbled by the work of the Brothers, community members and teachers. I have left PNG impassioned to do all that I can to support the work of the Lasallian Foundation and continue to make a difference to the lives of so many children.

## CEO'S MESSAGE



After nine years of hard work building the Lasallian Foundation to what it is today, Br Paul Smith AM fsc, has passed the CEO baton to me. I want to thank Br Paul for all his energy and passion in driving positive changes for thousands of disadvantaged children and young people throughout the Asia Pacific. Fortunately we are not losing Br Paul. From July 1st his new role is Executive Chairman of the Lasallian Foundation, replacing Sally Nicholes, who has been Acting Chair since September 2012. Sally will continue as a Board member. I would like to thank Sally for her

dedicated service and generosity.

I have worked with the Lasallian Foundation since 2007 as the program manager and am incredibly proud and privileged to be part of the De La Salle Brothers work in the educational service of the poor. I've seen the generosity of our donors and friends transform lives across many countries – from simple developments like constructing a well or feeding preschool-aged children to more complicated, large scale projects such as building entire schools. I've also been lucky enough to meet many of the children that your care and concern has been supporting. One of the greatest joys of my job are the conversations I have with the children, young people, their parents/carers and teachers about what they would like to see change in their school and community, and later how the Lasallian Foundation's involvement has impacted their lives.

Over the years, I've come to know some our donors well and I hope I will have the opportunity to get to know more of you. We do welcome your feedback, so don't be shy in contacting us. Thanks too to the De La Salle and

associated schools in Australia and New Zealand who have been ably supporting the mission work of the Brothers through the Lasallian Foundation.

I have had the opportunity to develop strong relationships with our in-country partners (De La Salle Brothers and their lay partners) whose hard work and commitment brings to life our goal of improving the lives of impoverished children and young people through education.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to introduce some new team members: Emma Wills, our new Fundraising Manager, and Lara Harry, our new Office Manager. They both bring a wealth of knowledge, experience and passion for our work. With your continued support and generosity, I look forward to working closely with our small team, Board and in-country partners to continue the growth of the Lasallian Foundation and delivering enduring positive outcomes for thousands of disadvantaged children and young people.

Miranda Chow



# PLEIKU PRIMARY SCHOOL, VIETNAM BREAKING DOWN THE CULTURAL BARRIERS

BY BROTHER PAUL SMITH AM – CHAIRMAN

To give a present or a gift and not see the gratitude, the eyes brighten, the smiles and the opportunities these gifts represent is a wonderful act of kindness. I am privileged in that I can see these signs of relief, happiness, hope and gratitude when I visit the projects you help facilitate.

I have recently returned from Pleiku, a central highland town in Vietnam. I was present for the opening of our new and extended primary school, the first De La Salle Brothers-run school since the country's reunification in 1976. It was the first day for grade one students attending school. Mothers and fathers, grandparents all arriving by whatever transport available, mostly motor bikes piled as high as possible with all that their son or daughter needed to start their future in learning.

It was delightful to see the parents making up the beds, crawling over the bunks and sorting out clothing (not that this took too long). The transition into hostel accommodation was no problem for the grade ones as they will be sleeping top to toe in the bunks. These children come from homes where the family all sleep in the one room on the same mattress. Having a fellow classmate to bunk with is of enormous comfort to them.

The delight was when these children witnessed the official opening of this wonderful new school. When I talk about "these children", I am talking about Montagnard children, a minority group (also known as Degar, "mountain people" or "highlanders") who speak very little Vietnamese. In addition, they have a different set of culture and traditions, and

have never previously attended any form of schooling. Like many minority groups, discrimination against them is rife.

The first day of school was an extraordinarily positive and overwhelming experience to see. The parents, many of them from the poorest of poor communities were bursting with pride. Many were sending their child to attend school for the first time with a real prospect of their child going onto secondary and eventually tertiary education - a prospect that previously was unattainable for most of these families and children.

Pleiku Primary School is a unique and special service because it offers bilingual services which include five specialist dialect teachers. These teachers are dedicated to working with the minority groups and help them integrate into the wider Vietnamese community in both language skills and customs. In the past, a project of this scope had been a struggle for Vietnamese Government schools. The Lasallian Foundation is proud to have been asked and stepped up to the challenge of taking part in this program.

I am confident that with the existing local community support, we can continue to help better integrate these children into the Vietnamese communities. The breakdown of discrimination is clearly evident already - a huge achievement in itself.

You, as a valued supporter of the Lasallian Foundation, have every reason to be proud of this phenomenal achievement.

## YES! I WOULD LIKE TO HELP CREATE POSITIVE CHANGE TO THE POOREST COMMUNITIES IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION

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All donations over \$2 receive a Tax Deductible receipt.

**Please return this form with payment in the reply paid envelope provided to:**

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## GET INVOLVED

- ★ Donating much needed funds
- ★ Organising your own fundraising event – donating the proceeds to the Lasallian Foundation
- ★ Making a gift in lieu (Birthday, Christmas, In Memoriam etc) to Lasallian Foundation
- ★ Asking your employer to start a Workplace Giving Program, nominating the Lasallian Foundation as a recipient
- ★ Leaving a Bequest in your Will to the Lasallian Foundation

### We can help!

Please call our office on (03) 9508 2702  
or email [info@lasallianfoundation.org](mailto:info@lasallianfoundation.org) or  
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# GIFTS IN WILLS CAN TRANSFORM THE LIVES OF THE VERY POOREST CHILDREN

The Lasallian Foundation is proud to be an active member of this year's Include a Charity campaign. We have once again joined forces with over 160 Australian charities who are working together to highlight the importance of making a gift to your chosen charity in your Will.

These gifts provide us with the capacity to grow our programs – reaching the poorest of poor and helping transform the lives of children and families living in poverty and remote communities in the Asia-Pacific region.

Once you have taken care of your loved ones, we would ask you to consider making your last wishes really count by leaving a gift in your Will to the Lasallian Foundation.

**For more information about leaving a gift in your Will, please contact us on (03) 9508 2700 or email [info@lasallianfoundation.org](mailto:info@lasallianfoundation.org)**



## THANK YOU

We wish to thank our valued supporters who donated so generously to our **2013 Tax Appeal** which aimed at growing our vital work into helping children living in the settlement slums of PNG.

As a direct result of your generosity, we have expanded our project to defend children who are faced with the hardships of slum living conditions and enhanced the lives of over 100 children who were facing a life of poverty with little or no prospect of a fulfilling life.

We are honoured for your ongoing support and on behalf of the children benefiting from your kindness, we thank you.