

Innocents Relief Ltd

Annual Report October 2024

This is the second annual report of Innocents Relief Limited. Although Innocents Relief the unincorporated association has continued to operate throughout the 2023/2024 financial year, it is now no longer registered as a charity in Queensland and its bank accounts have been closed and all funds transferred to IR Ltd. The bank accounts were kept active until recently as some donations were still being made into them. Glenys Hodges, our Legal Director, has taken on the task of winding up the Association.

The financial problems with our Indian Centres, which have plagued us for the past few years, now seem largely resolved, although we were forced to close IND 07 due to their inability to access transferred funds from their FCRA account. We also closed IND 45 during the year, not because of financial issues, but because of a lack of communication following the death of the previous Director. Overall, however, we have continued our fundamental business of supporting the education of impoverished children in developing countries and as a result of the closure of a number of Indian Centres over the past couple of years our focus has shifted towards Timor Leste. In September last year the two Centre Managers and President, together with representatives from other charities, visited Timor Leste to observe first-hand the difficult conditions the children face in getting an education. This visit was greatly enhanced by Ali Ribiero our “agent” in Timor Leste and we have now agreed to continue her appointment for another twelve months. With this shift in focus, we thank all our members, sponsors and supporters who agreed to change their sponsorship to the Timor Leste schools. Without the remarkable generosity of all our sponsors we would be unable to carry out our *raison d’être*.

Thanks are also extended to Clare Carter and Mary Seymour, who as Centre Managers have continued to communicate and work with our Centres to achieve their educational goals despite numerous difficulties. See below for further information on the activity of each of our Centres.

Robyn our secretary, Anne our assistant secretary and Glenys our legal expert have worked tirelessly throughout the year and have done a great job in the overall administration of the company. Andrew Tunny has taken on the treasurer’s role, and our two most recent volunteers, Robyn and Phil Locke have taken over the management of the African, Sri Lankan and Peruvian Centres thus allowing Clare to focus on the Papua New Guinea and Timor Leste Centres.

Michael White resigned as a Director earlier this year and has temporarily moved to Sydney. Michael made a valuable contribution to IR over the past 4 years and it was as a result of Michael’s input and insistence that we became incorporated.

Our income last year was \$365,185.14 which is down from previous years however our operating costs were also down at \$6,792.55, such that our overheads were 1.8% of total income. Over the next twelve months the Directors will be discussing ways to increase our

income with a focus on involving more young people. Our ability to have such low running costs is not only due to the generosity of the office volunteers but was also made possible by the generosity of Fr. Pat Richards, the former Parish Priest at St Lucia. Even after his retirement Fr. Pat continues to support our work and we extend our sincere thanks to him for his support over very many years and wish him all the best.

After moving to the Holy Family Parish Meeting Rooms during Covid, we have now moved back to St. Lucia for our meetings, and we would like to thank the new Parish Administrator, Fr. Greg Jacobs, for the continued use of these facilities. The Directors of course continue to work from home and with the help of our secretary Robyn Collins, all files are now kept electronically in Dropbox. While the likelihood of us being hacked is low, nevertheless, with the help of Robyn and Phil Locke's son, Jason, we will be reviewing our cybersecurity so as to ensure all data is as safe as possible.

Centre Activity 2023/2024 - Indian Centres

Currently we are supporting 12 Centres in India and over the last financial year we donated a total of \$24,940.00, the good news is that they are now receiving our funds. Hopefully similar issues will not arise when the FCRA certificates need to be renewed in 2028.

This year the directors at 5 of our Centres were transferred or retired. Those Centres with changes in the director were:

Mary Immaculate Primary, High and Tech (**IND 06**),
St Joseph's Primary and Secondary School (**IND 08**),
St Roch's Convent School in Trivandrum (**IND 11**),
Little Flower Convent Higher Secondary School for the Deaf (**IND 41**),
Providence Convent Sisters of the Cross (**IND 19**).

Unfortunately, we have had to close Centre **IND 45**, (Convent of Our Lady of Lourdes) due to lack of communication since June last year, plus expiry of their FCRA certificate. Sr Christella, the director, died in March last year and Sr Gracelet has not replied to emails. It is possible that she too may have been transferred but we have been unable to obtain any further information .

IND 02, Mary Immaculate Primary, High and Tech

IR provided funds for purchase of a computer and projector which is greatly appreciated by both staff and students. Needy students have also been provided with uniforms, books and stationery. An additional \$5,000 was sent to help extra students in need.

IND 06, Infant Jesus High School Mulagumoodu

Sr Felci sends her thanks 'for your generosity to help out our deserving poor children for their education'. She reports that the children are studying well and many scored high marks in their Quarterly exam thanks to the hard working and committed teaching Faculty. The children also learn Hindi, Silambam, Karate, Bharatha, Natyam (classical dance) and yoga with some

winning prizes in district competitions. A talented student in 9th grade, from a very poor family with a blind father and no mother, passed the National Merit Talent exam and is appreciative of IR's help in enabling her to continue her studies. She also helps other children in their studies.

Ten students also won prizes in football and hockey. The children enjoyed their educational tours to historical places and the Planetarium, Science Centre, Zoo and Botanical gardens.

IR funds were used for educational (Stationery, pencil boxes), medical, and excursion purposes. The children were also given water bottles and nutrient snacks. Since there is often extensive rainfall in this Kanyakumari District, umbrellas were also given to those in need.

Sr Felci says 'On the whole our poor children are able to continue their studies because they are helped by your generous contribution. We are always grateful to you.'

A special project funded renovation of the toilet walls and floor for which the children express their gratitude. Sr Felci says "Now the toilets look beautiful with elegant tiles...The children are glad to use the renovated toilets. The children express their gratitude to you for having funded the project. Thank you so much for the great help you have done to our school. we are ever thankful to you dear friends

St. Joseph's Convent Primary and Higher Secondary School (IND 08)

The students come from economically poor backgrounds and broken families. Most are under the care of guardians and are in need of financial support. IR funds helped pay their school fees and 50 students were provided with uniforms. The children of school workers who come from a poor economic situation are also helped with educational expenses. Sr Rakkini greatly appreciates the generosity of our donors and says it is a motivating factor for these poor children to pursue higher study.

St Roch's Convent Trivandrum (IND 11)

Sr Sahaya sends her thanks "for your generosity in helping the poor and vulnerable children. She highly values "the sacrifice of the sponsors to help the poor and the needy." The region has had a difficult year with heavy rain and flooding affecting the livelihood of the people. Despite this the children came to school regularly and did well both academically and in their extracurricular activities. This year all students passed the government Exams.

The school provides lots of opportunities to tap the hidden potential of the children taking into consideration their physical, mental and social wellbeing. The students are aware of the social issues affecting the earth, nature, the economy and the health sector. On World Environmental Day they planted a tree and on world AIDS day they learnt how to protect themselves. They have also had an awareness programme covering drug addiction and encouraging them to become responsible citizens.

The students take part in different competitions such as singing, dancing, yoga, painting, etc. They participate in inter school competitions at both district and state level and St. Roch's convent school receives many awards and prizes.

The sisters are celebrating their 100th year and are proud that they have ‘formed many good citizens for society’. The Centre now has a new Director, Sr Lucy Andrews.

IND 41 Little Flower Convent Higher Secondary School for the Deaf.

Funds were used for uniform material for 20 children and purchase of an audio system for early identification and early intervention in hearing impaired children. They now need funds for the purchase of school bags for these children

IND 52 Sacred Heart Convent High School Srivillipuppur

There had been no communication from this Centre for some months however Sr Lily Jeya Rita has now responded to requests and has promised a report on 2023/24 activities .

IND. 77 St. John Vianney’s Girls’ Higher Secondary School, Palliyadi, Kanyakumari Dist, Tamil Nadu

Sr. Arulda Rose sends her gratitude as IR funds enabled her to help 128 needy students. Tuition fees were paid for 27 students, nutritious food provided for 40 students, shoes and uniforms for 23, notebooks and textbooks for 17, and stationery for 54. Medical expenses were also paid plus boarding fees for some students. The teachers empower the students to take up their social responsibilities through various classes, seminars and club activities, and a highlight for the students was a study tour to Magic Planet in Kerala. This is a school where mentally challenged children are trained to do magic, and blind students to sing and dance. This really challenges the students to look into their talents and make use of them.

IND 16: Shraddha Niketan Ankleshwar

The focus of this school is on the **empowerment of women** throughout all activities; including the role of women in the protection of the environment. Academic achievement of the girls is fundamental and recently the school introduced monthly tests for feedback to the girls so as to tailor their learning experience. Sr Sushila reported that the students delivered outstanding speeches on their Constitutional Rights on Republic Day. The school had 172 students in the last academic year and in the 2024/25 academic year Balvatika students will be officially included in primary. There are 12 tuition classes running at Ankleshwar villages and IR funds were used for purchase of benches, desks, and classroom other expenses.

IND 19, Providence Higher Secondary School used IR funds to pay school fees for 11 poor children plus food and medicine for some. Fees were also paid for a 3rd year student undertaking an Electronics and Communication Engineering Degree. Sr Sharly, the new Director, commented that IR’s support enables children to study well. IR has agreed to provide funds for a very bright student who achieved 1st rank in the Public Exam to undertake a BSc nursing degree course.

IND 54 The Kerala Society of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary

We are currently awaiting a report from Sr Rani Thomas who is usually a good correspondent.

IND 60 FIH Generalate: Benmankhi School

IR funds assisted 53 students with textbooks and uniforms plus other school needs. There are more than a thousand students in the school with 110 boarding, and their needs are great. More

classrooms are also desperately needed as children not at school may be subjected to child labour.

IND 62 Seva Kendra Arunachal East Miao

90 students were provided with books and uniforms in three of their schools. College fees were also paid for a number of students along with books and uniforms.

Africa et al. Centres

It has been another busy year for our schools, children's homes and orphanages, particularly in Uganda, South Africa, Malawi, PNG, and Timor Leste.

The students we support in Kampala, **Uganda (UGA 01)** are HIV+ or have AIDS. Innocents Relief has become their major financial support for all their schooling and other needs. We have donated just over \$38,000 this year to pay for school and boarding fees, medical needs, food and transport for 45 students. This is an ongoing cost that we need to account for each year.

In **South Africa** we also support children who are HIV+ or have AIDS. Holy Family Care Centre (**SAF 03**) is run by an Australian, Sister Sally, who has a deep love for the many babies and children in her care. Our funds - \$4,390 this financial year have paid for new uniforms, shoes, medication, dairy food, nappies and other essentials for the children's health, nutrition and care.

Nazareth House (**SAF 02**) had to make the difficult decision this year to house the children in their care with foster families. Before the children moved out of the home, Innocents Relief funds paid for the children's preschool fees and extra curriculum activities, uniforms and stationery. As some of the children have chronic illnesses, funding also paid for weekly medical intervention and physiotherapy.

We are continuing to support these children now through an outreach program which reaches even more children in need. This program provides cooked meals, provides stationery, helps the children with their homework and most importantly, provides a safe space for the children from the home to reconnect with each other and play. In total, these children have received \$5,250 of support from IR.

In **Malawi (MAL 01)**, we work alongside another Brisbane charity - Project Kindy. Whilst Project Kindy pays the teachers' wages and pays school fees for the children attending the 11 remote kindergartens, Innocents Relief supports the primary schools the children attend after kindergarten. This year we provided over \$15,000 to build a kitchen in a girls' primary school and a further \$2,700 for food. We have also been paying the tertiary fees for a nursing student, Vision, who will graduate this year! Our Centre Manager Clare Carter will be accompanying the Project Kindy founder, Donna Power, on a reconnaissance trip to Malawi at the end of October. This will provide an opportunity to visit the kindergartens and primary schools and to see firsthand what more can be achieved there, under the guidance of the Canossian Sisters.

St Ignatius Secondary School in Aitape, **Papua New Guinea (PNG 02)** has faced significant challenges since our AGM last year. In 2023 The PNG government failed to provide sufficient funding by way of the Government Tuition Fee Subsidy which is supposed to cover the tuition of each student. Innocents Relief funds were needed to make up the shortfall for the 820 students who board at the school. This continues to be the case this year. Thanks to Innocents Relief funds, no student has had to be sent home - as has been the case in other schools around the country.

In March the school encountered its second challenge – the highest flood on record. All classrooms, offices, and the Administration Block were inundated. Textbooks were ruined, food rations such as rice and flour were rendered inedible, and cupboards, shelving and tables were made useless by the water. \$20,500 was needed to replace what was destroyed.

Whilst the school is benefiting from electricity generated from a solar farm that they invested in last year, they do not have the capacity to store any of that power. Consequently, they have had to use \$15,500 of IR funds to buy very expensive diesel to run generators at night. This is unavoidable however as the lighting enables the students to study and move more safely around the campus.

IR funds have been used to pay the school's substantial food bill even though the students' diet is supplemented from the school's vegetable garden. Funding has also supported the infrastructure for pit toilets as the toilet blocks were damaged in the flood. IR funds have also assisted the school to set up a cocoa nursery that is doing so well that they are planning to market cocoa seedlings, chickens and eggs – long term this will be a very welcome source of extra income for the school.

Despite all the challenges, the 2023 Grade 12 class was again one of the Top 10 Schools in the National Upper Secondary National Examination, and more than half of the students were selected for Tertiary degrees. Unfortunately, many of them could not enrol due to the exorbitant fees of between \$4,400 to \$6,500 – completely out of the reach of most students. 12 of the top students have however been supported by IR funds. In more good news, the director, Frank Evans noted in his report that *'the school continues to turn out graduates with sound moral principles, which is a rare occurrence in PNG where corruption and the pursuit of personal advancement at any cost is the prevailing order.'*

Prithipura Communities in **Sri Lanka (SLA 01)** continues to make the lives of the intellectually disabled people in their care meaningful and joyful. This financial year we sent them \$3,170 which was used to supplement the annual food budget at the infants' home. This makes up only 9% of their yearly food bill.

The Shree Batase Secondary School in **Nepal (NEP 01)** has undergone significant improvements in the years since we have been supporting them. The students now have access to the internet via their new computer lab. They have received funds to complete an administration and classroom block, only partially funded by the government. Our funds have enhanced the school grounds and provided a waste management system – the first for a

school in that region. We have paid wages for two maths science teachers over two years, which has greatly enhanced learning in these areas for the students. Thanks to our donors, the Gr 9 students enjoyed an eye-opening multiday cultural experience, travelling to Kathmandu and other areas. We made the difficult decision to cease support for the school this year, as it is now better resourced than most of our schools and we felt that donor's funds were needed elsewhere. It will continue to receive support from the Friends of Himalayan Children charity.

We have also had to cease support for the Manuel Duato School for physically and intellectually challenged students in Lima, **Peru (PER 01)** and for the Vatuboro Loes Community Preschool in **Timor Leste (TLE 03)** due to a lack of communication over many months.

Timor Leste continues to be the main regional focus for Innocents Relief. Our Centre Manager has just returned from her 3rd self-funded trip and has come away with an even deeper appreciation for the time and effort our directors and their staff give to educate and support the children in their care. They have provided a better understanding of how things work there, and what the greatest needs are for the schools, boarding facility, orphanage and community health centre that we have been supporting with the help of our donors.

She was most fortunate to meet with the General Secretary of Education for the diocese that our schools are in. This meeting came about after a major learning we had last year. One of our schools needed two new classrooms and a toilet block, as they had grown from a Grade 1-6 to a Grade 1-9 school. They asked if they could build the classrooms with the capacity for two more classrooms on top. They had previously built 3 other ground floor classrooms with IR funds, with no issue. What we didn't know was that they had decided to cut costs so that they could start building the second storey.

When we visited the St John Paul II School (**TLE 01**) last year, we were deeply concerned by the poor construction of the building, with the ground floor horizontal beam bowing under the weight of the second storey, which was well underway. The cement was crumbling in places, the windows were too small and the ground floor ceiling too low for adequate ventilation. We didn't realise until then that the school had not engaged an engineer to oversee the work and that the builder was not using a floorplan of any kind. We asked them to cease work immediately and to ensure no students or staff entered the worksite.

We then contacted the diocese and started working with the General Secretary of Education to rectify the issue. He provided us with a building team, including the diocesan engineer. Following her visit to the school this year our Centre Manager is happy to report that the second storey has been removed, the windows widened, and the walls raised for better ventilation. When it is completed, they will use IR funds to install guttering and a water tank for water capture – the first of our projects in Timor Leste to do so. The classrooms should be ready for use by the start of school next year.

This lesson has been very valuable and has led to us ensuring that we see floor plans with every quote we receive for all Innocents Relief projects and that every project is overseen by a qualified engineer. In the Timor space we have been impressed with the work of Illo Construction, a Dili-based company whom we are now entrusting with all of our projects there.

Our interaction with the General Secretary of Education was fruitful in many ways but most importantly, he expressed his desire to work with Innocents Relief on future projects. Three classrooms at the St John de Brito Secondary School in Liquica (**TLE 06**) have recently undergone renovation with our funds, which was great to see. But they, like most schools in Timor, are desperate for a library and an administration building. It was suggested that they combine these buildings to cut costs. The General Secretary agreed with this concept and said that if Innocents Relief funds the library, the diocese will fund the administration building. Most of the students we help in Liquica and Bazartete attend this school, so it is well worth supporting.

Illo Construction has just finished two new dormitories in the compound of the Redemption Sisters (**TLE 07**) in Liquica. This will enable the Sisters to double the number of secondary girls who board there from 20 to 40 girls. These girls are supported with nutritious meals from the Sisters' extensive vegetable garden, chickens and fish nurseries. They receive help with their study and have the use of iPads and the internet – a rare occurrence in Liquica, which has very patchy internet access. Their old dormitory building will now be used as a study and dining area. The Sisters have requested funding for a new toilet and shower block to accommodate the extra girls.

The new library at the St John de Brito Primary School in Bazartete (**TLE 04**) is well underway and will consist of a library and a reading room for the students. A Rotary container is currently filled with shelving for the library and 220 chairs and 130 desks for the classrooms. They received 90 desks earlier this year.

With the help of the Ubuntu Foundation, we will also fund a library at the St John de Brito Primary School in Liquica (**TLE 05**). They are beyond excited about this much longed for project getting off the ground. We would like to extend our thanks to Carolyn Vincent and Peter Treseder of the Ubuntu Foundation for contributing to this project.

We are hoping that the Mary MacKillop Foundation in Dili will provide furniture and books for each library, as promised when we met with them last year.

Last year we reported on the great need in the remote community of Atabae for a testing machine for tuberculosis, malaria and other mosquito born and infectious diseases. The gold standard was a Gene Xpert machine because of its accuracy and speed of diagnosis. The other major bonus with this machine is that its developers – Cepheid, donate the very expensive single use testing cartridges to countries like Timor Leste for free! This small but mighty machine cost AUD 26,000. The community is very grateful to the 3 IR supporters who made

this purchase possible. Fast testing and diagnosis mean that infected patients can be isolated quickly to reduce the spread of disease. Their health outposts in the mountains are still in need of 4 refrigerators to store vaccinations, 4 autoclaves (for sterilisation) and 4 infant suction machines for the babies born away from the main clinic.

IR believes in supporting the health of the communities we work in, as without good health and protection against disease, children can't attend school - which is the key to improving their quality of life.

At the Dom Gabriel Manek Orphanage. Sr Leonarda, the Mother Superior, takes in girls from all over Timor Leste – many of them from unstable homes due to alcohol abuse, family violence or the death of a parent. She provides a very loving and safe environment for the girls to heal, grow strong and thrive. The girls are delightful. It is very difficult to imagine what they have been through when we see their beaming smiles.

Innocents Relief provided AUD 10,000 this year to cover the girls' educational, medical and nutritional needs. She now has 23 girls and hopes to one day support 50 as the need is so great. To achieve this she will need to rebuild her home in stages – a major financial and logistical undertaking. We will need significant support from our donors to make this a reality.

There is no doubt that we live in a troubled world and once again Innocents Relief would like to thank all the office volunteers and especially all members, sponsors and supporters, whose contributions have made a huge difference to the lives of many children over many, many years. It is extremely heart-warming to see such wonderful people continuing to support the education of children so as to break the cycle of poverty.

October 2024