

INNOCENTS RELIEF

Helping poor children in developing countries since 1962

Registered under Collections Act 1966 (Qld). Donations are tax deductible.

Registered Charity CH453

ABN 35895369317

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From the President: September 2020

It is with great pleasure that I introduce this year's Newsletter. Clearly the COVID-19 pandemic has been the major factor which has impacted significantly on us as an organisation and on all the schools and children we support. Within this Newsletter you will read about the devastating effect it has had, not only on the education of the children but also, on their families and their communities.

With the extreme generosity of some of our members, we have been able to provide additional educational support to half of our most affected schools thus allowing them to free up internal funds to provide food and relief packages to the families and communities. We are now appealing for additional funds, over and above the normal sponsorship so that we can provide additional support to the remaining schools, their children, families and communities.

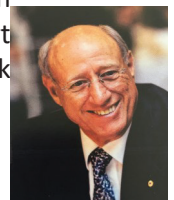
As all of our schools serve poor and disadvantaged communities, the pandemic has highlighted the need for us to support all our schools, so as to ensure the education of all the children is able to proceed both during and, hopefully, after the pandemic.

Throughout the crisis, the health and safety of our office volunteers has been paramount. The need for social distancing together with the other restrictions on social gatherings has resulted in most of our volunteers working from home and only going into the office sporadically.

Notwithstanding the pandemic, the work of Innocents Relief goes on and the committee has now met a number of times via Zoom to ensure that the distribution of funds continues uninterrupted. Despite the obvious difficulties, our volunteers have once again shown their dedication to making a difference to the lives of many disadvantaged children around the world, and on behalf of Innocents Relief I would like to thank all of our volunteers; Anne, Mary and Clare our Centre Managers, Ros and Susan our data managers, Robyn our secretary, Lex our treasurer as well as Christine and Carla our committee members.

A major achievement is that we have commenced to support another school in Timor Leste, at Epelo (Ai-Pelo) (TLE02) and have provided running water to the school and the wider community. As you will read in this Newsletter this was just one of our many successful Special Projects this year. On behalf of all the children, I would like to thank sincerely our amazing members and supporters who have made these projects possible. There is no doubt that we live in a troubled world and 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.

Gregory Seymour AM
President



COVID-19 Appeal (SPCOV2) – a very Special Project

We want to make a special grant of \$2000 to each of our 31 schools to assist them to keep poor children at school. Phase 1 is complete and fifteen schools have each received \$2000. We are seeking donations for the remaining 16 schools. Your gift, however great or small, will be greatly appreciated. Thank you.

BSB No. 124 001 **Account No.** 10110882 **Account Name:** Innocents Relief **Reference:** Your name, SPCOV2

Please send an email to innocentsrelief@outlook.com advising of your payment so that a receipt can be sent to you.

Make cheques out to Innocents Relief and post to PO Box 4096, St Lucia South, Qld, 4067.

COVID-19 interrupts education for poor children

Our schools report that COVID-19 is causing havoc in their communities and making it very difficult for children to continue their education. Here are some of their stories.

INDIA

Life in **India** for the marginalized is difficult at the best of times but since COVID-19 started impacting the country, the challenges have been exponential. In September, as many as 75,000 new cases were reported daily with 1000 deaths. Unemployment is widespread and whilst people without COVID-19 receive some food from the government, people in home quarantine do not. Our schools report that what has been promised from the government is not often received in full. In Arunachal Pradesh women and children are anaemic and more prone to disease due to malnutrition. Due to road closures they cannot access food from their neighbouring state. Survival is their biggest concern. One school is dealing with flooding and landslides from the monsoon and another has 20 families living at the school, as their homes were lost due to sea erosion.

All schools have been closed since March. The government televises classes for younger children and schools are trying to deliver classes online. However, many families do not have television or smart phones. The government has issued books to students but many of the parents are illiterate, so are unable to help their children. Some children are working with their parents as labourers to bring in much needed funds. There is a concern that it will be difficult to get children to return to school after the pandemic due to fear. Suicide numbers are increasing in the general population.

Our schools are working very hard to support the poor families in their areas with food, PPE, medications and textbooks. Some teachers collect children from their homes and teach them under trees. Thirteen schools have been opened as quarantine centres, for which our schools are providing food.



Sewing reusable masks in India

Fr Pushparaj, Principal, St Vincent's home for Children, (IND 07) writes: "During the lockdown three priests and two teachers have been living in the boarding house where we have had time to do some renovation work, including in the children's dining room and study hall, tiling the bathrooms and toilets and paving in the playground. The children are fine at home with their parents. We are making a visit to their homes to help them with text books and to deliver food."



Sr Jasintha Rosalind of Little Flower Convent, Higher Secondary School for the Deaf, (IND 41) writes: "As the schools in Tamil Nadu are still closed, we have been conducting classes online for our Hearing Impaired students, which was initially a challenge.

Most of these students are from less privileged and poor background. Their parents are facing a lot of financial difficulties as most of them are daily labourers and due to the continuous lockdown in the country, they have lost their jobs and livelihood.

Our dedicated staff have customized teaching methods. We are sending activities, worksheets and lesson exercises. The teachers have been sending voice recordings and have been making individual phone calls to students to help revise the lessons.

We are in continuous touch with the parents and are trying our best to guide and help them. Children are enthusiastic and are responding well but are definitely missing the school ambience and our aural/oral method of teaching."

AFRICA

The experience of COVID-19 in Africa is varied. **Uganda** has experienced very few reported cases and only one reported death due to a severe five week lockdown enforced in March. However, the effects of the lockdown are monumental. People were starving and suffering with medical complications as the very poor could not access food, and the hospitals were closed to prepare for COVID-19 patients. Now, anyone found distributing food without going through government channels or breaching the 7pm curfew is at risk of being shot, gaoled and tortured. Our school has received permission to distribute food and medical assistance to the poor families they support, many of whom are HIV+ or have AIDS. However, its main benefactor, an Italian Corporation has had to channel its excess food to Italy and many local donors are now unemployed or unable to work.



COVID-19 cases in **Kenya** have escalated due to workers having to use packed public transport. Fortunately, schools are closed. COVID-19 testing is only available in Nairobi. Our school in Chera is trying to support the most vulnerable with food and medication but their region has also been hit with floods and a locust plague. Food security is their biggest concern.



South Africa has had the most cases in Africa. One of our schools has lost a large number of their elderly people. The children in all of our schools in Africa are vulnerable as many are HIV+ or have AIDS or severe lung conditions, but due to strong measures by the staff in their school, they have remained COVID-19 free. However, as schools are closed, funds sent for school fees have now been channelled into providing food, medication and PPE. One school has employed young adults to live in and tutor the children to help them continue their education, others are doing their best to keep the children engaged in learning. Once schools reopen, they will need funds for school fees.



Check out IR's new website:
<https://www.innocentsrelief.org.au>

Earlier this year our twelve year old website disappeared from the Internet, possibly triggered by an upgrade. We were not able to restore it so a new website with a new domain name was launched in July.

Search engines take a while to recognise new websites. Random pages from the old website still appear when you Google 'Innocents Relief'. We are working on it, but in the meantime, if you enter the new address you will find the new website.



Stories from our schools are regularly posted on Facebook.

Follow us on Facebook to hear the latest news about schools and Special Projects.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA



In Papua New Guinea there is little testing, so cases and deaths due to COVID-19 are largely unknown. Port Moresby was shut down for two weeks and schools were shut for four weeks but life elsewhere is continuing as usual. Due to the uncertainty of cases and lack of medical assistance, our school in Aitape has put in strict hygiene measures for the students and staff. Now that school has resumed in full, families are struggling to pay for school fees, as their relatives are now unemployed.



PERU

Peru is now one of the hardest hit countries in the world with 46,000 deaths due to COVID-19. Face masks are not enforced, and public transport, markets and workplaces are overcrowded. The health system has collapsed, and chemists have raised their prices. Some government assistance is available for those with bank accounts. This excludes many. Schools have been closed but our school in Lima that looks after intellectually and physically impaired children is providing as much support as it can. Funds are desperately needed to help the most vulnerable families there.



Contact Us

If you have any queries or suggestions you can contact us by

Email: innocentsrelief@outlook.com

Phone: 07 38707940. The office is not staffed due to COVID-19 restrictions. However, your call will be forwarded to a Committee member's mobile phone.

Website: You can send a message via our website <https://www.innocentsrelief.org.au>

Facebook: News from our schools is posted regularly on Facebook. You can send a message via Messenger.

Special Projects: making education possible

If a school lacks a reliable water supply, children cannot attend school. If school buildings are dilapidated and poorly equipped, a child's capacity to learn is impacted. Most infrastructure needs in our schools can be met with relatively small grants. Since late 2018, IR's generous donors have given \$196,000 which has funded 14 special projects at an average cost of \$14,000. These grants improve a child's chance to escape poverty through education.

Water Tank and Guttering : SFS Integrated Primary School, Katani, Kenya (KEN 01)

Harvesting water from roof guttering is an increasingly popular method of water procurement in African countries that experience flooding rains followed by long dry periods. We were happy to accommodate this school's request earlier this year for \$10,000 to purchase and install guttering and an in-ground water tank to service their boarding and day school. This project is still in progress.

Solar Power: Nazareth House, Johannesburg, South Africa (SAF 02)

Nazareth House cares for abandoned and at-risk babies and children. Many are HIV+ or have AIDS. They provide 24/7 medical care and ensure that the children attend nearby schools. They are faced with crippling monthly electricity bills of \$20,000. Despite paying exorbitant prices, the power supply is intermittent with many periods of load shedding. Thanks to our generous donors we have been able to provide \$20,000 to phase in solar power. This will allow them to make better use of their funds to provide quality care for their children. This project is about to commence.

Building Repairs: Nirbhaya Shelter, India (IND 60)

In 2018, floods affected the boarding facility damaging the roof. The Director requested financial support to make the necessary repairs. In November 2019, IR was able to send \$21,785. Sr Rexia Mary wrote: "With immense gratitude we raise our hearts for Innocents Relief donors..... for the timely help you rendered for building repairs and truss work for Nirbhaya Shelter Home for Young Girls. These girls need a secure environment. We are approaching the next rainy season soon. We, the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, together with all the girls and staff in Nirbhaya Shelter Home express our deep gratitude to Innocents Relief for their magnanimity and generosity to share their treasure and prayers for our poor girls in Nirbhaya. The new truss work added more space to their home".

Dormitory for Orphaned Boys: Salesan Primary School, Chera, Kenya (KEN 02)

The AIDS epidemic has left many children in Africa orphaned. Many of our schools take in children who have nobody else to care for them. This school has a growing number of orphaned boys who are currently accommodated in an old classroom. In March, IR was able to send \$20,000 to build an extra floor onto an existing building to create a dormitory. It is in the first stage of the renovation.

Dormitory in construction— Chera, Kenya

New classrooms in construction—Maubara, Timor Leste



A **BEQUEST** continues your current generous support. It goes without saying that Innocents Relief promises that 100% of your gift will be applied as you have directed. Your solicitor can provide advice on wording but it is sufficient to just state: Innocents Relief ABN 35895369317, an amount and a purpose for the gift. Thank you.

IR supports a second school in Timor Leste

Innocents Relief's relationship with the Timorese began ten years ago when we partnered with the Friends of Timor Leste, a group set up by St William's Parish, Grovely, to support schools in the Liquica district. IR supports a primary school (TLE 01) located in a remote village outside Maubara. It can take a day to travel from Liquica to the school. The children had no school until land was gifted in 1990 and the community built a school. Families live by subsistence farming and fishing. Parents pay as much as they can, but the school has a significant budget shortfall.

The Maubara school was one of the first recipients of a Special Project grant when the program started in 2018. Thanks to the generosity of our donors, for the relatively low total cost of \$33,000, the Maubara School has received two Special Project grants: the main building was waterproofed and the exterior painted; the second grant is funding two new classrooms and a library, both are near completion. Prior to 2018, IR's generous members also funded a toilet block, a covered eating area and a staff room. The school is also supported by 23 annual sponsorships which help to fund textbooks, stationery and uniforms.

In 2020, IR began to support another school at Epelo (Ai-Pelo) (TLE 02) on the outskirts of Liquica. Its immediate need was for a fresh water supply. The community and school paid to truck water in at significant cost to its very poor families. Children had to bring their own water to school to drink, to flush the toilets and to wash their hands. In another Special Project, IR's donors contributed \$15,500 to deepen the well and to pump water to two water tanks for the school and community. This project is near completion. The school receives 20 annual IR sponsorships.



Do you have time to volunteer?

IR's dedicated Committee needs some administrative assistance. Tasks include maintaining the membership and sponsorship database, receipting, taking minutes and communicating with donors (mainly via email).

The workload varies but typically is 4-5 hours per week with as many weeks off as you need.

Data entry has to be done in our St Lucia office, usually on Thursdays. Some tasks can be done from home, by logging on to IR's Outlook email account. While COVID-19 restrictions apply, meetings are generally by Zoom.

Training will be provided and an experienced volunteer will work with you until you are comfortable with new tasks. Familiarity with data entry, email and Word would be very useful.

Please contact the Assistant Secretary, Susan Cobcroft via innocentsrelief@outlook.com if you are even slightly interested in helping.

From the Annual General Meeting

Lex Haworth, Treasurer reported: This is my last Annual Report as Treasurer, after eight years in the position – an interesting and sometimes challenging experience. Financially the year has been very similar to the previous one. Several quite generous donations enabled us to fund Special Projects for particular needy schools. This, plus the increase in membership fee approved at the 2019 AGM, allowed us to build up a reserve fund against future contingencies. A separate Bank Account has been set up for contingency funds.

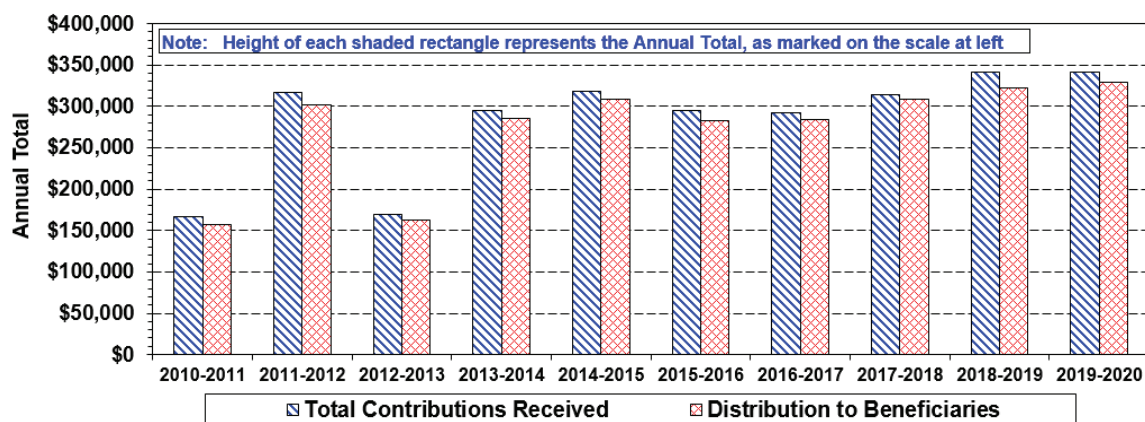
Returns of transfers, particularly from Indian Banks for what may seem trivial reasons, is an ongoing problem. The loss of about 6% due to exchange rates can be several hundred dollars on a large transfer, and the Committee will need to continue looking at possible ways to reduce the risks.

A copy of the financial statements is available on request, or, via the Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission (ACNC)'s website (www.acnc.gov.au). Total receipts were \$341,951 of which \$329,138 was sent to beneficiaries. At the end of the financial year current assets were \$37,173 (chiefly Cash at Bank) and current liabilities were \$24,711 (funds held for distribution to beneficiaries). Total operating expenses were 1.76% of total receipts.

Our overhead costs are very low because of contributions of time and resources by many people. In particular, we thank Father Pat Richards of St Thomas Aquinas Parish for use of office space and electricity at no cost, Norm Hoare for auditing our accounts without fee, Spot Productions for very reasonable printing rates, and of course all our office workers who give their time and skills freely.

My sincere thanks to the Committee members and other volunteers who have worked with me during the past eight years, in particular Rod Fernan, Rosalind Viney and Susan Cobcroft. Very special thanks also to my wife Rosemary for her continuing patience and support. We look forward to having more time to ourselves in the future.

Figure 1. Comparison of Total Contributions Received and Payments to Beneficiaries



Robyn Collins, Secretary reported: At 6 July, IR had 374 members plus 21 supporters who are reasonably regular donors. While membership had declined by 13% since the last AGM, donations had not declined largely due to generous support for Special Projects. This may reflect a change in attitude over time, in that a person may want to support IR's efforts via donation but may not be interested in membership.

IR's 374 members funded 752 sponsorships (413 school and 339 child sponsorships) at 6 July. Not all schools request child sponsorships. It can be difficult for Directors to select one child when many are in need. When members resign, a replacement sponsorship is needed. Currently, there are 20 children requiring new sponsors.

A 'mini' newsletter was introduced in February. It was distributed via email or post for members who did not have email. Positive responses were received. A new website was launched in July.

ACNC regulates Australian charities including those operating overseas. It will be necessary to make some amendments to IR's constitution to comply with ACNC requirements, principally to state that IR is a charitable organisation.

If undelivered, please return to:
INNOCENTS RELIEF
PO Box 4096
ST LUCIA SOUTH QLD 4067

POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA

Our next newsletter will be sent via email in February 2021.

Email saves printing and postage costs. The February newsletter is four pages only so it will not crash your email. Can you please make sure that we have your current email address? If you have not been receiving email from IR then we do not have your email address. If you do not have email, the newsletter will be posted to you.

Email us at innocentsrelief@outlook.com

