

Innocents Relief

President's Report July 2021

It is with great pleasure that I present this year's President's report. Clearly the Covid-19 pandemic has again been the major factor that has impacted on us as an organisation as well as on all our Centres. As a result, we have had to adapt to the so-called 'new normal' and change what we do and how we do it. If I may paraphrase Benjamin Disraeli "Change is inevitable. In a progressive society change is essential." So it was with us over the last year. The pandemic meant that schools were closed, families were locked down, there was large scale unemployment and children and their families were starving. While we have attempted to ensure that the children's education was maintained where possible, in many situations it was a matter of just providing whatever support we could. Of note is that while our *raison d'être* is to break the cycle of poverty by supporting the education of impoverished children, our Constitution does allow us to support any child in 'distress' and clearly the pandemic has placed a lot of children in 'distress'. To facilitate this more basic support, we moved from individual child sponsorship to School or Centre sponsorship. The pandemic highlighted the myriad of issues facing our Centres. With individual child sponsorship some children were being supported while other equally needy children were not. The move to School/Centre sponsorship was strongly supported by all Centre Directors as it allowed them to support all the children as well as their families during these extremely difficult times. As a 'School Sponsor', members will now be able to take pride in the achievements of the whole school and know that in many cases whole communities are benefitting from their support.

Throughout the crisis, the health and safety of our office volunteers has remained paramount. The need for social distancing together with the other restrictions on social gatherings has resulted in our volunteers working from home and only going into the office sporadically. It is with great sadness to note that for the latter part of last year Ros Viney was going into the office weekly to ensure the database was kept up to date. Unfortunately, she passed away early this year after almost 30 years as a dedicated volunteer and committee member. As you know we held a memorial morning tea in May to honour her enormous contribution to Innocents Relief, but I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge Ros' tremendous contribution publicly. We miss her.

Another change in how we do things that has taken place this year is in the number and business of our committee meetings. As a result of working from home we were not having the informal face-to-face interaction we would normally have, such that issues were not being discussed as they arose. To rectify this and to ensure that the distribution of funds continued uninterrupted it was necessary to increase the number of regular committee meetings. It is now an ACNC requirement that all decisions are made by more than one person and that there is a paper trail showing this. It was therefore necessary for us to hold formal special

committee meetings to discuss funding issues which would have normally been discussed informally in the office. Initially the committee was meeting via Zoom, however it was felt that these meetings lacked the personal interactions that are essential to ensure that the distribution of funds continued uninterrupted. Notwithstanding the pandemic restrictions, the committee now meets almost monthly and sometimes twice a month at our home in Chapel Hill, with some members, on occasion, attending via Zoom. It has not been easy and the work load for everyone seems to have tripled but once again our volunteers have 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, Susan our data manager and assistant secretary, Robyn our secretary, Christine our treasurer as well as Michael H and recently Michael W who are committee members. Michael W has also taken over as minutes secretary from Susan and I would like to record my thanks to him for doing this.

When we established the 'Special Project' programme some two years ago, we were cognisant of the fact that our *raison d'être* was to support the education of impoverished children. However, we also recognised the trend for 'one-off' donations and the need for us to develop a mechanism for the allocation of casual unrestricted donations that complied with the new ACNC standards. We did not, however, foresee the Covid-19 pandemic. Over the past twelve months when most of our schools have been closed the 'Special Project' programme has enabled us to complete the building of a water tank for KEN 01 and the building of a Dormitory for the boys at KEN 02. We provided funds to support the wages for underpaid kindergarten teachers and to buy maize for volunteer teachers in Malawi (MAL 01). In South Africa (SAF 02) we purchased 2 new heat generators to reduce the crippling cost of electricity as phase 2 of their solar installation project and in Tanzania (TAN 04) we provided funds to support very bright students to ensure their education through the pandemic. Other projects included Cyclone Relief funds to TLE 02 to repair classroom damage and to purchase replacement furniture and the provision of a sustainable water supply for TLE 01. In India we have completed the installation of solar power for IND 16 as well as providing building repairs for IND 46 and a new roof for IND 54. We have also been able to support the continued education of extremely poor rural students in IND 66 and girls from families living in abject poverty in isolated villages near China & Myanmar (IND 62).

Over the past year we have launched 'Special Project' appeals to raise funds to provide Covid-relief to all our Centres. These appeals have been very successful raising over \$100,000 such that we have been able to provide an additional \$3,000 to each Centre with 4 of the most needy receiving an extra \$6,000. This clearly has made a huge difference to the children and their communities.

Our Centre Managers will certainly tell you more about these projects in their reports.

Perhaps our major undertaking over the past twelve months has been the building and equipping of two new classrooms and toilet blocks for our two Timor Leste schools. This

project, that is still ongoing, was made possible by an extremely generous donation from one of our members and, together with the Covid appeals, represents the value of our 'Special Project' programme.

On behalf of all the children and families who will benefit from these projects, I would like to thank sincerely the 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.

Our membership has continued to decline over the past twelve months, but our total income has increased from \$341,952 last financial year to \$572,519 this year, an increase of some \$230,567 or 67.42%. Our operating costs were roughly the same as last year but due to the increased income it meant that our overheads decreased from 1.76% last year to 0.93% this year. The treasurer will cover this more fully in her report. Our ability to have such low running costs is not only due to the generosity of the office volunteers but is also made possible by the generosity of Fr. Pat Richards, the Parish Priest at St Lucia. And while we have been unable to fully use the space under the church this past year due to the Covid-19 restrictions, he continues to support our work both directly and indirectly. Without his support we would not be able to function as we do, and again, I would like to express our sincere thanks to Fr. Richards.

I hope you all enjoy reading our newsletters that are published twice per year; one in September which includes summaries of the reports from our AGM and the second 'mini-newsletter' in February. The two newsletters are being put together by Robyn and Carla using an in-house publishing programme which, I'm sure you will agree, has resulted in a modern and informative format. Again, on behalf of all of us I would like to thank Robyn and Carla for this fantastic effort.

Our new website was rebuilt during the year and is now up and running. This was an enormous task which Robyn undertook, and I would again like to thank her for all her efforts. I would also like to thank Christine for introducing the Xero accounting programme and as many of you would now have noticed, electronic receipting.

Finally, thank you to all the office volunteers and committee members and especially to all donors, both members and supporters, your contributions have made a huge difference to the lives of many children over many, many years.

Gregory J Seymour AM

President