



newsletter

March 2013 – issue # 31

indigo foundation is an independent, volunteer run, Australian community development organisation.

We work with marginalised communities providing innovative assistance to improve health, education, and human rights.

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- ✦ What is a Pig Bank? Find out what is happening in Rote, Indonesia.
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India: supporting the desire for education and the potential for change! Tamil Nadu, India

The Program for Education and Awareness Building

Nicole Moore - Project Coordinator

Returning from my recent visit to the Program for Education and Awareness Building (PEAB) in Madurantakam, a rural area approximately two hours outside of Chennai, I have been reflecting on the changes that have occurred since I last visited the project. While the smiling faces of children and the obvious disparities between city and village living remains, the level of community ownership and support for village education has grown enormously.

I was overwhelmed by how much the project team and the community have achieved in the last few years. Where similar projects seek out students to participate, ours is inundated with ever more young minds desiring a better future with more opportunities than the generations before them.

Supported by the growing number of parents and on-lookers, the tutors at the Village Education Centres (VEC) we support are doing an extraordinary job. They not only prepare students of all ages for academic success, they also support the emotional wellbeing of students who describe the tuition as helping to build confidence and self-esteem.

In 2005 education was legislated as a right for all Indian children up to Year 8 of schooling. Since then, awareness

has grown among Dalit communities about the need and relevance of educating their children in order to achieve social and economic wellbeing.

Generally highly disadvantaged and marginalised, most Dalit children face a range of challenges when accessing education. They attend government schools, which are chronically underfunded and poorly resourced. There is a lack of understanding and support in government schools regarding the needs of first generation learners, and many parents do not have the experience or skills to support their children's education. Information on, and support for, future opportunities after Year 10 is scarce. Homes are often overcrowded and lack privacy for study. These children stand very little chance of success when they compete with students from urban centres and the private system (most families who can afford to will send their children to private schools) for places in higher education.



'You have no direct connection with us but still you have supported us', VEC Coordinator, Mathukumar, with Nicole Moore and Caitlin Winter at one of the Village Education Centres in Mudurantakam.

In 2006 we began working the communities of Madhurantakam in Tamil Nadu through the PEAB, which aims to support and promote education opportunities for rural Dalit school children. We provided \$5,000 for one year of activities and after positive evaluations our partnership has been extended twice, with the signing of two three year Commitment Agreements. Currently the PEAB supports seven VECs in and around Madhurantakam, a coaching centre for year 10 students and a Student Guidance and Information Centre. The majority of students are Dalits, however the project does not discriminate and also provides tuition for Hindu and Muslim children living in the villages.

While the project has undergone a significant transition process over the last year (with the resignation of the Project Manager and transfer of administration to the Social Action Society for Youth), creating some challenges to the ongoing delivery of the project, overall the PEAB has been able to sustain functions with little to no impact on the students themselves. The new project team members Muthukumar and Krishnamutti have provided exceptional leadership and continue to build the capacity of the community to contribute to the project and to take collective responsibility for the very important work being undertaken.

The main difficulty of the transition came from a lack of financial administration during the period of change. Pravaham Trust had agreed to continue administering the project until 30 November 2012 yet no funding was received by the project team after August 2012, an issue that has since been resolved.

This problem however did highlight the significant community commitment to the project, with all tutors continuing to operate the VECs despite not receiving their payments for over three months. The VEC Coordinator was able to raise funds to pay for 10th Coaching Centre teachers by accessing a loan. This money has since been repaid. In addition, the owner of the 10th Coaching Centre building allowed a reduction in rent payments during the transition in order to allow the tuition to students to continue.

The increased level of community involvement in the PEAB confirmed that the project has increasing community ownership, and by extension a greater chance of being sustainable.

Perhaps the most significant change I saw was the level of participation in planning and decision making processes. I had the great fortune of conducting a co-design workshop with tutors during my visit and unlike the shy, softly spoken team of two years prior, this time the tutors were eager to contribute their ideas and visions for the future. Their ambitions were great: that 'all kids are well educated' by 2020, and their benchmark for success is a minimum of undergraduate education for all.

This ambition is driven by the results of the past few years, with three students successfully transitioning into university studies this year alone. That is an amazing

achievement for these first generation learners who have overcome educational disadvantage, poverty and caste discrimination to become role models for their families, friends and community.



Project Co-ordinators Nicole and Caitlin at the 10th Standard Coaching Centre in Mudurantakam.

One VEC student stated 'My tutor teaches me in a way that I can understand'. A further child explained 'Tuition is not boring. It is fun and helps me get good marks by studying hard'. In general, students agreed that the VECs had helped them to understand their school work and feel more confident in their capacity to continue with study.

The students at the 10th Coaching Centre advised that 'tuition is an enjoyable place where we can freely sit and learn'. Although flooding during the rainy season had prevented a number of students from attending, the remaining students said they were happy with the tuition received. One student stated 'No matter how many times I ask the same question, they will still teach me'. A further student advised 'They keep attendance and check on me if I don't attend' which is a valued attribute of the PEAB.

During the visit, many people from the community commented on the assistance that had been provided to the three students attending university. It was noted that the lack of support in years 11 and 12 impacts on the ability of students to attain university entrance. This issue is being considered in a new project proposal to us, currently being prepared.

Students described financial constraints as a major deterrent to entering tertiary studies. One of the aims of the Student Guidance and Information Centre is to help students access Government loans that can assist in meeting course fees. These loans however do not meet the full cost of study and many families are unable to pay off loans without facing extreme financial hardship.

Along with meeting the cost of course fees, students also need to cover outlays associated with either travel or accommodation in the city. Of the three students who have commenced university studies, two are currently being accommodated in hostels, and one is commuting on bus (approximately two hours each way).

Students living in the city are also required to cover the cost of meals and other living expenses. A scholarship

and/or residential program is currently being considered to support the financial needs of high achieving and committed students who would otherwise be unable to continue with their studies.

The project team is wonderfully inventive and resourceful. Alcoholism is a significant issue among men living in the villages. This often leaves women and children without money for food and education when the male head of the family spends his income on alcohol. In response to this, the team started a street theatre program for students to illustrate the impacts of alcohol through a creative medium. Women's empowerment and income generation activities are also under investigation.

When asked if they felt their community had benefitted from the PEAB, all VEC students answered either 'a lot' or 'sometimes'. The newly appointed Project Manager suggested that the project is capable of anything and that financial resources are the main constraint. 'With adequate resources we can do anything'. With the support of indigo foundation, and the passion of the project team, I am confident that this will be true!

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Mahalir Sakthi: the power of women

Naaman Kranz and Caitlin Winter - Project Coordinators

Mahalir Sakthi is a 'community organisation' in the true sense of the term. It is run by, and works for, people living in the slum areas of Madurai. Women and children from various religious and caste backgrounds benefit from Mahalir Sakthi's work, and are involved in the daily running of its programs. In slums areas that offer little opportunity and support for women and children, Mahalir Sakthi has had a large and long-lasting impact on many.

In 2011, Libby House and Deborah Raphael travelled to Tamil Nadu to meet with Guna and Grace, Mahalir Sakthi's Founder and Coordinator respectively and discuss the opportunities for an indigo foundation-Mahalir Sakthi partnership. In January 2012, we signed a Commitment Agreement for one year to support four activities - a tailoring centre, a typing centre, youth group meetings and a children's summer camp. We anticipated this would be the first step in establishing a longer term relationship.

From the 11th to the 16th January 2013, we had the opportunity to visit Mahalir Sakthi. The purpose of the visit was to develop our relationship with Mahalir Sakthi and assess the value of our initial support. The assessment considered the extent to which the four activities have been conducted in accordance with the Agreement, including the extent to how they align with our four guiding principles. We also wanted to look at the impact of the activities on the rate of women's participation in the tailoring and typing centres, the number of women obtaining employment following participation in the centres, the school retention rate of youth group meeting

participants, and the number and diversity of children participating in the summer camp.

We undertook a round of consultations and focus group interviews with students and families participating in the activities to reflect on the achievements of the past 12 months, as well as identify future community priorities. We also observed the homework centre (not funded by indigo foundation), and participated in and watched the two day summer camp. Meetings were held with Mahalir Sakthi staff in order to understand the impact indigo foundation had on the processes, context, and outcomes for the Mahalir Sakthi community.

The Tailoring Centre

The tailoring centre is well established and has been running since 2006. It is situated in the same location as one of the tuition centres. Four machines cater to all the women (approximately 60). A handful of women have their own machines at home, but most rely on using Mahalir Sakthi's machines to train and complete their job requests. The tailoring centre is open during school hours (9am – 3pm), and a full time tailoring teacher stays in the centre to assist women who attend.

Twenty-two women were present at the informal consultation. Only nine of these women had completed 8th standard (year 8), and the rest had completed less than this. For thirteen of the women, tailoring was the sole source of income. A majority of women were making poti (incense) or doing domestic work before learning tailoring and using this skill as an extra source of income. Poti is a particularly dangerous occupation due to the toxic chemicals used in the process, which can cause a variety of lung problems. One day of work making poti could earn a woman 50 rupees, compared to tailoring one garment for approximately 50 rupees. The length of time to tailor a garment could vary from a few hours to a day depending on the woman's skill and training level.

With the skills learnt at the tailoring centre, the women are able to gain employment at factories for big export companies, or work as sole traders and contract their skills to a variety of clients within their community. The overwhelming majority of the women at the meeting had husbands with alcohol problems, who often mistreated the women and children. Also, men would often spend what little money they earned on alcohol, leaving virtually nothing for food, tuition fees or clothes. With the extra income gained by tailoring, the women stated they were now able to provide more adequate food and clothing to their children. The women told of their self-esteem and pride increasing due to the generation of income for their families. They said that even their children were feeling proud of them for leaving their previous slum jobs and learning to tailor. Women require at least six months training before they are able to make money from their skills and it takes 18 months to complete their tailoring certification.

About 120 women have come through the tailoring centre since it started and all had found work. Mahalir Sakthi takes a significant role in finding jobs for its tailoring students, by using its large number of business connections. Guna and Grace negotiate with employers to ensure that the students are being paid and treated fairly, and also offer the women's husbands assurances about their safety. Mahalir Sakthi is often approached to provide workers by potential employers because of their reputation for good and honest services. The informal 'employment agency' service that Mahalir Sakthi provides is integral to the women's security and their husband's approval of their endeavours.

On average, the tailoring centre receives 60 new applicants each year. The women participating are required to supply their own material for their training, and this enables them to save money by making their own clothes when learning their tailoring skills.

When asked for a 'wish-list' of improvements for the tailoring centre, the women discussed the benefits of having 1-2 more machines, funds to service machines, covers to protect the machines, and the possibility of recruiting a new staff member with more advanced skills in tailoring.

The tailoring centre has clearly given women from this slum community a rare opportunity to learn a new skill and generate their own incomes. This has not only improved their own lives but also the lives of their children through increased self esteem and income to spend on school fees, clothing and quality food. On top of the direct economic benefits to the women, the tailoring centre noticeably gives these women immeasurable social benefits, including an avenue where they could meet, discuss their family issues and support each other through difficult times.

The Summer Camp

The highlight of our trip was seeing the students from Mahalir Sakthi's tuition centres show off their various academic and artistic talents at the Summer Camp Valedictory function. Approximately 250 students participated in performances that celebrated traditional Dalit music and dance, as well as singing, English language, drawing, general knowledge and Bollywood dance competitions. The event took place over two days and packed in performances, guest and motivational speakers, traditional songs and dances, social awareness songs, theatre of the oppressed, magicians, and a delicious communal lunch. Students were aged from 4-17, and represented nine different Mahalir Sakthi tuition centres from various Madurai slum districts.

The Summer Camp was a celebration of the students' hard work throughout the year, a reward for their focus on education, and encouragement and opportunity for them to explore and develop their talents in the creative arts and to meet new friends.

Tuition centre tutors played a central role in encouraging and supporting their students to participate in the camp

and students made clear bonds with their tuition centre peers (across diverse ages, sexes, religions and castes). 68% of students taking part in the Summer Camp had parents who had only completed year 8 or less at school.

Students began the day with an outdoor performance of traditional Dalit dances and music, which have historically been stigmatised (because it is Dalit). However, Mahalir Sakthi uses the Summer Camp to celebrate and empower the students with these traditions, displaying them proudly. At the opening of the camp, students also sang many awareness songs about Dalit rights, women's rights and accepting and celebrating the diversity of caste and religion. Performances also included awareness plays about Dalit rights and violence against women. There were talks from four guest speakers and the presentation of prizes for the 14 different competitions.

The enthusiasm and passion of the students equalled that of an Australian rock concert audience as they cheered for their tuition centre tutors, and their peers who won prizes in the competitions. Students transport and lunch and all prizes were funded by us.



Students playing traditional Dalit music

A focus group interview was conducted after the Summer Camp with eight boys and five girls to seek an understanding of the impact of the Summer Camp within the community. Students explained that they enjoyed participating in the competitions because it gave them a chance to improve their talents, gain confidence, improve their English, and learn about Dalit heritage and culture. The Summer Camp also provided students with the opportunity to make new friends and meet people from castes, religions and districts they wouldn't otherwise be spending time with.

The guest speakers at the Summer Camp gave important and inspiring messages. These speakers included an international Dalit activist, a criminal lawyer, an ex-government accountant, and ex-Mahalir Sakthi tuition students who had graduated from university. Students referred to these guest speakers as their role models, and discussed how they learnt about the importance of studying, equality between castes, religions and sexes, and

the importance of their involvement in social movements for change from these guest speakers.

Students described how they were unable to do the activities offered at the Summer Camp at their school, and how most school events required the segregation between boys and girls, age groups and sometimes castes/religion. Mahalir Sakthi liberated the students from these boundaries by allowing them to participate together. Schools also avoid any discussion on Dalit rights.

Without participating in the summer camp, students would only be able to engage in these kinds of extracurricular activities if they purchased expensive tuition or were members of private clubs, which were in no way an option for the members of the focus group.

Students explained how proud their parents were when they brought home a prize, and how most parents encouraged their children to participate in Summer Camp and tuition activities more than they encouraged participation in school activities. This is largely due to Mahalir Sakthi's strong community connections and emphasis on Dalit rights.

The girls in particular shared their gratitude for the Summer Camp. Usually, most of these girls would not be allowed to leave their home unattended, yet due to the strong trust built between the Mahalir Sakthi staff and the community, girls of all ages and were allowed to participate in the activities. The students expressed their hope that one day their parents or family members could watch them perform in the Summer Camp.



A communal meal during the Summer Camp.

Youth group meetings

We interviewed thirteen students who had regularly participated in Mahalir Sakthi's bi-monthly youth group meetings for children aged 12-18. The Youth Group meetings are conducted in a tuition centre, and had a different topic of focus each session. Students highlighted that hearing guest speakers talk, learning self defence and self-protection, learning about child rights, and being given career advice have been the most valuable of the topic covered during the Youth Groups meetings.

Students explained that they share what they learn at Youth Group meetings with their friends and family. This

includes important health and hygiene lessons such as washing your hands after going to the toilet, boiling tap water before drinking it, washing your hands before and after eating food, cutting and cleaning your finger and toe nails and the need to eat green vegetables. Although it may seem fundamental, many of the children and their family were regularly sick as a result of not maintaining basic hygiene and nutrition practices.

As well as health and hygiene issues, students also discussed their rights as children and as Dalits. The children learnt practical ways to access and assert their legal rights. Some meetings were specifically focused on girls protection and taught young girls practical self defence techniques to keep them safe.



Yes they do. A poster in in one of Mahalir Sakthi's centres.

The Typing Centre

The typing centre provides training 4-5 times per week, and allows for all 32 enrolled students half an hour of practice with the teacher lesson. Three typewriters are provided for the students, two English and one Tamil. Students said that they do not learn to type at their schools, and yet having typing skills is a necessary requirement in order to attain a government or administrative job in the future. None of the students have a computer at home and therefore, their only exposure to this technology comes from the typing centre. It was clear to us that the typing centre is a long term investment for the students, and will help to diversify their employment opportunities. Students' heightened self esteem was obvious as they discussed their pride in telling their teachers and friends that they knew how to type.

Staff feedback

Mahalir Sakthi staff meetings are informal and deal with business whilst providing social support and counselling to staff members. The women will commonly discuss family violence, legal, neighbourhood, inter-caste marriage and Dalit issues. Communal lunches are eaten before staff meetings as a bonding method. All Mahalir Sakthi staff members who tutor at the tuition centres live in the slums and have completed at least 12th standard or higher. The tutor's sole income comes from tutoring, as their husbands

don't allow other work. Guna and Grace were required to negotiate with the tutor's husbands to allow their wives to work and to reassure them of their wives safety. The significant respect within the community that Guna and Grace have has been built up over several years, and most husbands will accept their requests for their wives to leave the home in the evenings to assist with the various Mahalir Sakthi projects.

We discussed with the staff the impact they feel Mahalir Sakthi has had on their community. They explained how children from their community could not afford to pay for private tutoring or training, and that the only way they could gain extra skills or academic support was through free programs such as those provided by Mahalir Sakthi. A majority of the student's parents have low paying and demeaning jobs, such as scavenging and often have alcoholic and abusive fathers. Before Mahalir Sakthi began their operations, many parents encouraged their children to leave school and start working to earn money. Now, more and more children are staying at school and are allowed outside the home after 5pm to attend the tuition centres. Mahalir Sakthi tutors make personal contact with the student's families to discuss their child's progress and reassure the parents of their child's safety at the centre. Mahalir Sakthi staff discussed how they have observed the children's confidence, English skills and academic grades increase since participating in the tuition centres and Summer Camps.

As Mahalir Sakthi is providing such a diverse range of programs, the staff was asked to rank the three most important activities for their community. They ranked the tuition centres/summer camp as number one, followed by the tailoring centre and then the health camps (funded by Australian non government organisation, SHARE).

The staff raised with us a new program they want to initiate, but do not currently have the funding to run. They described the dire situation that many women domestic workers face in the slums. Domestic workers are frequently abused and underpaid by their employers, partly due to their lack of skills as domestic workers, and partly due to a discrimination against Dalits and women. Mahalir Sakthi envisages a Domestic Workers Union for women in their slum community. This proposed Union would train, recruit and contract women to be domestic workers for clients, whilst ensuring fair treatment and pay. Conditions of the workers would be monitored and managed by Mahalir Sakthi staff, who would approach the hirer's of domestic workers when problems arise. Grace has had experience operating a similar project run by the Tamil Nadu Theological Society however this project stopped due to funding cuts. A new full time staff member would be required to initiate this project, and six months would be necessary to recruit approximately 50 women to participate in the program. Mahalir Sakthi will be presenting us with a proposal to support this initiative.

The staff also discussed the need for a solar inverter to help keep the tailoring/typing centre functioning during

the daily power cuts, as well as a CD player and camera for the Summer Camp/tuition centres.



Naaman and Caitlin sharing a meal with Guna and Grace.

Guna Vincent, the Manager of Mahalir Sakthi is a Dalit woman who grew up in the slums of Madurai. She has seen firsthand the benefits that education can have, and she has left a legacy in the hundreds of people that have been assisted by her and the work of Mahalir Sakthi. We look forward to our relationship with Guna and the rest of the dedicated woman at Mahalir Sakthi will continue into the future.

The Solomon Islands: challenges in development

Sally McNeill – Project Coordinator

We have been involved with the Turusuala Training Centre since 2004, and over the past nine years have supported the centre to provide residential vocational training for youth on the Weathercoast of Guadalcanal. Although there have been many positive achievements and outcomes from the centre the partnership has not been easy. This is in great part due to the isolation of the Centre at Avu Avu and the weather-dependent accessibility of the site, which has made regular and reliable communication a challenge. The experience with Turusuala has reinforced the difficulties of maintaining a relationship with a partner in an isolated area and highlighted the need for perseverance and patience when trying to maintain contact. It has also underscored the vital role of an in-country liaison officer.

The Weathercoast community established the Turusuala Training Centre in response to a concern about youth returning to their villages after fighting in the 'tensions' and getting into trouble through boredom. The centre is run by local staff and governed by an elected committee of village representatives and provides youth with skills to contribute to village life.

The original program at the centre included literacy, life skills, agriculture courses and joinery. Each course was taught over three years, with students living onsite in a boarding school arrangement. After the first few years it became apparent that this year long style teaching

excluded many young people from participating particularly women. As a result, the residential course was reduced to two years and block style courses were also offered. These taught specific subjects in 1-4 week periods. Over time an excellent outreach program was added so courses could be taught to farmers and youths in their villages, and students could undertake activities that were beneficial to the community. More recently, involvement with another donor organisation, Kastom Gardens Association, has shifted the focus of the centre to more agricultural and food security courses, recognising this as a key concern on Weathercoast.

In 2008 the Centre moved from government buildings on the hill to a purpose built classroom. A new girls' dormitory was also constructed to encourage more young women to come to the centre, thus addressing the uneven gender balance.

Our funding has enabled the Turusuala to pay staff salaries, provide food for students and staff staying at the centre, buy teaching materials, and building and fence materials for new dormitories. Most notably, we provided the money to purchase the land on which the centre is now located, and with this land title there is now long term security.

Unfortunately for Turusuala, enrolments have dwindled since its establishment. Accommodation is available for 30 students however in 2012 there were only 17 students and 4 staff. Further, although the Centre wanted to encourage gender equity very few females have enrolled in the courses. More needs to be done to improve young women's access to education, and this is something the Turusuala Management Committee recognises, supports and is working on.

Several periods of no communication and a lack of reporting has hampered our contribution to the centre. A successful monitoring and evaluation trip by Lucinda Wilson in 2011 resurrected contact with the centre and re-established our relationship after almost 12 months of silence. A new Commitment Agreement was signed and an action plan outlined. However, despite this 're-boot', reporting and communication between the us again deteriorated. This lack of contact has been due to a combination of issues: the geographic and telecommunication isolation of the centre; the absence and then resignation of our in country Project Coordinator; and our inability to find a suitable candidate to visit the Turusuala.

The breakdown of communication between indigo foundation and Turusuala has taught us a number of lessons. Firstly Turusuala has survived several periods without our support, using funds from other donors and fundraising themselves. Essentially, they proved they can achieve one of indigo foundations four guiding principles; sustainability. For us, however, it also reinforced the need to be vigilant about reporting, responding quickly and creatively if requirements are

not met in a timely manner. This lack of reporting from the Centre and subsequent lack of communication from us was misinterpreted by Turusuala to mean that we were no longer interested in the partnership. Secondly, it emphasised the importance of visiting our partners on a regular basis: the best way to deal with a chronic lack of communication is simply to go to the project and talk to the stakeholders. Each monitoring trip has helped the community to reassess its aims and needs and has achieved a clearly articulated plan of action. Thirdly, it reinforced the importance for an in-country liaison officer who can independently report on outcomes for indigo foundation over the short term, addressing problems as they arise and providing feedback. An in country liaison is particularly vital in a project like Turusuala where many staff and students at the Centre do not speak English.

At the same time, we need to be sure our partners understand and act upon their responsibilities, especially in terms of pro active communication and reporting. If this component of the relationship is dysfunctional, from either or both sides it is almost impossible to provide support and assistance. Our partners need to demonstrate they want this support, and equally, we - indigo foundation - need to be kept to account by our partners regarding *our* commitment and record of communication.

Our difficulties have not yet been resolved, having been unable to recruit a liaison officer or establish a clear and reliable line of communication with Turusuala. As mentioned above, some of this is purely because of logistics, location and the circumstances of the Weathercoast (and somewhat ironically is part of our rationale to provide assistance to Turusuala), but there is another component that speaks to the willingness and commitment of each partner to maintain, and build the relationship. We deeply appreciate the challenges the Centre faces and the successes it has achieved in spite of these, and would ideally like to continue our assistance. At the same time, we are in the process of confirming with Turusuala whether the partnership will continue, and will keep you informed as to developments.

A Pig Bank starts in Rote, Indonesia

Libby House – *Project Coordinator*

Oengaut is a coastal village situated on mostly stony and hilly land not given to horticulture, although it has plentiful fresh water wells and prolific coconut and lontar palm groves. Because of its poor soil and topography Oengaut has been unable to take advantage of the food gardening projects funded by our partner organisation Lua Lemba Education and Community Development Foundation. Many of the villagers rely on tapping the lontar palm in season – a dangerous and labour intensive occupation for

the men and their families and on farming strings of seaweed – an occupation not fruitful in Oengaut as the reef comes very close to shore here making space tight in the lagoon. Although Oengaut has seen considerable housing development over the past few years little of the new wealth has trickled down to the poorest members of the community.

In July 2012 a group of six men representing four Oengaut clans approached the Lua Lemba Treasurer and village co-ordinator Ande Abineno with an idea for buying a fishing prahu that could be used to ferry surfers out to the reef breaks for a small fee and also to access new ground for farming seaweed. The men regularly meet for discussion on how to improve life for themselves and their families; all of them rely on tapping for palm sugar and growing seaweed for their livelihood.

After reflection and several discussions with Pak Ande the Oengaut Co-operative developed a new proposal which better fitted both the skills, capacity and needs of the group and the principles, objectives and funding constraints of Lua Lemba. This proposal was for a pig bank.

I was fortunate to be invited to the August 2012 Lua Lemba meeting when the proposal was presented, and had been approached by several Lua Lemba members anxious to air their views beforehand. It was not going to be an easy passage as the executive was split fairly evenly and Lua Lemba Chair Onesimus N'dun seeks consensus in decision making. I expected it to fail. I severely underestimated the powers of persuasion and preparation that had gone into proposal development.



Lua Lemba Treasurer second from left, with the Executive of the Oengaut Pig Bank.

The 2010 report from the Australian Centre for International Agriculture Research identifies pigs as the most important livestock type for smallholders in Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT), the chain of islands of which Rote is the easternmost. Pigs have traditionally played an important role in the religious and social activities of Rotinese communities and are a critical source of protein for domestic consumption. A primary function of the palm

sugar tapped in Rote is that it is converted to protein when fed to pigs.

As the community here becomes wealthier more pigs are consumed. No longer restricted to ritual events, weddings, dowry raisings and funerals, pig meat is eaten at significant birthdays and other family celebrations. However in 2000 Swine Fever swept through the pig population and many poor families have been unable to replace their livestock. Now it is often difficult to source a pig for food, so families buy weaners and grow them out for consumption. This is the main goal of the Co-operative members – to sell weaners at a profit. Government programs have provided breeding stations where improved, disease resistant stock can be bought, and it was from here that the Oengaut group bought their pigs.

Lua Lemba granted the Co-operative AUD300 and with this money they bought four breeding sows. The best female piglet from the first litter will be given to the next member of the Co-operative once they have met specific selection criteria. The original sow owner is then relieved of further obligation but the recipient of the female piglet in turn must give the best female piglet from their first litter to a nominee of the Executive. The Executive have been trained in vaccination techniques and will provide and administer the necessary vaccination at low cost. Compliance is one of the requirements of membership. Favouritism and family loyalties can be the downfall for enterprises in small communities but having the four main clans represented on the Executive should mitigate this risk.

Food security programs are an increasingly important part of the program of activities for Lua Lemba. They have now supported five food gardens and a plant nursery that covers four villages. In turn these have inspired a great many private food gardens. Some of the gardens cover several acres, two are independent and one has been producing food for export to the Provincial capital of Kupang for several years.

If the Pig Bank has similar success it has the same potential - expansion to other areas, positive impact on primary health, income generation and consequent improved access to education for marginalised communities in Rote.



Alex He'u from Oengaut Pig Bank with his sow.

Two of the four sows have already been mated and I look forward to seeing the first litters when I return to Rote in June.

If you have any questions about the information in this article or about the Rote Project please contact me at libby.house@indigofoundation.org

Nyirripi Camp: 2013

Sally Stevenson – Project Coordinator

Nyirripi is a remote Warlpiri community located 160 kms southwest of Yuendumu and 460 km from Alice Springs. The community has a small population of approximately 250 people who are relatively transient, moving frequently throughout the region and into Western Australia. Young families make up the majority of the population. There is a lack of males and females aged from 18 – 25 years old.

Nyirripi has limited services and employment opportunities. The Central Desert Shire is present in the community as are the Police. The community has a school, shop, crèche, old people's meals centre and a Batchelor education room. The majority of the community relies on welfare payments for income.

Spending time on country with family is considered a highly important part of community development and cohesion and personal growth for Warlpiri people.

For the last three years indigo foundation has supported Nyirripi community to implement a cultural strengthening program. We fund 'bush camps' which are designed to assist the transmission of cultural knowledge from older generations to young people, as well as provide the resources for community members to undertake a large scale cultural activity.

The camps are facilitated by the Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation (also known as the Mt Theo Program) which reinforces the strong youth focus.

The latest camp was held at Old Nyirripi, in a sandy creek bed a few kilometers from Nyirripi, in late March.

The primary organisers of the camp were Kathleen (MK) and Gail Gibson and they created opportunities over the weekend to go hunting for bush foods and meat, to tell Jukurpa (dreaming) stories and learn associated dances and songs. We are looking forward to a full report of the weekend, as well as a short film and photo story book that will be produced out of the camp containing interviews, stories and images of the activities that occurred throughout the camp. MK is particularly passionate about producing materials that people can keep after the camp so they will remember the stories and the messages they contain. These will be produced with the assistance of PAW Media¹ and the Mt Theo Nyirripi youth workers.

¹ For over 29 years, we've been creating TV, radio and music in the remote Aboriginal community of Yuendumu. Working with local people in language and according to local cultural protocols we create unique Aboriginal media productions.

In this year's camp, up to 100 people spent two nights camping out, immersing themselves in country and culture. Local school teachers and police visited over the weekend. Some community members had to return to Nyirripi for a funeral on Saturday but they hurried back to the camp as soon as they could. On Saturday night the kids were painted up by the men and women, and danced.



Getting ready for ceremony...

Development outcomes from a cultural project of this type are many and varied. Ultimately the most important achievement will be the preservation of cultural values and a handing down of cultural heritage. The process of passing on cultural knowledge to younger generations is an important and empowering process in today's society for an Aboriginal community, especially one like Nyirripi which has expressed concern that cultural strength is waning. Considering the holistic view of health that Aboriginal people often take (their relationships with the land, people, knowledge of culture etc) such a project has the potential to deliver positive benefits for Nyirripi.

As this year of the third of a three year agreement, we will be travelling to Nyirripi in May to discuss how best our partnership can continue. We will reflect on the value and effectiveness of the bush camps, and look at other ways we can assist the strengthening and perpetuation of this unique and ancient culture.



Young women with MK (second from left, back row) at the camp.

At the same time, we are proud to announce that the Faculty of Creative Arts at the University of Wollongong will host eight Nyirripi artists through an artists-in-residence program in June. The artists will be using the public gallery space of the University so students, staff and members of the public can come and talk with them while they work. This is a wonderful opportunity to enjoy Warlpiri culture, and we hope it will be the beginning of a longer term and mutually beneficial relationship.

We are fortunate the Warlukulungu Artists Cooperative are providing transport from Nyirripi to Alice Springs and back and the Kooloobong Village at the University will accommodate the artists free of charge. Now we just need to raise the remaining \$8,000 to bring the artists to Wollongong! Watch out for our crowdfunding initiative on that! [or email sally.stevenson@indigofoundation.org if you would like to assist].

‘Talking the world to a better place’

The Australian Arab Women’s Dialogue in Australia

Amy Ward – Development Coordinator

Having lived in the Middle East for a number of years, the patron of indigo foundation Libby Lloyd AM, had the opportunity to observe and live amongst strong and influential women in the region many of whom defied any stereotypes of being hidden, veiled or oppressed. With such images increasingly being used to depict women in the Middle East Libby wanted to create an opportunity to showcase examples of women from the region as they truly are - outspoken, strong and vocal leaders. It was out of this passion and commitment that the Australian Arab Women’s Dialogue was brought to life.

In 2011 Libby met with Dr Victoria Mason from the School of Politics and International Relations at the Australian National University who had a similar passion for women in the Middle East. Together as Co-Convenors they worked with a host of sponsors to develop the program, seek expressions of interest from interested participants and create a team to help deliver the project. The culmination of this hard work led to the launch of the inaugural Australian Arab Women’s Dialogue from 16 – 27 March 2013 which was held in Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne. Fatima Ali, the Project Manager worked hard to make sure the delegates arrived safely to Australia on their Etihad sponsored flights and along with Amy Ward, indigo foundation’s Development Co-ordinator, volunteered to be part of the team assisting with the host of events forming the Dialogue.

We were incredibly fortunate to have eight inspiring delegates from the Middle East attend the Dialogue all of whom are leaders in their field. This included Dr Houriya Kazim from the UAE (the UAE’s first female surgeon), Wafa Abdel Rahman from Palestine (Founder and Director of Filistinyat an NGO committed to changing the discourse of media to include women and youth in Palestine), Rana

Husseini from Jordan (a journalist with the Jordan Times, author and activist particularly in the area of honour killings), Hanaar Edwar from Iraq (a human rights activist working in Iraq for over 40 years and founder of the Al Amal Association which means ‘hope’ in Arabic), Minoush Abdel Meguid from Egypt (an investment banker and political activist during the protests in Tahrir Square throughout the Arab Spring), Manal Elattir from Morocco (a social entrepreneur who established ‘Anarouz’ which invests in female artisans in Morocco) and Zeina Daccache from Lebanon (a psychologist, drama therapist, actress, comedian and director and founder of Carthasis an NGO which provides drama therapy to prisoners as a tool for communication and social change).

The program was demanding as the Convenors and organising team were committed to ensuring the delegates had the opportunity for meaningful dialogue with key Australian women. Some of the highlights of the Dialogue included:

- afternoon tea with her Excellency Quentin Bryce, the Governor-General;
- dinner with a number of the Ambassadors from the Middle East;
- meeting with Julie Bishop, Deputy Leader of the Opposition along with Senator Kate Lundy and Minister Julie Collins;
- a nationally broadcast National Press Club event;
- dinner with Anna Bligh;
- meeting the Governor of New South Wales;
- meeting with the Commissioners of the Human Rights Commission;
- a facilitated panel discussion with Jenny Brockie from SBS at the Powerhouse Museum, filmed by the ABC TV program *Big Ideas*; and
- the showcasing of Zeina Daccache’s powerful film - *Scheherazade in Baabda* – about drama therapy in a Lebanese women’s prison (it will screen again at the Arab Film Festival in June).



Zeina Daccache in discussion with the audience, following a screening of *Scheherazade in Baabda* in Sydney.

Whilst we know the women had a great time during all of these official events we also know that other highlights

included seeing kangaroos in Canberra, the Opera House and Harbour Bridge in Sydney and shopping in Melbourne! We were pleased that despite the demanding schedule they had an opportunity to enjoy their time in Australia.

The Australian women involved were enthusiastic and receptive towards the delegates and our Chairperson Sally Stevenson was a guest at many of our events in Sydney. We were also fortunate to get a great deal of media coverage of the events with radio interviews and television show appearances all of which went towards countering any stereotypes that may have existed about women from the Middle East.

We formed great friendships with the women and were so proud to be associated with them and the inspiring work they are doing in their home countries. The delegates were enthusiastic throughout the Dialogue and demonstrated that indeed women from the Middle East are not hidden, veiled or oppressed - but inspiring and strong leaders.

indigo foundation Graduate School of Medicine Prize

We warmly congratulate Jessica Webster for winning the indigo foundation Prize for Academic Excellence in Personal and Professional Development at the Graduate School of Medicine, at the University of Wollongong.

This award recognises Jessica's achievements in subjects such as community health and ethics - key components in respectful community development.



Jessica Webster presented her award by Dr Susan Engel, indigo foundation Management Committee member, and Senior Lecturer in international studies, global politics and international political economy.

General Manager: comments and thoughts

Rob Mitchell

Another quarter, and ever more exciting developments and challenges for indigo foundation!!

Our well-attended team training weekend at the University of Wollongong in February certainly produced a buzz for our exceptional team of volunteers, and I'm sure has set the scene for a very successful year ahead.

Our current projects are running successfully, and we have new projects taking shape in Africa and Indochina.

My prime concern, of course, is to ensure that the supporting framework for all of that work is in place and working well, and I'm very pleased to be able to say that we have in place both the people and the processes to support our project teams.

There will always be the need to improve, and our particular focus over coming months will be on marketing and fundraising. The Marketing Sub-Committee is now active, and under the leadership of our new Treasurer Ron Switzer. The team can provide the necessary support to the various fundraising initiatives undertaken by our volunteers in Sydney, Wollongong, Canberra, Adelaide and Melbourne.

Research, and the further development of our 'respectful partnership paradigm', will also move ahead this year, with the publication of a major case study of our work, and initiation of studies led by Prof Vernon Ireland on lessons learned from the implementation of our complex projects.

We have a very busy time ahead, with confident expectations of successful project outcomes and a heightened public profile for our foundation.



Heads down at the training weekend: Cressida Hall, Ron Switzer and Susan Engel.

marketing & fundraising

Successful events and future plans!

Community and fundraising events are critical in helping 'spread the word' about our work, as well raising the necessary funds to support communities around the world. Our thanks for some great recent events go to:

- : **Vicki Crinis**, who organised a beautiful evening at Diggies Café in Wollongong. Her son Stan, the owner of Diggies very generously covered all costs of the evening, providing delicious food (and plenty of it!) and organising donations of exceptional wine from Bacchus Wine Merchants, High Gate Wines, and Brendon Bate wine agencies. Eric Dunan and his jazz trio entertained us with cool jazz and Ali Reza Yunespour kept the crowd of 100 deeply engaged with his talk about our Borjegai project in Afghanistan. We raised over \$10,000, whilst have a delightful evening. **Thank you Vicki!**



James, Emma and Susan on the door at Diggies

- : The Australian **Competition and Consumer Commission** and the **Australian Energy Regulator** who which hosted an International Women's Day event for staff in Melbourne and generously donated funds raised to us! Our thanks to **Jessica Zito** for coordinating.

Upcoming events include:

- : In Wollongong, in April **Emma Pickford** is organising **Frock-up**, a three-way charity event for Mission Australia, World Vision and indigo foundation. A \$10 entry fee will be charged, the proceeds of which will be divided amongst the three charities (with are set to receive \$4.50 from every ticket). Every person donates 2-3 items of clothing ie handbag, shoes, dress. These items will be hung up on racks, and upon entry all participants will be allowed to freely take up to 3 new items from the racks. In another section of the warehouse there will be Myers brand name clothing (already discounted) with another 30% off for all Frock-Up participants. In addition, there will be nail and makeup technicians, free cheese and champagne, and a courtesy party bus to deliver participants into town after. Final date and time to be confirmed shortly – watch out for it on our website and facebook page!
- : The **Annual Canberra Dinner** will be held again in June – details soon!
- : Our inaugural **Adelaide Dinner** is also coming soon! We have such a wonderful network of supporters in Adelaide that we can't wait to get you all together for a terrific evening!
- : and.....



On June 12th, in Wollongong, we will be partners in a One Just World Forum on Child Rights and Development. The date marks the International Labour Organisation's World Day Against Child Labour.

One Just World is a national series of free, Q&A style forums aimed at involving the community in conversation and debate on key international development issues facing Australia, the Asia-Pacific and beyond. World Vision conducts the forums in Partnership with AusAID and the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA). indigo foundation and the University of Wollongong have been asked to be partners for this particular forum.

There will be a public forum open to all in the evening and possibly a secondary schools forum during the day. We will post further details on our website and facebook page closer to the date, however if you're really interested in participating please contact Susan Engel susan.engel@indigofoundation.org, and for further information about the One Just World Forum see: www.onejustworld.com.au.

As winter approaches, think about the exceptional quality red wine we have for sale!

Every dozen bottles of wine sold will contribute \$48 towards our projects!

We encourage you to personally support this wine fundraiser, as well as ask your family, friends, and other potential supporters to do so.

Placing an online order is very simple: just go to indigofoundation.org and click on the link on the top right hand side of the homepage.

Don't forget! 'Like' us on **facebook** for all the latest news and events...and please contact us if you would like to support our fundraising efforts! We'd love to hear from you!

indigo foundation think piece

Personal reflections on what activism is

By Dr Diann Rodgers-Healey, Executive Director, Australian Centre for Leadership for Women (ACLW)
www.leadershipforwomen.com.au

I recall a time when one year before Easter there was an online global campaign against one of the larger multinational corporate giants that produces chocolate. The campaign made loud the news that this corporation refused to cease exploiting and abusing children for increased production of cocoa beans to satisfy the global Easter demand for chocolate. My research verified these claims. Horrified by this, I was determined not to buy this company's brand of chocolate when I visited my local supermarket. Being a brand of high quality chocolate in attractive packaging, it wasn't surprising to see people choosing the condemned brand. Perhaps they had not

heard the news. However, just as I was leaving the chocolate section, a lady smiled at me. I wasn't sure how I knew the lady, yet her face looked familiar, so I decided to inform her as she reached out for that brand. I indicated to her that it would have also been my choice, but that there was news that the company allowed the practice of beating children in employment to ensure that they would keep working to pick more cocoa beans. The lady listened and then as she reached out for the company's product, she laughingly said to me, 'oh well, the children have already been beaten.' I was speechless and shocked. I often reflect on that experience. I question, can one really change someone else's values? I would like to share with you some of my reflections about this in the context of activism.

We respond to activism, the issues and people associated with it, because I believe that these elements stir within us unrest, empathy, sympathy and compassion to support others who are experiencing what we see as being unjust and wrong. Although a particular activism might draw out others who are also moved by its subject, how each individual interfaces with the issue central to the activism, is unique to the individual. This is governed by the lenses we use for our sense-making process of the situation and the receptivity of these lenses is predicated and influenced by our own set of values as determined over time by our unique encountering of experiences and the meanings we make of them. As values differ, what might stir deeply within me with angst, might meet with indifference in another. So, am I justified in being horrified at a reaction that is different, opposite to my own? No, I don't think so if I fully appreciate the entire dynamic of values formation and its unique makeup for each individual as governed by numerous factors including culture, religion and gender.

So what does this say about the aims and effectiveness of activism if people's differing values lay the foundation for vastly differing and even conflicting evaluations of injustices? Whilst the activist 'fights' for the plight of others and seeks support from others to help change the situation, what are the chances that their voices will be heard, valued, and seen to be meaningful by *all*? For some, yes, if their values appreciate the context. Historically, wars and civil rights movements indicate that a large populace can share similar sense-making and motivation to act towards certain goals. This would still seem evident today, for example, in the Arab Spring.

However, in today's society it is said that the saturation of communication, especially digital and the growth of individualism over collectivism, diminishes people's interest to engage and that this applies to global and local situations of inequalities and injustices. Is this contemporary observation an accurate explanation, or is there something more personal and basic that governs why some choose to engage and some do not? The catalyst to act based on one's sense-making of an injustice differs for each of us and is intertwined with various elements including our sense of identity, past, present and

future; our sense of our own powers and how we interpret the external context we are faced with, all of which are in turn influenced by another layer of forces such as culture, gender and religion. A unique blend is arrived at in one's own time frame as one's external and internal sensibilities lead to a response. In such a complex evolving, multidimensional, multifaceted dynamic, which I am sure is far more intricate and diverse than my understanding, am I justified in judging those whose values are different to mine?

To judge another for their values is to believe that one set of values is better, more right, more superior to another set and that we have the right to judge this. It is to believe that others lack the ability for sense-making in arriving at an end point that is different to mine. It is to deny the diversity of humanity itself, to stop dialogue, to devalue and constrain richness that might result from a deep understanding and valuing of differing positions.

Although, I believe that I have no right to judge another human being for the values that they possess, I do have a right to uphold my own values system and act accordingly. The power of the activist lies not in how *loud* they shout to make an injustice known, but in the fact that they *do*. Flooding the world with this awareness means that individuals are availed the opportunity to interact with this news. What each of them makes of it is their responsibility, not the activist's.

If the activist chooses to influence an individual's sense-making, judging the individual would have to be the most ineffective way to do this. Dialoguing with the individual to understand, explore, clarify, question, and make sense of the individual's position is the only way to begin to engage the individual. This process as I see it would impact on both parties if it is authentic, and from the gestalt of this empathising and valuing, lies the greatest possibility for a shift in mindsets and values, and this might occur in both parties. The activist might arrive not at a position of judgement, but a deeper sense of understanding, knowing, acceptance of the other person and this affirming of the other person might make way for a new way of seeing themselves and the world around them. It might enable the individual to reflect and question or envisage a glimpse of an alternative path.

I know this is possible as I see it happening in my coaching work and feel privileged to have the opportunity to walk in parallel with another who has invited me in to their world, past present and future. I walk out with a richness as do they. Stopping judgment, establishing deep trust and respect, listening to understand and valuing that they have made the very best of what life has offered them, does result in powerful transformation in both parties.

Such an interaction is not about empowerment. It is flowing in and out, between and within the thoughts, words and feelings of another and staying the course to understand and appreciate. It is being thankful for the privilege of seeing their truth and pain in its rawness and appreciating the risk they take in 'letting us in.' This is a

parallel journey, not one that is hierarchical as empowerment implies. The transformative power comes from the sheer desire to support and walk with the other person, to reach out as one human being to another, and to jointly explore territory familiar and perhaps unfamiliar to the individual themselves, all the while being open to change in oneself from the insights gained.

In this journey, both partners are equal, power is not imposed, but arrived at from the act of reflection, contemplation and exploration of the individual's past and present through *existing* lenses and *emergent* lenses in both the activist and the individual, that come in to being as the connection between the activist and the individual continues. Emergent lenses for the individual, for example, might be that they do have a source of power within them that has come to the fore in the past. For the activist, it might be that their perception of an individual in that particular context is very limiting and that there are other factors which need consideration. For this entire process to unfold, there needs to be a willingness from both parties to trust and to be, all the while being open to the possibilities that might emerge.

My reflections are echoed in the findings of a recent study² which I undertook involving twelve global leading women activists who shared their insights about their activism work with women. A predominant theme in their reflections is that nothing can be changed in a person's life, unless the person wants to change it. Forcing change that is not wanted is to deny the person's power and right to be and to enforce another power. It is to force readiness against the signals that show that the person is not ready to take the step. The view 'that it is for her own good' does not make it right. It is a one-sided equation which is unsustainable and fundamentally lacking in respect for the individual.

What also emerged from the study with global women leading activists was that for the majority of these activists, their activism was seeded in their childhood when they observed experiences of inequity close to them and they tried to make sense of this. This sense-making fuelled their self-journey of value formation and empowerment. Their multidimensional journeys strengthened from absorbing knowledge, skills and strategies from education, socio-political, collegial, workplace, local, national and global activist contexts. In interpreting the world around them through lenses founded in their awakening, their activism was motivated by this inner sense-making and valuing, and actioned using capacities they had built and enhanced over time. As such, their continuum of activism reflects a strong alignment between their consciousness, intentionality and agency. Understanding and assisting the individual is the approach which they advocate rather than empowerment. They emphasise that judgment of the individual has no place in their approach.

² This study has been elaborated in a book by the author. It is entitled, *Women's Activism – Insights for empowering women from global women activists* (2013).

It is challenging to reconcile the knowledge of the fire that burns within the activist with the advice that waiting for the individual to invite the activist to assist, is the most powerful way for the activist to assist the individual and achieve a positive resolution as only then, the individual *owns* the way forward. That activism is not about 'fixing' situations and lives, but about realising that we all can find our own way, but at times we need support from each other as friends, allies and a listener who hears our strength and enables us to see it when things get blurred and clarity is lost.

In my activism, assisting an individual for me is not about controlling or following a prescribed script for success, but patiently walking with the individual if and when invited, and offering suggestions, perspectives and resources if and when the individual wants this. The light that ultimately shines at the end of this process is bright and encompasses both of us. For me, it leaves a long lasting sense of fulfilment and of knowing that being there for each other is what life is really about. Reaching out and reaching within, intertwines my own humanity with those around me.

Thank you.

our people

Alice Martin – Financial Administrator



After several years as Treasurer I have become the Administration Officer for indigo foundation. I enjoyed being Treasurer and found working with the Management Committee very interesting and stimulating. I did not have a

background in Development and so I received an education about what makes aid successful. I think in every organisation there is a requirement for change in the Management Committee. To function best there should be new people with new ideas and ways of looking at issues as well as a need for stability and long service. indigo foundation Management Committee meets both of these criteria. The new Treasurer, Ron Switzer, will bring a new perspective as well as being ideally experienced to help us meet our increasing financial and regulatory obligations. I would like to welcome Ron and say that I look forward to working with him.

As Administration Officer I am again using all those accounting skills that lay dormant whilst the children were little. Now they are all in High School I have part time employment in Medical Administration and time to spare for indigo foundation. indigo foundation uses MYOB which is not software I have used before. The issues so far have been technical not accounting. Fortunately my husband David is enough of a technical wizard to sort out the software issues.

I live down in Wollongong and whilst near to Sally Stevenson and Susan Engel we still operate in the virtual world. indigo foundation really is that rare virtual organisation. It is nice however to meet you all at training weekends and social functions.

If you have any queries I may be able to help you with please get in touch. My email is alice.martin@indigofoundation.org and I look forward to working with you all in the near future.

Management Committee update

Sally Stevenson – Chairperson

This newsletter is thick with news and activities, which I think says it all: we continue to be dynamic and optimistic! The next three months, as we race towards the end of the financial year, will be no different. David and Mandy Wheen have just left for Rwanda, Ian Seal heads off to Uganda soon, with Ali Yunespour shortly after to Afghanistan and Santino Yuot to South Sudan in May. We wish all our Project Coordinators the best on these trips and look forward to their reports, which we will include in our June newsletter.

On the people front, we've had an unusually quiet quarter in terms of comings and goings, but did all thoroughly enjoy getting together for our annual face-to face gathering in February. It's always a wonderfully motivating time – knowing we are working with such compassionate and dedicated volunteers.

Anyone who has ever run a fundraising event knows what a heart-in-mouth undertaking it can be – as you ruthlessly exploit friends and family and diplomatically encourage all who may fall within any of your social and professional networks to come and support your event. For those of us who do not have a sales gene, not only is it a lot of coordinating and organising, it's also very emotional! So, I want to say a special thank you to all those family and friends who accept our continual approaches with grace and generosity – and those volunteers who really put themselves 'out there' when they offer to raise funds for us. We are deeply appreciative of your efforts.

As another 66 brave people come to Australia seeking refuge from persecution, refugee children continue to be held in detention by Australia. In a follow-up from my last update, the latest statistics from March 1 show: 998 children in secure detention facilities, 985 in community detention, 34 children detained on Manus Island and 281 children detained on Christmas Island. **It is not acceptable.** www.outofsight.org.au is a powerful site that shows a collection of images, drawings and audio from inside detention on Manus Island. The site is built by ChilOut, an organisation dedicated to getting children out of detention [<http://www.chilout.org/>] with the support of GetUp!

We've had an excellent start to the year – and look forward to bringing you more news soon. Thank you again for your interest and support.



Dalit dancers at the Mahalir Sakhthi Summer Camp, 2013.

PO Box 694 Dickson ACT 2602 Australia

info@indigofoundation.org

www.indigofoundation.org

ABN 81 765 707 4
