

**REVIEW OF  
THE FRIENDS OF SUAI  
PROGRAM  
CITY OF PORT PHILLIP  
2004 -07**

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

ATA	Alternative Technology Association
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CoPP	City of Port Phillip
CSG	Community Steering Group
ET	East Timor
INTERFET	International Forces in East Timor
IT	Information Technology
FoS	Friends of Suai
SCC	Suai Community Centre
SYC	Suai Youth Centre
TL	Timor Leste

# 1 Executive Summary

The Friendship Agreement established between the City of Port Phillip (CoPP) and the community of Suai in Timor Leste, in May 2000, was a forerunner to the establishment of further East Timorese partnerships by other municipalities. Today there are some 50 such relationships. Under the guidance of the now Prime Minister of Timor Leste, Xanana Gusmao, and a number of visionary leaders both within the CoPP Council and the wider community, the Agreement was firmly focused on responding to the needs identified by the people of Suai and developing local level 'people to people' links between the two communities.

This review, which has been commissioned by the Friends of Suai Community Steering Group (FoS CSG)<sup>1</sup> on behalf of the CoPP Council, assesses the effectiveness of the partnership relationship and the program activities undertaken by this group during the life of its Strategic Plan: 2004 – 07. It also provides a framework to help guide the development of the next Strategic Plan: 2008 – 10.

Input was received from a wide range of stakeholder groups, including CoPP Councillors, the CEO and some Council staff; community organisations and individuals associated with FoS; CSG members themselves; and the Suai Commission members and the Suai Community Centre (SCC). In addition, the Suai Commission, in cooperation with the NGO Development Partnership Group<sup>2</sup>, undertook their own Evaluation of the Friendship program for the period 2004-2007. This was presented to the CSG by the SCC Coordinator in Melbourne, in August 2007.

Based on information obtained, the CoPP and the people of Suai are to be congratulated on the development and practical implementation of a successful and mutually beneficial partnership. Analysis of stakeholder feedback shows that project activities undertaken by CoPP in Suai between 2004 and 2007 have been very well received by both communities. This includes appropriately targeted, small-scale, community support and training, particularly in education; agro-forestry; solar panel installation, computer technology and media arts. Importantly, the relationship between the FoS and its Suai partners has been considerably strengthened during this time. Allied to this, project management capability in these key agencies, and knowledge and understanding within the CSG itself has greatly improved.

This is not to suggest that all joint project work has been totally effective. Shortcomings have been reported in some areas. However, it is evident that this collaboration has led to new insights for both CoPP and Suai about ways to improve the targeting, design and management of future initiatives. The partners are now strongly committed to ongoing cooperation and to further strengthening community level bilateral links being set up between individuals, local organisations and schools.

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<sup>1</sup> In this document the Friends of Suai Community Steering Group is also simply referred to as CSG aka Friends of Suai Taskforce CoPP.

<sup>2</sup> This comprises approximately nine NGOs in Suai working together for development in Covalima.

In terms of the other primary focus of the FoS Strategic Plan, i.e. to engage with the CoPP community and to encourage local level involvement, support and connections with Suai, the review findings show that although some very effective work has been undertaken, especially through visits by Suai representatives to CoPP and to meet community members, there is scope for this groundwork to be further enhanced.

It is clear that the people of CoPP who contributed to this study are extremely proud and supportive of the contribution being made to Suai by their Council and the CSG. However, it is also apparent that many supporters are time poor, and although they are willing to donate, they are quite limited in terms of participating in FoS activities. Nevertheless, opportunities for further outreach have been identified, along with some community level ‘champions’ who are prepared to assist the CSG to reach out to their own constituencies. Case study investigation in this review highlights areas where this can be pursued, as well as the potential for increased community engagement.

A number of critical success factors have been identified that are essential to the ongoing effectiveness of partnership activities. These are:

- a committed, highly skilled and well networked group of CSG members;
- a Program Coordinator with a strong background in international development and an ability to maintain good partnership relationships in Suai and CoPP;
- good channels of communication between CSG, SCC and project partners;
- good English language skills of SCC and Suai Youth Centre (SYC) staff;
- flexibility to adapt project activities in response to the needs of Suai; and
- the “packaging” of tangible project activities for promotion within CoPP.

A variety of opportunities now exist for CoPP and the Suai community to build on the solid foundation that has been laid through the practical application of this Friendship Agreement. This report summarises the views of different stakeholder groups concerning this potential. Key areas for program enhancement include:

- Strengthen joint planning and project work in strategically targeted areas;
- Provide ongoing capacity development support to the SCC and associated Suai partners in a range of skill areas related to project design and management;
- Increase the level of information and support provided to schools, community agencies and individuals willing to assist with fundraising, provision of appropriate resources and conduct of community awareness raising activities;
- Coordinate volunteer support in program administration and other areas;
- Enhance the link between FoS and other community events and activities and encourage greater involvement and support from local traders and businesses;
- Investigate ways to facilitate: exposure programs, student exchanges and short-term visits by skilled professionals willing to provide hands-on training support, combining this with preparation programs for participants; and
- Establish mechanisms for workplace giving and encourage Council and local employers to enable interested staff to provide a few hours of voluntary assistance per month to FoS during working hours.

There is now considerable potential for enhanced cooperation based on the strong partnership already established. The challenge will be how to extend the current level of program activity facilitated by the voluntary committee and part-time Coordinator. Additional in-kind, support from Council in targeted areas will help to achieve this.

## 2 Introduction

### 2.1 The Friendship Agreement

#### 2.1.1 Establishment of the CoPP relationship with Suai

The Friendship Agreement between the City of Port Phillip and Suai was the first of its kind in Australia. Under the firm leadership of the then CoPP Chief Executive Officer (CEO), who was said to have been “*a strong guiding force for the project*”<sup>3</sup>, a Statement of Friendship was formally signed by Council and Xanana Gusmao<sup>4</sup> in May 2000. From the CEO’s perspective, Council commitment to develop this partnership grew from a desire to make a significant contribution by way of practical support to the people of this remote coastal township, devastated in the crisis of 1999. According to her, early discussions with Xanana Gusmao and East Timorese diaspora:

*“helped to identify the kind of contribution that could really make a difference. It was decided to focus on building personal connections between the people in the two communities... to share skills and experiences ... not just a connection based on us sending them funds.”*

In developing this partnership, the CoPP built on lessons learned from its prior experience of a sister city relationship in Japan. A Friends of Suai Committee was established in 2000 in order to involve the local community in assisting Council to develop sustainable, community level links e.g. between schools, childcare centres, environmental groups, etc. Council has provided an allocated yearly budget for program activities totally \$611,000.00 between 2000 -2007 plus salary and on-costs for project coordination at 22 hours per week since 2002. During this period community donations have totalled \$242,000 indicating strong community support for the relationship with East Timor.

The initial focus of the FoS work in Suai was on skills development, governance and rebuilding basic facilities. Coordinators were appointed at both ends to help facilitate project activities: in April 2002 in CoPP; and in July 2003 in Suai. A number of joint initiatives were undertaken, including a community leadership program; and rebuilding the derelict district administrator’s residence, which became the Suai Community Centre. In the early years, the CoPP, through FoS supported placements of three consecutive Australian Volunteers who coordinated project work and played an important partnership development role. However, by mid 2005 it was agreed that external volunteer support of this nature was no longer needed. This was seen by both parties as a true sign of the maturing of the relationship.

Many review respondents see the ‘*people to people*’ focus of this Friendship as key. Visits from Suai, especially from Xanana Gusamo, have “*helped to cement this*

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Redefining Success and Failure’, CoPP, 2003, p3.

<sup>4</sup> Former Leader of National Congress for Reconstruction of East Timor, President and current PM.

*connection*”, strengthening Council and community support. However the precarious situation in Timor Leste is a constant constraint that has to be addressed in order to broaden and deepen the relationship. Despite civil unrest and development set-backs in recent years, partner organisations have successfully moved the program forward.

### 2.1.2 Insights gained from research about Friendship Agreements

*“Agreements built on notions of paternalism are less likely to succeed than those committed to relationship and trust building between and within communities in Australia and Timor Leste”<sup>5</sup>.*

Research undertaken of the relationships between Local Government Areas (LGAs) and townships in Timor Leste highlights the potential for community connections that take place under the banner of a ‘Friendship Agreement’ to:

*“foster healthy international relations built on notions of mutuality and respect rather than fear and deterrence”<sup>6</sup>.*

The research shows that the meaning of the term ‘friendship’ varies across different municipalities and is informed by the overall objective of the partnership. It also indicates that groups comprising people with a strong community development focus place considerable importance on ongoing communication with their Timorese partners as a way of furthering the relationship.

In such instances a Friendship Agreement has a twofold purpose: to build relationships between Australians and Timorese; and to revitalise community action in Australia. These friendship groups are generally very clear about the benefits of the partnership for the Australian community, such as the value of:

- developing closer working relationships between people who might not normally have had an association with one another;
- increasing links between community and Council representatives; and
- raising community awareness about the availability of Council resources and other forms of support for outreach.

The research also recognises that more tangible benefits are achieved in those LGAs which employ Project Coordinators ‘at both ends’ to support a working group of interested volunteers. Factors that can enhance the sustainability of links are:

- Allocation of sufficient finances;
- Bi-partisan political will and effective leadership;
- Continuing (two-way) exchange visits;

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<sup>5</sup> Building Relationships across the Timor Sea’: An Evaluation of the Australian/Timorese Friendship Agreements. R. Spence, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

- Broadening the support base /community participation in both communities;
- A clear understanding of each parties' expectations and limitations;
- Realistic/attainable objectives and programs, recognising resource limitations;
- Adapting lessons from both 'sides' using good evaluation procedures; and
- Continuity within the Friendship committee(s) themselves.

## 2.2 Purpose of the Review

The objective of this review is twofold:

- a) to assess the effectiveness of the implementation of the Friends of Suai program during the period 2004-7; and
- b) to provide a framework and guidance to the FoS Community Steering Group for the development of the FoS Strategic Plan 2008-10.

In order to achieve this, the review has considered the CSG performance against each of the *FoS Taskforce TOR Objectives* for the 2004-07 Strategic Plan, namely:

- To promote the Friends of Suai program throughout the Port Phillip community.
- To encourage community members to participate and provide support to Friends of Suai.
- To work in partnership with the Suai Community Commission in identifying appropriate projects and activities.
- To make recommendations to Council officers about funding of programs and activities and the expenditure of funds raised.
- Where appropriate, to liaise with wider Victorian contacts and networks related to East Timor, in order to promote and support Friends of Suai.
- To organise and support fundraising activities for the Friends of Suai program.

Overall the review has two main foci:

- To seek feedback from CoPP stakeholders, including Councillors, donors, organisations that are engaged with FoS and the general public who expressed interest in FoS, concerning their satisfaction, level of involvement and their rationale for continuing or discontinuing their engagement with FoS; and
- To consider the successes, difficulties and lessons learnt of the relationship with Suai in reference to Objective 3 (above).

## 2.3 Review Methodology

This evaluation comprises five main components. These are:

- **Key document review** of a range of FoS reports and other written material including: the FoS Strategic Plan, progress reports and other relevant documentation.
- **Review of feedback obtained from the Suai Community Commission, in particular:**

- The SCC Evaluation Report presented to the CSG by the Suai Coordinator, Simao Baretto, in August 2007;
  - Individual interview with Simao Baretto conducted in August 2007; and
  - Written feedback received from some SCC members in response to a short set of questions sent by email in March 2008.
- **Collection of feedback from CoPP supporters:**
    - Implementation of a short questionnaire sent to 197 people on the FoS mailing list in October 2007 (see Annex 1); and
    - Follow-up telephone calls conducted by some FoS Community Steering Group members with 12 of the 53 respondents to this initial survey (see Annex 2).
  - **Individual interviews with:**
    - The current Mayor & selected CoPP Councillors;
    - The CEO and a small number of CoPP staff;
    - Representatives from community groups, networks and schools that have been involved with FoS and/or supported specific projects in Suai.
  - **Collection of feedback from FoS Community Steering Group members** via a focus group; a meeting to discuss the feedback obtained from the telephone interviews; and individual interviews with some group members.

## **3 Analysis of Feedback from Local Stakeholders**

### **3.1 People on the FoS Mailing List**

#### **3.1.1 Overview**

In October 2007, the 197 donors and supporters of the FoS CSG were sent a short questionnaire (by post and/or email) canvassing their views about the program and in order to gauge their interest in supporting its ongoing work. A total of 53 people (27%) returned the questionnaire, six of whom were CSG members.

A quarter of the respondents said that they were not currently actively involved with FoS; another quarter had been involved since the early years (2000-02); and a further quarter said that they first became involved around 2003-05. An overwhelming majority have a strong interest in Suai and Timor Leste and 85% said that they are either satisfied or highly satisfied with their involvement in the FoS program. It is evident that the friendship group has retained the active interest of some supporters since the early years of its establishment, especially with respect to donors and committee members. New supporters are also seeking further involvement and linkages with the program. It is also clear that the majority of supporters are pleased to contribute financially but due to time constraints are not actively engaged in activities. Some are keen to learn more and are willing to participate in functions and events in the municipality where they can.

Following analysis of the survey data, some CSG members conducted follow up phone calls to 26 respondents who had indicated that they were prepared to elaborate on their written feedback. Efforts to contact these people were successful in around 50 % of cases. This additional interaction provided some very useful information about the specific interests and skills that these supporters could contribute. It also indicated that although these respondents are generally willing to support the group, the majority lead busy lives and many feel extremely limited in what they can offer.

Nevertheless, these telephone calls helped to identify several individuals who could help with general administration, promotion and fundraising (a few being prepared to seek the support of local traders and businesses) if asked to do so. Some expressed interest in being involved in particular projects, including exchange visits between Timor Leste and CoPP. A number indicated that they have professional skills that they could offer, but they are uncertain how these might be of use. A couple of people would like to attend CSG meetings; several want to receive more regular information; and a few could establish networks for coffee sales.

#### **3.1.2 How do people hear about FoS?**

The most common ways in which respondents had first heard about FoS were:

- through Divercity, the City of Port Phillip Newsletter (32%);
- word of mouth (26%);
- via local papers (23%); and
- via a flier which included with the CoPP rates (15%).

### **3.1.3 Why do people become involved in FoS**

The three most common reasons given by respondents for becoming involved in FoS were because they:

- wanted to support the people of East Timor (81%);
- were interested in overseas aid / international development (49%); and
- wanted to develop links with the people of East Timor and/or with the people of Suai in particular (40%).

In addition:

- Over one third of all respondents had either visited Timor Leste or had been involved in the broader East Timor network, some having worked with international development NGOs.
- around one third want to participate in a local initiative focused on Timor.
- A small number had a particularly close association with Suai and its region: two had lived in Covalima, another had links to the Zumalai sub-district and one had served with INTERFET forces in Suai in 1999.

### **3.1.4 What kind of involvement do people have in FoS?**

The most common form of involvement that respondents had with FoS was through making a donation (72%). More than half said that they received FoS newsletters and just over one third had attended FoS functions and activities. Only five people indicated that they had provided volunteer support, one of these in Suai. Six respondents are actively involved in the FoS Community Steering Group.

### **3.1.5 How satisfied are people with their involvement in FoS?**

Four out of five respondents said that they were either satisfied or more than satisfied with their involvement in FoS (a total of 25% being more than satisfied). Some people failed to answer this question, but two people reported being less than satisfied with their level of involvement. One said that night meetings across town did not suit and that they had not been asked to help with basic day-time administrative tasks. The other person indicated they would like to see more outreach within CoPP; more skill sharing and mentoring with the people of Suai; increased low key fundraising; and improved publication of achievements to encourage more rates donations.

When asked if they would like to be involved in FoS in 2008, over two thirds of respondents answered in the affirmative. Seven people said that they would not seek active involvement, three of whom were still happy to make a donation.

When asked to elaborate on their preferred involvement in 2008:

- Eleven people said they would be pleased to donate regularly but did not want any greater involvement;
- Seven people said they were keen to support FoS but were time-poor or already doing voluntary work;
- Five people said they were interested in receiving ongoing updates and information;
- Three people said they would be willing to volunteer time (one in Suai); and
- Several people indicated they would participate in FoS functions and events.

### **3.1.6 Suggestions about other activities**

There were a variety of suggestions concerning ongoing FoS activities. This includes:

- Greater outreach within CoPP including increased promotion and provision of more information about Suai/Covalima in local papers and the CoPP website.
- Implement some new ideas for fundraising and 'hands on' volunteer work.
- Conduct municipal visits, student exchanges and exposure programs.
- Increase linkages with other LGAs interested in Timor Leste.

### **3.1.7 What else can people contribute to FoS?**

Follow up telephone calls to those survey respondents who indicated willingness to talk with a CSG member provided useful information about ways in which some individuals would be prepared to support FoS. This includes:

- Participation in CSG meetings and activities.
- Help with promotional activities.
- Event management.
- Involvement in fundraising activities, including setting up networks for coffee sales and seeking support from local traders and businesses.
- Involvement in specific projects including exchange and exposure programs.
- Assistance with general administration and documentation tasks, including preparing submissions.

## **3.2 Partner Organisations Involved with FoS**

### **3.2.1 Overview**

During the life of its current Strategic Plan, relationships between the CSG and community organisations, schools and not-for-profit social enterprises situated in the CoPP and beyond have been considerably strengthened and extended. Organisations such as Balwyn Rotary, Rotary South, Oxfam Australia and The City of Kiama (to name but a few) have been key partners in this timeframe. A comprehensive list of partnership projects supported in 2004-07 is provided in Annex 3.

One component of this study has been a review of four current partnerships which are good examples of the type of relationships that are now being built. These case studies provide an indication of the potential for the creation of further linkages within the framework of the FoS program model which is underpinned by 'people to people' relationships and responding to the identified needs of the Suai community. The main elements of the 'stories' associated with these case studies are presented in Boxes 1-4.

In addition to the collection of detailed feedback from these four organisations, discussions were held with two other community based groups: Inner South Community Health and Veg-Out Community Garden, and with CoPP Youth Services. The focus of these interviews was to obtain feedback concerning the interest and potential for future engagement of these organisations with FoS. The input provided by these three groups is incorporated into findings reported in 3.2.2 – 3.2.7 below.

## BOX 1

### Relationship between Elwood Secondary College and Friends of Suai

*“We want to be asked, we want to share and we want to participate... we do not want an agreement built on paternalism... we want a relationship that will build trust between Suai and Elwood College”.*

Elwood Secondary College is a multi cultural school community. Involvement with FoS is seen as a natural progression of the school’s strong international focus. Staff believe that the school has a social responsibility to provide students with opportunities to learn about the situation facing one of Australia’s nearest neighbors. This can have important spin-offs in the wider community.

The school first became involved with FoS in 2002 when it hosted a visit from some teachers from Suai, organised by the FoS Community Steering Group. This provided an opportunity for the Timorese teachers to: meet students and staff; observe the College curriculum in action; and learn about the Australian education system. It also provided an opportunity for College staff to hear about the critical situation facing Timorese teachers and students.

The following year, the College facilitated a day long student convention during ‘Democracy Week’ that focused on Timor Leste. Over 200 students aged between eight and eighteen years old from all schools throughout the CoPP schools participated. This forum was attended by representatives from: the Australian Military, The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and members of the Timorese community in Melbourne. This led to some students deciding to provide practical support to the Suai community. One such student, who went on to become an international lawyer, has subsequently worked in Dili through the UN.

In 2006 a similar forum was held at Elwood College under the banner of a ‘Constitutional Convention’. Some 125 students from a range of CoPP schools participated. This was followed up in late 2007 by the SCC Coordinator visit to CoPP. A highlight of this visit was an address that he gave at a special lunchtime meeting held at Elwood College for Year 12 politics students from several schools who were studying democracy and citizenship. This was attended by local and state parliamentarians and the Mayor of CoPP. In addition, the SCC Coordinator interacted informally with students and attended several classes. Due to the efforts of the History and Politics Teacher who has been instrumental in facilitating the links between the College and FoS, ‘*The Education Age*’ published an article about the school’s relationship with FOS, with a focus on the school’s educational approach: making ‘history live’ for students.

Activities of this nature helped to develop the knowledge and understanding of students about the historical, political and cultural situation in Timor Leste and reinforced the school’s philosophy that links education with social change. Students interviewed in this evaluation said they: *“greatly appreciated meeting the SCC Coordinator and hearing about a completely different society, with massive inequalities in terms of resources... his stories made us cherish what we have”.*

Benefits for Elwood College associated with its relationship with FOS are:

- the school’s underlying philosophy of social justice and social change strengthened;
- the CoPP community has been shown: Elwood College is *“educating students for life”*;
- students had direct exposure to cultural and social issues effecting the people of TL;
- the consciousness raising that has occurred has had a personal impact on individual students and teachers and has helped *“to build connections within our own community... it has provided us with an opportunity to do something for others and has real practical outcomes”*; and
- schools came together with the wider CoPP community to work on a common issue.

## **The Future**

College staff who have been involved with FoS are fully committed to continuing to provide support and develop links with the people of Suai. However, as is the case with all schools, teachers at Elwood College have a demanding workload. They offer the following suggestions about ways to strengthen the relationship with FoS in the future:

- increase communication and follow-up between the College and FoS particularly with respect to events hosted by the school;
- increase engagement between FoS and the CoPP community, in particular develop a stronger focus on capturing the energy of the young people; and
- clarify logistics required for the College to send donations of appropriate learning materials, to Suai.

Overall Elwood College views the relationship with FOS as very positive and would like this to grow even stronger. Both staff and students would like FOS to provide them with a specific project that the school could support. If it could be arranged, the College would be prepared to consider helping to facilitate a teacher going to Timor Leste for a short period to assist with teacher training.

*“We can provide books, resources, what ever they want, chairs and tables etc, if we are asked for it. We can contact former Elwood College students, whom we are confident, would financially contribute to installing a generator or whatever the priority is for Suai. Having said that, we do not want to focus on material assistance only, we want to build on our relationship with our neighbor and we want for them a peaceful coexistence.”*

## **BOX 2**

### **Relationship between Infoxchange, CoPP IT Services and FoS**

*“Projects of this nature make a substantial contribution to enabling the Timorese people to communicate with one another and the outside world”.*

Infoxchange is a national not-for-profit social enterprise that uses Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to promote social change. It runs a service called Green PCs through which used computers are refurbished for disadvantaged individuals and communities. The organisation is committed to helping to rebuild Timor Leste, by aiming to use *“ICT to deliver skills development, education and employment through the creation of a sustainable social enterprise”*.

In late 2006, Infoxchange established and facilitated Info Timor, which supports ICT development and training, to send trainees from Dili Institute of Technology to Australia where they refurbished 500 computers for shipment to Timor Leste. FoS purchased nine of these computers and two laser printers for the Suai Community and Youth Centres. This involvement of Info Timor is an important contribution towards building a sustainable local ICT business in Timor Leste.

In recent years the CoPP has donated computers no longer needed by Council staff to Green PCs. In 2007, discussion between the CoPP IT Services Manager and the FoS Program Coordinator led to the idea of asking Infoxchange to donate some computers to the people of Suai. This resulted in further dialogue between the three parties regarding the possibility of Info Timor providing a broader level of ICT assistance to Suai.

In 2008 CoPP donated approximately 65 computers to Infoxchange. In exchange Info Timor refurbished 30 Pentium IV computers for Suai and will provide technical training for two local technicians in computer and software maintenance. Public domain Linux software in the four main languages of Timor Leste will be installed in computers and a network will be established at the SCC or other community location. Potential to develop a sustainable local business enterprise and valuable education and community resource development in Suai.

### **The Future**

Both the Executive Director of Infoxchange and the CoPP IT Services Manager would like to see the partnership continue and believe that there is considerable potential for further development of project activities. They believe that the FoS Program Coordinator has been instrumental in creating the connection between the two parties and linking them with the Suai community. They consider that this is a critical role in terms of facilitating ongoing communication between the key stakeholders.

The CoPP IT Services Manager would like to see shipments of around 100 refurbished Council computers per annum being sent to Suai in response to locally identified needs. He sees some potential for Council IT staff to be more directly involved in supporting ICT capacity development in Suai, perhaps by volunteering during their holidays to assist with training activities conducted by the SCC. He also sees value in CoPP publicising the contribution being made through Green PCs, to the wider community.

For the Executive Director of Infoxchange, the relationship with FoS fits well with the organisation's commitment to social justice and desire to enable the Timorese people to manage ICT themselves. For him, possibilities for extending joint project work include:

- developing an 'Info Timor' type of enterprise in Suai which would employ skilled local technicians and train community volunteers to refurbish, fix and maintain computers, and provide ICT training to local government, NGOs and schools;
- establishing an ICT Training Hub in Suai supported by local people with a local area network (LAN). Infoxchange has recently had discussions with the Timorese government about establishing government funded facilities in each district to facilitate computer networks and access, and support district administration, schools, police, community centres etc with ICT development;
- potential for FoS to link with the emerging 'Computers in Schools for East Timor' program currently being explored by Infoxchange with the national government with potential to provide educational resource development to help bridge the digital divide.

### **BOX 3**

#### **Relationship between Alternative Technology Association and Friends of Suai**

*"Perhaps the best thing from the project has been the local involvement. Installation assistance has been provided by the Suai Community Centre Team... after two years working with ATA's International project Group they are going to work on the final installations by themselves"*<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> ReNew, Issue 102, Jan-March 2008

The Alternative Technology Association has been “promoting renewable energy, sustainable building and water conservation since 1980”<sup>8</sup>. This community based, not-for-profit organisation has an international projects arm which has been operating in Timor Leste for the past five years, installing solar panels and helping to train local people in both installation and maintenance. ATA has access to some 20 skilled volunteers who are prepared to pay their own way to Timor Leste during their holidays to support these project activities.

ATA has connections with Friendship groups in a number of Victorian Local Government Areas. Formal links between ATA and FoS were established in 2005 and ATA now considers this to be one of its strongest partnerships. The International Project Coordinator at ATA believes that the success of this three-way partnership between ATA, CoPP and Suai has been greatly facilitated by the professional and personal qualities of the FoS Program Coordinator. This includes: a strong background in international development; high level communication skills; and the ability to network both within Suai and amongst key stakeholders in Australia.

Major achievements include:

- five solar installations in Suai and the surrounding district of Covalima, funded by CoPP, Balwyn Rotary Club, Oxfam Australia, and the City of Kiama [nb. FoS was instrumental in securing funding support for this project which is the largest activity supported by ATA in Timor Leste];
- the successful conduct of a training workshop in solar panel installation at the Suai Community Centre in 2006 and 2007;
- provision of capacity building support provided by a group of skilled ATA volunteers who worked alongside local people to install the initial solar panels;
- trainees from Suai and the surrounding area took full responsibility for the last two installations;
- electricity has been provided to the Suai Community Centre, the Youth Centre, the radio station and six remote health clinics;
- provision of electricity to the remote health clinics has had significant health benefits for the people of Suai and the Covalima district due to increased capacity to provide lighting for night-time emergency clinics and cool storage for vaccines;
- provision of electricity to the Community and Youth Centres has facilitated the use of computers; and the radio station now has the power to function when required;
- community centres & health clinics now have increased access to reliable power & lighting otherwise intermittent or non existent.

### **The Future**

ATA is keen to undertake further joint projects with FoS and is awaiting feedback from the people of Suai about their needs. This matter will be taken up with the SCC by the FoS Program Coordinator during an upcoming field visit. ATA is particularly interested in supporting local people to install and maintaining the solar panels themselves and see the future potential for a local person to become a local agent for ATA on the ground.

A key benefit of this partnership for ATA is the fact that volunteers have the opportunity to undertake meaningful work in Timor Leste and can share these experiences when they return home. This opportunity can attract other skilled volunteers to express interest in working

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<sup>8</sup> ATA promotional brochure

with ATA's International Program. The practical experience provided to the volunteers by participating in the Suai project helps to extend their own skills base.

ATA consider the main factors associated with the success of this project are:

- ATA and FoS share common goals, including a focus on responding to the development needs of the people of Suai;
- effective three-way communication facilitated by the FoS Program Coordinator;
- the strong international development background of both organisations; and
- the practical, hands-on CAN DO approach of the ATA staff and volunteers.

Significantly, the major success of the initiative has been the ability of local people to become an agent for ATA technical support, via the three-way-relationship.

#### **BOX 4**

##### **Relationship between Jewish Aid Australia and Friends of Suai**

*“Involvement with Friends of Suai provides an important avenue for the Jewish community to be involved in an international development initiative, not only supporting local projects”.*

Jewish Aid Australia (JAA) aims to involve the Australian Jewish Community in projects of humanitarian need in the broader community. Amongst other activities, it funds community development project overseas and facilitates education programs for Jewish students and youth groups. The organisation has a large group of volunteers who contribute to a wide range of different humanitarian projects.

Involvement with FoS fits well with the JAA strategic plan. The organisation raised funds for East Timor after the crisis in 1999 and has actively supported FoS since 2003 both via fundraising and through participation in the FoS Community Steering Group.

Currently three JAA members regularly donate to FoS. There is potential for this to be expanded. These funds initially supported women and children via a nutrition program and are now providing educational scholarships for orphans. To date, ten children have been assisted with scholarships of \$5000 each to help them to complete their education.

The JAA Coordinator is keen to encourage further donations. She would also like the organisation to become more involved in awareness raising and educational activities focused on Timor Leste, within the local Jewish community. For this to happen, more regular information from FoS about what is happening in Timor Leste and in Suai in particular, is needed. This includes specific feedback about the scholarship project which JAA could use to promote this activity within the Jewish community in order to increase the level of support.

##### **The Future**

The JAA Coordinator suggested several ways to enhance the link with FoS, including:

- An additional staff person soon to be employed by JAA to focus more on the international project work could be invited to participate in the CSG;
- JAA volunteers could be encouraged to contribute time to support FoS activities;
- There is considerable potential to conduct awareness raising activities about Timor Leste in Jewish schools. Schools are always looking for speakers and resources that teachers can use to extend their educational program. Jewish volunteers could put together some teacher resource kits from information provided by FoS;
- Students are often required to undertake voluntary work in the community and could

- be encouraged to become involved in activities that are linked to Suai; and
- School to school linkages and student exchanges could be planned in the longer term (however, issues such as lack of funds for Timorese students to come to Australia and the language barrier would need to be addressed).

### **3.2.2 Why groups become involved in FoS**

The community organisations interviewed in this study reported that one of the main reasons they engaged with FoS was that this fitted well with their own strategic direction. Two of the four case study organisations, both social enterprises located outside of the CoPP, already had their own programs in Timor Leste and saw the partnership with FoS as a way to establish links in Suai.

For several respondents, the connection with FoS had the added benefit of helping to raise the profile of their own organisations with their constituents and in the broader community. All respondents were committed to the need for the Timorese people to identify their own needs and to take control of their own development. They saw FoS as an expression of international solidarity at the local level.

For Elwood College, Jewish Aid Australia and Alternative Technology Australia in particular, the association with FoS provided an important vehicle for raising the awareness within their own communities about the situation of one of our nearest neighbours, and to promote the fact that social change is possible if people work together. Feedback from other groups confirmed the value of this educational agenda.

Another attraction of the partnership for Elwood College is that it provides a way of connecting students with the wider community. For both Jewish Aid Australia and Alternative Technology Australia the connection with FoS also has the potential to provide short-term volunteers with a meaningful experience and to develop new skills which they can bring back into the Australian community. The significance of this aspect was echoed by other community groups interviewed in this study.

### **3.2.3 Critical success factors of a good partnership**

Three of the seven respondents interviewed in this component of the review had extensive experience in international development and were personally committed to the capacity building approach that underpins FoS projects. It was evident that this factor contributed significantly to the establishment of the relationship and to its ongoing success. In two other cases respondents represented constituencies that had a distinct international focus and a strong commitment to social justice.

From the perspective of most respondents, key to the successful partnership with FoS is the facilitation by an FoS Program Coordinator, including the energy and experience that underpin the development of project ideas; strong links with the Suai community; and an ability to maintain effective working relationships both within Suai and in CoPP. A glimpse of this energy can be seen from the schedule of meetings organised for the SCC Coordinator with a range of agencies, schools and Council personnel, when he visited CoPP in August 2007.

Other factors seen as important to the development of a good partnership are:

- A good channel of communication between FoS, Suai and other partners.
- Flexibility to adapt project activities in response to Suai community's needs.
- "Packaging" of tangible project activities to promote to constituents.

This last point is worth reiterating. Representatives from the school, agencies without staff to coordinate international work and the Council emphasise the need for FoS to provide strong support in project development. Although those eager to partner with FoS employ skilled personnel who could make a valuable contribution to project work in support of the Suai community, these people currently lack the time and in some cases the know-how required to design suitable and appropriately targeted initiatives to engage with Suai.

### **3.2.4 Areas for improvement**

When asked to suggest ways in which the relationship with FoS could be improved, some respondents said that they would like increased communication and more regular and updated information, particularly concerning joint projects.

### **3.2.5 Ideas for the Future**

Those stakeholder groups with a specific project focus, such as Alternative Technology Australia and Infoxchange are currently negotiating with FoS about ways to extend current joint initiatives in Suai. This includes installation of more solar power and increased support for ICT development. Importantly, both of these projects involve a capacity building component which aims to develop a locally sustainable social enterprise in Suai.

Both Elwood College and Jewish Aid Australia see a potential for their students and members to be involved in fundraising to support specific projects identified by FoS. This includes the provision of appropriate resources such as school texts and other educational materials. Both are also keen to continue their involvement in awareness raising initiatives amongst their own constituents. The College sees great potential for further engagement with other schools across CoPP, focused on student learning about Timor Leste and issues such as democracy and social justice.

Several respondents noted the potential for their involvement in student exchange programs or in facilitating groups of skilled volunteers who could make a personal 'hands-on' contribution to the Suai community for short periods. This includes teachers, healthcare professionals, technicians and people skilled in the use of computers. However it was recognised that in order for this to become a reality, funding would need to be sourced and language barriers overcome.

Staff from CoPP Council offices who contributed to this study saw value in FoS raising its profile internally and increasing links with other community focused initiatives being undertaken by staff across council. Respondents saw considerable potential for this to lead to an increased level of support from Council personnel and possibly to the identification of a range of new project ideas. It was suggested that staff could be encouraged to consider workplace giving; to volunteer some time to assist with FoS promotion, administration or project work; or could be assisted to make a direct contribution of their skills by visiting Suai in their own time.

## **3.3 Councillors and Council Staff**

### **3.3.1 Profile of respondents**

Seven people closely associated with the CoPP were interviewed during this evaluation: the Mayor, three Councillors, the Chief Executive Officer, the Youth Development and Planning Officer and the IT Services Manager.

### **3.3.2 What is understood by the term Friendship?**

These respondents are very proud of the Friendship Agreement and the level of trust built. They highlight the importance of the program being overseen by a community based committee which aims to develop leadership and staff potential in both locations, and believe that in recent years the partnership has begun to mature.

The Friendship Agreement is considered to be different to the Sister City relationship that CoPP has with Japan. It is seen as a practical project which involves more than just material aid. In the words of one respondent: “...we are on a journey together”. The focus is on “*building bridges of understanding between the two communities*”, as well as providing skilled people to help develop capacity in Suai.

### **3.3.3 What has been achieved by FoS**

These stakeholders believe that a great deal has been achieved by the CSG since its inception, and particularly in more recent years. They greatly value and are proud of the contribution made by CSG members. They see this as a group of highly skilled volunteers, supported by a skilled Coordinator. When asked to identify the main achievements, particularly over the last couple of years, the following list most quickly came to mind:

- Support provided for leadership development of new and emerging leaders in Suai through the community centre, which was built with support from FoS.
- Improved communications between the two communities which has helped to strengthen the friendship at both ends.
- Implementation of a range of practical projects, such as reforestation, the scholarship program, and the provision of chairs for a local school, which have responded to the needs of the people of Suai and focus on sustainability.
- Innovative and cutting edge projects like the community education media project and the Suai Media Space, an interactive documentary website currently in construction.

### **3.3.4 What is the value of this for CoPP?**

Respondents felt that one of the major benefits of the Friendship for the CoPP has been that it has brought together a variety community members to learn more about Timor Leste and to support the Suai community. Of particular note is the capacity building that had taken place within the FoS Community Steering Group itself.

There is a feeling that although many people in the CoPP see the link with Suai as a way of helping a neighbour with whom there is an historical connection, not everyone appreciates the value of the relationship and the funds allocated to it. Councillors are quick to justify continued involvement, stressing that the people of CoPP are very fortunate to have the capacity to share some of what they have, as well as highlighting the importance of building understanding and trust between the two communities.

But they are aware that people within CoPP lead busy lives and are limited in the number of projects and activities in which they can be involved.

### **3.3.5 Areas for improvement**

Overall, members of the COPP stakeholder group are pleased with the strategic direction being taken by the CSG. The focus on building community level connections, rather than pursuing policy objectives is considered appropriate. They believe that the partnership has already led to many positive impacts, particularly in Suai. It is recognised that as a voluntary group, supported by a part-time staff member, with a limited budget, future objectives need to be realistic, especially given the often precarious situation in Timor Leste.

One area for improvement identified by a number of respondents was the need to put more energy into maintaining the FoS public profile, promoting its work and providing regular updates about the achievements associated with the partnership relationship. New ways of reaching out to the local community need to be explored, building on existing community initiatives such as markets and festivals, and better utilising library facilities and the CoPP newsletter and website. It was suggested that the CSG could explore ways to make better use of Council resources for promotion.

There is a feeling that most of those involved in the FoS program are already connected to Timor Leste in some way. While this is somewhat understandable, respondents advised that: *“The committee needs to be careful not to just be talking to itself”*. It was suggested that there would be value in the CSG being more strategic and targeted in terms of its future development, giving greater attention to where it can link with like minded individual and groups most effectively.

Public events associated with the visit of Simao Baretto were said to be a good way of trying to involve more people, however it was advised that careful planning of such activities is vital to their success, giving careful consideration to the information needs of the audience. The promotion of specific projects is seen as a good way to raise community awareness and funds eg. the student scholarships and the work being done with respect to website development. This helps in building connections.

It was recommended that the CSG should be very specific in terms of identifying areas where additional support might be required and target any submissions made to Council in this regard.

### **3.3.6 Ideas for the Future**

There is agreement that in its upcoming Strategic Plan the CSG should aim to extend the good relationships that have now been developed between Suai and individuals and organisations within CoPP. While recognising the need for realistic and well targeted objectives, it is felt that there is much value in continuing to take up new community focused opportunities as they emerge, at both ends, being careful not to take on too much, for fear of committee ‘burn out’.

There is support for the idea of facilitating more exchanges, as this strengthens community linkages and has a significant effect on those involved:

*“This way people will develop life long linkages and establish real friendships... this impacts on the individual and they are never the same” (Councillor).*

It was suggested that financial support could be sought from philanthropic trusts to, for example, help to develop better facilities in Suai to accommodate visitors from

CoPP. However, it is recognised that supporting exchanges and visits is resource intensive and that this could take a considerable amount out of the Coordinator's part-time role.

Council stakeholders are open to exploring new ways to strengthen CSG's work within CoPP. This includes greater encouragement and opportunities being given to those who visit Suai to share their experiences more broadly on return.

There is also support for FoS to increase its engagement with small traders and with the business sector of CoPP. The development of a link with the business association should be explored and ideas such as the establishment of an outlet for goods made in Timor Leste could be investigated.

It is suggested by some of these respondents that the current Council reaffirm its commitment for the remainder of the 10 year Friendship Agreement and extend this for a further period. It is appreciated that development is a long-term process and that the important groundwork has now been laid which will enable CoPP to make a more significant contribution to sustainable development in Suai in the future. Moreover, it is recognised that the 10 year anniversary presents a very important opportunity for CoPP to showcase and celebrate what has been achieved through the partnership so far and to promote new joint initiatives to be undertaken over the next decade with support from a various community based organisations, social enterprises and individuals.

### **3.4 FoS Community Steering Group Members**

#### **3.4.1 Profile of respondents**

Before summarising the feedback obtained from the FoS Community Steering Group concerning program effectiveness, it is worth noting that this is no ordinary committee. It comprises some 15 highly skilled and committed members of the CoPP community. Many participants have had a long personal association with Timor Leste, over and above their FoS involvement. Some have considerable experience of working in the international development sector; others have undertaken extensive research in Timor Leste; and a number are long-term activists who have been working for justice alongside the Timorese people.

Ten CSG members participated in a focus group session, with good representation across the 10 year life this group. Some respondents had joined FoS in its early years, others had been part of the committee for three or four years and some commenced attending meetings only recently. The purpose of this focus group was to obtain the views of CSG members concerning the effectiveness of group's work over the past four years and their ideas for further program development.

A month or so later, a second review session was held with CSG members to discuss feedback obtained by them from telephone interviews that they conducted with FoS supporters in follow-up to the initial survey. This interactive session, which was attended by eight members of the group, provided a useful forum to explore a range of possibilities for increasing community engagement within CoPP. The main ideas associated with this discussion are included in section 3.4.6 below.

### **3.4.2 What is understood by the term Friendship?**

There is general consensus within the CSG that the term “Friendship” means working at a grassroots level to facilitate relationships between people from the two communities. In particular, it involves working with members of the Suai community to develop confidence and trust, giving them “*a voice*” to set their own agenda according to their needs and values. The focus is on creating a climate where people want to get to know each other out of genuine interest, as friends do, not due to an interest created by dependency.

For many respondents the term “Friendship” infers a mutual benefit – “*a two-way exchange is required to ensure balance*”. It is felt that the people of Suai have a great deal to share with Australians about the value of relationships and “*how to walk side by side with others in the community*”. Group members consider that the FoS program provides an opportunity for this sharing to take place, as well to encourage the development of relationships that can be sustained beyond the life of the program.

It is acknowledged by many respondents that this reciprocity is critical to the success of the Friendship. In recent years, as the relationship has developed, the focus has shifted more away from what the CoPP community can do to help the people of Suai, to encouraging the Suai community to see the value of their own contribution to the partnership, with greater emphasis being given to the development of direct community level linkages. Multiple examples were given of mutual benefits gained through the program through exchanges in areas such as the media arts, and by facilitating channels of communication between people and organisations at a variety of different levels.

One CSG member provided two specific examples of what the Friendship means to SCC staff in practice. The first relates to an incident which took place in 2006 during the period of crisis in Timor Leste. Some soldiers involved in the international intervention had utilised the Suai Community Centre for a short period. After their departure it was found that some internal damage had occurred and that some equipment was missing. The people in Suai were afraid to complain to the authorities and instead contacted their friends in the CSG, asking for assistance. This was readily given and led to an apology from the head of the Australian intervention force and repair of the damage done. For CSG members, this example highlights the strength of the relationship. It reinforces the fact that the people of CoPP will very soon hear about any negative occurrence that takes place in Suai, and that they will respond.

The second example focuses on the readiness of the SCC staff to prioritise requests for assistance from FoS. This includes the SCC Coordinator and Deputy Coordinator readily giving their time to host and accommodate a range of visitors and students who want to stay in Suai / Covalima. SCC staff see this as their responsibility even though such visits can interfere with their own work and family obligations. In a similar way, during this evaluation, SCC staff went to considerable lengths to collect feedback from some of their members to feed into the review, concerning the benefits associated with the Friendship Agreement.

### **3.4.3 What has been achieved by FoS**

There is broad agreement within the CSG that the FoS program has been very successful in the period 2004-07, particularly in terms of developing relationships and contributing to capacity building in Suai, especially the Suai Community Centre. In the early years Australian volunteers played a key liaison role between SCC and FoS,

but in more recent years a direct relationship has developed between the two parties. These achievements were seen to be particularly significant given limited program resources; remoteness; lack of communication facilities; and the difficult political and economic context within Timor Leste.

There is a strong feeling that up until now the main focus at both ends had been on “*laying the foundation*” which has led to a genuine and multi-layered friendship between the two communities. There is general agreement that there is now an opportunity for the CSG to build on this strong foundation both in Suai and to extend the committee’s outreach within CoPP. The work already undertaken through some of the CoPP schools is seen as a good example of how the FoS can help to raise community awareness about Timor Leste. This has the potential to further enhance local level connections.

#### **3.4.4 What is the value of this for CoPP?**

From the CSG’s perspective, one of the major benefits of the Friendship Agreement for CoPP is the growth in understanding about international development and specifically concerning Timor Leste, that has taken place amongst those who have been associated with the FoS in some way. Individual CSG members note the personal value for themselves of participating in a local level initiative in support of the people of Timor Leste.

Many respondents believe that during the life of this current strategic plan there have been a number of occasions when the CoPP community has had the opportunity to learn more about, and become connected to, the people of Suai. Visits from people in the Suai community to CoPP are seen as particularly helpful in this regard, providing an opportunity for the public to attend functions with Suai guests. FoS responded to the 2006 crisis with public events which engaged community interest through the broader current events in Timor Leste. Other examples include: a photo exhibition (2004); a Theatreworks performance and film (2006); a second student conference (2007); and public meetings (2005 & 2007). In addition, opportunities have been provided to help with raising funds; assist with mail-outs; help to organise events; and pack goods for shipment to Timor Leste.

Respondents also recognise that up until now, the Committee’s primary focus has been to develop the partnership with the people of Suai and to provide appropriate levels of support in areas of need identified by them. They appreciate that community engagement can be “*hard work*”, particularly in terms of helping people to understand how the issues being faced by the people of Timor Leste might be related to their own lives. They are keen to develop new ways to promote the program to a broader range of people.

#### **3.4.5 Areas for improvement**

The CSG recognises that although it has strong support from Council and has developed a wide range of community contacts there is a considerable potential to increase this level of engagement. Members consider this to be vital to the ongoing success and sustainability of the Friendship Agreement, both with respect to developing links and as a source of much needed funds.

Considerable groundwork has now been undertaken to establish a firm basis for the development of a wide variety of community linkages. However the committee recognises that FoS is not an international development agency and that it has limited

resources available to undertake its work. The challenge is to find ways to support an increased level of community outreach without outpacing the capacity of the CSG and the FoS Coordinator.

It is felt by some that better use could be made of staffing and program resources within CoPP to promote FoS. There is also an opportunity to build on the good rapport already established by the FoS Program Coordinator with other CoPP staff and to identify ways in which more Council workers can participate in the program. One suggestion is to encourage workplace giving for particular projects. Another idea is for the Council to allow interested staff to participate in an internal FoS working group through which they could volunteer for a few hours per month during working hours, to help with specific administrative or project related activities.

In terms of the work being undertaken within Suai itself, it is suggested that it is now time to explore ways to facilitate more exchanges and skills development. Amongst other things, SCC staff have asked for assistance in community development training.

There is general agreement in the group that the current FoS objectives are somewhat “*unclear and overlapping*”, and do not reflect the true nature of the program ie. building relationships and friendship. Respondents suggest that the Strategic Plan 2008-10 should give greater emphasis to the centrality of facilitating ‘*people to people*’ links and cultural exchange consistent with a joint strategic plan. It was also considered timely to review the CSG structure to better focus its work within the CoPP and to extend its range of activities.

### **3.4.6 Ideas for the Future**

Respondents consider that improved capacity to engage the CoPP community in FoS activities will broaden relationship building and increase the level of support for the Suai community. However, they recognise that there are already considerable demands on both the FoS Committee and Program Coordinator in terms of time and that increased engagement within CoPP would require additional resources.

It is suggested that greater attention be given to promoting FoS work and informing interested parties about how they can become involved. The CSG is keen to increase volunteer support by providing opportunities to assist with administration and project related activities. Particular projects could be promoted over a set time-frame to attract broader community support. However the group is determined that all such assistance must operate within the project model and guidelines set up by the CSG.

Council could be asked to assist FoS with promotion and to host and resource some community events which include a focus on Timor Leste. The FoS website could be better utilised to provide information and gain expressions of interest and support. Improved promotion and communication is now timely since a range of smaller projects have been developed which could attract community support and there is increased capacity in Suai to facilitate a range of joint partnership projects. Some examples of ways to involve the community were identified, including:

- Facilitating exchange opportunities for students and other interested people within CoPP, combined with a one month intensive information/ education program for participants to help to prepare them for their visit to Timor Leste. FoS could also facilitate short-term immersion/exposure programs for selected community members (ie. nurses, teachers, agriculturalists) to offer their skills;
- Workplace giving amongst CoPP Council staff could be promoted. This idea could also be promoted to businesses and schools within CoPP.

- Development of a CoPP skills database to act as a “volunteer bank” that could be tapped to support particular projects, eg. identify suitable people to a conduct a three week intensive English language course in Suai.
- Linking FoS with existing events and activities eg. the farmers market via VEG-OUTS’ arts and cultural group
- Building connections between Elwood College students and schools in Suai;
- Developing a relationship between the St Kilda Youth group and Suai youth using the “Skills by Stealth” model.

Furthermore, innovative initiatives such as the Suai Media Arts project which is being facilitated by one CSG member with support from CoPP and FoS, has the potential not only to enhance the skills of Suai youth in computer based arts and interactive website development, but to assist communication between the two communities. Importantly, this project provides a vehicle for the people of Suai to tell their own stories about their history and culture. It also provides a way to link people in CoPP more directly with Suai’s development journey.

## 4 Feedback from Suai

### 4.1 SCC Views on Project Achievement

*“When we came down from forest and came back from west Timor, we had nothing at the time... but by the presence of FoS the Community Centre (now) takes part in developing our community” (SCC staff member).*

A review of the FoS program undertaken by the Suai Commission and the Suai Community Centre in 2007 found that a great deal has been achieved through the Friendship Agreement. This review which involved considerable time and effort on behalf of the Suai partners, represents the views of a 19 stakeholders, including some locally based international partners, who have been associated with FoS activities during the period 2004-07.

The overall findings of this review indicate that the Friendship Agreement with CoPP has been most effective and has led to some valuable outcomes for the people of Suai. Of particular significance has been the strengthening of the relationship and trust between SCC and FoS and the capacity building support provided to SCC staff.

It is also evident that project activities undertaken in some areas have been more successful than in others. Any shortcomings in project work are seen to have highlighted useful lessons that can help to inform the targeting, design and implementation of future joint initiatives. The collaborative efforts undertaken in this reporting period have established a firm basis from which to move forward together with greater confidence and mutual understanding.

Major achievements for 2004-07 include:

#### Education

- Provision of educational scholarships to 10 orphaned and 1 disabled student;
- Provision of 300 chairs for Ladi Secondary School (2007);
- Conduct of vocational training: a computer course (30 people were trained in 2004) and two levels of sewing courses for women (18 people trained);
- Conduct of English language courses (27 people trained in 2004)

The scholarship program has been very successful and SCC would like to see this continued. So too is the ‘Chairs for Schools’ project which had the added benefit of employing local people in chair production. There is considerable potential for the conduct of more vocational education courses, however this should be combined with the provision of appropriate resources eg. computers, sewing machines, and training local people in equipment maintenance. There is also scope for training in mechanics.

## Agriculture

- Establishment of a tree nursery with 16,000 trees;
- Community assisted to prepare funding proposal;
- Initial project funds (\$US7,000) provided by FoS;
- Local people trained in plant propagation, maintenance and terracing;
- Involvement of the local community in tree planting; and
- Technical support from the District Agriculture team.

The Agroforestry (Nursery) project is considered highly successful, with strong potential for replication. (FoS hoped that the this type of project would potentially target International NGOs as buyers of seedlings for reforestation as income generation). Sustainability will be enhanced by ongoing links between the project and the Department of Agriculture and the community.

## Health

- Project activity undertaken to address malnutrition; and
- Provision of training for a small number of healthcare staff.

This project which achieved initial benefits and filled an important gap, has been superseded by larger scale projects implemented by international NGOs and the Government of Timor Leste.

## Other

In addition to the above, the SCC review highlights another major achievement that was not listed in the SCC Workplan for this period. This is the installation of solar panels for lighting and power and training of staff in how to maintain them.

An interview with the SCC Coordinator during his visit to CoPP in July-August 2007 confirmed the immense value that SCC places on its partnership with the City of Port Phillip and the Friends of Suai. It is quite clear that even though Suai now receives a greater level of support from the National Government and from international NGOs, this in no way diminishes the importance of the Friendship Agreement with CoPP. On the contrary, it appears that these developments reinforce the true significance of this early expression of solidarity. In the words of one SCC representative:

*“The City of Port Phillip started making a friendship with our District (when) we (had) nothing... They helped us before we had something, not... after we have something... we must count \$ 0.05 was given when we had nothing rather than... count \$100.00 after we have something”.*

For this respondent a small amount of funding given by FoS / CoPP when Suai had nothing was extremely important, perhaps even more so that the much larger grants that are now being made available by other donors.

## 4.2 Future Areas for Cooperation

Following the above mentioned review, the Suai Community Centre and Commission identified key priority areas for Suai and the Covalima District for 2008. These are education; health; agriculture; and technical training. Around this same time, the CSG listed its own priority work for 2008. Annex 4 provides an overview of the relationship between these two lists.

It is evident that there are several areas for ongoing collaboration, as well as some areas where joint project work is likely to be less of a focus. However, this situation can change as was evident with respect to the ready up-take in Suai of project activities and training associated with solar panel installation. This project was not envisaged when the 2004-07 plan was being prepared<sup>9</sup>, however it has turned out to be most beneficial. This reinforces the need for flexibility on both sides, and a level of openness to explore new project opportunities as they emerge.

The main areas for mutual collaboration for 2008 identified by both SCC and FoS are:

### Education

- Refurbishment, teacher training and provision of books and resources for Suai Secondary School Library.
- Scholarships and support for orphan students in Covalima.
- Summer school - In service training for teachers in English, Maths.
- Computer training, including maintenance.
- Continuation of the Women's Sewing Project.

### Agriculture

- Continuation of the Reafforestation Project.

### Technical Training

- Enhancing computer use, training, networking and maintenance in conjunction with Infoexchange Australia and Info Timor, working towards the development of small business enterprise in computer technology in Suai.
- Installation of solar panels and provision of technical training to maintain them, in partnership with Alternative Technology Association.

In addition to the list of priorities presented by the SCC Coordinator during a feedback session held with the FoS Community Steering Group in August 2007, some other areas for potential cooperation were identified by him are:

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<sup>9</sup> Initial planning at the community centre had included solar power but other infrastructure was considered priority at that time.

- Training for SCC staff and the community in proposal writing and evaluation; together with the provision of books and other resources on these topics;
- Training in the establishment and management of small scale income generating projects;
- Short term visits from FoS Community Steering Group members and others to projects and to provide training for SCC staff in various skills areas;
- Increased cooperation between schools in CoPP and Suai, with a focus on the provision of appropriate books and other resources and exploring ways to develop friendships between children (recognising language is a real barrier);
- Construction of a guest house next to the Suai Community Centre to accommodate visitors from CoPP and elsewhere.

In addition to the above projects which ‘fit’ directly within the priority areas identified by SCC for the period that is the subject of this review, FoS is currently engaged in a number of other activities in support of Suai. These new initiatives, which are summarised below, are likely to be included in the FoS Strategic Plan 2008 -10:

### **Media**

- Launch of Suai Media space website – YoMatre
  - This website will be an interactive website – providing the ‘Suai story’ both pre and post Independence history and current narrative where visitors can publish their stories.
  - Hoped that students in Australia and in Suai will post information on this site. Aim to be fun, current, with history featuring short documentary film.
  - In Timor CD ROMs will be swapped with Australia until the website can be accessed via the internet or intranet.
- On going support for the Suai Media Unit & Theatre Group
  - Developing skills in community education film making e.g documenting health, agricultural and cultural information relevant to the community
- Supporting Community Radio in Covalima
  - Establishing the infrastructure to go to air in 2008.

### **Culture**

- Textile Exhibition & Forum September 2008
  - Valuing the role of women and textile in East Timor
  - Fashion and marketing both international & domestic
  - Exhibition of traditional and authentic weaving.
- Traditional Tais Project
  - Council commissioned a traditional Tais to be made for the new St Kilda Town Hall made with cotton thread dyed using the traditional methods.
  - The plant for the dye will be planted and harvested for this process.
  - Older women to teach younger ones method to produce the textile CoPP.
- Film Festival Day of East Timor Films.

## 5 Conclusions

### 5.1 Assessment of Work Undertaken by FoS in 2004-07

This review has found that the Friendship Agreement established between the City of Port Phillip and Suai is an excellent example of a mutually beneficial community level partnership. The good working relationships and trust that are now evident between the two communities provide a firm basis on which to develop further joint program activities which can make a significant contribution to sustainable development within Suai and the wider Covalima region.

Major achievements during 2004 -07, which is the focus of this study, include:

- Capacity strengthening within the Suai Community Centre and the Suai Youth Centre and increased development awareness and commitment amongst FoS CSG members concerning Timor Leste and the Covalima region;
- Implementation of appropriately targeted, small-scale, community support and training, particularly in education; agro-forestry; solar panel installation and computer technology, and innovative media arts programs and website design;
- Development of strong connections between FoS and its partners in Suai, with a number of community agencies, groups and social enterprises located: in CoPP e.g. Rotary South; in neighbouring municipalities, e.g. Alternative Technology Association, Infoxchange, Jewish Aid Australia, Balwyn Rotary, Oxfam; and in other locations e.g. City of Kiama [A more extensive list of community partners is provided in Annex 3];
- Valuable groundwork undertaken in engaging some sectors of the CoPP community to support the FoS program e.g. with Elwood College; and
- Facilitation of the involvement of some sectors of the CoPP community and engagement of individual citizens through donations; volunteering on the CSG or helping with promotion and fundraising; and attending forums and events.

These are significant accomplishments, especially since they have been achieved with very limited staffing and project resources and a voluntary committee. Most importantly, solid links have now been established between the two communities at a variety of different levels. One significant outcome resulting from these relationships is that the Suai partners are now well placed to manage and sustain a wide range of project activities, supported by CoPP and/or other external funding agencies.

However, the review has also highlighted a number of areas where there is scope to further enhance some aspects, in particular strengthening community engagement within CoPP. In addition, greater focus on joint strategic planning would increase program effectiveness overall. Key opportunities are summarised below.

## 5.2 Recommendations

A variety of opportunities now exist for the City of Port Phillip and the Suai community to advance the valuable work already undertaken through this Friendship Agreement. These initiatives have a strong potential to achieve a wide range of sustainable development benefits for the people of Suai, as well as enhancing development awareness and community connectedness within the CoPP itself.

This report summarises the views of different stakeholder groups concerning this potential. However, for these outcomes to be realised, continued infrastructure support to maintain the Suai Community Centre, including staffing and administrative resources, along with an ongoing commitment to fund the FoS Coordinator position within the City of Port Phillip, is required. On the basis of the review findings the following recommendations are proposed.

### 5.2.1 For the Friends of Suai Community Steering Group

#### In Suai

- Strengthen joint planning between FoS and SCC through the development of a shared strategy plan to guide ongoing program activities;
- Explore ways to provide a greater level of support for project work in targeted areas such as education, technical training, agriculture, environment and media arts development, while remaining open to new project initiatives which emerge in response to identified needs in Suai/Covalima;
- Provide ongoing skills development support to the SCC and SYC in a range of areas, in response to their expressed priorities.

#### Building a Sustainable Support Base in CoPP

- Better inform and utilise the skills of those within CoPP who are willing to donate time, money and/or resources in support of the people of Suai;
- Increase the level of information and support given to schools and community agencies willing to assist with fundraising, provide appropriate resources and conduct community awareness raising activities;
- Link FoS with existing events and activities and encourage greater involvement and support from local traders and businesses;
- Work with interested schools and community based groups to “package-up” specific projects that can be used by these partners to educate their constituents about the situation in Timor Leste and to attract their involvement and support;
- Investigate ways to facilitate: exposure programs, student to student communications and short-term visits by skilled professionals willing to provide hands-on training support, combining this with preparation programs for participants (n.b. recognising CSG’s resource limitations and exploring ways to assist other bodies to develop programs of this nature); and
- Publicise mechanisms for workplace giving and encourage local employers to enable interested staff to provide a few hours of voluntary assistance per year to FoS during working hours.

## 5.2.2 For the City of Port Phillip Council

It is recommended that the City of Port Phillip Council reaffirm its commitment to the 10 year Friendship Agreement, acknowledging that a firm foundation has now been laid on which to:

- Strengthen existing connections and establish a broader range of ‘people to people’ linkages between the two communities.
- Enhance community benefits both in Suai and in CoPP.

In line with this, recognition should be given to the fact that development is a long-term process that needs to be adequately resourced if sustainable benefits are to be achieved. For this reason, Council is encouraged to extend its current commitment to the Friendship Agreement for a further period. The timeframe of an additional decade was proposed by a several stakeholders, with Council maintaining its existing funding allocation for the program at roughly the same level as the present time. This includes continued support for the Suai Community Centre and staff, and for the FoS Coordinator based in Port Phillip.

As well as this increased support could be provided to the Friends of Suai Community Steering Group in the following areas, some of which have been already outlined above:

- Manage internal resources to support the work of the FoS Program Coordinator to increase the level of engagement with individuals, community based groups, local businesses and schools in CoPP. This could include assistance to develop a communication strategy; promotion of activities and achievements; and support with event management.
- Consider introducing a leading edge scheme for Council staff to volunteer a small number of work hours per year to assist with FoS administration, promotion, fundraising and project activities.
- Publicise the mechanism by which Council staff can regularly donate funds to FoS through a ‘workplace giving’ arrangement.
- Encourage Council staff to participate in short-term skill sharing and exposure programs facilitated by FoS in Suai.

It is also suggested that Council seize the opportunity presented by the 10 year anniversary of the Friendship Agreement to host a celebratory event which brings together some of the key people who were instrumental in the establishment of this unique expression of municipal and community level solidarity. This occasion could be marked with: a formal public event; a series of community level festivities hosted by organisations and schools that have been involved in the FoS Program; and a publication and/or documentary celebrating the highlights and main achievements of the partnership during its first decade.

These activities could draw attention to the importance of relationships built with Timor Leste in troubled times and beyond and foreshadow key areas for ongoing program development which can grow with the expansion and further deepening of the friendship.

## References

City of Port Phillip (2004), *Redefining Success and Failure: An account of the Friendship Agreement and ongoing relationship between the communities of Port Phillip, Australia and Suai, East Timor.*

Dr R. Spence and F. Ninnes (2005). *Building Relationships across the Timor Sea: An Evaluation of the Australia/Timorese Friendship Agreements.* University of New England, Armidale, NSW.

Alternative Technology Association Newsletters and promotional material (2008). Melbourne.

## **ANNEX 1**

### **Friends of Suai Survey, October 2007**

**1a) How did you first hear about Friends of Suai?**

- In the local paper
- In the City Of Port Philip newsletter
- On the City Of Port Philip website
- At a local event/activity in the City of Port Philip
- Via the East Timor network
- On the radio
- Word of mouth eg. from a friend
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

**1b) In what year did you first become involved in Friends of Suai?**

- I first became involved in Friends of Suai in 200\_\_
- As yet I have not really been involved in Friends of Suai.

**2. Why did you decide to become involved in Friends of Suai?**

*Please tick as many of these boxes as apply to you*

- It provided me with an opportunity to participate in a local initiative
- It provided me with an opportunity to meet like-minded people in my local area

- I was interested in overseas aid and development issues
  - I wanted to support the people of East Timor
  - It provided a way for me to develop links with people in East Timor
  - It provided a way for me to support and/or develop links with people in Suai, in particular
  - Before becoming involved with Friends of Suai I was previously associated with East Timor/Suai in the following way
- 
- 

### **3. What kind of involvement have you had with Friends of Suai so far?**

*Please tick as many of these boxes as apply to you*

- Received the FOS newsletter or other relevant information
- Made a donation       Attended a FOS event / function in the City of Port Philip
- Hosted a presentation / talk about Friends of Suai
- Been a volunteer eg. helped out in the FOS Office, helped to arrange an event etc.
- Been a member of the FOS Committee
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

**4. How satisfied are you with the level of involvement that you have been able to have with Friends of Suai?**

The opportunities available for me to be involved with Friends of Suai have:

- More than satisfied my expectations                       Satisfied my expectations
- Been less than satisfactory for me.

**5. Would you like to be involved in Friends of Suai in 2008?**

- YES     NO

Please comment

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**6. Do you have any suggestions about other activities that you would like Friends of Suai to undertake in the future?**

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To assist us in our future planning, we would like to follow up a small number of respondents by telephone. If you are prepared for us to contact you, please provide your name and contact details below. If we are unable to contact you on this occasion, please be assured that this written response is greatly appreciated.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Organisation (if relevant) \_\_\_\_\_

Phone No. \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_ Best time/s for us to call \_\_\_\_\_

**THANKYOU FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION**

## ANNEX 2

### Follow-up to Initial Survey

Respondent Name \_\_\_\_\_

Organisation (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

1. In your response you indicated that the main reason(s) that you decided to become involved in FoS was [fill gap as per survey feedback]

You also said that to date you have been involved in FoS in the following ways [fill gap as per survey feedback]

It seems from your survey response that you have been: more than satisfied   
satisfied  less than satisfied  with the involvement that you have had with  
FoS so far. Can you tell me more about this?

2. Are there any particular issues that you would like to raise about FoS, or do you have any suggestions about ways in which it could improved?

3. You have indicated that you would like to be involved in FoS in 2008. Can you tell me any particular ways that you would like to be involved?

4. Do you have any particular skills that you would like to offer? What are these?

5. There are a number of areas where FoS currently needs voluntary support. I am interested to know if you would be able to contribute in any of the following ways:

#### Administration

- Help to maintain the FoS mailing list
- Help with bookkeeping?
- Assist with info technology eg. website redesign or maintenance?
- Help out with general administrative work? What in particular?

#### Promotion

- Help with general FoS promotional activities
- Organise a speaker for a community meeting

Documentation

- Assist with writing tasks eg. preparing submissions and reports?

Event Management

- Help to plan or conduct FoS activities locally?
- Help to organise the showing of films about East Timor

Fundraising

- Establish a local network for E Timor coffee sales?
- Help with fundraising at local events
- Help to raise funds and in-kind support from local traders or business

Other

Do you have any other ideas about ways in which you could provide voluntary support to FoS?

6. Is there anything else that you would like to add that you think the FoS Committee should consider when it develops its Strategic Plan (2008-10)?

**THANKYOU FOR SPEAKING WITH ME**

## ANNEX 3

### FRIENDS OF SUAI PROJECT ACTIVITIES 2004 - 07<sup>10</sup>

Project	Year	Partner Organisation
Renovation of Suai Community Centre (SCC) and staffing	2004 - 07	Australian Volunteers International
Computer and English classes	2004 - 05	
Support for Australian Volunteers working with SCC and SYC	2004 - 05	Australian Volunteers International
4 WD vehicle and maintenance	2007	Balwyn Rotary
Construction of school building walls and school equipment		Rotary South
Construction of pre schools		Rotary South
Nutrition project & drought relief	2004 - 06	FoS Balwyn Rotary
Nutrition Centre Kitchen	2005 - 06	
Sewing Project Level 1 & 2	2006 - 07	
Mechanics project	2005	
Nursery - Reafforestation	2006-7	
Orphan Education scholarships and support people with special needs	2007	Jewish Aid Australia
300 school chairs for the Suai Public Secondary School	2007	
Suai Youth Centre	2004 -07	
District Youth Congress	2004	
Youth projects (Football Assoc, Youth Congress)	2004	
Youth Media Centre training: Yo Ma Tre	2006 - 07	Jen Hughes CSG member & Independent filmmaker
Suai Media Space website	2006 - 07	Jen Hughes as above

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<sup>10</sup> This list only includes projects supported by CoPP in 2004 – 2007. A number of other projects have been implemented in 2008.

Computers for SCC and Suai SYC & computer refurbishment with ET students	2006	Infoxchange, Australia
Small activities fund (SCC)	2007	
Toolbox for community centre	2007	
Facilitation students: Camanasa report	2005 - 06	Engineers without Borders
Media Training	2007	Marcus Salvagno & Caydene (Chilli) & ET Timor Womens' Association
Solar panels for SCC & SYC, Fohorem health centre	2006	Alternative Technology Assoc
Solar panels for four health clinics: Fatuluik, Fatumean, Tilomar, Macteur	2007	Alternative Technology Assoc
Zumalai Health Clinic supplied and installed by local Suai technicians	2007	Alternative Technology and City of Kiama, Friends of Zumalai
Bibi Bulak drama group	2006-7	Bibi Bulak, Dili
Survey of Covalima schools	2006	East Timor Development Agency, Dili
IDP refugee support	2006	Alola Foundation Dili
Community radio, solar panels & battery	2004 / 2007	Alternative Technology Assoc

### **Friendship & Exchange Visits**

Visit to Friends of Baucau by AVI and SCC staff, 2004.

CoPP visit, May 2005.

SYC Coordinator visit to Melbourne, VU Conference on Timor Leste, June 2005.

CSG member mentoring visit to support new SCC Assistant Coordinator, Sept 2005.

CSG member visit re Scholarship program, 2005.

CoPP representatives visit Suai, 2005.

Facilitation of Melbourne University student - Luisa film, 2005/6.

Visit by Engineers without Borders, February 2005 & 2006.

CSG Chairperson visit in association with Austcare, 2006.

CSG member and FoS Coordinator visit with Media training, February 2006.

ATA visit and needs assessment, January 2006.

Violence and ADF in Suai – communication and visit by CSG member, Aug 2006.

Visit by CoPP representatives with the ATA, 2006.

Brigid Buick & Luke Gaynor, CSG members extended visit to Suai, 2006.

FoS Coordinator visit to Suai with Austcare, Dili Institute and AVI, February 2007.