

# NEWS RELEASE



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## POWERING UP EAST TIMOR

Rebuilt computers and new solar panels are being packed up today and sent to East Timor as part of an important new project initiated by the Friends of Suai and supported by the City of Port Phillip. In 2000, the Port Phillip community pledged to help rebuild Suai, a small coastal town almost completely destroyed by Indonesian-backed militia during the independence the year before.

Under a partnership between two not-for-profit organisations, the Alternative Technology Association (ATA) and Infoxchange Australia, six students from the Dili Institute of Technology in East Timor, who are currently in Melbourne as part of a training program with Infoxchange, will learn how to utilise solar power. When they return to Dili, the East Timorese will set up a social enterprise called Tulun Dili that will provide local communities with access to affordable computers and technology. Using an alternative power source will assist the social enterprise to facilitate accessibility to technology in East Timor.

St Kilda Ward councillor, Karen Sait, represents the council on the Friends of Suai, and said that the students are being trained to set up an enterprise similar to Infoxchange in East Timor.

“Technology can be married with social justice. The computers for Suai are part of an ongoing computer training program to help young East Timorese become computer literate. The students could be the nucleus for setting up IT help and hardware across the country,” she said.

“The computers are to be programmed with free Linux software which the students are currently translating into Tetum. The students are also undertaking training in the maintenance of the solar panels.”

ATA has provided solar panels at half price through industry sponsorship and a troop of ATA volunteers will head over in October to use their expertise and install the solar panels to power-up the community centres.

Cr Sait said that the recent troubles in East Timor highlighted the need to educate and train young East Timorese. “Half the population of East Timor is under the age of 21 and around 75 per cent are under the age of 27. Most have a scanty education at least. Computer training is crucial for their future and the future of the whole country,” she said.

Friends of Suai are supporting both a youth centre and a community centre in Suai. Both will receive solar panels and new computers. The solar panels will also power the transmitter for the local

community radio station and the health clinic in the mountains outside Suai that has no electricity at all and can't operate at night.

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