



9.1 **FRIENDS OF SUAI/COVALIMA ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22**

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: **ALLISON KENWOOD, GENERAL MANAGER, COMMUNITY WELLBEING AND INCLUSION**

PREPARED BY: **CARLENE HARLOCK, COORDINATOR FRIENDS OF SUAI/COVALIMA**

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To present the Friends of Suai/Covalima (FoSC) 2021/22 Annual Report (Attachment 1) and inform Council of the achievements over the last financial year.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 In September 2020, Council formally reaffirmed its Friendship with Covalima district, signing a ten-year Friendship Agreement for 2020-30. This was the third consecutive ten-year agreement, initially signed in 2000.
- 2.2 The Friendship Agreement comprises a Statement of Friendship and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The Statement of Friendship outlines the nature and intent of the friendship to utilise skills and knowledge in both communities and in doing so, empower both to manage their shared future. The supporting MOU maintains a formal arrangement for Council's relationship with government representatives in Suai.
- 2.3 In September 2020, Council also endorsed the FoSC 2020-25 Strategic Plan. This plan has a strong focus on strengthening capacity of the Covalima Community Centre (CCC) in Suai and ensuring its sustainability.
- 2.4 The FoSC 2021/22 Annual Report is aligned to the FoSC 2020-25 Strategic Plan and details activities of the Friendship. These include events and fundraising in the Port Phillip community, and the achievements of the educational, health, social and environmental programs implemented at the CCC.
- 2.5 CoPP program funding for FoSC includes a grant to the CCC for core operational costs including; staffing, communication, transport, administration and hosting community meetings. A transition plan for the Friends of Suai was endorsed by Council in December 2021 that will progressively reduce the access to and reliance on this direct funding.
- 2.6 Fundraising and donations to FoSC support community development initiatives in Covalima, implemented by the CCC. In 2021/22, fundraising activities and community donations contributed \$74,000 to programs in Covalima district. Funds and items were donated for the scholarship program, the Suai Secondary School library, the Vulnerable Persons Unit safe house in Suai and for the With One Seed reforestation program.
- 2.7 The establishment and growth of the CCC in Suai is one of the primary legacies of the friendship with the Centre continuing to grow its capacity and capability. In setting out the achievements of the FoSC over the last 12 months, the Annual Report recognises



the increasing capacity of the leadership team at the CCC in Suai and their efforts to implement sustainable programs and activities that meet the needs of local communities.

3. RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 3.1 Endorse the 2021/22 Friends of Suai/Covalima (FoSC) Annual Report (Attachment 1).
- 3.2 Acknowledge the on-going work of the FoSC Community Reference Committee and thank the Committee for its efforts.
- 3.3 Acknowledge the work of the Covalima Community Centre throughout 2021/22 and the role it has played in enhancing the lives of the Suai/Covalima community.

4. KEY POINTS/ISSUES

- 4.1 The City of Port Phillip established a relationship with the coastal town of Suai in Covalima district, Timor-Leste 22 years ago. The relationship was formed in response to the mass destruction and killings that occurred after the Timorese people voted for independence in 1999. In response to expressed concern from the Port Phillip community, a friendship was developed with Suai and the district of Covalima.
- 4.2 The Friendship has been formally recognised through three ten-year Friendship Agreements, initially signed in 2000. In September 2020, Council reaffirmed its Friendship with Covalima district through a third ten-year Friendship Agreement for 2020-30.
- 4.3 The Friendship Agreement comprises a Statement of Friendship and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The Statement of Friendship outlines the nature and intent of the friendship to utilise skills and knowledge in both communities and in doing so, empower both to manage their shared future. The supporting MOU maintains a formal arrangement for Council's relationship with government representatives in Suai.
- 4.4 The Friendship Agreement is complemented by a Municipal Cooperation Agreement of which the City of Port Phillip is a signatory, along with 14 other local councils in Victoria. This agreement, signed by the Mayor and CEO of Port Phillip in April 2016, provides a framework for building local government in Timor-Leste.
- 4.5 In September 2020, Council also endorsed the FoSC 2020-25 Strategic Plan. This plan has a strong focus on strengthening capacity at the CCC and support for its future financial independence.
- 4.6 The FoSC 2021/22 Annual Report is aligned to the FoSC 2020-25 Strategic Plan and details activities and achievements of the Friendship during the last financial year. These include fundraising and events in Port Phillip and successful community development initiatives implement by the Covalima Community Centre (CCC) to benefit communities in Covalima. Highlights include:



- FoSC fundraising and community donations contributed \$74,000 to support community development programs implemented through the CCC in Suai. This includes more than \$11,000 raised at a successful trivia night held at Middle Park Bowls Club in March 2022.
 - The *Art of Friendship* exhibition at Carlisle Street Arts Space which celebrated the 20-year anniversary of friendship and featured artwork from local artists from Port Phillip and Timor-Leste.
 - Planting of a further 26,600 trees in Covalima as part of the With One Seed carbon reforestation program funded by FoSC. This successful program is now being replicated throughout Timor-Leste with financial support from the EU Rai Matak (Green Land) program.
 - The CCC played a pivotal role in the District COVID-19 taskforce response, including advocating for vaccine access and uptake, and providing ongoing hygiene training to promote handwashing and hygienic practices.
 - The CCC distributed much-needed food relief packages to 220 households in remote villages isolated due to flood damage and pandemic travel restrictions. This project was funded through FoSC and international NGO Give2Asia.
 - Donations of CoPP computers through Council’s disposal program ensure the sustainability of the IT Social Enterprise at the CCC, and ensure access to affordable computers and training in Covalima.
- 4.7 The establishment and growth of the CCC in Suai is one of the primary legacies of the friendship. The CCC is growing in capacity and capability with the support of the City of Port Phillip and is now a registered NGO, an accredited training centre and has formal partnerships with international NGOs and development agencies.

5. CONSULTATION AND STAKEHOLDERS

- 5.1 The 2021/22 Annual Report has been prepared with FoSC Community Reference Committee Chairperson, Megs Alston; Treasurer, Michael Henry; and Covalima Community Centre Director, Alberto de Jesus Barros.

6. LEGAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no known legal and risk implications.

7. FINANCIAL IMPACT

- 7.1 The FoSC 2021/22 Annual Report is written and produced by the Coordinator of FoSC. There is no expense other than officer time associated with the production.
- 7.2 The budget allocation for the FoSC program for the 2021/22 financial year was \$60,000 and a 0.6 FTE position to coordinate the program and relationship between the Port Phillip and Covalima communities.
- 7.3 The FoSC program funding for the Community Centre is used for core operational costs including staffing, communication, transport, administration and hosting community meetings. Funds are also provided for an annual external financial audit of



the CCC. This funding has allowed the CCC to form partnerships with local and international organisations to implement programs and build capacity.

- 7.4 In December 2021, Council endorsed a Transition Plan to reduce funding to FoSC by 25% each year, with all direct funding reduced by 2025/26. FTE resource to support the program will also transition to 0.4 FTE for the 2024-25 year, and to 0.2 FTE for the 2025-26 year.
- 7.5 FoSC fundraising activities and community donations contributed \$74,000 to support programs in Covalima district. Funds and items were donated for the scholarship program, the Suai Secondary School library, the Vulnerable Persons Unit safe house in Suai and for the With One Seed reforestation program.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 8.1 FoSC is committed to sustainable practices and has supported the establishment and expansion of a new reforestation initiative called With One Seed. With One Seed is the first internationally certified carbon program in Timor-Leste. It involves working with subsistence farming communities to plant thousands of trees on deforested land over the coming years. Farmers receive education and training on planting and maintaining the trees and an annual income from the sale of carbon credits. More than 45,000 trees have now been grown in the FoSC funded nursery and distributed to local farmers.
- 8.2 The FoSC funded water, sanitation and hygiene project at Suai Secondary School is providing running water and toilets for more than 2,200 students. Households in nearby villages are also connected to the community water tank which provides access to fresh water. With support from FoSC and the CCC, the school has established a management committee to ensure the sustainability of the water supply and facilities.
- 8.3 The CCC is working with rural communities to increase food security and to develop resilience to the changing climate by encouraging land and water conservation, risk assessment and reforestation.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 9.1 The FoSC is a community-initiated commitment that supports an enriching relationship for both Port Phillip and Suai/Covalima communities. The friendship provides Port Phillip residents with the opportunity to engage in international relations with one of our closest neighbours, Timor-Leste, and experience mutual learning and understanding through acting locally and thinking globally.
- 9.2 The FoSC program provides the opportunity for understanding good governance, community participation and sharing of best practice in civil administration, both in Timor-Leste and in the Port Phillip community.
- 9.3 The FoSC Community Reference Committee (CRC) is a formal advisory group to Council and is supported and resourced by the FoSC Coordinator. More than 15 residents regularly attend meetings and organise events in the City of Port Phillip. The CRC also assess project initiatives to ensure the Friendship pursues best practice in international development.
- 9.4 Port Phillip residents have provided time, skills, money and friendship, ensuring the relationship is based on community-to-community links. The Friendship engages



residents, service clubs, churches and educational institutions in Port Phillip to connect with and support our friends in Timor-Leste.

- 9.5 Fundraising, cultural events and public meetings have ensured participation and engagement in the community; attracting residents, Councillors and staff, and the Timor-Leste network in Victoria. Port Phillip residents are kept informed and engaged with the friendship through program updates, social media, event invitations and opportunities to donate.
- 9.6 Donations of second-hand computers by City of Port Phillip, supplemented by community donations, ensure the continuing operation of the IT Social Enterprise at the CCC. Income is generated through the delivery of training programs and the computers are sold at affordable prices to students and families.
- 9.7 Scholarships funded through community donations have provided over 169 scholarships since 2012 to students from Covalima district to further their education at senior secondary, vocational and tertiary levels. Covalima district is one of the poorest in Timor-Leste and the scholarship program is providing access to education and preparing students for future employment.
- 9.8 The CCC has an excellent reputation for their work in promoting gender equality, social inclusion and advocacy across all programs. The Rural Women's Development Program at the Centre supports incoming generating activities for more than 100 women and provides leadership and empowerment training for women elected in village councils.

10. ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICY

10.1 Since 2000, the FoSC Friendship Agreement and program have been guided by and aligned to the strategic goals of each Council Plan.

10.2 This program aligns with two of the Strategic Directions in the 2021-31 Council Plan:

Strategic Direction 1 – Inclusive Port Phillip, Initiatives:

We will provide:

- client services and programs that are inclusive and accessible for all, including people who identify as LGBTIQ+, people with disability, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Indigenous backgrounds, and people experiencing homelessness.

Strategic Direction 5 – Well Governed Port Phillip, Initiatives:

We will provide:

- opportunities for our community to participate in civic life and help share Council policy, services, programs and decisions by facilitating engagement in line with Council's Community Engagement Policy.

10.3 The FoSC Community Reference Committee is a formal advisory group to Council, providing community members the opportunity to participate in civic life to inform Council decision making. The CRC work with the CCC and local government in Suai to provide good governance for the benefit and wellbeing of its community.



11. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

11.1 TIMELINE

11.1.1 The FoSC Annual Report will be presented at the Annual Meeting of the FoSC Community Reference Committee in November 2022.

11.2 COMMUNICATION

11.2.1 If endorsed by Council, the FoSC Annual Report will be distributed to FoSC members, donors, partners and supporters, and will be made accessible on Council's website (FoSC webpage).

12. OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT INTEREST

12.1 No officers involved in the preparation of this report have any material or general interest in the matter.

TRIM FILE NO:

ATTACHMENTS

1. Friends of Suai Covalima 2021/22 Annual Report