

# Friends of Suai news



Tuesday 1 April 2025

## Message from the Chair

We hope you enjoy reading this quarterly newsletter with updates on our friendship activities in Port Phillip and Covalima.

We remain committed to supporting our friends in Suai and funding initiatives that benefit the people of Covalima. Funds raised by Friends of Suai support the Covalima Community Centre in Suai so that it can maintain its crucial services, including facilitating the successful scholarship program.

**Donating to Friends of Suai is a powerful way to contribute to Timor Leste's development, promote equality and help build a brighter future for its people.**

[Donate to Friends of Suai via Give Now](#)

## News from Port Phillip

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### Successful trivia night

On Thursday 20 March, we had a very successful trivia night at the Middle Park Bowls Club and raised over \$10,750! Many people contributed to make the night a huge success, including many local businesses and individuals who provided items for the silent auction and raffle. We are also extremely grateful to the CoPP staff volunteers and to Mayor Cr Louise Crawford for her terrific work as Quiz Master.

All funds raised will help to ensure that the Covalima Community Centre can continue to implement sustainable community development programs, with a strong focus on education, health, gender equality, livelihoods and the environment.



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## Remembering Patsy Thatcher

Our friend and mentor Patsy Thatcher passed away on 19 November 2024. Patsy was a founding member on the Friends of Suai Committee in 2000 and remained active for over a decade. She was generous with her deep knowledge of East Timor and anthropology, and opened her home to many Timorese visitors.

Patsy was deeply committed during the Timorese journey to self-determination and her contribution was recognised by National Government of Timor-Leste. You can read the full tribute here:

[Statement on the passing of Patsy Thatcher « Government of Timor-Leste](#)

Vale Patsy.

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## Farewell to Carlene

On 4 December last year the Friends of Suai/Covalima gathered at the Emerald Hotel, South Melbourne to sadly farewell Carlene after **seven** years as Co-ordinator. In acknowledging her service. Megs Alston, Chair of FOSC, thanked Carlene for her exemplary work and strong commitment to the Friends of Suai/Covalima's goals and wished her well for her next challenge. *"As well as being privileged to support East Timor through the Friends group it is the friendships we have developed working together that I value the most"* Carlene said. Carlene was presented with a vase and a beautiful silk scarf, handcrafted by FOSC member Liz Milsom, to remind her forever of the appreciation of people of 'Suai' and 'St Kilda' of her contribution.

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## Upcoming events

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### **Celebrating 25 years of Friendships**

2025 is the anniversary of the Friendships which were formed to support Timorese communities after the devastation when the Indonesians left in 1999. The movement grew to about 40 friendships, each with a distinct focus of activity and way of working. Sadly a number of these groups have been unable to survive due to lack of funding and an ageing membership.

The first friendships formed were Friends of Suai, Friends of Aileu and Friends of Baucau, each with Friendship Agreements signed by Xanana Gusmão when he was in Melbourne on 4 May 2000. A special event will be held to celebrate this occasion at Coburg Town Hall, involving councillors from all three councils, on 6 May.

A Friendship Conference for the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary will be held in Dili. It is being organised jointly by the Ministry of State Administration in Dili and the Australia Timor Leste Friendship Network in Australia. FoSC will have a small participation of self-funded members together with a delegation from the CCC from Suai.

## News from Suai, Timor-Leste

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### **Graduation ceremony for Baucau Teachers College**

A graduation ceremony was held in March for students who have successfully completed their third or fourth year of primary school teaching. Scholarship recipients Meliana & Emmanuel (pictured left and right) have completed their fourth year and are now embarking on their careers teaching the next generation. Elizia (centre) and Elvira have completed their third year and are now underway with their final year of study and are on teaching placements. We wish them all great success and send our congratulations.

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### Teaching placement in Suai

Elvira is currently undertaking a two month teaching placement at the Caicido Catholic Basic Education School in Baucau Municipality. The objective of this placement is to deepen her understanding of teaching methodology and gain practical experience and knowledge from other teachers.

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### Hospitality students preparing for employment

Friends of Suai is funding scholarships for students at the local Canossian Vocational Training Centre in Suai to complete a Certificate in Hospitality. There have been fantastic employment outcomes for students who complete this course. The photo below shows students practising their skills in table setting and serving.

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### **International Women's Day celebration**

Each year the Rural Women's Development Program team at the CCC, funded by IWDA, organise a commemorative event to celebrate International Women's Day. Last year the team decided to extend their outreach by holding forums in more remote sub-districts of Covalima. This year a forum was held in Fatumean with a range of speakers presenting under the theme 'Women are ready to lead in all areas'. Guest speakers included CCC Commission President Sgt Amelia de Jesus Amaral (pictured) who spoke passionately about gender equality. More than 170 people attended the forum and positive feedback was received.

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### **Rai Matak (With One Seed) expansion**

The Rai Matak team at the CCC continue to work with subsistence farmers in Tilomar sub-district to plant and maintain trees. In 2025, Rai Matak is expanding into the two sub-districts of Fatumea and Fatululic. New staff have been recruited and are undergoing extensive training from the Rai Matak team in Dili and Baguia. The Rai Matak have begun extensive community engagement in the new areas to ensure that communities fully understand the initiative. Locations for nurseries are also being sourced. We look forward to sharing more information on this fantastic initiative which is bringing much needed income into subsistence farming communities.



## Stay connected

The friendship between the Port Phillip and Covalima communities is a relationship that goes beyond the usual concept of financial aid. It connects the community in the City of Port Phillip with the community of Suai/Covalima in order to enrich and enhance the lives of all involved. The participation of the community is key to the success of the friendship.

Get involved by volunteering your time, making a donation or attending our events. All are welcome.



## Making donations

All funds raised will ensure the Covalima Community Centre in Suai can continue to implement community development programs. Donations can be made via the following methods:

### Direct deposit (preferred method)

Commonwealth Bank account  
Acct Name: Friends of Suai Donations  
BSB: 063 243  
Acct: 1034 3552

### Online via the Friends of Suai Covalima

🔗 [givenow.com.au/cause1266](https://givenow.com.au/cause1266)  
(fees apply)

## Bequests

You can make a bequest in your will to the Covalima Community Centre in Suai as it is an incorporated body (unlike Friends of Suai). This is a wonderful way to make a lasting impact to benefit future generations. You can obtain advice from your legal adviser about doing this, and for general information please email [friendsofsuai@portphillip.vic.gov.au](mailto:friendsofsuai@portphillip.vic.gov.au)

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