



9.1 FRIENDS OF SUAI/COVALIMA ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

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

PREPARED BY: CARLENE HARLOCK, COMMUNITY BUILDING FRIENDS OF SUAI/COVALIMA

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To present the Friends of Suai/Covalima (FoSC) 2022/23 Annual Report (Attachment 1) and inform Council of the achievements over the last financial year.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 FoSC is a Community Reference Committee (CRC) and works in partnership with the Covalima Community Centre (CCC) in Suai, East Timor to meet the aims and objectives of the Friendship Agreement between the City of Port Phillip and Covalima communities.
- 2.2 In September 2020, Council formally reaffirmed its Friendship with Covalima district, East Timor, signing a ten-year Friendship Agreement for 2020-30. This was the third consecutive ten-year agreement, initially signed in 2000.
- 2.3 COPP program funding for FoSC includes a grant to the CCC for core operational costs including: staffing, communication, administration and hosting community meetings. A transition plan for the Friends of Suai was endorsed by Council in December 2021. The transition plan translates to a reduction of direct funding support for the partnership over time.
- 2.4 The FoSC 2022/23 Annual Report is aligned to the FoSC 2020-25 Strategic Plan (Attachment 2) and details activities of the Friendship. These include events and fundraising in the Port Phillip community.
- 2.5 Strengthening the CCC and its programs is a key focus of the Strategic Plan. The achievements of the CCC and the implementation of educational, health, social and environmental programs are included in the Annual Report.
- 2.6 Highlights of the FoSC achievements in 2022/23 include significant fundraising activities, educational outcomes for Timorese community members to become nurses and mid-wives, increased community IT capacity, securing of sustainable income production from forestry carbon capture and disaster preparation activities.
- 2.7 The establishment and growth of the CCC in Suai is one of the primary legacies of the friendship with City of Port Phillip. The CCC is growing in capacity and is now a registered NGO, an accredited training centre and has formal partnerships with international NGOs and development agencies.

3. RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 3.1 Endorses the 2022/23 Friends of Suai/Covalima (FoSC) Annual Report (Attachment 1).
- 3.2 Acknowledges the ongoing work of the FoSC Community Reference Committee and thanks the Committee for its work.
- 3.3 Acknowledges the work of the Covalima Community Centre throughout 2022/23 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 coast town of Suai in Covalima district East Timor in 2000. The relationship was formed after 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 consecutive 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 FoSC work in partnership with the CCC to meet the aims and objectives of the Friendship Agreement.
- 4.5 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 was signed by the Mayor and CEO in 2016 and provides a framework for building local government in East Timor.
- 4.6 The FoSC CRC is a formal advisory group to Council and is supported and resourced by the Community Building Officer Friends of Suai/Covalima. 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.
- 4.7 The work of FoSC is guided by the 2020-25 Strategic Plan which has a strong focus on strengthening capacity at the CCC and support for its future financial independence.
- 4.8 In December 2021, Council endorsed a transition plan whilst committing to in-kind support and ongoing assistance to the FoSC CRC. The transition plan would gradually reduce all direct grant funding to FoSC by 2025/26,
- 4.9 Highlights of the FoSC achievements in 2022/23 include:
 - 4.9.1 FoSC fundraising activities and community donations contributed \$43,633 to support programs in Covalima district and to contribute to core operational costs of the CCC. Funds and items were donated for the scholarship program, the With One Seed reforestation project, health programs, the Vulnerable Persons Unit safe house in Suai and computer training for rural women.
 - 4.9.2 A successful trivia night was held at Middle Park Bowls Club in April 2023, raising over \$14,000. There was great support from the Port Phillip community and Council, with 116 tickets sold and over \$5,500 worth of goods and services donated by local traders and residents.
 - 4.9.3 Donations of computers through Council's disposal program have been used to provide community training programs for 42 municipal government staff in Covalima and have ensured the sustainability of the IT Social Enterprise at the CCC.



- 4.9.4 The FoSC scholarship program has now provided 174 scholarships for students from disadvantaged families to further their education. All scholarships are fully funded, and many community members have contributed to this program. This year five young women completed their post-graduate studies in midwifery at the National University in Dili.
- 4.9.5 The Civic Health program at the CCC is playing a pivotal role to promote public health. One of their key actions is to implement disaster risk reduction activities in the most vulnerable communities in Covalima district impacted by extreme weather events.
- 4.9.6 During April 2023 a further 28,000 trees were planted as part of the With One Seed carbon reforestation initiative. This brings the total to 74,000 trees planted since the project started in 2019. This initiative is now being replicated throughout East Timor with financial support from the European Union's Rai Matak (Green Land) program.

5. CONSULTATION AND STAKEHOLDERS

- 5.1 The 2022/23 Annual Report has been prepared with FoSC Chairperson, Megs Alston; Treasurer, Michael Henry; and the CCC 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 2022/23 Annual Report is written and produced by the Community Building Officer Friends of Suai/Covalima. There is no expense other than officer time associated with the production.
- 7.2 The budget allocation for the FoSC program for the 2022/23 financial year was \$30,000 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 CCC is used for core operational costs including staffing, communication and transport. Funds are also provided to contribute to the annual financial audit, civic health program and training.
- 7.4 In December 2021, Council endorsed a Transition Plan to reduce funding to FoSC by 25% each year, with direct funding ceasing by 2025/26.
- 7.5 FoSC fundraising activities and community donations contributed \$43,633 to support operations of the CCC and direct programs in Covalima district. Funds and items were donated for the scholarship program, the Vulnerable Persons Unit safe house, health programs, the With One Seed reforestation program and computer training for rural women.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 8.1 FoSC is committed to sustainable practices and has supported the establishment and expansion of a reforestation initiative called With One Seed. This program works with subsistence farming communities to plant thousands of trees on deforested land over. More than 74,000 trees have been grown in the FoSC funded nursery and distributed to local farmers. The program is currently undergoing an audit for Gold Standard Certification so that the carbon captured in the trees can be sold on the international carbon market, generating income for farmers for many years.



- 8.2 The FoSC funded water, sanitation and hygiene project at the Suai Secondary School has provided running water and toilets for more than 2,200 students. The CCC Health Program Coordinator continues to monitor the facilities and work with the school to support a management committee to ensure the sustainability of the water supply and facilities.
- 8.3 The CCC has developed an excellent reputation for their work in Disaster Risk Reduction. They work with rural communities to develop resilience to the changing climate by providing information and training on land and water conservation and disaster preparedness planning.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 9.1 The Friendship is a community-initiated commitment that supports an enriching relationship for both the Port Phillip and Covalima communities. Residents can engage in international relations with one of our closest neighbours, East Timor.
- 9.2 The FoSC program provides the opportunity for understanding good governance, community participation and sharing of best practice in civil administration in East Timor and the Port Phillip community.
- 9.3 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 schools in Port Phillip to connect with and support our friends in East Timor.
- 9.4 Fundraising, cultural events and public meetings have ensured participation and engagement in the community, attracting residents, Councillors, staff and the East Timor 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.
- 9.5 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 computer training at the Centre and excess stock is sold at affordable prices to students and families.
- 9.6 Community donations have provided over 174 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 East Timor and the scholarship program is providing access to education and preparing students for future employment
- 9.7 The CCC has an excellent reputation for their work in promoting gender equality, inclusion and advocacy across all programs. The Rural Women's Development Program at the Centre supports income generating activities for more than 100 women and provides leadership and empowerment training for women to compete in village elections.

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, Initiative:



We will provide client services and programs that support inclusive and accessible activities including people who identify as LGBTQIA+, people with a disability, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Indigenous backgrounds and people experiencing homelessness.

Strategic Direction 5 – Well Governed Port Phillip, Initiative:

We will provide opportunities for our community to participate in civic life and help shape 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 and 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 later this year.

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.

ATTACHMENTS

- 1. Friends of Suai Covalima 2022/23 Annual Report**[↓](#)
- 2. Friends of Suai Covalima 2020-25 Strategic Plan**[↓](#)