

Timor-Leste Kindergarten

Kindy Box Project

'From little things big things grow'

The beginnings

Back in 2008 I travelled to Timor on an exploratory mission to see if there was anything we could do to help. I had recently joined the Rotary Club of Richmond and was confident that they would back me if I found the right project.

Sr Aurora Pires

And on that trip I met Sr Aurora Pires.

Born in Timor she had fled to Australia with her family at the time of the Indonesian invasion. She is a dynamo – who happens to be a trained kindergarten teacher. She returned to Timor on independence and has worked tirelessly since then to improve the standard of kindergartens.

She convinced me that one of their big needs was classroom resources – their classrooms were bare and teachers had little to support their teaching.

And so the Rotary Club of Richmond **Kindy Box Project** was born, just as Trevor was moving into Jean Marc's shoes as President.

...the little things start happening...



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What was in a Kindy Box?

To quote from the first ever Newsletter:

"...Stapler, hole punch, biros, black & coloured pencils, sharpeners, crayons, chalk, folder and paper, children's and adult scissors, string, bull clips and much more. Bill Dagg and DIK were able to supply some of these items (from the last census and Workchoices!). A prize inclusion is a bright yellow census satchel!

A box of Lego was also an essential item.



Some items were donated whilst others were purchased at cost price. The items were packed into an 80l container ..."

The Kindy Boxes were shipped through DIK, unpacked by the Rotary Liaison

Officer in Dili (Daryl) and distributed to 13 schools nominated by Sr Aurora as being needy but with International Directors who would be supportive of what we were trying to do.

A Kindy Box was costed at around \$100 – so the model was: sponsor a teacher at \$100 a box. We even sold Gift Certificates of \$100 value at Christmas time.



The first Kindy Box



A packing day

Timor-Leste Kindergarten

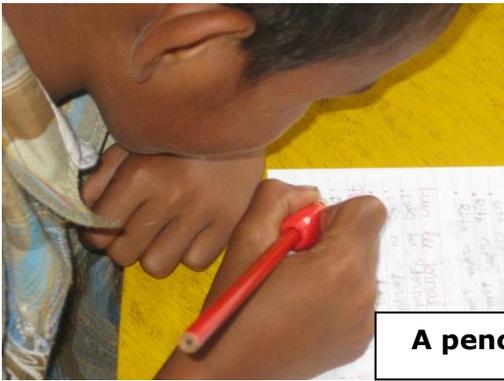
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And then?

... the little things start growing ...

As the project grew and we became more involved in teacher training, the *Kindy Box* needed to supply specific resources. They needed to match the curriculum: Handwriting, Reading to Children, Gross Motor, Fine Motor and Literacy.



A pencil grip

So we needed skipping ropes, bean bags, bats, balls, story books, pencils and grips, stencils, lacing cards, jigsaws, educational activity sheets and more. With our focus shifting to the strictly educational, there was less time to source donated items of a general nature.



A translated Story Book

Whilst members and friends of the Rotary Club had enjoyed the *networking* and *hands on* of packing Kindy Boxes, no one stepped forward at that time to take on the sourcing and co-ordination role, so this aspect of the project continued to drop off.

The other difficulty we were experiencing was storage – there's not a lot of double garages and sheds around the club! So resources had to be boxed as they were sourced and then sent to DIK for storage ('just in time').

How do we see the future?

... and growing ...

Trevor and I had always seen this as a project that would just keep growing.

But **we needed to keep the focus on training** – unless teachers had the knowledge, resources were next to useless as teachers didn't know what to do with them!

So both training and resources are essential, but the training becomes the project driver.

The \$ would also become an important factor when we started to spread our wings. More schools meant more dollars. And also, for sustainability, the Timorese had to have a more affordable model.

The generous and far sighted vision of President Rob in 2011 in agreeing to fund the *Kindy Boxes* for one more year gave us the time needed to closely scrutinize what we were sending and reduce it to the absolute minimum, particularly in terms of cost and labour. The outcome was a document specifying the essential items, their cost and source (that document was circulated to the club).

At this stage the minimum resources required cost about \$500 per classroom.



Fine Motor Skills activity

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Resource Kits

To distinguish the resources we now provide from the original Rotary Club of Richmond *Kindy Boxes*, the items currently given to a teacher are referred to as the **Resource Kit**.

So what next with resources?

With this new model emerging, responsibility and accountability are moving closer to the individual teachers. They will need to find funding for their resources, but now they can give a dollar value to it. We will source much of the *Resource Kit* content here but responsibility for distribution will shift to Timor.

This doesn't mean we won't continue to help or even sponsor a particular teacher ourselves, but the aim of the project is empowerment and that means gradually shifting responsibility to Timor.

However, we recognize there are two emerging areas we still have to address in Australia:

1. The existing group of schools will soon need to top up their consumables and replace items at their end-of-life.

2. The new schools that are coming on board have very little in their classrooms and the *Resource Kits* that we are supplying, whilst meeting specific subject needs, are really not enough to set up an activity based classroom.

In particular they will need resources for creative activities: dress ups, building blocks, lego, jigsaws, quiet reading books, cars, trucks, dolls, toys, plastic people, animals etc. All of which can be found second hand.

It is the second need that I would like to draw to your attention in this Newsletter.

In order to provide the new teachers entering our training with activity based learning resources we could reinvigorate the original *Kindy Box* concept: source second hand items of general educational value to be shipped across to the new schools. **Is there a group within the club and its friends who would be interested in doing this?**



Donated goods for activity corner