



Trish Doyle MP

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New South Wales Parliament Legislative Assembly

Timor Leste

2 May 2018

Approximately 1,400 Timorese were killed and 300,000 were forcibly pushed into West Timor as refugees. The majority of the country's infrastructure, including homes, irrigation systems, water supply systems, and schools, and nearly 100 per cent of the country's electrical grid were destroyed. This fledgling nation required considerable support from the United Nations, its nearest neighbours and other nations in order to re-establish security, stability and basic services such as hospitals, schools, roads, power et cetera. It is within this context that support groups in the Blue Mountains have grown to provide direct assistance from the grassroots to communities in Timor-Leste.

Established in 1996, the Springwood East Timor Support Group hosts an annual trivia night and, with funds raised, has provided assistance to Dr Dan Murphy's Bairo Pite Clinic, Topu Honis Shelter Home in Oecusse and the Alola Foundation. The group's members include Pam and Chris Gorman, Vic O'Callaghan and Vanessa and Chris Joret, along with many others—too many to name. In 2004 the Blue Mountains East Timor Sisters [BMETS] project was established. Mary Waterford, Jude Finch and Suzie van Opdorp were founding members. Over the past 13 years the sisters have raised more than half a million dollars and have supported scholarships, violence prevention programs and women's projects. Other members of the group include Louise Nash and Lesley Sammon. I note the passing of founding member Gail Clifford and her contribution to East Timor, the Blue Mountains and Leichhardt Municipal Council.

As a result of the work of BMETS, the Blue Mountains Hatobuilico Friendship Committee was established. The committee has worked on practical projects in the mountainous village of Hatobuilico, including the rebuilding of community centres and schools. I commend the work of this committee and note the contributions of John and Elaine Telford, Sheila Quonoey and Councillor Romola Hollywood. The Blue Mountains Trek for Timor has contributed more than \$300,000 to projects including the building of district

schools, provision of student resources and income-generating projects for women. This work is truly inspiring. It is based on respectful relationships and empowerment and shows how reaching out can be powerful. Recently I had the opportunity to have a young Timorese student on work experience in my office. Domingas Soares is in year 10 at Korowal School in Hazelbrook. She grew up in a poor family in Saelary. Her parents separated when she was six months old. She is the youngest of seven children. Her father died in 2009 and Domingas and her sister went to live with their aunt. Their aunt did not send them to school. Instead, Domingas said:

... she would hit us and scream at us. In 2010 she sent us to an orphanage. I was terrified to go to the orphanage because I did not know what an orphanage was and I did not speak Tetum. I only speak my native dialect Makasae.

I was excited because I didn't have to live with my aunt anymore. I thought my life would change forever because there is no one to hit and abuse me. But I was wrong.

My sister and I were ... bullied and verbally abused by [people]. We wanted to tell the nuns but they did not believe us.

Domestic violence happens at the orphanage, school, neighbourhood and in the street. Sometimes you see parents hit their children ...

At the orphanage, life was hard. We woke up at 4:50, to pray and clean then go to church and school. We did not do our homework until 11 at night and we did not go to bed til 11:30. I did not start school until I was ten years old.

In 2011 my Australian mum (Wendy Chandler) told the nuns that she wanted to look after my sister and I. She took us out of the orphanage to live with her. I was really happy, but the communication between us was hard because I did not speak English then. But then I started to learn English.

Today I'm studying [and living] in Australia, I'm so happy that I get this wonderful opportunity and good education. I hope ... one day, I'll go back to my country [to work] to stop the domestic violence there, and listen to those people who need help.

Domingas' advice to politicians is this:

Listen to young people and stand by their side when they need you. Don't leave them alone to suffer from domestic violence or any violence. Bring their issues up and discuss it with them, young people need you. We're your future so please look after us. I believe you all can do this.