

Bondia

Baguia

Newsletter 17, July 2013

Baguia 2013 by Derarca

This year has already seen a lot of Aussies making the journey to Baguia. In February Meagan and Ame (FoB committee members) spent 3 weeks in Baguia and did a great job of reviewing projects, visiting villages and assessing new requests.

May saw Adrienne (FoB Vice President) and myself in Baguia to follow-up on the numerous requests, and visit schools to ensure our large scholarship program to over 100 students was running smoothly at all the schools.

I decided to venture to Larisula, which due to inaccessible roads became a hair-raising 'serious' 4WD expedition. Atanatico (Larisula High Principal) walked at least 2 hours up the 'track' to meet us and then guide us slowly back. He insisted we get out and check the more difficult sections – sometimes filling in the larger holes with rocks! If I hadn't told them I was coming I would have happily bolted out of there!

We were finally rewarded by the sight of the beautiful children at the FoB supported kindergarten who greeted us with songs. The teachers were delighted to receive what we had brought from Australia, especially Adrienne's paints.

Our visit to the two local schools emphasized their poor condition and lack of equipment. This is compounded by a lack of electricity. The locals need to walk 3-4 hours to Baguia town just to charge their mobile phones! At Larisula Junior High some students have to bring their own chair from home, as there are not enough for the students to sit on.

The driving stress was heightened on the return journey, by cramming a young family of 6 - including a baby - into the back seat with Leopoldina, I feared if I lost control on the track, I would be responsible for too many deaths! So it was great relief to finally arrive in Baguia – and the family was so grateful for avoiding a 4 hour walk, most of which would have been done in darkness.

I was delighted that we had made it to Larisula to see the community, as due to the lack of a viable road, I had not visited since 2009. However I vowed not to brave returning until the new road is built!

Helena's Story My name is Helena Soares Mariz and I was born in Baguia. I am the youngest in my family and have three older siblings who are all married.



Helena learning to use email

I attended Primary and Junior High school in Baguia, but at that time there was no recognised Senior High in Baguia, so to complete my schooling I moved to Baucau and lived with my uncle. His house was crowded with many children, as my uncle had eight of his own children and there were five other cousins staying in the house to attend school. I really liked school and achieved high grades. I desperately wanted to go to University, but when I graduated from high school my father told me he had no money to support me and as my mother was sick I must come back to live in Baguia and care for her. At first the disappointment was very hard for me and I cried a lot. Then I had to try and change my expectations.

Now I am I'm 24 years old and I still live at home with my parents. Monday to Saturday I get up at 3am to prepare breakfast for my parents, before I make the 2-3 hr walk up the steep mountain track to the community primary school at Rufagua village. I work there as a voluntary teacher for Maths, Natural Science and Religion from 8am to noon. Then I walk back down to Baguia, where on two afternoons a week I teach at the Computer Centre for 3 hours. On Sunday I teach at the English classes funded by FoB.

My dream is still to go to University - but I don't see how it is ever possible?

*[Despite working 3 jobs and an exhausting lifestyle trekking up the mountain, Helena earns less than the Timor basic wage. **Your donation can make the dream of Helena and other girls like her come true. Friends of Baguia offer scholarships to Uni of \$500 pa.]***



Baguia children at Kinder

A Complex Country of Many Contrasts by Amé Pocklington

To write about the people and places of Timor-Leste is to write about a country of stark contradictions and contrasts. Several nights in the nation's capital exposed Meagan and I to the uneven distribution of wealth and power between various segments of the population. The affluence of the growing professional class in comparison to the poverty of the masses was glaringly present within the districts and streets of Dili: an urban landscape of many shades, colours and inconsistencies.

Leaving behind the bustling and oftentimes confusing atmosphere of the city and making the journey towards our true destination, the remote sub-district of Baguia, was tremendously exciting. Yet despite the social, political, economic and cultural differences between Dili and Baguia, the theme of contradiction and contrast remained. This was made most clear to us through the



Amé & Meagan with Baguia kids

intermingling struggles and aspirations of the people we lived with and worked alongside during our stay.

Meagan and I were quickly brought to the sobering realisation of the very real hardships that life in Baguia entails. On our second day in the village we attended the funeral of an old and prestigious man who had passed away the previous week. As we stood solemnly on the mountainside during the ceremony, I thought that but for the sadness of the occasion we could have been in paradise. The clear and rain-washed blue sky, the vivid green hues of the moist jungle with its dripping leaves, the panorama of steep valleys and ravines and mountains rising up to cut jagged teeth into the clouds was breathtaking. Such was the contradiction between the natural environment and the terrible sound of mourning women around us.

It may seem morbid and depressing to dwell on death and grief, but our time in Baguia was as much about mortality as it was about life and hope. Within two weeks

we attended four funerals; it was simply impossible to avoid the truth of poverty and the cruelty of preventable death and illness. At times it was distressing and traumatic to be a witness to these things.

Set against the emotional backdrop of seemingly constant bereavement, we discovered a people of humility, dedication, hope, and perseverance. We taught English and geography to students who displayed hunger and thirst for new knowledge. We climbed a mountain to visit a remote school that had been built with no external support from the government. We spoke to school leaders who continue to work within harsh and resource-poor environments to provide the next generation with a chance to participate in the future of their country. We met the coordinators of the computer program that is making a tangible difference to the lives and employment prospects of local people. Most importantly, we were embraced and accepted by each person we met and we were overwhelmed with the love, generosity, kindness and companionship that were afforded to us.

Baguia, Dili, Timor-Leste: places of contradiction and contrast. In this country we found hope and faith to coexist alongside pain and loss. We discovered a complex society that is learning how to unlock the potential of its people. As difficult and heartbreaking as our stay in Baguia was at times, Meagan and I were shown anew that Friends of Baguia is building something significant, something worthwhile, something invaluable and something life-giving. It is a privilege to be a part of this wonderful partnership that we have with Baguia.

Leopoldina is grieving deeply after the death of her husband, John Gusmao last year.

She wishes to express her deep gratitude to the people who gave so generously to the Fund to support the future education of her children.

(Refer website for further information)

Thanks to the Social Service Captain, Madi Schiller, and the Jamieson House Captains for the potato bake fundraiser at Korowa Anglican Girls' School. Marianne Hale continues to inspire the students and staff at Korowa to support our program of scholarships to secondary school students in Baguia.

Postscript: Due to unseasonal heavy rains in June the road into Baguia has washed away. So for many weeks people have had to walk the last hour into Baguia town, as the trucks cannot get through from Baucau.

Contacts for Friends of Baguia Inc

Enquiries: Ella Doonan (03) 8290 1333 edoonan@stonnington.vic.gov.au

President: Derarca O'Mahony 0412 761 763

www.baguaia.org.au

Incorporation No: A0050160K

Council's continuing support of Friends of Baguia is greatly appreciated.

