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Subject: Many Hands International news from Timor-Leste July 2015 - Preview
Date: 29 July 2015 10:44 pm
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Many Hands International

culture based community development

 Forward

 Website

In this issue

- ➡ News from Timor-Leste and Australia
- ➡ Stimulating early childhood development through creative outdoor play
- ➡ Training and sustainable futures in rural Timor-Leste
- ➡ Skills development opportunity in Australia
- ➡ MHI contributes to World Health Organisation meeting, Delhi, 9-10 July
- ➡ Presenting at Timor-Leste Studies Association Conference, Dili, 9-10 July
- ➡ Creative arts and wellbeing for youth and women
- ➡ Business Development Training
- ➡ New Director for MHI
- ➡ Internship
- ➡ Supporting our work

News from Timor-Leste and Australia

Dear Friends and Supporters

In this edition of MHI's ebulletin we report on our people and work in Timor-Leste and Australia, including the development of two creative playspaces for children in Lospalos and news of terrific skills development opportunities for our staff.

Best wishes,

Holly, Kim and Vincent (Directors)

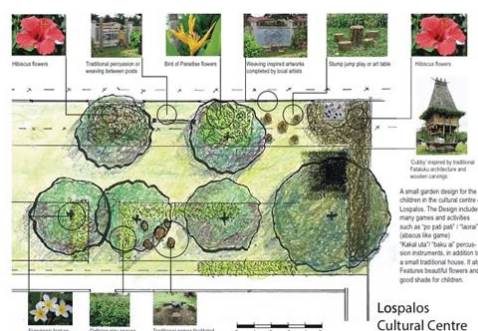


Image: MHI staff and families enjoy a special lunch to farewell Director Kim after her visit in May and June

[back to top](#) ↑

Stimulating early childhood development through creative outdoor play

In a new initiative, MHI is seeking to promote early childhood development through the provision of creative places for play. Whereas spaces for creative play are the norm in schools, kindergartens and other public places in the developed world, in countries such as Timor-Leste this is not yet the case. Children in Timor-Leste have ample time to play outside school hours, but have very few playgrounds that enable the crucial learning experiences of play in education. MHI has recently been very fortunate to have had the skills of Australian playground expert James Nash who worked with MHI staff member Ildefonso da Silva for three months to assess and design two new playgrounds



Silva for three months to scope and design two new playgrounds for Lospalos. Find out more about what we are doing and how you can help [here](#).

Children's Garden

Image: Plans for the Lautem Cultural Centre children's garden

[back to top](#) ↑

Training and sustainable futures in rural Timor-Leste

Khey Gandara is a leader of local performing arts group Sanggar Haburas and works with MHI on a range of projects. *Zumba Dili* fundraised to enable Khey to have the opportunity to travel to Indonesia for training in Zumba, a lively dance program that contributes to aerobic fitness, co-ordination, stamina and strength. MHI assisted with organisation and extra financial support. Khey returned from Indonesia much inspired and has since been training young members of her dance group to co-lead with her. Consequently, four evenings a week this new team offers the people of Lospalos the first ever formal dance-fitness class. It's very popular, attended mostly by women of all ages, who enjoy the social nature of the class. The class is one of the very few safe options for women to exercise. In evaluation survey done this week, women reported that Zumba was their first ever opportunity for group exercise. Participants pay a small fee and Khey now operates a successful micro-business, one of the first cultural businesses in the town. The business has long-term sustainability as it does not rely on 'foreign investment' in a town where there are few foreigners at this stage! [See more here](#)



Photo: Local women enjoy Zumba classes in the Lautem Cultural Centre

[back to top](#) ↑

Skills development opportunity in Australia

Women's empowerment and combating gender violence through culture and media, July 2015, Griffith University, Queensland

Khey was nominated by MHI to travel to Australia for a training program at Griffith University in Queensland Australia: *Women's empowerment and combating gender violence through culture and media*. This wonderful opportunity offered Khey and another Lospalos dancer, Trisna de Jesus, a month of workshops in dance, music, singing and film production that culminated in a collaborative performance at Griffith University. Participants had many opportunities to attend performances and visit museums and galleries, for perhaps the first time. They've developed many new skills to share with their communities as a result. Khey plans to broaden her current offerings of traditional dance and Zumba classes for people in Lospalos now that she has returned. The program was instigated by Erika Goldsmith, a Griffith University dance student who first visited Timor-Leste in 2012 [as a volunteer with Many Hands](#) and her dance group Kinetic Collective, and was fully funded by the Australian Government through an Australian Awards Fellowship, and supported by Griffith University.



Photo: Khey, Trisna and colleagues perform in Melbourne at an Arts and Peace-Building event organised by Timor-based NGO Ba Futuru.

[back to top](#) ↑

MHI contributes to World Health Organisation meeting, Delhi, 9-10 July

In a hat trick of great opportunities for our staff, Health Promotion Officer Thomas Lopes recently represented Timor-Leste at the World Health Organisation's *Regional Meeting on*



Strengthening Civil Society Organizations on non-communicable diseases in Delhi in July. Thomas has been making good inroads in his work to combat a very serious health issue – smoking – with Timor-Leste having the highest rate of male smoking in the world. His commitment and pro-active work have included development of partnerships with the Ministry of Health in Timor-Leste and World Health Organisation. These agencies welcome the support of an active non-government organisation and our partner Deakin University, whose work in reducing smoking in Australia has been very successful (with the rate of smoking now down to 17%).



Photo: MHI Director, Dr Kim Dunphy; Deakin University Project Partner Professor John Toubmourou; MHI officer Thomas Lopes, meeting Ministry of Health representatives Dr Herculano Seixas dos Santos and Mario Serekai making plans for collaborative work.

[back to top ↑](#)

Presenting at Timor-Leste Studies Association Conference, Dili, 9–10 July

New challenges were taken on by MHI staff who made three different presentations at the recent **Timor-Leste Studies Association Conference** at the National University of Timor-Leste on 9 and 10 July. Staff member Nelinha Pereira reported on the findings of our research project on attitudes to smoking and tobacco prevention, which is the first step in our efforts to support reduction of tobacco use. Our team presented it twice: once each in English and once in Tetun to ensure the greatest range of conference participants could hear the research results!



MHI team member Idefonso da Silva made two presentations: one on the findings of MHI's cultural research project **Protecting Endangered Forms of Fataluku Cultural Expression** and one on findings of the playground scoping project. In developing and sharing their presentations, our staff expanded their professional skills and MHI added value to our work by sharing it with our Timorese and international colleagues. We were very pleased to have this opportunity.

Photo: Traditional musician Henrique Lopes from Aldeia Malahara in Lospalos sub-district sharing his skills on the oi-oilu double flute with our research team.

[back to top ↑](#)

Creative arts and wellbeing for youth and women

Our long term objectives of providing opportunities to stimulate young people's creativity and offer women experiences that promote wellbeing were supported by the recent visit of creative arts therapist and community artist Karma Bernes from NSW, Australia. Karma recently won an award for the 'Best Youth Project of the Year' in the Byron Shire (NSW) for her **In.scribe youth street art program**.

Karma and MHI staff member Nelson Diana da Costa ran a program for local young people at the Lautem Cultural Centre. Karma encouraged participants to:



- Develop aspirations through creative processes.
- Find personal meaning making and reflection through art making.
- Affirm the value of culture through developing creative themes.
- Build collaborative skills.
- Develop a positive sense of identity.

The program drew upon the culture of street art in Timor-Leste as a valuable means of expression and creative visioning for youth. Participants learnt skills in stencil making, paste-ups and mural painting which

they used to create a mural for the primary school opposite the Lautem Cultural Centre.

Karma also ran Women's Wellbeing workshops in Lospalos and Bacau. These followed on from the 2014 wellbeing program of dance delivered by Kim Dunphy and Marita Jacobsson. Karma worked with women through creative arts therapy and mindfulness practices to develop skills to assist themselves and others to: enjoy self expression, spontaneity and creativity; improve communication and relationships, and experience healing and recovery.

Karma's volunteer work was supported by a [crowd funding campaign](#). We thank all of those who contributed.

Photo: Karma, MHI staff member Nelson da Costa and participants with finished mural created for Lospalos primary school.

[back to top ↑](#)

Business Development Training

Last month, a visit of a tour group to the Lautem Cultural Centre prompted some business development training by NZ volunteer Tim Ballagh, working with young members of the Red Cross in Lospalos. With Tim's guidance, the group planned a menu, budgeted, shopped and served the visitors, ending up with a modest profit for future activities of their group. Check out their work in this [video](#).

[back to top ↑](#)

New Director for MHI

We welcome Vincent Ashcroft as a Director of MHI. Vincent was appointed elected as Director and President of the Board at the MHI AGM in December 2014, replacing Lisa Mori who retired from the Board after three years.

Vincent joins us after three years as Head of the Australian Aid Program in Timor-Leste and brings a wealth of economics and development management expertise to MHI. In his first development job in 2002 he worked as the Senior Adviser in the Budget Office of the new Government of Timor-Leste. He has also held a number of senior Australian Public Service positions, including:



- Assistant Director-General – Economics, Rural Development and Infrastructure, AusAID (Canberra, 2010–2011)
- Country Economist – Australian Aid Program Indonesia (2008–2010)
- Senior Treasury Representative – South East Asia, Australian Treasury (Jakarta, 2006–2008)
- Director – Budget Policy Division, Australia Treasury (Canberra, 2003–2006)
- Assistant Director – Budget Coordination Unit, Australian Department of Finance and Administration (Canberra, 2002–2003).
- In his first development job in 2002 he worked as the Senior Adviser in the Budget Office of the new Government of Timor-Leste.

Photo: Vincent, centre right, visiting Lospalos during his time leading the Australian Aid Program.

[back to top ↑](#)

Internship

We thank Amy Stevenson for all her hard work over the past few months while she has been interning with MHI in Australia. Amy was an Australian Youth Ambassador for Development and MHI's Youth Arts Program Mentor in Lospalos during 2014, supported by the Australian Aid Program through Scope Global. Amy has been working with Director Holly Schauble on developing some



of the policies necessary before we can apply for OAGDS status, which will enable us to offer tax deductibility for donations. Amy's internship was supported by Scope Global.



[back to top ↑](#)

Supporting our work

We welcome your support for all of our activities promoting peace and prosperity in Timor-Leste through culture. This month we particularly welcome donations to our project to make two safe spaces for creative play for young children in Lospalos town. We have [the places ready, the plans drawn up and the people keen](#), but we need \$30,000 to make it happen. [Donation options here](#).

[back to top ↑](#)

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