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alola

As we reflected on the stories that would be told in this special maternal and child health edition of the Alola Australia newsletter - the successful MILK campaign in Australia, Maria's experiences as a new mother with Alola support and the work of maternal and child health in communities throughout Timor-Leste we noticed a strong theme. Each story highlighted the importance and effectiveness of strong partnerships, community participation, sustained support and passionate commitment. We should mention that these reflections took place while relaxing on the very beautiful Atauro Island toward the end of a wonderful trip meeting wonderful people who were working in their communities, supporting women and children and the development of a strong and proud nation. You can read all about this and more - we hope you enjoy this edition.

2014 MILK campaign a great success

Thank you to everyone who generously supported the 2014 Alola MILK Campaign.

This year, morning teas were held around the country, hosted by Alola supporters including Macedon Ranges Friends of East Timor, Wyndham City Council's Maternal and Child Health Services and Mitcham Private Hospital. Morning teas were held in workplaces, playgroups and living rooms from Perth to Brisbane, and many places in between! Everyday Hero again provided a fun online platform for Alola supporters to attract donations from family and friends.

In addition, a very special afternoon tea was held on 29 August at The Windsor Hotel in Melbourne. A sell-out crowd of 200 guests enjoyed The Windsor's traditional afternoon tea, while Dame Quentin Bryce and Kirsty Sword Gusmão reflected on their experiences of and hopes for the women and children of Timor-Leste. ABC broadcaster Jon Faine kindly drew the winners of a raffle held on the day, which alone raised around \$2,500. Alola Australia's Chair Maria Bohan welcomed guests and MILK campaign convenor Kate Ashmor MC'd the event. We have been overwhelmed with positive feedback and wish to extend our sincere gratitude to The

Windsor for its generosity and to everyone who supported this special fundraiser.

At last count, \$12,000 has been raised in the 2014 MILK Campaign to benefit Fundasaun Alola's maternal and child health programs in Timor-Leste. Thank you again to each and every Alola supporter who made this possible.



Maria Bohan, Quentin Bryce, Kate Ashmor, Kirsty Sword Gusmão, Jon Faine at The Windsor

Community support for mothers and babies

Maria Maia and baby Helen Maia's story

My name is Maria Maia and my new baby's name is Helena Maia da Silva. I am 38 years old and I live in Libolulelo hamlet of Tibar Village in Liquica District.

I have two children and when I was pregnant with my second baby I felt very tired and weak. Even so, I was taking care of my pregnancy so that my baby and I could stay healthy for a safe delivery.

During my second pregnancy, I received counselling from a SHIO member¹ Maria Madalena about safe delivery for both the mother and baby. As well as the information given about safe delivery, Maria also counselled me to give birth at the nearby health facility which meant that I would also be given a maternity pack provided by Fundasaun Alola. The packs are distributed through community health centres and health posts in areas where SHIOs have established.

On my due date, I called Maria who had referred me to the health facility which meant that I could go straight to the Dili National Hospital (HNGV). Soon after arriving at the hospital I delivered my baby girl Helena Maia and I began breastfeeding her immediately. After the birth I felt very weak and my baby was jaundiced so we were admitted to stay at the hospital for two days before we were discharged home and back to my village.

Given that the Dili National Hospital does not provide maternity packs to the mothers, Maria visited me and my baby after returning home and gave me a maternity pack which contained baby wraps, clothes and sanitary items. I told Maria that the pack is very useful for me and for my baby.



Maria Maia and SHIO member Maria Madalena

¹ SHIO Suku Hodomi Inan no Oan (village loves mothers and babies members) are volunteers

I was very grateful and thanked Maria, the Midwife and the Fundasaun Alola for providing me with information about safe delivery, counseling on breastfeeding, and for providing the pack. I recommend to all my friends, to give birth at hospital or to be attended by the health workers so that both baby and mother's life can be safe and to get a maternity pack.

I now know more about how to take care of myself during pregnancy and childbirth and to provide good feeding practice for my children. I have breastfed my second baby exclusively for six months and she is one year old now. I introduced food and other drinks to her when she reached six months old therefore she is now looking very healthy. Before the SHIO program established in our village, most of us did not go to health facility to give birth and instead we gave birth at home. Now most of us give birth at a health facility and mothers know about the importance of breastfeeding and complementary feeding.

In the future I will have regular visits to a health facility for my ante natal care and I will give birth at health facility and if my children get sick I will bring them to the health facility for better treatment so that my children and I will stay healthy.

Alola Maternal and Child Health 'involving communities in addressing maternal and child health inequalities'²

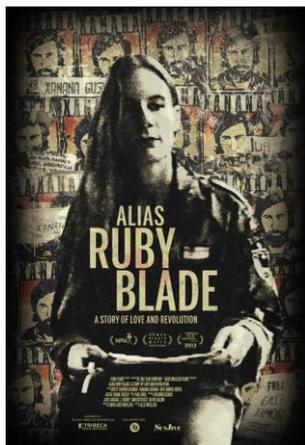
Alola's maternal and child health programs support women and children through community based networks and health facility based programs by raising awareness, promoting good nutrition and supporting safe motherhood, newborn care, exclusive breastfeeding and birth spacing.

By working through a community based participation approach, Alola's maternal and child health program is able to connect with women who might otherwise be hard to reach and allows for the development of community action plans to increase access to services and support for women in the community.

The successes of the program to date have seen an increase of exclusive breastfeeding from 31.7 percent in 2003 to 62.3 percent in 2014, health facility births increase from 10 percent to 22 percent and 77 community based mother support and SHIO groups established in ten districts.

² This article was compiled from information provided by Fundasaun Alola Maternal and Child Health and UNICEF 2013, *Innovative approaches to maternal and newborn health*

Alias Ruby Blade



Alias Ruby Blade continues to be screened around the countryside both as public and at home fundraisers. Well done to the folk who organised and went along to see Alias Ruby Blade in Hobart, at The Sun in Yarraville, Kyneton as part of the Timor-Leste festival, with the Wangaratta friends group and at the Geneva Switzerland home

screening. To date the screenings have raised \$9,000 for Alola. And there's more . . . look out for screenings in Darwin and another in Hobart.

If you are interested in holding a fundraiser for Alola by screening Alias Ruby Blade at home or in your community at a cinema or public venue please contact us on friends@alola.org.au Home screenings are easy and fun. All you need to do is purchase a DVD and then invite a group of friends to come and watch the movie and make a donation.

Visiting strong women developing a strong nation

In August seven Australian women from Victoria headed off to Timor-Leste to meet and talk with Timorese women. Two weeks later having traversed five districts, well supported by Shirley Carlos from Timor Adventures, the most lasting impression is of strong, articulate women, facing big challenges fearlessly.

We spent our first day in Dili visiting significant historical centres such as the Resistance Museum and Santa Cruz Cemetery then for the next two weeks travelled to the east and met with women in Lautem, Baucau and Viqueque districts before returning to Atauro and Dili.

There were many highlights from the stories of work in education, cultural preservation, youth training, maternal and child health and economic and community development. We swam, walked in the mountains, bumped along narrow roads, sang together and practised yoga in the most amazing places.

Community participation in maternal and child health

We left the airy veranda of our small guest house in Baucau and travelled from the old town up winding roads to the new town for our visit with the Maternal and Child Health staff at Fundasaun Alola. As with everywhere we visited we were warmly welcomed and given delicious coffee and Timor treats, on this occasion it was tasty fried breadfruit.

Betty, the Maternal and Child Health Co-ordinator and other Fundasaun Alola colleagues generously gave their time to talk about their work which covers the Baucau, Manatuto, Viqueque and Lautem districts.



Joao Hornay MCH Program Officer, Thomas Fatima Office Security, Beatriz Sequeira (Betty) MCH Coordinator, Rui Belo Office Manager at the Baucau MCH centre.

The work includes promoting exclusive breastfeeding for six months and addressing the challenges new mothers face such as having been sold the idea that formula food is better and needing return to work which for many means not being able to have their baby with them. In these circumstances encouragement is given to express rather than introduce complimentary feeding too early and in the meantime Alola's advocacy program is working with other organisations to advocate breastfeeding for women in the workplace.

When asked what she was most proud of Betty said that it was being able to provide information to the community so that they are able to improve their health.

Samalari mother support group

The day spent in Samalari, Baucau sub-district with members of the Alola Mother Support Group was unforgettable. Met by the Coordinator, Maria Fraga, Meta de Jesus Sousa, vice coordinator, and Elisa and their children, we sat on the verandah of the

Xefe de Suco's home and heard all about the work the group does to support mothers.



Rui Sequeira, Xefe de Suco, Samalari and Meta de Jesus Sousa

There are 27 members of the group, including men and the Xefes de Suco and Xefes de Aldeia. Felismena Rodrigues, a member of the group from the Aldeia across the river had walked for an hour to join us.

We later drove across the river – literally - and visited the new clinic that has been built there. We talked about breast feeding, the nutrition program, family planning, and the community's response to the challenges of transport to access hospital health facilities. There are five cars in Samalari between 2,404 people and the Mothers Support Group has the phone numbers of all five car owners who can be called up to transport a pregnant woman experiencing difficulty to hospital in Baucau to give birth.



River crossing between Samalari villages

Cultural preservation, weaving and support for young women to access employment in Lautem.

Although a number of staff were in Dili preparing for the Arte Publika Arts Festival in Dili we were still able

to visit [Many Hands International](#) in Lautem. MHI is an organisation that believes that rebuilding cultural knowledge and practice is fundamental to achieving community health and wellbeing. Nelinha Pereira, Program and Administration Officer and Lucia Pichler, Creative Arts Capacity Building Officer welcomed us and told about their work in Lautem with the community in partnership with the State Secretary for Arts and Culture and the Ministry of Tourism.

Staying at the ADM Guesthouse in Los Palos meant we saw firsthand the work the ADM nuns do to provide employment and training opportunities for young women from the district. We especially enjoyed the lunch we had at Café Fitun Naroman in Los Palos. The next day our visit to the [LO'UD](#) Cooperative was an introduction to Makalari culture and weavings. Groups from Fuloro, Caenlio and Fuat talked with us. They work in collaboration with [ETWA](#). A little further down the road to the Suco of Home, our hosts the local weaving cooperative welcomed us with more delicious coffee, breadfruit and taro before we enthusiastically perused and purchased from their beautiful Tais collection.

The Geelong connection



Viqueque Friendship House staff and the Geelong contingent

As first time visitors to Timor-Leste, Colette Crehan, Anne Fairbairn and Janyne Rees were immediately impressed with the energy and busyness of Dili, the national capital. They found Dili abuzz with construction and activity and people and a sense of rebuilding and transformation despite the obvious challenges. However the highlight for the Geelong folk was the trip to Viqueque, Geelong's sister-city. The city of Viqueque is in the south-east of Timor-Leste, 183 km from Dili and has a population of about 5,477.

'We were warmly welcomed by Jacinto Soares (Sinto) Coordinator and the team at the Friendship

House. We were so impressed by the staff at the kindergarten and had a laugh as we all tried to sing along to 'head, shoulders, knees and toes' (*ulun fatuk, kabaas, ain tuur, ain faun* if you want to give it a try) and other Timorese children's songs in Tetum. The computer training room and the music room are great assets for the community, although the cost of the internet is prohibitive in Timor-Leste at present. It was inspiring to see such enthusiasm and despite, limited funds and basic, second-hand equipment, staff running these facilities has used their ingenuity and skills and had created a 'sound-proof' room from egg cartons.

Our visit to Timor-Leste was both rewarding and humbling and has certainly inspired us to be more active in our commitment to Timor-Leste on our return to Geelong'.

Reconnecting with Fundasaun Alola

Gillian Essex last visited Timor-Leste in 2009. Coming back she found that in the meantime Fundasaun Alola had grown into a strong and capable organisation.



Fundasaun Alola managers Nuni Nobre (Scholarships Coordinator), Macu Guterres (Maternal and Child Health Coordinator), Jose Ximenes (Economic Development Manager), Alzira Reis (CEO), Fatima Pereira (Advocacy Coordinator)

'I was extremely impressed with the professionalism and obvious dedication of the CEO (the second Timorese CEO) and the four program managers, especially as some were acting in this role during our visit.

It is a testament to Alola that it clearly provides for the skill development of staff, which then has a positive impact on other organisations within Timor-Leste as these staff move to other jobs within them.

I was also pleased to see that one of the program managers was male, as were other key staff

members at Fundasaun Alola. While the focus of the Alola will always be women, I believe that it's important to include men. I very much admire the men who work alongside women to improve the health, education and financial independence of women, thereby benefiting children and the nation as a whole'.

The joys of visiting Timor-Leste

For each of us picking out a standout moment was too difficult so we chose a few. They included sitting under a waterfall in a pristine pool surrounded by the lush green bush at Loi Hunu, standing in the sea looking along the white sands of Jaco Island, seeing the children joyously playing hoops made with a tyre rim, plastic bottle and stick and, meeting with strong, committed, articulate young people who were happy to share their hopes and achievements with us. Reconnecting with Fundasauan Alola and the impressive team who steer the organisation to achieve great things was nothing short of inspiring. The challenges are ever present in Timor-Leste yet as we travelled we saw strength, resilience, rebuilding, joy, hope, ingenuity, beauty, innovation. Atauro Island was special too. It was beautiful and relaxing and we were encouraged to learn that the locals are committed to maintaining it as low-key tourist destination featuring eco-style tourism. The snorkeling and the handicrafts are sensational.

We shared meals, stories and photos and came home with a reinvigorated commitment to work in support of the fabulous work that Fundasaun Alola is doing.

This article was created from the collective efforts of Christine Perkins, Melanie Atkins, Colette Crehan, Anne Fairbairn, Janyne Rees, Gillian Essex and Wendy Mayne. Longer versions of these stories will soon be available on the website and there are more photos on Alola Australia's facebook. The group travelled with [Timor Adventures](#) with all expenses paid for by the participants. Other travel companies in Timor-Leste include Eco Discovery and Mega Tours. The best time to go is between June and October – to avoid the wet season.

Contributors

Alola Australia newsletter production team

Wendy Mayne, Christine Perkins and Sue Lee

News from Fundasaun Alola

- Alzira Reis CEO
- Maria Maia da Silva new mother and the staff of Alola's Maternal and Child Health program

Stories

Kate Ashmor – 2014 MILK campaign

Melanie Atkins, Colette Crehan, Gillian Essex, Anne Fairbairn, Wendy Mayne, Christine Perkins, Janyne Rees – 2014 visit to Timor-Leste

Melanie Atkins – Alias Ruby Blade

Keep in touch



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Visit our website. www.alola.org.au

Coming soon on the Alola Australia website:

- Full stories and more photos from the 2014 visit to Timor-Leste
- Photos from the MILK afternoon tea at the Windsor

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'Strong Women, Strong Nation' 'Feto Forte, Nasaun Forte'