



**Partners in Aid**

**Annual General Meeting 2013**

# Partners in Aid

## **Chair's Report**

2013 has seen a number of changes and challenges for Partners in Aid and our partners. Despite this the projects that we support have gone from strength to strength, delivering great outcomes for the people of India and Bangladesh.

Changes to the board came with the departure of long serving board members, Roger Hughes and Chris Pittendrigh. Between them Roger and Chris had chalked up over 45 years on the board, and both had dedicated time and energy to supporting the two projects in Bangladesh. Roger has stayed on as an advisor to the board and both projects are now in the capable hands of Mary Dunne.

We welcomed new board member Phillip McMillan. Phil has visited the SEDS project in India and brings a new energy and business skills to the board.

We were sad to report the death of a very long time donor and supporter, Ruby Ashcroft in February. Ruby and husband, former board member Ted, were generous donors and supporters of the Bangladesh project and their interest and confidence in the work done there was highly valued by the board.

There have also been challenges for one of our partners, SEDS in India. Their long serving accountant and valued staff member Rabbani was killed in a car accident in January. A prolonged illness and treatment for the CEO followed soon after. It is a testament to the solid foundations of SEDS, provided by

Manil and Rajen, that the projects continued as planned and we can happily report that the CEO is back at work and on the road to recovery.

Partners in Aid itself has had a year of review of our journey so far, and we have a strategic planning process scheduled for early next year. We need to secure our fundraising base and this will take some innovative thinking. Our reliable funding sources have served us well this year. World Food Day in March again raised a solid amount, thanks to the support of Geoff and Andrea Pickering. The Alpine Women's Group under Joy Handley again held a successful fundraising luncheon. We have a Partners in Aid fundraising wine available through Goodwill Wines. And we are looking at formalising workplace giving and bequests as further sources of funds.

We are supported by a steady stream of donations from loyal supporters, many of whom have been donors for a very long time. Without their support Partners in Aid could not fund the education, environmental and community development projects which make such a difference to the lives of people in India and Bangladesh.

Partners in Aid remains one of the very few not-for-profit aid organisations which is run entirely by volunteers resulting in over 90% of funds raised going directly to our projects. (In the year to June 2013, we had raised \$140,100.98 and spent \$135, 508.14 on our projects.)

We know this is why many of our donors support us, it is why most of our board members are involved and we believe it sets us apart from other aid organisations.

Partners in Aid has also maintained high standards of governance, meeting our obligations under the ACFID Code of Conduct and responding to any recommendations from our auditor.

It has been very satisfying to see our partners continue to excellent work they do and the projects we fund continue to deliver benefits to some of the poorest regions in the world.

The Jamuna River project in Bangladesh provides education and support to children and their families living on a shifting sandbank. The Symbiosis Project also provides valuable training skills to young people enhancing their life prospects. SEDS in India is helping marginal farmers develop real livelihoods through sustainable agriculture and low carbon farming. ABWU in Kolkatta supports destitute women with skills and education developing self reliance. Our child sponsorship programmes in India give children the opportunity to complete their school education and develop a strong foundation for life.

All our projects are aimed at sustainability, providing funds which will help people and their communities develop the skills and structures to improve their lives, their environment and the future for their children. We work in partnership and a lot of the board's efforts are directed at maintaining and developing those partnerships.

I would like to acknowledge the work of project managers on the board for building and sustaining the important relationships with our partners: Lyn and Ian Pickering with SEDS, Anne-Marie Maltby and Joy Handley with ABWU, Mary Dunne with Symbiosis and Jamuna River, and Glenys Hughes for sustaining our relationship with the associated project in the Phillipines.

Partners in Aid succeeds in its mission only due to the dedicated work of board members and volunteers. I would also like to acknowledge the enormous workload of our Treasurer Andrea Pickering, the administrative and compliance skills of Secretary Graham Moore, and the social media and

communications skills of Kristin Aitken. Thanks are due to the Pickerings and Graham Moore for hosting, between them, our office and meeting spaces.

Project managers will report separately on each project and its successes this year. These projects and their successes are our motivation. We can see change occurring, lives improving, environments regenerating and we report these to our members and supporters through our newsletters.

A final acknowledgement must go to our donors and supporters. Without their generosity and reliability, none of this would be possible. I look forward to building our support base in 2014 and thank the board for its support in my role this year.

Amanda Stone, Chair

### **Child Sponsorship at SEDS in India**

The child sponsorship program at SEDS has remained the same with about 200 children on the program, ranging in age from 5 and going to UKG, Kindergarten through to 15 and 16 year olds in Year 10.

Thirteen students sat for their Year 10 exams with twelve of them passing, some with excellent results.

Sponsors have continued their support for this program to assist children at the lowest end of society to remain in school. Five new sponsors have joined us this year, with some of these people taking up sponsorship of children whose donor had passed on

Feedback from sponsors ensures that we are keeping them satisfied and committed whilst also providing the best outcomes for the sponsored children.

Positive donor responses usually come after receipt of Report cards, photos, Christmas cards etc., acknowledging the efforts of Partners in Aid and the way the program is conducted.

This year has been a difficult one for Mrs. Manil Joshua, the CEO of SEDS who has been undergoing treatment for a health issue. This has impacted in some ways on their project work, but the sponsorship program has continued to operate well, because of the work of Prasanth the Sponsorship support person in the Office. His professional and personal skills have been invaluable to this area of SEDS work. During the year he made the decision to return to University. We will miss him, however for nine months prior to his leaving, Prasanth trained Anitha in all aspects of the work, and she has also demonstrated an empathy for the work. Training alongside both Prasanth and Anitha, has been Pallavi, one of our former sponsored girls.

The selection format for child sponsorship has not changed dramatically since the inception of the child sponsorship program in early 1995, although the selection process has become more refined, with more follow up checking on data on each child. This has been as a direct result of the formation of the Women's Self Help Groups and their ongoing empowerment which has been of tremendous benefit to not only the women, but also their families and the environment within their own communities.

Our students complete their sponsorship after Year 10, a decision which came about after discussions with Manil at SEDS some years ago. In the past two to three years, the Government have committed to supporting students who

successfully complete Year 10, to move on to College for Year 11 and 12, and then on to University if this is possible.

The girls who do not go beyond Year 10 in their studies, have had the opportunity for some years to join a SEDS Vocational Training program where they learn basic sewing, and in time the use of either a pedal or electric sewing machine. The boys have the opportunity to learn some skills including motor bike mechanics, electrical wiring and carpentry through the Vocational Training School.

The sponsorship program continues to grow slowly, and it is pleasing to have so many young people taking the opportunity to study beyond Year 10. The parents have become more supportive of their child's education and now are looking for their children to improve their lives through education, something which was denied them.

A good year for SEDS child sponsorship, with some very good results from students at all levels.

Lyn Pickering - SEDS Child Sponsorship Co-ordinator

## **ALL BENGAL WOMEN'S UNION , KOLKATA, INDIA**

### *Cutting, Tailoring and Knitting Training Project*

This is now the only vocational training that we support and \$3,833 was sent for this year's project. At twenty girls, five more girls were trained than the previous year including girls from Bangladesh who are waiting for repatriation back home.

As always, the project is invaluable to give the girls skills that are useful for their families as well as to become more economically self-sustainable. We have been funding this for 18 years and it is considered particularly helpful for girls who are slow-learners or are unable to continue with their studies. Although it is a strange concept for us here in Australia, it is regarded as important that these skills improve the girls' prospects for a good marriage. Products of the training can be sold which subsidises the girls personal needs

### *Teacher training*

Due to specific donations, we have again been able to support a two day teacher training workshop which was aimed at improving teaching of basic maths and Bengali. The program was for 10 teachers at \$301. We feel that this relatively small amount achieves a great deal. The teacher training is to fill a need that we felt was not well covered in general teaching training particularly to the level that is needed at ABWU. The girls struggle with schoolwork and this reflects the general problems they face. The school is in a slum area which creates some obvious issues plus a large proportion of the girls who arrive at ABWU have never been to school and most of the others are quite behind. The teachers find it pretty daunting and the training is valuable on many levels – teachers feel more confident and enjoy feeling as though they can tackle the remedial work better, the resultant teaching is a lot more fun so the girls enjoy it more as well as it being more effective.

### *Karate training*

Again from specific donations, we were able to fund karate training at a total of \$2313. These weekly classes are regarded as beneficial for not only imparting self defence skills, physical fitness and improved confidence but it is known to be an excellent supplement to counselling, dance therapy and other

therapeutic methods used at ABWU. The classes are reported to be progressing well and attendance currently stands at 53 including many special needs girls

### *Sponsorship*

Sponsorship numbers have dropped a little with 72 sponsored girls, six less than last year, largely due to the death of several sponsors. We have been gratified with the improving achievements of many of the girls – in the last year, six girls have completed tertiary education, a further five are continuing tertiary education and several have completed Year 12. This is a significant increase over previous years which is not only a great achievement for the individual girls but is providing a great example for the others and greatly encourages the staff. Given the background of these girls, it's quite amazing.

### *ABWU General*

Home searches conducted for some girls have been successful with a few of the girls being restored to their families which is a happy outcome.

A new Child Protection Committee has been set up to address issues faced on a daily basis at the Home with representatives from the girls, management, residential carers, school teachers and the Child Protection Unit.

Overall, ABWU has made effective use of our funds and we are happy with the outcomes achieved.

Anne-Marie Maltby, ABWU Programme Co-ordinator

## **Report on Activities in Bangladesh**



Partners in Aid continues to have two projects in Bangladesh, these being the Jamuna River Development Project (JRDP) and the Technical Training and Information Support Program (TTIS). Both projects are designed and implemented by Symbiosis Bangladesh, with Partners in Aid funding and monitoring the projects.

The JRDP has now been running for a decade and started with the building of a four-room primary school on land donated by a local man, Ali Asraf. This was the first school on the island, and the only one until a second school was built with funding from Partners in Aid in early 2012. Having primary schools on the island removes a significant barrier to attendance as it means children do not have to take a long boat trip to the nearest school. Both of the schools are portable and will 'leap-frog' down the island as the island shifts downstream due to erosion from monsoonal flooding, although the newer school is of a more substantial structure to better withstand cyclones and will be harder to transport.

More than 220 children are now enrolled in the two schools and were issued with new books and materials in January 2013. The students are progressing well and attendance is reasonable; however parents sometimes insist children stay at home if they need them to work and Symbiosis continually needs to reinforce the message to parents of the importance of sending their children to school. The number of children enrolled only represents around 20% of the potential school population on the island; however recruiting teachers remains an ongoing challenge and is the main impediment to increasing participation rates. Through the funding provided by Partners in Aid, Symbiosis is able to

provide some skills development training for teachers but the schools are significantly understaffed. The pre-school class continues to operate well.

The existence of the primary schools underpins the broader community development work undertaken by Symbiosis. This work encompasses a range of activities including savings groups, functional education (literacy and numeracy), food production, increasing awareness of a range of social issues such as child marriage and women's rights, health workshops and child health monitoring, arsenic testing and training of Traditional Birth Attendants (this reduces rates of infant and maternal mortality and more than 20 TBAs were trained during the year). Arsenic testing was limited during 2012-13 due to unavailability of the testing kits; however Symbiosis has identified a new source of these kits so this will be back on track soon. During 2012-13, community participation in the project activities has exceeded expectations and the project overall continues to make a real and sustainable positive impact in the locality.

Since the outset in 2003, the Jamuna River Development Project has been funded primarily through the generous support of the Ashcroft family. Ruby Ashcroft passed away in February 2013, and together with her late husband Ted will be remembered for making an immeasurable difference to improving the lives of many thousands on the Indian subcontinent, particularly Bangladesh. Partners in Aid is extremely grateful to the Ashcrofts for their unwavering support, without which the JRDP would never have happened. A priority for 2014 is to identify and secure alternative sources of funding for the project, to enable this invaluable work to continue.

The Technical Training and Information Support project continues to go well. This well-established program provides vocational training, empowerment and

improved socio-economic status and health to women (and a few men) over a wide area of northern Bangladesh although it is centred in Mymensingh. The focus of the project is to equip participants with vocational skills in sewing and related skills such as block batik and hand printing, which enables them to earn an income at home or working in the garment factories.

Approximately 400 trainees received their training in basic (village level) sewing, and a further five completed the vocational sewing training course for industry, over the year. The industry course is currently on hold following the resignation of the trainer. More than 40 block batik and hand printer trainees graduated. The demand for embroidery training continued to be weak, with six trainees graduating. Separately to the activity funded by Partners in Aid, the team leader at the training centre in Mymensingh has built up a good relationship with other NGOs and recently provided training at the centre to a number of beneficiaries of a UNDP-funded program.

As with the JRDP, the TTIS project is holistic, with more than 400 women being members of savings groups and taking part in workshops on women's rights, health education, child nutrition and related topics during 2012-13. Project staff also receive training, including computing skills to enable easier record keeping and preparation of reports.

In summary, both JRDP and TTIS are performing well and meeting their objectives. The Symbiosis team continue to do an incredible job in sometimes very challenging circumstances.

Mary Dunne, Bangladesh Programme Co-ordinator

## **Financial Report 2013**

We saw our total income drop again this year, for the second year in a row.

Both years this has been a consequence of reduced funds from private donors who sponsor a specific project, and when looking at support from the general public, our funds have continued to hold or slightly increase, which is very reassuring as a small NGO in the current environment.

We continue to work hard to make a big difference to the life of people in India, Bangladesh and Philippines. During the 2012/13 financial year, we sent off \$135508 to assist people who need our help.

Our administration % for this financial year has run at 5.35%, and this achievement is something we are very proud of. As always, your board and small group of volunteers continue to work very hard to reduce costs, so that we can send as much support overseas as possible. While we will always have necessary costs, such as ACFID membership and audit fees, it is the reduction of all other costs that helps to achieve our goal of a low admin %.

As always, I thank our very dedicated group of supporters for their ongoing support, both financially and also with your kind words of encouragement. It is greatly appreciated.

Andrea Pickering, Treasurer