



PARTNERS IN AID

NEWSLETTER
JUNE 2022

Welcome to our last newsletter of the financial year

This edition is a little larger than usual as the Board seeks to bring you a more detailed update of some of the activities that your support has allowed us to undertake. At the request of some of our donors, Dr Roger Hughes reflects on Partners in Aid's longstanding engagement in Bangladesh as we conclude our projects there at the end of June. There's also a brief introduction to our 3 new Board members, Ruby Dubash, Wilaine Pis-O and Dan Pagoda.

It's the middle of May as I write this with just a few days to go before the federal election. By the time you receive the newsletter, Australia's government and the prime minister that will lead it will almost certainly be known.

The campaign to date has had surprisingly little mention of a policy position relating to foreign aid. In the past decade or so, Australia's

foreign aid – formally called official development assistance (ODA) – has fallen to historic lows since the delivery of Australia's highest contributions on record in 2012–13: \$5.2 billion.

Despite the global financial crisis of 2007–2008, Australia had met (and exceeded) its ambitious \$4 billion target of doubling ODA. However, in late 2013, the new government dissolved Australia's aid agency, AusAID and moved responsibility for ODA into the larger Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade. The government argued the move was necessary in order to "enable the closer alignment of the aid and diplomatic arms of Australia's international policy agenda." It was an unambiguous sign that Australia was re-thinking its approach to aid.

Foreign aid is often considered an inappropriate or unnecessary expense when there are so many in need right here in our own backyard. What is often forgotten is the sizeable value of foreign aid, far beyond the dollar figure. Also forgotten is the comparative level of poverty between people in need of support in Australia and those in developing countries, where infant mortality rates are unacceptably high, children miss out on

education and proper medical care. We sadly live in a world where hundreds of thousands lack food security, are forced to walk miles to get just a few drops of water and have no access to a sanitary toilet. It is our hope that after the elections whoever is leader of our wealthy, lucky country will continue to see the need to support our neighbours, near and far, in their times of need.

Meanwhile, your contributions to Partners in Aid will help a little to alleviate the devastating impacts that deep poverty has on the lives of people in developing countries. We make sure that whatever you donate goes a long way in the communities we support, with our operating costs consistently kept well below 10% of income. As we approach tax time, know that your donations will help change the lives of people in need. We simply can't do it without you.

Warmest wishes,
Dr Cecily Neil and the Board

admin@partnersinaid.org.au





HOW TO GIVE

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Because Partners in Aid has no paid staff, our overheads are very low. This means nearly all the money donated goes directly to our partner organisations. All donations are tax deductible. There are a number of ways you can support Partners in Aid projects, including making a general donation, buying items from one of our partners or leaving a gift in your will. You can donate by:

- Leaving a bequest
- Direct bank transfer
- Cheque
- Online at [Mycause](#) or [GiveNow](#)
- Purchase from our [Goodwill Wine](#) partners

We're also working to make it easier for you to donate directly to a specific project. This month, we're excited to give the option to make a donation to the Sinangpad project in the Philippines (see the link at the bottom of the project page in this newsletter). Over the coming months we hope to roll-out similar functionality for our projects.

BEQUESTS

A gift in your will, no matter what size, will make a significant difference to the work of Partners in Aid. You can bequest cash, a percentage of your estate or a residuary gift. All bequests are welcome and there are no fees. We use bequests to assist with the continual development and improvements of all our programs. We recommend that you seek professional advice from your solicitor or financial adviser in planning a bequest. For more information or a confidential conversation, please contact Cecily or Lyn on 03 9704 6315 or email admin@partnersinaid.org.au.

BANK TRANSFER OR CHEQUE

Details of how to donate through bank transfer or cheque can be found on the following page. Please ensure that bank transfers have the details of your name and the direction (i.e. the name of the project) of your donation, if any.

If forwarding a cheque, please complete the short form in this newsletter page or write a note with your name and project of your donation. You can also email admin@partnersinaid.org.au to advise your payment and where you would like it allocated.

ONLINE AT MYCAUSE OR GIVENOW

You can make a one-off or regular tax-deductible donation through the secure platforms Mycause or Give Now. Just click on the link or type the address into your internet browser.

- [Mycause](#)
(www.mycause.com.au/charity/25612/PartnersinAidLtd)
- [Give Now](#)
(www.givenow.com.au/partnersinaid)

GOODWILL WINE PARTNERSHIP

You can also enjoy quality wine and support Partners in Aid projects at the same time. For every case of wine sold, a proportion goes directly to Partners in Aid, with no overhead costs. You can order individual bottles or corporate and personal gift packs. Order your wines or buy gift vouchers by placing your order [here](#) and support Partners in Aid.



PHILIPPINES: SINANGPAD HEALTHY VILLAGE PROJECT

PROJECT DIRECTOR: DR CECILY NEIL

Last year was not a good year for the Sinangpad members. Travel restrictions and involvement in the vaccination campaign, together with personal illness and tragedy, severely limited their ability to build on the good work they have already done.

Nonetheless, they were able to ensure that all families in 19 villages had access to a sanitary household toilet, thus eliminating open defecation in these villages. This is only one component of the Sinangpad Healthy Village Project which works to enable communities to improve the overall environmental sanitation in their villages. However, it is a very important one. It's incredible to think that just one gram of faeces can contain:

- 10,000,000 viruses
- 1,000,000 bacteria
- 100 parasite eggs

And in the absence of sanitary toilets, a quarter acre block set aside by a village for open defecation is a paradise for flies. Back in 2007, a poll reported in the esteemed *British Medical Journal* found that sanitation was the single greatest medical milestone in the past 150 years.

The Sinangpad Association has recently submitted to PIA its plan for the next 3 years, pandemic permitting. Philippines has now achieved 72.8% vaccination of their target population (May 2022). This is not enough to provide herd immunity, but it is moving in that direction. Assuming movement becomes much freer, in addition to helping villages achieve zero open defecation, the Association members will return soon to village training in environmental sanitation. This includes helping communities mobilise and develop action plans based on villagers' priorities and funding the materials and support for community members to build simple infrastructure that will remove barriers to adopting healthier behaviour. The Association also plans to run experimental soap-making courses.

The hiatus in the ability to implement some of the Healthy Village Project activities has not dampened the enthusiasm of the Sinangpad members. Val and Rose, two key members, recently concluded a Facebook message with the comment shown here on the right.

You can now make a donation to Partners in Aid specifically for direction to the Sinangpad Healthy Village Project by visiting www.mycase.com.au/pia-sinangpad.



"WE PROMISE
THAT WE WILL
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SINANGPAD
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ENDEAVOURS
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PALLIATIVE
SERVICES."



BANGLADESH: A REFLECTION

Partners in Aid will shortly conclude sponsorship of its Bangladesh projects. At the request of some of our members, Dr Roger Hughes reflects on the organisation's involvement in the country over a long period.

The end of this financial year, 2021-22, will see the end of our projects in Bangladesh. In previous newsletters, I have covered the reasons why it is time for us to move on. Now, I shall cover our final project reports from Bangladesh.

When I became involved with the Society for Those Who Have Less back in 1978, it had already been operating in Bangladesh for 15 years. At that time it ran an orphanage and the 'tin school', both of which were for orphaned rural boys, located on Bhola Island, the largest Bangladeshi Island at about 130km long. The Society also had a strong livestock importing (donated livestock from Australia) and breeding programmes on its own farm just north of the capital, Dhaka. Most of the livestock sent to Bangladesh and bred before distribution to struggling farmers were cattle (both beef and dairy) but all sorts of livestock from chickens to sheep were sent to meet certain niche needs. Many of the larger animals were donated by Australian farmers off their own farms, while the smaller farm animals were often purchased in Australia using contributions from non-farmers. Generosity abounded, with some of both the original farmers and non-farmers still involved in PIA to this day.

However, artificial insemination made the livestock programme redundant and so in the mid-1980s the farm north of Dhaka was handed to the Bangladeshi Government. It still produces top quality livestock for local farmers with farmers required to make a contribution to the cost of the livestock. Over the years the cost to local farmers has risen. Consequently it now unfortunately excludes the poorest farmers, but it has still made a huge difference to the quality of farmed livestock in the country.

Simultaneously, with the changes in the livestock programme, it was decided that the orphanage and school on Bhola Island were self-sustaining because of the hectare or two of farmland attached to it for rural training. While some members of the Society decided to continue support for the orphanage and school, the organisation decided to move on. It selected several areas in the north of the country around Tangail where it established holistic programmes of support for the rural community, with strong support from ActionAid UK. In appreciation of that support, the organisation changed its name to the Society FTWHL-Action Aid Australia.



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This was, as my mother-in-law noted at the time, a very unfortunate name choice being Society for those who have less action, Australia! However, I can assure you, there was a lot of action!

The various aspects of these holistic rural projects – including seed banking, livestock support, literacy training, establishing savings groups and child sponsorship – initially went extremely well. However, it became necessary to split the organisation in Bangladesh into two self-autonomous organisations to overcome personality differences, with one part operating in the original project area and the other part in the Rajshahi area in the far west of the country (at Bagha thana on the Padma River). (This action paved the way for our name change to “Partners in Aid” as we subsequently had no employees of our own on any overseas project). Our support for the first of these two organisation was withdrawn soon after, when it failed to perform adequately even after ActionAid Bangladesh stepped in to help. However, the project in the Rajshahi area, implemented by our split-off organisation MEHEDI, was a spectacular success. It provided support to poor land holders to help them keep their land in periods of flooding, school and municipal libraries and infrastructure for a small-scale silk-making industry among other aspects, all in a socially holistic manner. Unfortunately, the head of MEHEDI, ‘Bacchu’ Shamsuddin, a man of great action, suffered extreme emotional difficulties, with the loss of his two sons independently, one after the other. With these losses, his own will in life collapsed and the project wound-up.

Overlapping in time with the Rajshahi projects and now just over 25-years ago, while PIA was still called Action Aid Australia, Service Fellowship International (SFI, Baptist Church) asked us to help establish SFI in Bangladesh. We agreed and subsequently decided to support projects administered by SFI as a development agency over in Bangladesh. Initially, we supported a holistic, technical training orientated series of projects, the TTIS series of projects, in the north in the area surrounding Mymensingh. Subsequently, SFI initiated the Jamuna Development series of projects, specifically for Action Aid Australia, to help the poor on an annually monsoon flooded island. Readers will know about these projects (our current projects) so I shall not describe them further.

“How many people have your donations helped over the years through PIA’s projects in Bangladesh? I have tried to fit numbers but it is impossible to say, especially as there are different degrees of help, and many projects keep on helping long after the project completion (e.g. the cattle breeding projects, now being replicated by PIA in a modern form in our dairy project in Sri Lanka). Covering those dramatically affected it is quite conservatively hundreds of thousands when dependents are included. How can we possibly measure the impact of the above projects? We cannot.



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INDIA: SEDS CHILD SPONSORSHIP

PROGRAM DIRECTOR: LYN PICKERING

SEDS was founded in 1980 by Rajen Joshua and Manil Jayasena as a grassroots development NGO, motivated by the desire to help the poorest of the poor in the drought-prone area of Ananthapur District in Andhra Pradesh.

I recently read an article in a Rotary magazine with reference to teenage mothers who for many reasons (e.g. early marriage, rape and other abuses) left school. With support, many of those girls are now returning to complete their education and they are now looking at more positive outcomes, not only for themselves, but for their children.

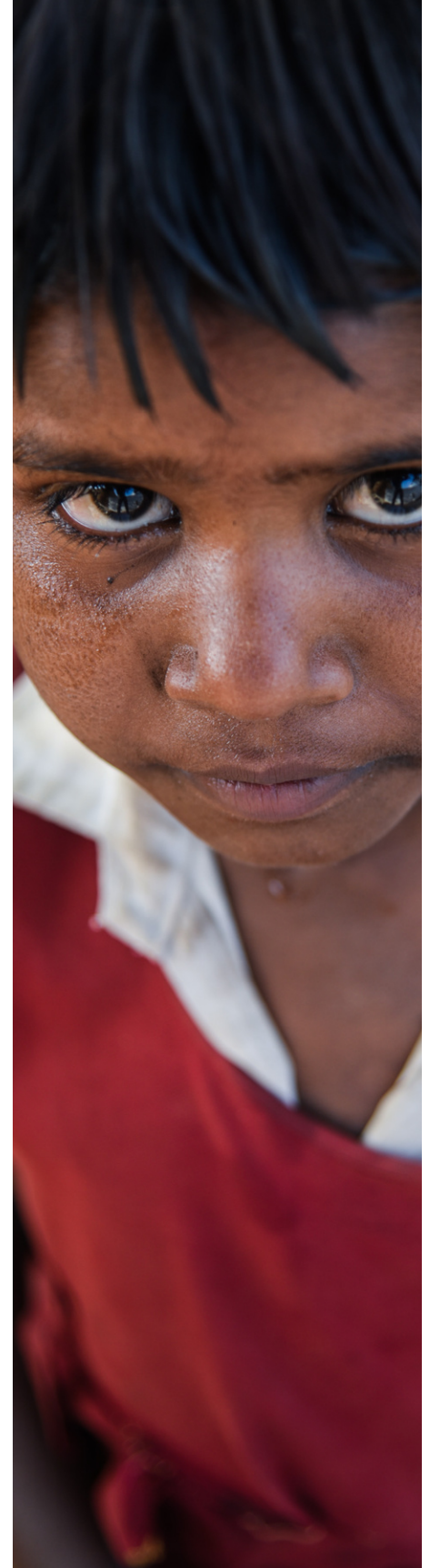
It gave me pause to reflect on the child education program which has been assisting children through SEDS in India since early 1995. The program became a reality after discussions by Ian and I with Rajen and Manil during my first visit to SEDS in late 1994.

The programme has always had a high rate of participation from girls; however, boys have also become part of this successful program, with 770 students in total coming into the child education program since 1995.

Back in 1994 during that first visit to India/SEDS and while on field visits with Ian and Rajen, I noticed that many children from low socioeconomic families were not attending school for a variety of reasons:

- Children from poor families were often expected to add to the family income by working in the agricultural fields alongside their parents, or looking after younger siblings, a role which was given to young girls.
- Parents and grandparents before them had not received any education and were illiterate.
- Early marriages were arranged for girls once they hit puberty.
- Availability of education from Year 6 was outside the local village.
- On occasions, teachers mainly in the very rural areas were not "going to school to teach" but taking a second income in the fields as recorders of loads of soil etc.

After several discussions during that two-week visit, it was determined that SEDS staff would look for students who wished to attend school; those who had the support of their parents; those who were recommended by the school principals and teachers; and also, by the local SEDS health and field workers who were familiar with their communities.





SEDS child sponsorship (continued)

The first few years were challenging due to a number of the issues raised earlier but we persevered. The programme has continued since that time as SEDS was able to set some positive guidelines with PIA input on both their and our expectations.

As students were allowed to leave their village for secondary school (Years 6 to 10), small gifts were given to those students who successfully completed Year 7, followed a few years later by another gift for completing Year 10. During the early years of the program, a Year 10 pass or fail certificate gave students many more options (i.e. to continue onto college for Years 11 and 12 or to find other work beyond working in the fields). The boys in the program were able to gain a license to drive a tractor or truck and this proved to be a good incentive. A few years later, the rules changed and only those with a Year 10 pass were able to apply for a license.

A Rotary friend of ours, Roger Griffiths, who has passed on helped to establish a driving school for some of the disengaged young boys and young men who were seeking better opportunities for employment.

The vocational program run at SEDS by Rashna Joshua for girls and young women has also meant that opportunities have improved for attendees. Sewing classes were available and many of the girls have now found work in the cities. For those from more protected communities, the girls (and also young women who remained in their local villages) married, had their families and were able to work from home or the local community centres.

SEDS holistic approach to developmental work has grown since its inception in 1980. This has meant that the program work of reforestation, watershed management and sustainable agriculture has also grown significantly. That continues today, along with other initiatives such as low carbon farming and diversification of crops. The students who came on to the SEDS education program lived in villages where SEDS program work was carried out.

Communities have benefitted from not only the outstanding program work led by the late Rajen Joshua (now continuing under Manil Joshua's leadership and their son Rohith), but education which has given so many young people more opportunities.

Being able to travel to India almost yearly for many years from 2 to 5 weeks each time has certainly given me a greater understanding of the school system and those who work within it.

Twenty visits later, sharing those visits with Ian and as I reflect on them, I know I am very lucky to have made so many good friendships. To witness and be a part of a culture so different to my own and to look at some of the best achievements of this longstanding student education program is a wonderful feeling.

Students in the program today now expect that once they successfully complete Year 10, they will be able to continue onto college for Years 11 and 12 and then on to university. Many senior students have gained support from the government. It has been noticeable in recent years that parents and even grandparents expect and demand more opportunities for their families.



SEDS child sponsorship (continued)

Our support of the program ends for the majority of the students at the end of Year 10 with a small number of exceptions. Over those years, we have met many of the students who have continued to university. Their stories are inspiring. Information technology and engineering appear to be the main focus of our former students at university.

Students who had so little have been able to demonstrate that, given an opportunity, they can succeed and they can dare to dream of better futures. (I wrote about some of the wonderful achievements of a number of SEDS child education sponsorship students some time ago.)

None of this would have occurred if it was not for the many wonderful people who chose to support the education of a child in India. For some, it has been a case of not one, but many students who have benefitted with many donors, continuing to sponsor a second, third or fourth child during the past 20 years. Thank you for your care and support for the students on the SEDS program. It is certainly appreciated by the Board and I, but more importantly by the families whose daughters and sons have benefitted from an education.

Covid has slowed education for many students over the past two years, but the students are returning to school. There is a renewed enthusiasm and optimism as we move forward with the students on the SEDS/PIA education program. The students can look to the future with hope for better things ahead for them and their families.



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INDIA: ALL BENGAL WOMEN'S UNION (ABWU)

PROJECT DIRECTOR: ANNE-MARIE MATLBY

The All Bengal Women's Union (ABWU) home in Calcutta has been operating for over 70 years and has been supported by Partners in Aid for more than 40 years. It is an NGO run entirely by volunteer women to rescue abused, at risk, destitute, abandoned and orphaned girls.

Now that things are settling down after the pandemic, ABWU have sent me snapshots of the last couple of years for the after-care home and the children's welfare home.

When the pandemic started in March 2020 and the homes were subjected to lockdown, a few girls were sent back to their home while most stayed as there was nowhere for them to go. There were a few new admissions, especially in the Swadhar project and old-age home.

In 2021, there was a sharp and noticeable increase in numbers at the old-age home where right now they have 44 elderly ladies. When the lockdown was lifted and schools reopened, practically all those girls who had gone home returned to ABWU.

During 2020 and 2021, ABWU endured a severe financial crisis as it had to provide food, medical support, toiletries, hygiene and sanitisation products, monthly salaries to all the staff etc.

With the sudden lockdown, there was scarcity of all supplies in the open markets leading to almost all markets closing. In a testament to ABWU's determination to care for and support the women, the organisation ensured that none of the residents faced a lack of anything, continuing the smooth operation of the home. The management of ABWU and staff worked hard and cooperated with each other to face and overcome the challenge to keep things as 'normal' as possible for the girls. It is hard to imagine how difficult it would have been to manage a group of locked-in girls from traumatised backgrounds who are both bored and fearful. With difficult conditions and much reduced staff, their dedication, as always, must be admired.

We have received two reports directly from the homes which are included on the following page. They have been edited slightly for clarity and length.





All Bengal Women's Union (ABWU) (continued)

After care home (girls over 18)

The pandemic did have its toll on our organisation. Last year, we had about 15 victims of covid 19. Most of them were hospitalised so that the numbers could be contained. However, all of them recovered and are doing well. We tried to provide proper and additional nutrition to build the immunity of our children and girls. We had visiting doctors who regularly visited ABWU and provided need-based treatment.

All classes were held online during the pandemic. All staff and our girls have been vaccinated in line with age-appropriate protocols. We provided sanitiser dispensers at all the shelter homes, gate, training centres, office etc. Usage of masks was compulsory. Visitors were limited to the main office and none were allowed to interact with residents. With the impending 4th wave, we are confident that we will be able to manage the covid situation at ABWU.

Children's Welfare Home, March 2020 to March 2022

On 24 March 2020, our prime minister ordered a total lockdown and we had to send all the children home who have a family, no matter how they may be. At that time we had sixty children in our shelter home who had no family or safe place to go to. Our main aim at that time was to keep the children well and covid-free. We had covid tests done for the entire shelter home.

We were aware how important it was to give counselling support to all our children during this trying time. Our counsellors were taking regular counselling sessions through WhatsApp video calls. Their objective and approach were to help children to cope with the pandemic situation and explain to them the risk of the virus and how to give them the mental support.

We faced real challenge in working out a solution to continue with the education. By end of April 2020 teaching staff created and made assignments for the girls whereby the teachers would give the assignment to the gate keeper of ABWU children's home every morning, collect the papers the next day and then give a fresh assignment. The school made sincere effort and started online classes from July 2020 by using Zoom and WhatsApp. Children who went home also could join the classes. We are happy to report that all children of our shelter home could continue with their education successfully. Our children finished their annual examination on 11 December 2020 and had the year-end programme on 23 December.

Children continued with their karate, dance and singing classes along with dance movement therapy, all online. The baking section of our home was busy making delicious Christmas cakes like every year with ever-growing demand for the same amongst members, well-wishers and regular customers.

Year 2021 saw the delta variant playing havoc in India. Few of our children and staff had covid. We had separate sick rooms arranged. Special care was taken and diet plan worked out for them. Some of the children became restless and had behavioural changes due to the fear of the unknown. Our house mothers and counselling staff dealt with the crisis in the best possible way.

As per government orders, children above 16 years got vaccinated.



WELCOMING OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS

The ability of Partners in Aid to do good is a joint effort between our much-valued donors and our volunteer Board members. Ruby Dubash, Wilaine Pis-o and Dan Pagoda were recently welcomed as three new volunteers to boost the Board's capacity and help continue to guide our important work.

Ruby Dubash

Ruby has been in the education, health, humanitarian and non-for-profit (NFP) sectors for over 28 years. She is currently the chief executive officer and company secretary of No Roads Expeditions Foundation, a humanitarian aid organisation that works in remote and rural communities in Papua New Guinea, Myanmar, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. Ruby has held four board directorship roles over the years and is currently a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and Institute of Community Directors Australia.

Ruby's skillset and experiences in governance, marketing and business development has seen her work on large national and international projects and campaigns, especially in the areas of business strategic planning, advocacy, financial sustainability, brand definition and government relations. Ruby has worked in small and large state, national and international NFPs and companies.

Ruby is looking forward to working with Partners in Aid to support change in the communities we serve and to meet the beneficiaries; experiencing first-hand the impact of our life-changing work.

Wilaine Pis-o

Wilaine's surname may be familiar to some readers – she is the sister of one of the key members of the Sinangpad Association. She and her family have now settled in Melbourne.

A finance professional, Wilaine is a qualified certified public accountant, a licensed member of the Philippine Regulations Commission – Board of Accountancy and has a Bachelor of Science in Accountancy. She has worked in the accounting public practice sector for 15 years, previously in the Middle East and in Singapore and the Philippines.

Dan Pagoda

Dan joins the Board of Partners in Aid with several years of experience working for parliamentarians from both the major parties, at federal and state level, in government as well as opposition. In one of his roles he provided research and advisory support to the chair of the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence & Trade Committee.

Dan returned to university for postgraduate study in 2017 to undertake a Master of International Relations at the University of Western Australia. He was fortunate to be accepted into summer school programs at both Sciences Po in Paris and Exeter and St Antony's Colleges at Oxford where he completed his masters and graduated with distinction. It was during his postgraduate study that Dan developed a particular interest in the plight of the Rohingya in Myanmar.

Today, Dan is the external relations manager for a global environmental services company where he looks after media and government relations. He's excited about the opportunity to work with Partners in Aid, gain valuable experience in the international aid space and provide support wherever he can.



A NOTE ABOUT OUR IMAGES

Wherever possible, we include images of our projects that are taken by our Board members on their self-funded visits to sites or photos taken by our partners themselves. However, we are particularly conscious of the need to respect the privacy of others, especially children. Accordingly, several images in this newsletter have been sourced from free online photo sharing website Unsplash.

DO YOU NEED TO UPDATE YOUR DETAILS?

If your postal address has changed, please email admin@partnersinaid.org.au or call 0477 743 053 and we'll update our records.

Similarly, if you'd instead like to receive our newsletter by email, please get in touch. Receiving the newsletter electronically allows us to save on the cost of postage. We are, of course, very happy to continue mailing the newsletter to you in the traditional way and are grateful to our printer for the continued donation of his time and resources.

ACFID



ACFID CODE OF CONDUCT

Complaints policy.

All complaints should be addressed to the Board Chair and will be treated seriously, acknowledged promptly and resolved within two months.

The ACFID Code of Conduct is a voluntary, self-regulatory sector code of good practice that aims to improve international development outcomes and increase stakeholder trust by enhancing transparency and accountability of signatory organisations. Partners in Aid is committed to the Code, of which we are a signatory and have been for many years. If you feel Partners in Aid has breached the ACFID Code of Conduct you can visit <http://www.acfid.asn.au/code-of-conduct/complaints> to make a complaint directly to ACFID.

WHO IS ACFID?

The Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) unites Australia's non-government aid and international development organisations to strengthen their collective impact against poverty. Its vision is of a world where gross inequality within societies and between nations is reversed and extreme poverty is eradicated. Partners in Aid is proud to be associated with such an organization, the peak body for the not-for-profit aid and development sector in Australia.