

Our Philanthropic Heart: A Hall without Walls

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It was three years ago that our family decided we wanted to give and support causes beyond our local community.

After making this decision, we were made aware of the struggles facing the people of Timor-Leste.

While this region is geographically close to Australia – it's faster to travel by plane from Darwin to Dili than it is to journey between Sydney and Melbourne – the nations are poles apart, in terms of basic services, infrastructure and health and education.

When we first travelled from the capital Dili to the township of Maliana – about a five-hour journey by road – it was glaringly obvious that this community remains emotionally and physically scarred by the country's battle to achieve independence.

But there was still a feeling of great hope and a determination to rebuild. We could also see that with the right support, young people here could be given an

opportunity to really flourish.



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Our attention was drawn to the Don Bosco Technical School, which was established in Maliana to educate both boys and girls in Years 10, 11 and 12 in electrical trades.

It is proudly run by the Salesian Christian Brothers and has been purpose-built to equip young Timorese people with vital trade skills that will benefit the country's planned gas refinery operations - seen as an integral part of the country's rebuild.

We were immediately struck by the teenagers on campus. Many of them are from very poor families and travel from many parts of Timor to board. They have overcome enormous obstacles to acquire an education and take none of it for granted. They are so obviously proud to be at school, praying daily in gratitude for the simple joy of three meals a day, companionship, and the opportunity to learn.



A ‘Hall without Walls’

What they were missing on campus was a place to congregate and shelter. While there were some very basic outdoor recreational facilities, these structures provided no protection from the searing heat and monsoonal rains.

We knew that simple, but solid buildings could make a real difference to the experience of these young people and their teachers.

So, after consulting with the school principal, Brother Marcal, a Salesian Brother, we set about facilitating a build of this “hall without walls” – a structure that would shelter the exposed basketball court and provide a natural hub for community events.

Just weeks ago, we travelled back to Maliana as a family to join the students and local community for the official opening of this building (see main photo above).

We felt so privileged to be involved, and to watch as this school creates its own history.

We were genuinely humbled by the generous hospitality provided to us by this community and consider ourselves lifelong friends.

The building looks fantastic and the project is beautifully aligned with our own philanthropic goals: it is sustainable for the long term and it has the backing of the Timorese Government.

In addition, the Salesian Brothers have a long history in Timor-Leste and have

committed to operating this school for the next fifty years.

We will continue to support this school because we believe it represents the best of what Timor-Leste's future can be.

There is so much more we can do and are planning for Timor-Leste.

We look forward to providing further updates shortly of another project in the region working with younger children.

