

# Sustain

MAY 2026





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## Reflection

In this first edition of Sustain since the joyful union of the IBVM and CJ, we stand at a moment of continuity and renewal, and we pause to reflect on the profound grace of education — that daily work of entering another's world, recognising their inherent dignity, and walking with them toward a life more abundant. Across more than 40 countries, our shared Mary Ward mission continues to believe, as both Gonzaga Barry and Mary Ward did, that education is not preparation for life but life itself: a nurturing of the whole person, a freeing of the spirit, a quiet and determined act of justice.

In these pages, we encounter communities where quality learning opportunities plant seeds of hope that allow women and girls to flourish. In the brickfield schools, children study amid dust and hardship, yet their desire to learn breaks open new possibilities. In Peru, education reaches those living at the fragile edges of society. In Darjeeling, career guidance helps young women imagine futures once closed to them. And in Vinh Loc, Sr Aithien's *Learning Support Program* shows how patient, attentive accompaniment can transform lives.

May these stories remind us that every teaching moment — every door opened, every heart encouraged — helps shape a more just, truthful and compassionate world. Education remains our most hopeful and enduring response to the needs of our time.

**Marina Ugonotti**  
*Principal, Loreto Normanhurst*



### COVER\*

Brickfield  
Schools  
Program

*\*Consent for all imagery of children and young people used in this publication has been received.*

### ABOUT US

Mary Ward International is a registered charity and is the Australian and global development organisation of the Loreto Sisters. Our Mission is to support the Loreto Sisters and the broader Mary Ward network as we work with women and communities to transform unjust structures and reduce poverty and oppression, primarily through formal and non-formal education.



Mary Ward International respectfully acknowledges

all Traditional Custodians of the land and waters of Australia. We pay respect to their Elders, past and present, and young leaders of today and the future. Mary Ward International commits itself to the ongoing work of reconciliation with our First Nations families and communities.



## MESSAGE FROM THE EO

# The Heart of Our Mission

This edition of *Sustain* is significant for Mary Ward International. It is our first since the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Congregation of Jesus came together as one. While this marks a new chapter in the Mary Ward story, our mission remains unchanged: supporting women and children through learning, advocacy, and opportunity.

This edition focuses on education, which lies at the heart of our network. You will read how the *Collective Voices Career Guidance Program* in India helps young women like Jasmine explore higher education and meaningful career pathways, equipping them with the skills and confidence to shape their own futures. Where once a child's only option was to work alongside their parents in the brick kilns, you will discover how the *Brickfield Schools Program* now provides children with access to a life-altering education.

Our commitment to education embraces both academic learning and essential life skills. In this edition, you will also learn how the *Children Without Fear Project* in Peru supports children in understanding their rights, building confidence, and strengthening their sense of justice and dignity.

From Vietnam, Sr Aithien Nguyen describes the positive impact the *Learning Support Program* is having on children who previously had no access to the formal education system, providing them with the opportunity to fully engage in learning and realise their potential.

We are proud to announce our new *Indigenous Education Scholarship Fund*, developed in partnership with the Loreto Sisters and the Aurora Foundation. This initiative opens doors for First Nations students to pursue educational opportunities previously out of reach, honouring their culture while investing in their future.

Across every story in this edition, one theme stands clear: education is the foundation of change. It builds the skills, confidence, and awareness that allow individuals and communities to thrive. As we embark on this new chapter together, we thank you for being part of a network that values learning, equity, and the transformative power of education.

**Kirstin Del Beato**

*Executive Officer, Mary Ward International*

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## ACCOUNTABILITY & ACCREDITATION

Mary Ward International is a member of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID). We are committed and fully adhere to the ACFID Code of Conduct, managing our work with transparency, accountability, and integrity. Mary Ward International is an approved organisation under the Overseas Aid Gift Deduction Scheme (OAGDS) and endorsed by the Australian Taxation Office as a Deductible Gift Recipient.



ACFID  
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## From Bricks to Books: *Futures Rewritten in the Brickfields*

In India's brickfields, migration is a way of survival. Each year, families leave their villages in search of work, moving from one brickfield to another. While migration provides a livelihood, it disrupts children's education, leaving many behind and reinforcing cycles of school dropout and illiteracy.

This reality has been especially harsh for women and girls. In many communities, education for girls is seen as unnecessary. Survival takes priority, and generations of women grow up without the opportunity to read or write.

Initiatives like the *Brickfield Schools Program*, run by the Kolkata Mary Ward Social Centre, are helping to change this. Open-air, flexible learning keeps children studying despite seasonal migration, allowing many to return to government schools in their home villages.

The program gives women a chance to attend classes after long days in the brickfields, a need made even more pressing as automation and robotics reshape the brick-making sector. In doing so, the program builds the skills needed for the future, affirms their dignity, and opens doors that were once closed.





## Ananya's Story

For years, seasonal migration shaped Ananya's childhood. She moved between her village and temporary work sites, carrying uncertainty instead of stability. Yet even in this shifting landscape, her desire to learn never wavered.

When her family arrived at a brickfield, Ananya enrolled in the local open-air school. Quiet, observant, and quick to understand, she stood out immediately. Her teachers recall how eagerly she participated, absorbing lessons with a natural ease, despite the challenges around her.

Recognising her potential, the program team helped Ananya transition to mainstream government education. This shift brought new challenges: a more advanced syllabus, higher expectations, and learning gaps created by years of disrupted schooling. Determined not to fall behind, Ananya attended the program's learning centre, where she received extra support to strengthen her educational foundation and keep pace with her peers.

In 2026, Ananya will sit for the Class 10 Board Examination, an achievement carrying enormous significance. Her teachers are confident in her progress, while her parents watch history unfold. She is on track to become the first in her family to complete a full school education.

Ananya's journey shows the difference education can make. With determination and support, she is breaking the cycle of seasonal migration and building a future her family once thought impossible.

## Education for All

Across the brickfields, women are seizing the chance to overcome generations of educational exclusion. Adult literacy classes have become a new force for change. They offer opportunities for women of all ages to read, write, and sign their names – small acts with profound meaning.

Three generations of women from one family exemplify this transformation. Sabitri, 80, grew up when education for girls was unheard of. Her daughter Aparna lived in a village without a school and was married before education became accessible. Her granddaughter Puja, 22, hoped for a different future, but migration for survival disrupted any chance of schooling. For all three, a thumbprint was their only signature.

When the family arrived at the brickfields and discovered adult education classes, they enrolled immediately. Each night, they practised letters and numbers together, supporting one another as they learned for the first time to write their names.

Sabitri now speaks with pride and determination. *"One day I will go to the bank and sign my name, not just press my thumb,"* she says. *"I want them to see that I can do it."*

Today, Sabitri, Aparna, and Puja inspire women across the brickfields, proving it is never too late to learn.

**Kaithlyn McNab**

*Mary Ward International*







# Threads *of One* Tapestry



For me, a Loreto alumna and former Loreto Ministries employee, and for many who have supported Mary Ward International over the years, the word *Loreto* carries a resonance that extends well beyond a name. It speaks to a tradition shaped by courage, conviction, and an enduring commitment to education and service – a legacy that can be traced back more than four centuries to Mary Ward, a woman far ahead of her time.

Her vision was simple yet radical: women should be educated, and faith should find expression not in isolation, but in action – action in the world, alongside those most in need.

Over the years, I often found myself reflecting on a quiet question, one that I am sure others also pondered or perhaps even asked out loud. If both the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM) and the Congregation of Jesus (CJ) shared the same origins, the same charism, and the same unwavering commitment to Mary Ward's vision, why did they exist as two separate congregations?

The idea of “*becoming one*” was beginning to take shape at that time, not as a sudden shift, but as a gradual and thoughtful discernment. It felt less like a change being imposed and more like something being restored – a coming together that felt like a natural course... one in which a shared mission could be carried forward more powerfully as *one*.

Now, *one* is here. In 2025, the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Congregation of Jesus formally united as one congregation – the Congregation of Jesus. Though their paths had diverged over time, both had always drawn from the same well – the vision of Mary Ward and her enduring commitment to education, justice, and the empowerment of women and girls across the world.

While now unified under the one name, the Loreto name and tradition remain central. What is being witnessed today is not the creation of something new, but the weaving together of threads that have always belonged to the same tapestry.

Becoming one congregation is a strengthening of the foundation upon which Mary Ward International's mission stands. The work remains the same – supporting women and children through education and the opportunities it makes possible – but the breadth and cohesion of the global community behind that work has evolved.

It brings together communities of Sisters, partners, and projects across continents with a renewed sense of unity. It cultivates deeper

relationships between regions, encourages the sharing of knowledge and resources, and enables a more collaborative and coordinated approach to addressing the challenges faced by the communities Mary Ward International serves. In essence, the network is less a collection of individual efforts, and more a single, integrated whole.

Across this global network, initiatives continue to support education, livelihoods, and advocacy. At the same time, new connections are being formed and existing ones strengthened, including newer connections in places such as Romania, Mauritius and Bangladesh.

From Ukraine and Hungary to Mongolia and Myanmar, from Argentina and Brazil to Zimbabwe and Zambia, and from the United States and Canada to Germany and Gibraltar, the reach of the Mary Ward tradition continues to extend, not as isolated points on a map, but as part of an interconnected movement. The map featured in this edition of *Sustain* visually expresses this reality.

This sense of interconnectedness has always been intrinsic to the Loreto tradition. What has changed is not its presence, but its visibility. Becoming one congregation allows that unity to be more clearly seen and more intentionally lived. It strengthens the collective voice of the Loreto family, enabling local experiences and insights to inform global conversations around education, justice, and human dignity.

The spirit of Mary Ward sits at the core of this union. Her belief in the transformative power of education, her commitment to justice, and her conviction that communities flourish when people work together continue to guide every aspect of this mission. In many respects, this moment can be understood as the fulfilment of her original vision – a global community, united not by geography but by a shared commitment to service.

For those who have supported Mary Ward International over the years, your place within this story remains unchanged. Your generosity continues to open doors to education and create pathways of opportunity for women and girls across the world. If anything, your impact is now part of something even more expansive, a mission that is deeply rooted and increasingly global. The name of the congregation may now be unified, but the essence of the Loreto tradition remains exactly as it has always been. Now, this global family moves forward together, sustained by a shared belief in the power of education to transform lives.

**Anna Turkington**



# Breaking the Cycle: *Changing Lives in Huaycán*

For those working directly with the *Childhood Without Fear Project*, each day is an opportunity to stand in solidarity with children and families navigating hardship in Huaycán, Peru. This densely populated urban community on the outskirts of Lima is home to many families living on steep hillsides. They face economic insecurity, high levels of violence, and have limited access to services. *"For me, it means actively and directly contributing to children and families,"* said Melanie Gonzales Zavaleta, a social worker with the project. *"It's about striving to create a positive impact that encourages change and improves their quality of life."*

Often, moments of hope arrive quietly: in the relief on a parent's face or the returning spark of hope in a child's eyes. *"What impacts me most is when I see a family no longer feeling alone – when they find their own solutions to overcome challenges."* These small, but profound, shifts capture the true progress of the program: transformation beginning within the families themselves.

The project creates a safe environment where children, especially girls in grades 4 to 6, can break free from cycles of violence and discrimination. Through small discussion groups, educational workshops, and personalised support, students learn about their rights and how to protect them. This empowers them to pursue education with confidence while developing the skills to reach their full potential and contribute to stronger, more resilient communities.

The work is not without its challenges, yet resilience grows through self-awareness. *"I am encouraged by the self-knowledge I've developed, recognising my abilities, limits, strengths, and even my fears,"* Melanie shares. This reflective practice shapes how they accompany others: with clarity, compassion, and purpose.

Melanie shares a powerful insight about her work: listening is the key to the project's success. *"By opening myself to people's stories and emotions, I recognise their dignity and strength. That trust allows me to support them as they take the lead in changing their own lives."*

**Kirstin Del Beato**

*Mary Ward International*

Interview with Melanie Gonzales Zavaleta by Mary Ward International Peru



## Finding Her Voice

Eleven-year-old Cami had always shown great potential in the classroom, yet she often struggled to make sense of the discrimination she saw around her. As part of the project, she joined a safe discussion group for girls and adolescents, which gave her space to express herself and develop her leadership skills.

Cami now speaks confidently when something feels unfair and encourages the project to reach younger children so they can learn about their rights too.

*"The right to freedom is very important," says Cami. "It's not about doing whatever we want but doing what is right."*

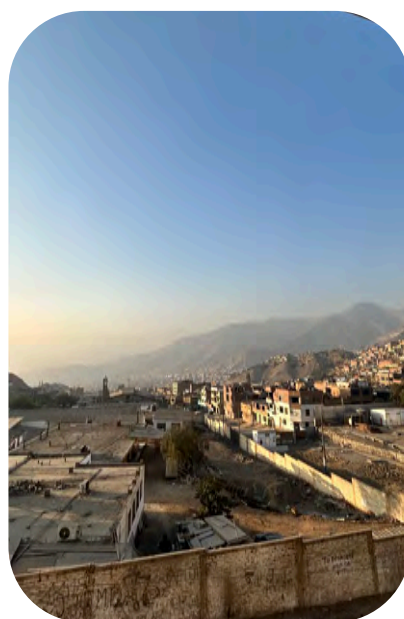


## From Chaos to Safety

Twelve-year-old Davide lives in a neighbourhood affected by gangs, drugs, and violence. His class had been known for its disruptive behaviour, making learning almost impossible. Through the project, he and his classmates learned about their rights, including the right to education in a safe, respectful environment.

With the support of their teacher, the classroom atmosphere changed dramatically. Davide now feels safe and focused, yet he is deeply aware of the challenges older students continue to face.

*"I would ask the project to also help the first years of secondary school, because here drugs and gangs are a very big problem that stops them from having a future," says Davide.*



## Courage to Break the Cycle

Living in a precarious home on one of Huaycán's steepest hillsides, ten-year-old Isabel faced domestic violence and economic hardship from a young age. Despite her cheerful personality and excellent grades, fear and uncertainty followed her into school.

Through the project's workshops, Isabel learned she has the right to live free from violence and that her voice matters. She soon began helping to teach other children about their rights, speaking calmly and confidently about emotional safety and violence prevention.

Most remarkably, Isabel used her new understanding to seek external support for her mother, demonstrating courage and leadership beyond her years.

*"Now I know that my opinion is valuable, and that it's important for us to be treated with equality and without violence," Isabel notes.*



# Our Global Network

Our newly expanded development network connects six Mary Ward International offices – Australia, Ireland, Spain, Peru, South Asia, and East Africa – with missions and partners around the world. Each brings a unique approach to supporting women, children, and communities, tailored to local needs through initiatives spanning education and livelihoods, health, and advocacy.





These efforts are strengthened by our global advocacy structures, including the United Nations Office in New York and the Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Office in Rome. Together, they amplify local voices on the world stage, ensuring that community experiences inform global conversations.

Across continents, these offices, missions and projects form a vibrant web of partnership and solidarity, united by a shared commitment: to advance education, justice, and opportunities for women and children everywhere.



# Beyond Our Imagination

This past year has brought exciting milestones for the *Learning Support Program* in Vinh Loc, Vietnam. During the summer break, which can last up to three months, 45 children attended the program, including many from the government system, eager to keep up with their learning.

*"I thought the children would want a break," says Sr Aithien, "but they all insisted on attending because of the pride they felt in learning. That determination has been one of the most rewarding parts of the program this year."*

Even more inspiring was the transition of six students into formal schooling. The children, aged six to seven, not only caught up academically but also obtained the identification documents needed to enrol locally, enabling their move into mainstream classes.

## A PLACE TO BELONG AND GROW

Launched in 2020 by the Loreto Sisters, the program supports children who have missed out on formal schooling, helping them develop literacy, numeracy, confidence, and friendships. Vinh Loc, on Ho Chi Minh City's outskirts, is home to families who migrated from rural areas for work, often in informal jobs, such as street vending, recycling, or factory work, making school enrolment a challenge.

## FOCUSED LEARNING

This year, new afternoon classes allow for smaller groups and more individual attention. Previously, the program offered only Class 1 and Class 2 levels, but some children have advanced into Class 3 for the first time, an exciting milestone in their learning journey. The program is now supported by three qualified teachers and two assistant teachers, ensuring every child receives the guidance and care they need to thrive.

## EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES

Encouraged by success in Vinh Loc, the Loreto Sisters plan to support 15 more children and their families in a second location near Ho Chi Minh City.

*"Formal school children love coming to our school. It gives them something meaningful to do during breaks and shows them there's no difference between formal and informal learners," Sr Aithien reflects.*

In a community often overlooked, the Vinh Loc *Learning Support Program* is creating opportunities for children to learn, grow, and flourish, turning barriers into educational pathways.

**Kirstin Del Beato**

*Mary Ward International*







# From Dreams to Degrees

As Jasmine finished school at St Mary's Girls' Secondary School in Darjeeling's tea estates, she felt uncertain about what lay ahead. Like many girls in her community, she dreamed of pursuing higher education but had limited exposure to opportunities, guidance, and encouragement.

That changed when she joined the *Collective Voices Project's Career Guidance Program* at the Darjeeling Mary Ward Social Centre. Through interactive sessions, group discussions, and one-on-one mentoring, Jasmine discovered a passion for governance, society, and public service. She received practical advice on college applications, goal-setting, and career pathways, while learning to navigate social and financial barriers. With new clarity and confidence, she applied to several colleges to study a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science (Honours).

*"Before attending the program, I was unsure about what to do next. The sessions opened my mind. Now I have a goal - I want to contribute to my community and make a difference,"* Jasmine reflects.

In the past year alone, the program has supported 45 young people to pursue higher education, vocational training, scholarships, and government schemes. Beyond career guidance, the *Collective Voices Project* strengthens the wellbeing and leadership of women and girls across Darjeeling's tea estates through rights education, health awareness, and income-generation initiatives. By building practical skills and creating pathways for community participation, the project helps young women grow in confidence, expand their opportunities, and make informed decisions about their futures. Partnerships with schools and local leaders ensure that this support continues to have a lasting impact.

Through the *Collective Voices Project*, hundreds of girls like Jasmine are gaining confidence, pursuing higher education, shaping their futures, and inspiring those around them. With each generation, the program's impact grows, enabling young women to transform their ambitions into real opportunities.

**Kirstin Del Beato**  
*Mary Ward International*

# Walking Alongside First Nations Students

Across Australia, too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are navigating an education system that was not designed with them in mind.

While progress has been made, significant gaps remain. Approximately one in three First Nations young people do not complete Year 12 or equivalent studies. Many face barriers, including distance, limited resources, and a lack of culturally safe learning environments. For students in regional and remote communities, these challenges can be even more pronounced.

Behind these statistics are young people with ambition, intelligence, and a deep connection to culture. What is often missing is not potential, but access; not capability, but opportunity.

It is within this context that Mary Ward International, the Loreto Sisters, and the Aurora Education Foundation (Aurora) have come together in partnership to establish the *Indigenous Education Scholarship Fund*.

Aurora is a First Nations organisation dedicated to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to achieve their educational and employment goals on their own terms. At the centre of its approach is a simple belief: education is strongest when it is grounded in culture, identity, and community.

This shared commitment comes to life through Aurora's *High School Program*. From Year 7 through to life beyond school, students receive tutoring, mentoring and practical resources. Elders, mentors and staff walk alongside them, helping to strengthen identity, build confidence, and navigate pathways to further study and employment.

For many students, this support is what makes the difference. It creates the conditions for students to remain engaged in school and begin imagining futures that feel possible.

Alongside this, the *Redefining Indigenous Success in Education (RISE) Project* is listening more deeply. It follows the journey of hundreds of students to understand which factors truly support success. Academic learning, cultural connection, and wellbeing are all part of the picture. These insights will help shape more effective and responsive education pathways for future generations.

For Mary Ward International, this partnership continues a long-held commitment. Education has always been at the heart of the Loreto tradition. It is not simply about learning, it is about dignity, justice, and the freedom to shape one's own future.

At the heart of this work is a shared understanding: lasting change begins by listening and walking alongside communities as they shape their futures.

*"First Nations young women already carry knowledge, resilience and vision for their futures. Our task is not to direct them, but to listen, to walk beside them, and to support the paths they choose. In working with Aurora, we are reminded that education is not an act of charity, it is justice in action,"* said Sr Libby Rogerson CJ.

Over the next six years, this partnership will accompany hundreds of students as they move through school and beyond. It will strengthen connections between families, communities and education, while contributing to a growing understanding of what meaningful, culturally grounded learning looks like in practice.

And when young women are supported to learn, lead, and shape their own futures, the impact reaches far beyond the classroom – because strong women build strong communities.

**Taylor Doherty**



# Stronger Together

Isabella, a Kamillaroi and Wiradjuri woman, joined Aurora's *High School Program* in Year 8. At the end of 2025, she graduated from Year 12 and has since returned to the program as a Mentor, supporting the educational journeys of other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

When Isabella first joined, she dreamed of becoming an actor. At the time, it felt distant. *"I never thought that acting could be a reality for me,"* she reflected. *"But the more I become involved with different opportunities, the more I think this is a real possibility for me. The High School Program opened a whole world of opportunities for me, and it's helped me improve my learning with access to so many more resources."*

Through tutoring, mentoring, and access to new experiences, Isabella's confidence grew. Just as importantly, she found a deeper connection to culture and community.

*"Being around other [Indigenous] people, I learned so much more. I'm like, 'wow, that's me!' We all did that. That's our culture. That's who we are. That's what our ancestors have done. These are our traditions. These are our ways of life and our values, and they show how closely we are connected to the Earth."*

*"I feel really good [being involved with the program], and like this is somewhere I belong."*

*"Like somewhere where we can share our stories without being judged."*

Over time, her aspirations evolved. With guidance from Mentors and Elders, Isabella began to see new pathways for her future. Today, she plans to study criminology at university, with the goal of supporting her community in new ways.

*"The program helped me to figure out my goals by working on certain themes in each age group. The Mentors have supported me with their guidance,"* she reflects. *"The best part of the program has been learning from Elders and people around me."*

Throughout her school years, Aurora walked alongside Isabella, giving her both the support and the freedom to grow, change direction, and define her own path.

For Isabella, graduating Year 12 was a milestone that extended beyond her own achievement. *"Graduating [high school] in my community is massive, as I'm the first in my family to graduate. It's a way for me to be a role model for other people in my community."*

Now, as a Mentor, Isabella is doing exactly that. She is walking alongside younger students, sharing her experience, and encouraging them to see what is possible.

*"I believe I'm more driven now,"* she says. *"Because there's a good support system here. The [Aurora staff and Mentors] always tell us to dream big and have really inspired us to be the best that we can."*

Isabella's journey reflects what happens when young women are supported with the right opportunities, a strong cultural connection and a community that believes in them.



# A Chance To Learn, A Life Transformed



For most of her childhood, Ananya's life was shaped by upheaval. Each year, her family migrated to India's brickfields in search of work, carrying uncertainty instead of stability. Schooling was repeatedly disrupted, and like many children of seasonal workers, she faced the very real risk of dropping out entirely.

Everything changed when she discovered the *Brickfield Schools Program*. In an open-air classroom beside the kilns, Ananya finally found a place to learn. Quiet, observant, and quick to understand, she immediately stood out. Her teachers recognised her potential and helped

her transition into mainstream government schooling – an enormous step after years of interrupted learning.

To keep pace with her peers, Ananya attended the program's learning centre each afternoon, strengthening her educational foundation and rebuilding her confidence. Today, she is on track to become the first in her family to complete a full school education.

With your support, girls like Ananya can continue their education, gain the skills they need for a changing world, and break cycles of disadvantage that have lasted generations.

*Your support today will help rewrite the future for girls like Ananya.*

## Support Our Open-Air Schools in the Brickfields of West Bengal.



**\$250**

Will provide a nine month seasonal education for one child.



**\$750**

Will provide literacy access and vocational training for one woman.



**\$2800**

Will help equip a brickfield school with the resources it needs for a season.

*I wish to donate...*

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☐ \$750

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Other Amount:

\$

*I wish to make a recurring monthly gift...*

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\$

*I wish to leave a legacy...*



Please contact me about leaving a gift in my Will.

**Note:** Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible. Funds raised through this appeal will be used to fund projects including but not limited to the examples in this appeal.

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Mary Ward International,  
PO Box 4082, Auburn South, VIC 3122

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[www.mwia.org.au](http://www.mwia.org.au)  
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Call (03) 8832 0411  
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Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Cheque: ☐ My cheque/money is enclosed and payable to MWIA.

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