

APRIL 2023

Sustain



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Reflection

Sr Libby Rogerson ibvm

Mary Ward's memorable quotation, "women in time to come will do much," is aptly suited to MWIA's focus on empowering women. The empowerment of women is, in essence, about justice. It is about valuing the dignity, insights and contributions of women and girls. Anything less is an injustice.

MWIA, through its various projects, seeks to provide opportunities for women and girls to rightfully receive an education, participate in decision-making and know their rights. Working with women to have their leadership recognised, their voices heard, and their contributions to family and community recognised is key to MWIA's efforts to empower women.

For Mary Ward, justice was based on authentic relationships with God, ourselves and people. This view of justice underpins MWIA's desire for women and girls to live positive, fulfilling lives, free from exploitation, exclusion, and oppression, enabling them to "do much."



COVER*

Solar Lanterns Project,
Sundarbans, West Bengal,
India

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

ABOUT US

Mary Ward International Australia (MWIA) 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 MWIA 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
Australia
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 Australia commits itself to the ongoing work of reconciliation with our First Nations families and communities.



Message from the EO

Women Gaining Ground

Mary Ward International Australia is proudly named in honour of Loreto founder Mary Ward, whose legacy inspires women and girls to gain ground across all spheres of public life. Yet the balance of power – of who makes decisions, controls the assets and holds influence over others – remains firmly in favour of males, irrespective of class, culture, or religion.

Female empowerment has become a significant topic of discussion in development and economics. Economic empowerment allows women to control and benefit from resources, assets, and income while aiding well-being. It refers to the ability of girls and women to make strategic life choices they were previously denied, and act on them.

Female empowerment can be defined as promoting women's and girls' sense of self-worth, their ability to control their own choices, and their right to influence social change for themselves and others.

It includes accepting female viewpoints, amplifying their voices and raising the economic, social and cultural status of women and girls through education and advocacy.

At **Mary Ward International Australia**, we strive to walk alongside girls and women to break down barriers to equal representation in all spheres of life.

We believe that healthy, educated and empowered women and girls are the key to the health and social development of families, communities and countries.

As this edition of *Sustain* illustrates, when women live safe, fulfilled, and productive lives, whether here in Australia or further afield, they can reach their full potential, contribute their skills to the workforce and raise happier and healthier children. They can help fuel sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity as a whole.

As you will read in this inspiring edition, there is much to celebrate and abundant opportunity ahead. Given our origin, if we, as part of the broader Loreto community, don't rise to this challenge and actively support the progression of female empowerment, then who?

Hannah George
Executive Officer, MWIA

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MWIA is a full 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. MWIA 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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An Unbreakable Spirit

Fiza Khosla

MWIA Community Engagement Coordinator

This March, I had the opportunity to visit the local community members living and working in tea estates throughout West Bengal, India, alongside my colleague from Australia. Having lived in India for over 20 years, I felt accustomed to the challenges plaguing Indian society, such as poverty, child marriage, child labour, and illiteracy. However, after experiencing the community's plight so closely, I felt distressed by the true extent of the injustice experienced. To me, it was utterly unfamiliar and incomprehensible. The extraordinary time spent within these communities has left me truly transformed.

Tea is a savoured beverage throughout India, a crowd favourite readily available in almost every household. As tea lovers, we often take for granted this much-loved beverage without realising the harsh realities of the tea industry, which has been plagued with human rights violations and ethical issues since its colonial inception in the 1800s. Our interactions with those most affected, often the women who live and work in these communities, revealed the true extent of the injustices they face and the feudal nature of the tea industry. Workers and their families live in overcrowded settlements crammed into the corners of the sprawling tea gardens. They work six to seven days a week for a meagre AUD4.50 a day, struggling to support their families. One of the most persistent fears among these women was their lack of financial independence and legal ownership over their homes and land, despite having worked for years. As India's population grows, development increases, putting these already vulnerable women and communities further at risk. In many instances, tea estates that provide employment and housing to thousands of people are suddenly sold for commercial development. With little notice and a lack of financial means, whole communities watch as bulldozers turn up on their doorsteps, leaving them with no home, no income and no hope for their futures.

The communities we visited face daunting social justice issues, amplified by a general lack of education and awareness, particularly amongst the older generations. Child marriage, child labour, child abuse, domestic violence, and human trafficking are just some of the inconceivable human rights violations ever prevalent in India. Girls and women are particularly vulnerable, as they are often lured by traffickers promising a better life and financial security. Tragically, older children in families are forced to quit school and work as child labourers. The early exposure, lack

of guidance, and excessive burden placed upon them leaves them vulnerable to addiction and other destructive behaviours, such as excessive drinking and smoking, severely impacting their childhood and futures.

Despite the extreme anguish and pain, and the many distressing stories faced by these communities, there was great comfort in knowing that the dedicated team of volunteers, case officers, project coordinators and the director of Darjeeling Mary Ward Social Centre (DMWSC) personally watch out for them and work tirelessly to support them. Through initiatives like [Collective Voices](#), [Ethical Enterprises](#) and [Legal Aid](#), the staff at DMWSC are empowering women, children and communities to understand, enact, and promote their rights in four key areas: education, protection, health and nutrition. They are making a significant impact in increasing community awareness through educational workshops on the importance of attending school, child marriage, trafficking and domestic violence. These efforts have been highly successful and victims have significantly decreased. The progress of children who have joined the programs has been remarkable - children attend school more regularly and have come together to motivate other families. They are the "little informers" of the community as they are often the first to report instances of abuse, domestic violence, and child marriage to project coordinators.

The DMWSC team's efforts extend beyond just awareness raising. They also provide practical support to the women and girls of the plantations through vocational training initiatives such as tailoring, weaving, and candle making. These workshops create opportunities for women and girls to gain financial independence and grow their confidence. They have helped women form and set up self-help groups, providing a platform to voice concerns and ensuring ongoing support and unity.

In the few weeks I spent in India, I learned so much about the people of my own country. I admire and applaud the 'unbreakable spirit of the people'; whether it be the staff of DMWSC working with determination to create positive change or the women and children of the tea estates who fight every day despite the hardships - they are truly courageous. Their bravery and perseverance serve as an inspiration and reminder that we must always, **always**, stand up for what is right.



Sukhni & Binita

Impact Story

Sukhni and Binita Oraon, sisters from Sukna, West Bengal, were raised in a community where their parents, like most, worked long hours at the tea plantations for marginal wages. Although they went to school, they had little else to occupy their time as children. Most evenings and weekends were spent doing household chores, helping mothers in the plantations or aimlessly roaming the streets. When the Darjeeling Mary Ward Social Centre (DMWSC) began the Sukna Jute Program under the Ethical Enterprises initiative, the sisters were among the first few students. Eleven years later, they are now teachers in the program, empowering other girls from their community.

Sukhni and Binita's classroom is not only a place where girls learn to make jute products but a space where friendship blossoms, stories are shared, and knowledge is gained about how to identify and protect themselves against child marriage, domestic violence, trafficking, and child abuse. The sisters themselves acquired vast knowledge from the program and now aspire to share the same with the young women from their local community. With the income earned from teaching and selling their jute products,

they are each pursuing their bachelor's degree with the dream of becoming teachers at the local university.

"Being associated with this program and DMWSC has given us the confidence, the independence and the faith to dream big and dream for more. We have received immense knowledge, life skills and support from the Sukna Jute Program. From the income earned, we are now pursuing our higher studies. We recently bought a bike to help with transportation, especially at night, and aspire to build a permanent house for our mother.

"Initially, our community hesitated to change and frowned upon us because we continually defied their ways. We also faced many difficulties, especially with the elders, when we encouraged the other girls of our community to be self-reliant and confident in their rights, but now, with help from DMWSC and our own unbreakable spirit, we have been embraced by our people, they even come to us with their problems and trust and respect us – this change is our most significant achievement."



Formed & Transformed

A Reflection by Sr Jwan Kada ibvm

I am sure that 400 years ago, when Mary Ward said, “women in time to come will do much,” she was envisioning and working toward the development of initiatives that showcased women doing great things as they became the “seekers of truth and doers of justice” our world needs.

In the many remote villages of the Sundarbans mangrove in West Bengal, India, there are women who are living this Mary Ward vision. Using solar lanterns funded by MWIA, women are taking charge of their livelihoods and leading their communities toward living sustainably. Villages in this isolated area are plunged into darkness after sunset as harsh weather conditions like cyclones and floods hinder access to electricity – the solar lanterns are a source of hope and light for communities. The lanterns are used for everyday activity, and the women now use them to sew and embroider at all hours to generate an income to feed their families. One woman we met makes saris and sells them to feed her five grandchildren, who were abandoned by their parents.

Social justice, advocacy and community development work is not for the faint-hearted. It is rigorous, constant, and always evolving. It requires a relentless response to the needs of the time and place. It is done in collaboration with others to ensure that it is sustainable.

I was privileged enough to spend two months volunteering with the Kolkata Mary Ward Social Centre (KMWSC), where I experienced the leadership of women who have the power to transform their communities. The Landing Pad project supported by MWIA educates and empowers women from informal settlements, the Sonagachi Red Light district, and several other villages to find their voice and stand up against the social stigma of menstruation. Women attend workshops on the importance of maintaining their health and hygiene and are given free menstrual pads and taught how to properly dispose of them. These women formed and transformed me; they have touched my life immensely with their leadership, courage and vision.

MWIA funds boundary-breaking projects that compel us to move into action, speak the truth, and ensure that justice is achieved. It supports women in claiming their dignity and freedom; to find their voice and place in their communities, ensuring that no woman or girl is left behind.



Walking Alongside First Nations Women

Kirstin Del Beato

MWIA Projects & Partnerships Manager

In Australia, MWIA partners with organisations that work together with women towards financial independence and sustainable economies.

Following are two stories of female empowerment, supported by MWIA partners Enterprise Partnerships WA and CatholicCare Wilcannia Forbes...

PIRIWA OP SHOP AND ENTERPRISE HUB

Piriwa is a female-led community organisation in Balgo (Wirrimanu), one of Australia's most remote First Nations communities. Young women in Balgo face overwhelming social and environmental barriers to education, training, and employment, and most available opportunities do not meet the needs of First Nations women. Piriwa aims to overcome these barriers and improve the well-being of local women by engaging them in culturally-based enterprise development while nurturing connection to country.

Monica Njamme is one of four local women leading Piriwa and is involved in the organisation's op shop and enterprise hub, both located in the town centre. Profits from the op shop are used to fund on-country trips, during which women collect bush materials to make natural products like soaps, balms, and medicine. As tourism increases in Balgo, these bush products will be sold to visitors, enabling the women to gain financial independence and economic dignity while promoting their cultural identity and well-being.

When leading bush trips, Monica sees first-hand how the experience impacts all who participate. Being on country together connects female elders with disenfranchised young women from Balgo, creating a secure space for them to learn from each other. The sharing of cultural knowledge and stories continues back at the enterprise hub, where the women work together to create various bush products and place-based artwork.

Monica is optimistic about the organisation's future. Its impact on the economic inclusion and empowerment of local women is apparent to all in Balgo, as is its positive contribution to First Nations health, and social and emotional well-being.

Monica is immensely proud that Piriwa is rapidly becoming a hub of work and activity, where First Nations women thrive and develop the skills required to sustain a business, explore meaningful employment opportunities, and are supported to launch their own enterprise initiatives – all while strengthening connection to culture and country.



"It's good we get to take young girls out from Balgo to collect bush tucker and learn from the elders and older people. I like to take the young girls out bush and show them bush plants for medicine and bush soaps for when you are cold or sick, then we collect the plants and can make them at Piriwa."

Monica Njamme



WILCANNIA MARKETPLACE HAIR SALON

Emma*, a lifelong resident of Wilcannia in outback New South Wales, often experiences great difficulty accessing basic goods and services due to the lack of public transport between her hometown and the larger regional centre of Broken Hill, over 200 kilometres away.

When Emma's friends told her that a hair salon named 'Cooee for Cuts' had just opened in town, she was excited to learn more. Along with her friends, Emma got a new haircut while chatting with hairdresser Juliann and other customers, all of whom were thrilled to finally have a hair salon in town.

The hair salon is part of the larger Wilcannia Marketplace, a social enterprise hub designed to create employment opportunities and fill service gaps within the local community. The hub also includes the town's only coffee shop and will soon open a recycled fashion boutique.

The salon is open three days per month and is regularly booked out. Consequently, Juliann needed a trainee assistant, and Emma, with her natural ability to connect to people, was a perfect fit. Employment opportunities like this are uncommon in Wilcannia; many must leave town to find work. This is particularly difficult for the large First Nations community of Wilcannia, many of whom feel a deep connection to country.

For Emma, meaningful economic participation will enable her to be independent and make decisions about her life and circumstances, which many women never experience. Through her new position at the salon, she will also serve as a positive role model to other First Nations women living in Wilcannia.

The hair salon has transformed the community, lifted spirits and created a sense of well-being. As the business continues to grow, it is hoped that more employment opportunities will become available to women like Emma.

* Name changed

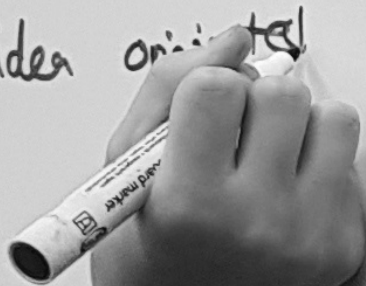


We are currently
chosen to focus on your project

or phone ~~what~~ call
we are wondering.



the hair salon and how
ed YOU to support ^{the} project
d that the idea originated



Head, Hearts & Hands

Ella, Georgina, Mahima & Zoe

Loreto College Ballarat, Year 9 Religious Education

Here, at Loreto College Ballarat, we are building our religious knowledge to expand our understanding of the nature of Mission and Service. As part of our studies in Year 9 Religious Education, we are digging deep into projects supported by MWIA and unpacking their contexts. We looked to our role models - the courageous women Mary Ward, Mother Gonzaga Barry, Mother Stanislaus Mulhall and Mother Stanislaus Mornane - to consider their own services in the world and identify why their efforts were so successful and influential.

With this in mind, we explored how mission can be applied to issues around the work that use the three H's: Head, Heart and Hands. These terms refer to the action of service and mission and allow all aspects of it to be present.

Using your mind or 'head' stimulates your thoughts and intellect, resulting in practical and methodical thinking. This includes the planning, implementation, and execution of the project at hand. This idea of 'heart' means our emotional response to a matter; how feelings such as empathy and compassion come into play and affect our work. Recognising the humanity within a struggle helps to forge bonds between the giver and receiver. Unlike the others, using your hands puts your thoughts and feelings into action. The choices we make in this step influence and shape the entire project. Applying yourself by donating your time, resources, and knowledge is important.

With all of this said, we looked at why these terms work harmoniously together, and if only a few were applied, would this result in the project being less of a success?

A central point for any mission or service is considering the dignity of the person. Its particular relevance is that each person is the image of God and, therefore, worthy of respect and compassion. This is not just a case of seeing God in all of those around us but also in ourselves; in this way, the divine in all of us connects. Human dignity comes from being human, not from what a person does or who they are. By studying the mission of MWIA and recognising the mission we can accomplish in our community, we create opportunities to connect with the divine in each person.

The accepted dignity of the person then flows through to two more concepts - subsidiarity and participation. Being a Loreto school, giving a

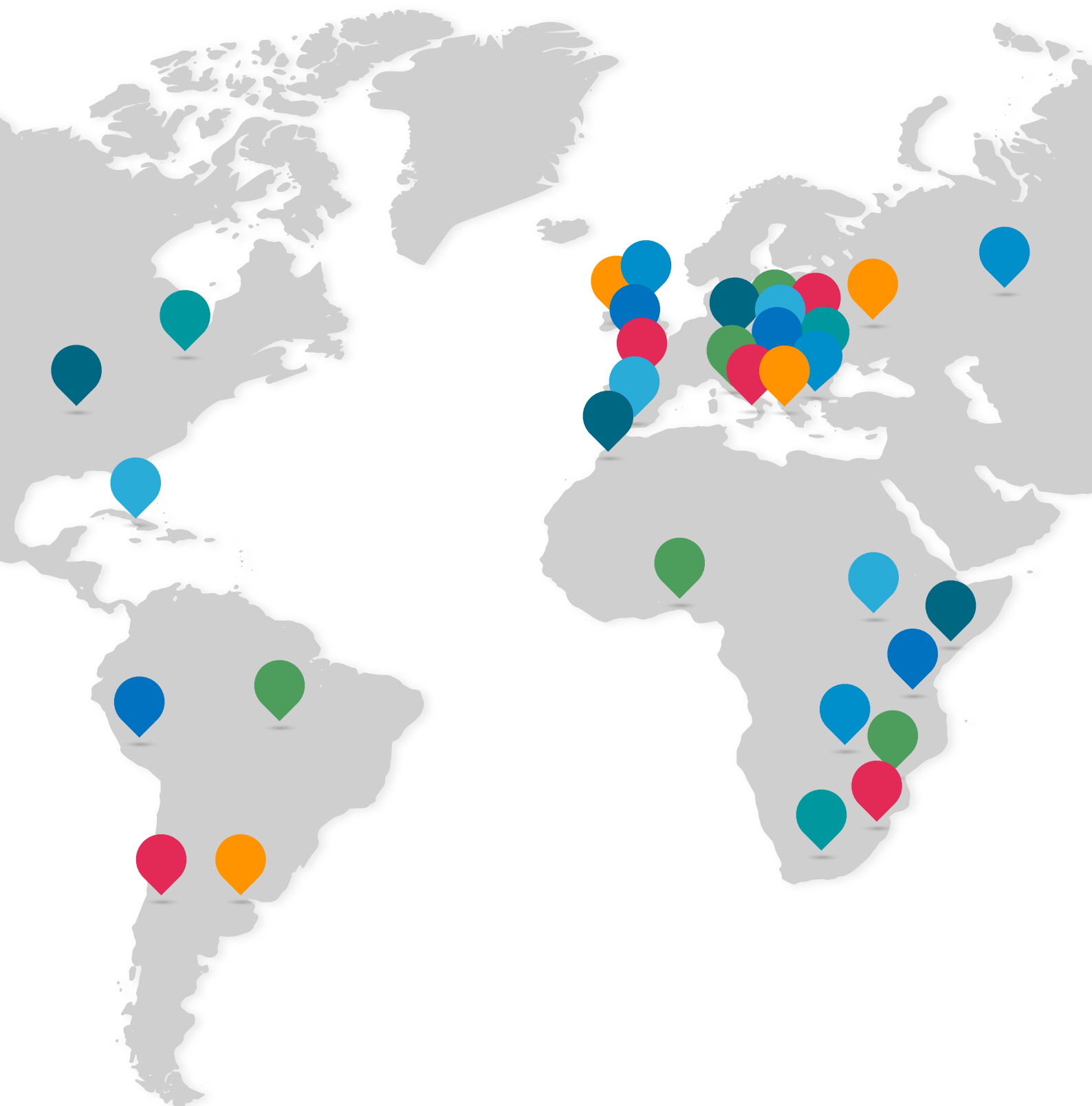
hand to anyone that needs it is very important, as is lending an ear for their voices to be heard and their opinions to be considered. Whenever we decide to help others, we think through the lens of subsidiarity and participation. We learn about these aspects in class; for many, it is a concept that might be tricky to comprehend. We understand it in its simplest form by saying that it is not the voices or the actions of those helping that should stand out but the ones of those in need of help. Examples may be when we play sports - we want to let other players take our turn, pass the ball, and let them have the shot. Actions like this lift the spirit of the team. So too, can we lift others up through mission and service by ensuring their inclusion and participation in decision-making. Through unpacking Catholic Social Teaching, we have engaged in these principles and understand that while people will require help, we also need to give them a comfortable position in which they can incorporate their feelings, thoughts, and actions in the matter.

We have found that Religion at Loreto College Ballarat is taught with a modern approach that regenerates the traditional way religion has historically been taught. This method uses personal values and faith as the focal points of students' learning. By teaching in such an inclusive way, students have more freedom to express their version of faith and curate their understanding of what they believe in. Our recent studies have opened up the possibility of what mission and service can be, moving beyond giving money or material goods to connecting, uplifting and empowering those in our community and seeing the presence of God in the people we interact with.

Many charities and events aid and unite the Ballarat community, including The Soup Bus Ballarat (after-dark food service to Ballarat's homeless and less fortunate) and Ballarat's Run for a Cause (fun run/walk with proceeds going directly to the Ballarat Christmas Appeal). Loreto is involved with many charities and local events. We have participated in events such as making Christmas baskets for the less fortunate, walkathons, the 4EK run, and more. Through the strength of our community and the guidance and values of Mary Ward, we hope to bring our new understanding of mission and service to what we do in the future. Through reflecting and contemplating the process of mission, we can do what the founding Loreto Sisters achieved instinctively.

Becoming One

Mary Ward Sisters Around the World



*"It's creating an energy –
an energy that will drive us
forward in mission."*

Sr Jane Livesey, former leader of the
Congregation of Jesus

The Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM), also known as the Loreto Sisters, and the Congregation of Jesus (CJ) are becoming one.

Currently two congregations with a shared founder, charism and mission, these Mary Ward women have agreed to merge, leading to a union of hearts and minds, and, from a social justice perspective, even greater impact.

Like our IBVM Sisters, CJ Sisters around the world provide much-needed healthcare, shelter for young people in need, support for the homeless and those seeking asylum, and protection for trafficked women and young people from bonded labour.

While the coming together of the two congregations will take time, for Mary Ward International it will ensure that *together* we will bring about even greater change over many years to come.



New Projects

Kaithlyn McNab

MWIA Administration Assistant

COMBATTING HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Kangemi, Kenya

Human trafficking is a complex and widespread problem that deprives people of their basic rights and fuels the growth of organised crime by exploiting those most vulnerable. People living in informal settlements are most at risk due to extreme poverty and limited employment opportunities.

This project aims to reduce human trafficking in the Kangemi informal settlement in Nairobi, an area home to migrants and refugees from neighbouring countries. By working with local partners, it seeks to mobilise the community through education and rights awareness training. By doing so, the community will become aware of their human rights, be able to recognise the warning signs of potential trafficking, and know how to seek help when someone is trafficked.

This project addresses key challenges affecting the fundamental rights specified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by increasing awareness of human trafficking in informal settlements within local communities. Health workers, law enforcement and other public bodies will be engaged to support the project's initiatives. Strengthening local networks will bridge gaps, making it easier to approach one another for consultation and referrals. A holistic approach to supporting the victims and survivors of human trafficking will ensure that the community is informed, aware and alert to the dangers of trafficking and will reduce the risk to women and children.

The residents of Kangemi will obtain knowledge that empowers them to recognise and avoid all forms of human trafficking and therefore live safe and secure lives free from the physical and emotional abuse caused by trafficking.



EDUCATION SUPPORT FOR GIRLS

Dharan, Nepal

Education is a necessary human right that plays an important role in the alleviation of poverty. However, in Nepal, many girls face challenges in accessing education. Due to gender expectations related to domestic and care responsibilities and social biases towards boys' education, many girls leave school prior to adolescence.

This project focuses on providing a safe environment for underprivileged young women and girls to receive an education. Girls' education is not a priority for many families who often opt for child marriage as an alternative to schooling their daughters. By offering safe access to education and training opportunities away from home, young women and girls have prospects beyond early marriage.

The project supports girls from informal settlements that are largely home to migrants from the Nepali Hill districts. These marginalised communities have limited access to rights due to internal displacement and a lack of employment opportunities. Women and girls from this area are further disadvantaged due to gender inequalities and discrimination.

The project aims to break the cycle of poverty by helping girls secure quality education, reduce illiteracy, prevent human trafficking, provide nutritious food, and promote the rights and opportunities of young women and girls. Educational initiatives include vocational training, health and nutrition, rights awareness, women's empowerment, and human trafficking prevention. The young women and girls are provided with a safe and socially-inclusive place to live while studying, enabling them to experience personal freedom and agency.



LEGAL AID

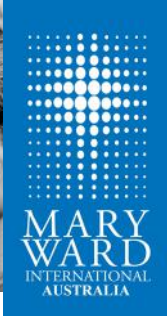
West Bengal, India

Tea plantation workers are habitually deprived of fundamental rights and entitlements, unaware of the statutory and legal assistance available. Darjeeling tea estates operate as economic production units and social institutions that control all aspects of the lives of those who reside there. The estates continue to operate in the same feudal manner 150 years after British establishment. Tea workers are impoverished and vulnerable, with no access to alternate accommodation or income.

This project takes a participatory and rights-based approach, focusing on upholding the rights of women and children. The project addresses power imbalances by providing vulnerable tea plantation workers access to a network of legal advisors known as “barefoot lawyers”. The “barefoot lawyers” are trained to guide and support community members in legal matters, including worker exploitation, family violence and human trafficking. Qualified lawyers are engaged for issues that cannot be resolved with the assistance of “barefoot lawyers”.

Tea plantation workers are one of India’s most at-risk communities. Labourers live in *kuchhas*, shack-like houses, without electricity, sanitation or running water. Earning below minimum wage makes it impossible for families to move in pursuit of better economic opportunities. The project will generate awareness amongst tea plantation workers of common legal challenges and create safety nets for them. This project aims to ensure that victims of any injustice or crime are aware of the process for seeking justice and have the confidence to come forward.





Women *still* face obstacles to gaining fair work and accessing health care and education. They face discrimination and violence while being inadequately represented in political and economic decision-making. Their voices are often silenced, they lack power and influence, and many have no control over their lives.

With your support, we are shifting attitudes, creating opportunities for independence, and amplifying female voices - **together**, we are making an impact.

In just six months, our Landing Pad initiative in India distributed 13,040 **free sanitary pads** to mothers in Kolkata's red-light district, females in the poorest of neighbourhoods, and adolescent girls employed as migrant workers, while equipping them to challenge social taboos and promote the importance of menstrual hygiene amongst their friends and communities.

Through education and rights awareness training, we are supporting those from informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya, to **combat human trafficking** and raise awareness of its dangers, particularly for young women and girls, resulting in more vigilant, less susceptible communities and a reduced number of people trafficked.

Your support is vital to our efforts to create a more equitable world where all females thrive and are supported to become leaders, entrepreneurs, and change-makers. Through your investment, we can continue to make **a tangible impact.**

\$150

will supply a young woman with a two-year supply of sanitary pads so she can attend school.



will train a local woman to deliver trafficking awareness programs for hundreds of women.



will provide
rescue & trauma
recovery support
to a survivor of
human trafficking.



will train 40 First Nations women in the skills needed to run a business.

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