

Labour of love

Deployment to Timor-Leste for two AFP members has transformed into a dream to build a youth centre in the Comoro community in Dili.



Left: Federal Agents Teresa Beck and Libby Bleakley are passionate about their dream to build a youth and community centre in Timor-Leste.



If it was possible to sum up Federal Agents Libby Bleakley and Teresa Beck in one word it would have to be 'passionate'. The two AFP members exude optimism – even across a phone line. When they talk about their dream of opening a youth centre in Timor-Leste the best they can do generally is contain the excitement.

The massive personal project they have embarked on is to open the Sentru Formasaun Ba Juventude (Learning Centre for Youth) in the Comoro community district near Dili. The project build is \$350,000, with \$45,000 needed for annual costs. So far they have raised \$80,000 since Christmas including \$30,000 of their own money.

But this labour of love they say is a much needed facility for youth in Timor-Leste's most populous area. Former Timor-Leste President Xanana Gusmao (now Minister for Planning and Strategic Investment) is patron of the centre and said it was his "honour and duty" to support the project. But for the two federal agents it is a life-work that goes beyond the call of duty.

"They are beautiful people," says Federal Agent Beck. "They all struggle every day and we just wanted to make a difference I guess. We just didn't want to finish our three years over there, collect the money, and go home and move on to the next mission. I love the country and I love the people. I think they have so much to offer."

"They all struggle every day and we just wanted to make a difference"



Libby and Teresa met during deployment with the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor in 2010-11. They were both deployed to the remote Viqueque district where they lived within the community environment. Being in the community everyday they decided to run a boxing class for the local youth.

“It was really popular and we knew they loved their boxing and we had some weights classes that we ran as well. You couldn’t drink; you couldn’t come to class if you were drinking the local palm wine or a member of the local martial arts group, which are a problem in Timor.”

Both federal agents began their policing careers in Australian state jurisdictions. Libby served with NSW Police and Teresa with Queensland Police Service. Libby brought a lot of experience with crime-prevention and youth-service programs from her 19 years with the NSW Police. In particular, she ran the Redfern Police Citizen Youth Club.

When the two federal agents were again posted to the Timor-Leste Police Development Program in 2012-14, the idea to establish a PCYC-like organisation in Dili was born.

Mr Gusmao is keen to make the centre a success. It was during a visit to Timor-Leste by Libby earlier this year that Mr Gusmao became the patron of the project. He has since promoted the initiative to media in Timor-Leste and organised a meeting with Timor-Leste Foreign Minister Dr Jose Ramos Horta.

Federal Agents Teresa Beck and Libby Bleakley have embarked on the mammoth journey to raise \$350,000 for the Sentru Formasaun Ba Juventude (Learning Centre for Youth) in Timor-Leste.

“I am confident that it will make a substantial contribution to the Timorese youth in the community in Comoro,” Mr Gusmao said. “Through this centre you will be able to develop local skills, build character and leadership capability. It is an innovative and positive proposal that I fully support.”

The federal agents have leased land for a minimum of 15 years at Comoro. An existing residential dwelling is to be converted into two classrooms and a gymnasium. They intend to build a small residential accommodation for visiting staff and helpers.

They are also funding the centre manager Elisio Fernando through university studies in order to take up the day-to-day responsibilities of running the facility. They are so determined to make this happen that they have applied for and received approval to have the project acknowledged by the AFP as their secondary unpaid employment.

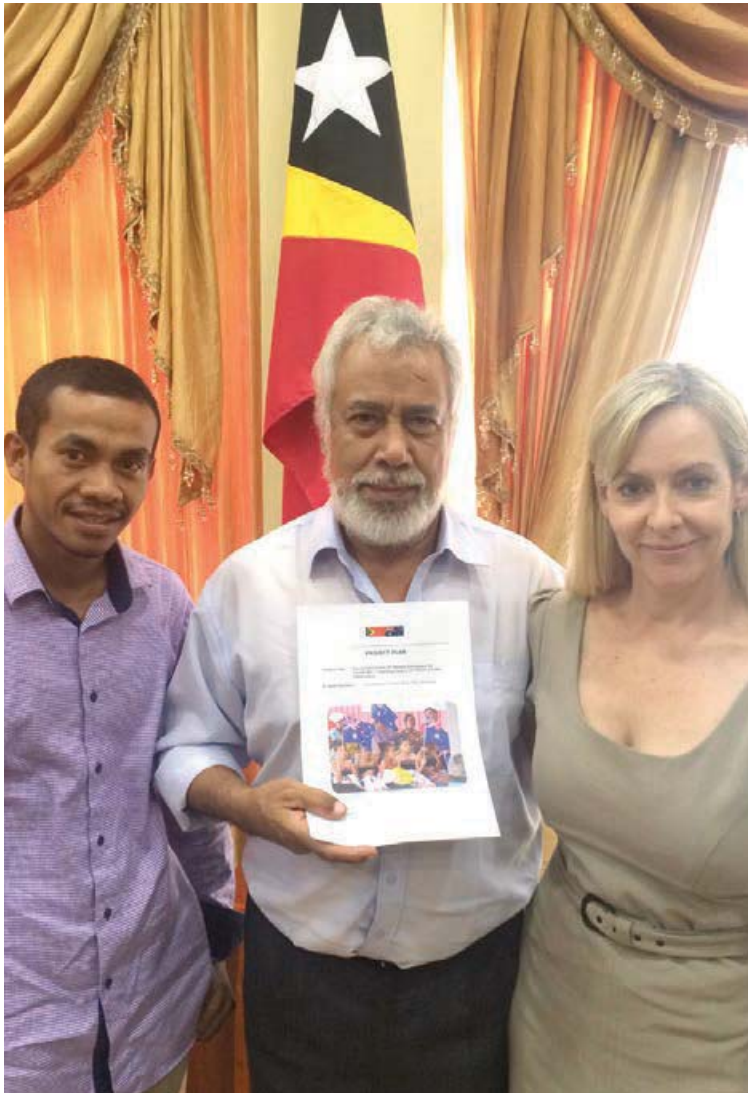
Federal Agent Bleakley says the Timor-Leste National Police was still a young organisation and a youth centre would help build bridges between the community and the police.

“We thought ‘wow, imagine having a PCYC over here’. We talked to a lot of police we got to know – I was running the gym at the [Police] Academy before and after work. So we got to know thousands of police and see what their impressions were and what was lacking in the community. And we did the same with the community.

“We thought with crime prevention it would be a good thing to have a drop in centre with a gym, because the martial arts gangs are still a big problem in Timor-Leste and a lot of murders are gang related,” she says.

As both are members of Rotary they are continually busy giving presentations to Rotary clubs throughout NSW. The project has been registered under Rotary Australia World Community Services who have provided a fundraising portal where donations can be made direct to the youth centre project.

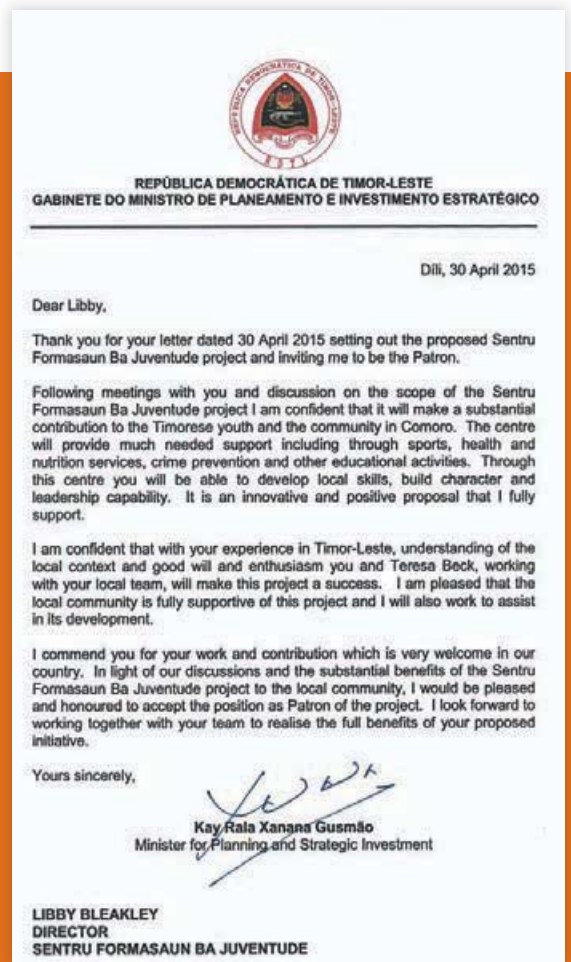
Tax-deductible donations can be made at the Rotary fundraising portal, which is located on the Sentru Formasaun Ba Juventude Facebook page.



Timor-Leste former President Xanana Gusmao, centre, proposed youth centre manager Elisio Fernando and Federal Agent Libby Bleakley meet in Dili.



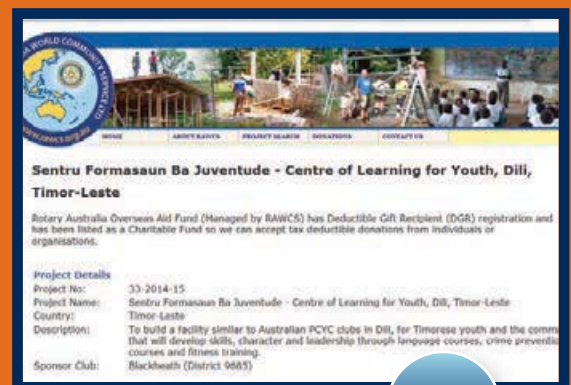
Federal Agent Libby Bleakley conducts a boxing class during her deployment to Timor-Leste.



Patronage: Former Timor-Leste President Xanana Gusmao has supported the initiative as his "honour and duty".



You can find out more about this project at the Sentru Formasaun Ba Juventude Facebook page.



Click here to support this project through Rotary Australia Overseas Aid Fund.



AFP Women's Network Chair Andrea Quinn addresses the 38th Asia Region Law Enforcement Management Program in Vietnam.



AFP Chief of Staff Justine Saunders leads a group session of the 38th Asia Region Law Enforcement Management Program.

