

# Carrying on the legacy of Australia's first Saint

**Sister Kathy shares her story with Mary MacKillop Today about working with some of the most vulnerable and remote communities in Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste.**

Saint Mary MacKillop believed in the power of education to lift communities out of poverty.

At Mary MacKillop Today, we are inspired by Australia's first Saint to empower vulnerable people to realise their dignity through education, health and sustainable livelihoods. We work with communities in Australia and overseas, in Timor-Leste, Peru, Papua New Guinea and Fiji.

A dedicated member of our team, Sister Kathy, has an inspiring story to tell. She has spent twenty years living in Papua New Guinea and, more recently, two years in Timor-Leste.

Sister Kathy shared how she made the move between the two developing countries, ***"The ministry in Timor-Leste needed a Sister to live in the country and be part of the team. I was asked to go as a mentor for a team of Timorese men and women who were working to improve education through upskilling the local Timorese teachers, enabling parents to ensure their children get to school.***

***The people in Timor-Leste are very materially poor and families live in extremely run-down homes. When I first got there, I remember thinking, I don't know how they have survived like this."***

Sister Kathy is an incredibly resilient person. She wasn't deterred by the shocking living conditions – she was motivated to get to work and overcome challenges.

***"One of the hardest things was learning the local language. It wasn't easy at my age, but I was desperate to speak with the locals, so I could build relationships (and understand what is going on at Mass!)."***

It wasn't long before Sister Kathy gained the confidence and the local know-how to connect with communities. One of our favourite things to hear her talk about is her outings with our Mobile Learning Centre - a colourful bus that travels to some of the most remote areas of Timor-Leste visiting schools, orphanages and disability centres. It's filled with creative tools such as puppets and musical instruments to teach kids literacy and numeracy through fun workshops.

***"As the bus would pull up, people in the village would come running out to greet us. And I'm not just talking children – the parents were just as excited! Some of these communities were so isolated, we were their first visitors"***.

It is a slow process, taking many visits to the community but at the end of the process the children from this group are ready for "big school" and some dedicated community members have been trained how to continue this "ready for school work", while the Mobile Learning Centre moves to begin again in another remote community.

Sister Kathy has lived a fruitful journey over the last few decades in some of the world's poorest, most remote communities. When we asked what has kept her going all these years, she told us, ***“Something that Mary MacKillop said has always stuck with me - “There where you are, you will find God.” I believe God uses each step in our lives to prepare us for the next. I’ve lived in different countries and experienced trials that have given me the skills I needed to help people in the next place.”***

As well as reaching children with educational opportunities, Mary MacKillop Today also offers programs to improve the skills of local teachers in remote communities. Many teachers in countries such as Timor-Leste didn't receive a quality education, so it's difficult for them to teach children basic things such as reading and writing.

Many parents in poor communities are illiterate and the generosity of supporters allows us to educate parents too, so that they can play an active role in their children's learning at home. Mums, dads and carers receive ongoing mentoring through basic reading and writing classes, plus simple educational books and games to take home to use with their children.

**Here in Australia, Mary MacKillop Today offers a First Nations Tertiary Scholarship program to close the gap on Indigenous education by giving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students the opportunity to pursue a higher education.** Thanks to kind donations, we can help students pay vital study expenses, such as computers, books and stationery and also essential living expenses such as rent and utilities. With the help of generous supporters, we've seen many successful graduates overcome financial hardship through the Tertiary Scholarships program and complete degrees in fields such as teaching, medicine, and community management.

Sister Kathy knows the power of education and shared, ***“Like Saint Mary MacKillop, I too believe one of the greatest gifts we can give to young people is education.”***

We are honoured to carry on the work of Saint Mary MacKillop, sharing God's love through practical help for people in need.

**If you'd like to make a gift to help more children gain access to quality education, you can visit the Mary MacKillop Today website [www.marymackilloptoday.org.au](http://www.marymackilloptoday.org.au) or call (02) 8912 2777.**