

Friends of Aileu

Introduction Booklet



Linking Merri-bek and
Hume communities
with Aileu, Timor-Leste.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 01.** About Us
- 03.** About Aileu & Timor-Leste
- 04.** Get Involved
- 06.** Our Projects
- 12.** Our Partnerships



Tony AmaraL

2022

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ABOUT US

Friends of Aileu is the friendship and relationship between:

- Merri-bek City Council and its communities
- Hume City Council and its communities.
- The Timor-Leste municipality of Aileu and its people.

Our relationship with Aileu is based on respect, solidarity, and sustainability. Since 2000, we have built a strong bond between our communities by sharing culture, knowledge, skills, and resources. We focus on education, health, and the environment in Aileu.

A Memorandum of Understanding, signed in May 2000, established the friendship relationship. Its commitments are reinstated periodically through a Friendship Agreement.

Read the original [Memorandum of Understanding \(PDF\)](#) and our current [Friendship Agreement \(PDF\)](#) to learn more.

Both councils have also signed Municipal Cooperation Agreements ([Moreland](#) and [Hume Municipal Corporation Agreements \(PDFs\)](#)) with the Ministry of State Administration. This is part of the Victorian Government's program to cooperate with Timor-Leste.

These Municipal Cooperative Agreements are consistent with the Victorian State Government's support for Timor-Leste's decentralisation process and the development of responsible, elected local governments.

Contact Us

For further information please contact our Friends of Aileu Project Officer by email: [**friendsofaileu@merri-bek.vic.gov.au**](mailto:friendsofaileu@merri-bek.vic.gov.au)

ESTE



TIMORLESTE

TIMOR



TIMORLES

ABOUT US

Currently, there are 32 friendship groups registered with the Australia Timor-Leste Friendship Network. Visit the [Australia Timor-Leste Friendship Network website](#) to learn more about these groups.

Eighteen of these groups are linked to Victorian local government councils. Merri-bek (formerly Moreland) and Hume were among the first councils to formalise their friendship. They did so with Darebin, Yarra, and Port Phillip.

The following principles form the basis of the friendship:

- Relationships: building partnerships based on mutual respect and understanding,
- Sustainability: committing to a long-term relationship,
- Respect: supporting Timorese-led decision making.

In a spirit of friendship, we engage in activities that support Aileu's people, their local democracy, and a sustainable future. We focus on education, community health, and the environment. We aim to promote participation by women and youth throughout the community. [The Friends of Aileu Strategy Plan \(PDF\)](#) has more details on how we support these activities.

The friendship relationship reflects and builds on the strong links between the people of Australia and Timor-Leste. These links stem from decades of support and solidarity. They grew, especially during periods of war, occupation, and peacekeeping efforts.



ABOUT AILEU & TIMOR-LESTE

Timor-Leste is one of Australia's closest neighbours. It achieved independence in 2002. In fact, its capital, Dili, is only 720 km from Darwin. Timor-Leste is home to 1.3 million people (2023 census). Over 70% of these people live in rural areas. Both the rural and urban populations of Timor-Leste farm and raise livestock.

The official languages of Timor-Leste are Portuguese and Tetun. In addition, the country is home to over 30 local languages. Many people also speak Indonesian, with a growing number proficient in English. Both Indonesian and English are recognized as working languages.

The Aileu Municipality is a mostly mountainous area, inland, just south of Dili. Its small town, the municipal centre, is less than 20 kilometers south of Dili. You can reach it by a 45-kilometre drive through forests, farms, and coffee groves.

Aileu is one of Timor-Leste's 13 municipalities or administrative subdivisions (formerly called districts). It is home to 53,000 people (2020 census). Almost all households in Aileu depend on agriculture or livestock raising.

Timor-Leste's municipalities are gradually growing their service delivery and governance responsibilities as part of the decentralisation process. In the coming years, the Government of Timor-Leste will transition the municipalities to fully responsible local governments with elected assemblies.

For more on the history between Australia and Timor-Leste, see our PDF, [Australia and Timor-Leste](#).



GET INVOLVED

We welcome the participation of all community members in the friendship, particularly those who live, work, volunteer or study in Merri-bek and Hume.

We invite community members to participate in the Friends of Aileu Community Committee, assist in fundraising and awareness activities, contribute their expertise and generally broaden their knowledge of Timor-Leste and Aileu.

You can contribute to the friendship by:

- Helping to staff information stalls at community events
- Submitting ideas for awareness-raising or fundraising
- Assisting at fundraising events, such as our annual Trivia Night
- Contacting local organisations and businesses that may be interested in assisting with fundraising
- Hosting visitors from Timor-Leste
- Communicating with our friends in Aileu and helping with the management of friendship activities there
- Becoming a member of the Friends of Aileu Community Committee.

Our relationship with Aileu also provides opportunities for new and enduring friendships, formed through sharing stories, food, music, and culture.

Email the Friends of Aileu Project Officer if you are interested in volunteering for Friends of Aileu activities or projects:

friendsofaileu@merri-bek.vic.gov.au



GET INVOLVED

Donate your Skills

The Friends of Aileu program has a broad appeal and opportunity for outreach both in Australia and Timor-Leste. Through our volunteer program we offer a wide range of participation levels and opportunities for engaging volunteer work. We're especially interested in those with skills or knowledge in areas such as:

- Community learning activities, such as neighbourhood houses and libraries.
- Permaculture and other approaches to sustainable and regenerative local agriculture.
- Developing economic opportunities, particularly for women.
- Sharing music, dance, art, and culture.
- Participating in activities with youth, including sports.
- Innovative and fun ways to raise community awareness and funds.

Make a Donation

You may want to make either a general or project-specific donation to Friends of Aileu. Read about our projects in our projects section below. You can also purchase and send a gift certificate donation for your choice of project.

All funds donated to Friends of Aileu are transferred to Timor-Leste partners to support agreed projects in Aileu. At this stage, tax-deductibility is not available.



[Donate Here.](#)



OUR PROJECTS

Guided by input from the Aileu Municipal Authority, the Aileu Friendship Commission and other Aileu partner organisations, Friends of Aileu has prioritised partnerships in Education and Training, Community Health, Oral Health Education, Nutrition, Sustainable Agriculture, Environmental Protection, Reforestation, Land and Water Source preservation.

We have maintained an emphasis on fostering opportunities for local people to lead community development activities amongst women, young people and disadvantaged members of the community.

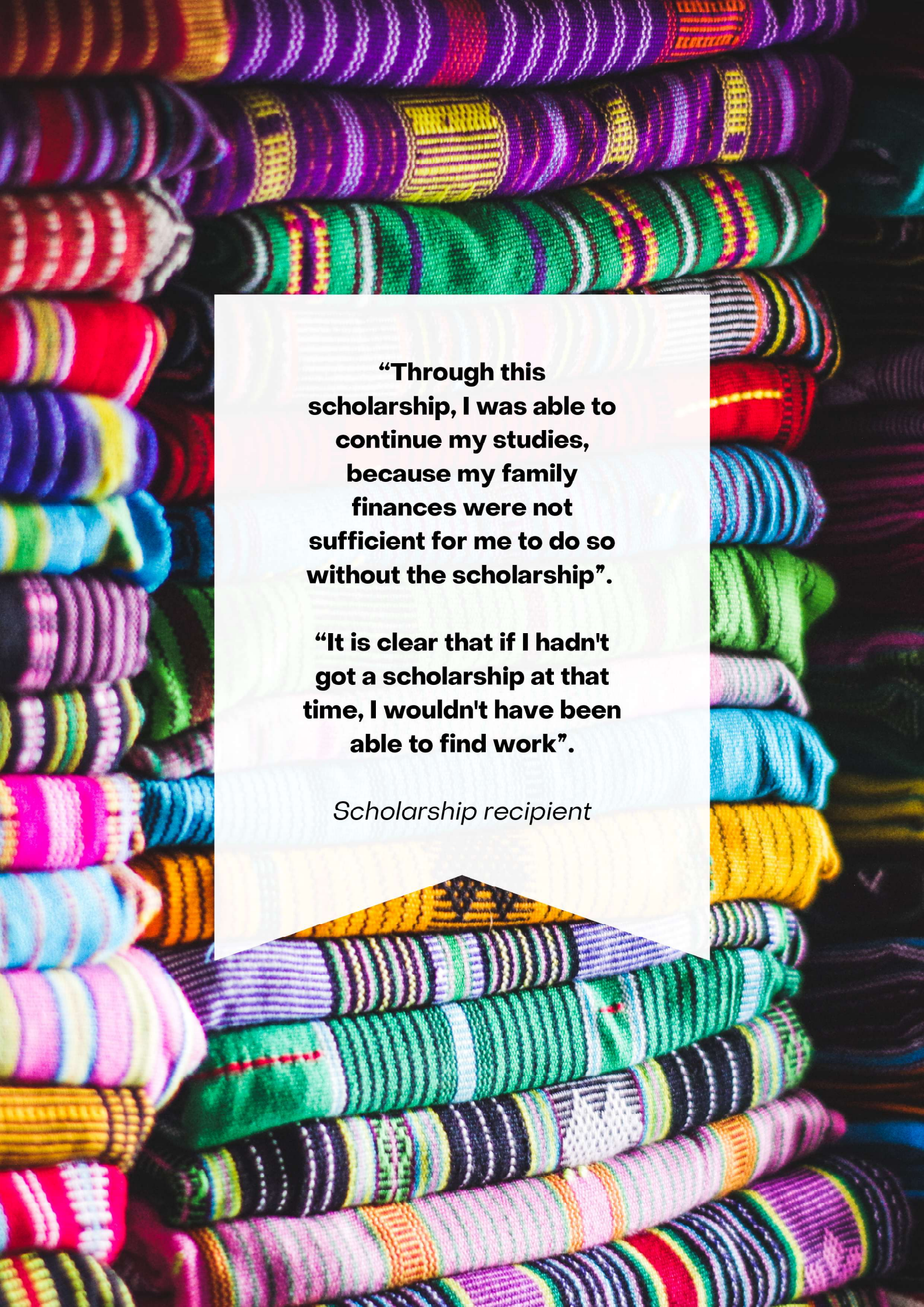
University Scholarship Program

The Aileu University Scholarship Program began in 2004. It was inspired by the late Councillor Andy Ingham, the first Chair of the Friends of Aileu.

By 2016, in partnership with Mario Soares of the Aileu District Administration and the Aileu Friendship Commission, the program had distributed \$143,000 to support 110 students, largely funded through the annual Trivia Night and contributions from groups such as the Kangaroo Valley Remexio Partnership, Campaspe East Timor Association in Friendship, and Rotary Club of Coburg. Many graduates went on to further studies and work in various sectors across Timor-Leste.

Since commencing in 2017 until 2024, \$33,600 has been provided to assist 15 young people (7 male 8 female) to undertake teacher training education at the Baucau Teachers College, with 8 having graduated with a Bachelor of Education (4 years study) and 4 having graduated with a Bachelor of Teaching (3 years study)

Friends of Aileu continues to support the scholarship program through various fundraising efforts.



“Through this scholarship, I was able to continue my studies, because my family finances were not sufficient for me to do so without the scholarship”.

“It is clear that if I hadn't got a scholarship at that time, I wouldn't have been able to find work”.

Scholarship recipient

OUR PROJECTS

PERMATIL: Permaculture School Gardens and PermaYouth Training

Friends of Aileu has collaborated with Permaculture Timor-Leste (PERMATIL) to promote sustainable agriculture and environmental conservation in the Aileu.

Friends of Aileu has supported PERMATIL's work in implementing Permaculture School Gardens with funding largely from donations by Merri Health and Grassroots Gathering

We have also supported young people's participation in water conservation and permaculture training at PermaYouth Camps and their practical implementation in rural villages organised by PERMATIL and the PermaYouth Association of Timor-Lorosae (PYATL).

Aileu Resource and Training Centre

The Aileu Resource and Training Centre (ARTC) has been a crucial partner of Friends of Aileu since 2005, developing into a vital educational and community resource.

Initially supported with building repairs and equipment, the ARTC has grown into a registered association with expanded programs. Friends of Aileu has supported ARTC to facilitate horticulture training to youth, provide salaries to staff at Kadalak Dame, developing gardens with horticultural activities by planting vegetables, vanilla, coffee, traditional medicines, facilitate computer course activities for students and adults, maintain the library and provide opportunities for the public to come to study and read in the library, and coordinate reforestation activities that can be carried out in Tataloco and Tatabau are maintaining areas near springs by planting trees, repairing damaged fences, making terraces and digging dams



OUR PROJECTS

Kose Nehan, Oral Health Education Project

Friends of Aileu's oral health program, initiated in 2007 following a request from the Aileu Vila Dental Clinic, focuses on promoting dental hygiene and preventative care in schools across the region.

Previously sponsored by Colgate, the program has provided toothpaste and brushes for a decade and involved educational visits to schools to encourage children to brush their teeth. Friends of Aileu also supported the creation of portable dental chairs in Timor-Leste, with the first installed at the Aileu District Health Centre.

Recognised by the Timor-Leste Ministry of Health and Education as a model for other districts, the program has expanded through regular visits from dental professionals and includes engaging school art projects that foster cultural connections between children in Aileu and Australia.

Community Health

Friends of Aileu, with partners like Merri Health, North Richmond Community Health, and the Campaspe East Timor Association in Friendship, has supported health projects in Aileu. Efforts include providing equipment for hospitals and clinics, renovating facilities for midwives and birthing services, equipping the Disability Workshop, and supporting outreach for people with disabilities.

Friends of Aileu has also worked to improve community health through better nutrition and living conditions, supporting egg, chicken, and pig farming, promoting soybean and soymilk production, and introducing low-smoke, fuel-efficient stoves. These efforts include supporting egg, chicken, and pig production initiatives, promoting soybean and soymilk production, and introducing low-smoke, fuel-efficient stoves.



OUR PROJECTS

Uma Ita Nian Parish Clinic: Income generation and women's development

With funds from Merri Health, Friends of Aileu has supported the Maryknoll Sisters and the Uma Ita Nian Parish Clinic. We completed various projects to help local women generate income. These projects include: building a sales kiosk, improving knitting and sewing skills, and expanding local products.

Solar Lighting and Power

Over the period 2003 to 2018, Friends of Aileu supported the work of the Alternative Technology Association (ATA, now Renew) and volunteers, including installation of solar lighting in 1,432 rural households, mainly in Besilau, Aileu Vila, and Remexio, and 18 solar lighting and solar power installations in schools and public building throughout Aileu.

The work in Besilau was largely funded by the Moora Moora Cooperative Community, and in Remexio by the Kangaroo Valley Remexio Partnership, with contributions from the Campaspe East Timor Association in Friendship.

Friends of Aileu was one of the ATA's early partners in Timor-Leste and hosted the pilot programs of the successful Village Lighting Scheme in Besilau, principally over the period 2007 to 2009.





OUR PARTNERSHIPS



Merri Health



north richmond
community health

Wulempuri - Kertheba



**GRASSROOTS
GATHERINGS**



dental health
services victoria



