

Project Update

January – December 2023

Our Sister Parish Projects in Railaco Timor-Leste



Children in Railaco happy to receive a freshly made protein-rich meals thanks to the Feeding Program supported by St Canice's Parish

Overview

Thanks to the longstanding **generosity of the St Canice's Parishioners**, Railaco Jesuit Mission and Jesuit Mission Australia have been able to assist the most disadvantaged families, children and youth in Railaco and communities nearby to lift themselves from extreme poverty and create a better future for themselves and their community.

The population of Railaco experience extreme disadvantage and the area has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the country. Many families cannot afford to provide nutritious meals and the children suffer from malnutrition, weak immunity, and poor health. Young people from marginalised households and remote communities have difficulty in accessing schooling, particularly higher-level education, creating another barrier to escape poverty.

For 20 years, the donations from St Canice's Parish have been helping to improve the health, nutrition, and access to education of Railaco communities nearby with a focus on the most disadvantaged families, children, and youth. The support of St Canice's is ensuring a strong education for senior school students at NOSSEF that leads into improved employment opportunities and income support for their families and communities. Additionally, children in their early years are benefiting from the feeding program that helps aid growth, prevent stunting (which is highly prevalent among Timorese children) and illnesses related to under-nutrition.

Project Highlights and Impacts

Thanks to the support of St Canice's Parish:

- **704 people have directly benefited** from the feeding program and NOSSEF school support during 2023.
- **350 children received nutritious meals** three times weekly through the feeding program.
- **Children served by the feeding program have gained weight** towards reaching a healthy weight for age and a decreased risk of malnutrition.
- **338 Students at NOSSEF gained a quality education** in a range of subjects due to the employment of qualified teachers.
- **All NOSSEF students who sat the National Exam passed**, compared with 90% in the Ermera Municipality.
- **10% of the NOSSEF's 2023 graduates are studying at Instituto de São João de Brito (ISJB)** a Jesuit teacher education college.
- **100% NOSSEF students passed their end of semester exams.**
- **16 Local teachers** have gained income and employment in their local community to the benefit of themselves and their families.
- **Caring for our Common Home**, children bring their own reusable plates and spoons.

This update provides information on the activities and targets achieved during the period January to December 2023 that have been implemented with your generous support:

- A Feeding Program for vulnerable children in the remote villages of Railaco.
- Quality education at the *Escola Secundária Nossa Senhora de Fátima* (NOSSEF) secondary school for vulnerable students who otherwise may not achieve a high school education.

Who is your gift reaching?

The project has successfully reached families, children, and youth in Railaco and addressed key areas of education and nutrition helping families and the younger generation to work towards breaking the cycle of poverty.

PROGRAM	TARGET PARTICIPANTS	Jan-December 2023 ACTUALS
Feeding Program	350 children	350 children
NOSSEF School Students	380 children	338 children
NOSSEF Teachers Salary support	15 part-time teachers	16 part-time teachers
TOTAL PEOPLE SERVED	745	704 participants

What benefits has your gift provided?

Feeding Program:

Thanks to the financial support of St Canice's parishioners, 350 children (145 girls) in three different locations of Lebdodon, Caitarehei, and Cocoa accessed a freshly made protein-rich meal containing either chicken, egg, tofu or tempeh.

Protein-rich foods are difficult for parents to afford or to source – with the usual household meals consisting of cassava, sweet potatoes, cassava leaves, and sweet potato buds and corn. A regular diet of foods that are low in nutrition value leads to stunted growth and development.

Each Monday to Friday from 8.30am the feeding program team prepared the lunches in the clinic kitchen of the Railaco Parish. Each portion/meal contained rice, beans or vegetables, and a protein, chicken, egg, tofu or tempeh.

The team then travels to the communities where the freshly made meals are provided to the children. The children attend the distribution locations with their parents or with their siblings. Each child receives the same portion.

Children also receive guidance on good hygiene and handwashing as well as avoiding food wastage – as only the amount of food required for distribution to children that day is prepared by the Feeding Program team. Children also bring their own reusable plates and utensils, "Caring for Our Common Home" in action.

Children were taught songs, games and prayers by nuns accompanying the feeding program team.

The feeding program ensures that children from vulnerable households receive nutritious and protein-rich foods that aid in their growth and development.

Objectives	Impacts
Essential nutrients are provided to children who would not otherwise have access to sufficient nutrients.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The feeding program has made it easier for children from disadvantaged households to consume protein-based food that is very important for them such as eggs, chickens, tofu and tempeh. Eating protein rich food like tempeh, tofu, chicken, eggs, and fish is a luxury for the households of the children. At home they consume cassava leaves, sweet potato buds, and bok choy that lack the protein they need.
Stunting prevented in children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a visible impact on the growth in weight and height of the children that can be attributed at least in part to the feeding program.
Children are healthier and better prepared to participate in school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The children that participate in the feeding program are mostly preschoolers and primary school students. The nutrition provided to them is aimed at helping them grow physically and to assist with focus at school. Parents reported that their children did not experience any serious illnesses. The improved wellbeing may be partly attributed to the feeding program and nutrition.



Children line up to receive their freshly made protein rich lunch.

NOSSEF School Activities:

NOSSEF plays a vital role in educating the youth of Railaco and developing them to be future leaders of Timor-Leste. Educating the young minds of the marginalised communities in Railaco is key to promoting peace and prosperity in the area and the whole country. Young people are the actors of peace and future leaders.

NOSSEF Secondary School offers classes for students in years 10-12. In 2023, 338 students are enrolled with 70% of students from Railaco and remote villages in the area. Other students come from further municipalities and are generally from disadvantaged, rural families.



Now in its 21st year of operation, many graduates from NOSSEF are continuing their tertiary education in universities and institutes, while others have found employment. NOSSEF graduates are highly sought for employment.

In fact, 10% of the 2023 NOSSEF graduates are studying at Instituto São João de Brito (ISJB). This Jesuit run teaching college creates a space for a "Student Centre learning" atmosphere which prioritizes the future teachers' intellectual and character development through "Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm", forming the future leaders of Timor-Leste. ISJB graduates are well regarded, 60% are teaching in secondary schools, 10% at university level with the remaining 30% of graduates working in fields related to education.

NOSSEF students also achieved a 100% success rate passing the 2023 National Exam compared with 90% success rate for the Ermera Municipality.



The Class of 2023 celebrate their graduation.



In July 2023 Fr David Braithwaite visited NOSSEF, experiencing how the gifts from the parishioners of St Canice's are benefiting the operation of the school.

St Canice's Parish funding support for NOSSEF has been used towards operating costs including the salaries for 16 part time teachers (5 women) in addition to the Jesuit teachers, to ensure adequate coverage of classes by qualified teaching staff. All 27 NOSSEF teachers are qualified Looking ahead, in this teaching year of 2024, NOSSEF also now has two additional full-time teachers thanks to the support of Jesuit Mission Australia and St Canice's Parish.

The students at NOSSEF received additional assistance from five student teachers who attend the Jesuit-run teacher training college Instituto de São João de Brito (ISJB) while they were undertaking their two-month practical teaching experience at NOSSEF. For four days during July 15 students and three teachers from Australian Jesuit and Ignatian Secondary Schools visited NOSSEF and contributed to the students' education. The young female and male students taught English and joined in sporting activities.

The school has implemented measures to Care for Our Common Home such as the NOSSEF canteen having separate rubbish bins for plastics, bottles and papers.



Objectives	Impacts
All NOSSEF students received lessons based on the curriculum and there is improvement in student performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 338 students received lessons from 27 teachers (including 16 part-time) across science, math, arts, literature from Monday to Friday. • 100% of students passed the examinations. • Students were more attentive in class.
A quality Jesuit education has been provided to young men and women in Railaco.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extracurricular activities including sports, music, and arts were offered to students during the school days. • 16 part-time teachers have been very motivated and involved in extracurricular activities even though it is sometimes outside their usual work hours. • Other activities such as mass and formation were also part of the school activities conducted. • The school fulfilled its obligation. All the part time teachers were paid accordingly and were able to continue teaching based on their schedule.
Jobs provided for qualified teachers in Railaco.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of the 16 part-time teachers are local residents. All are qualified teachers but may have been unable to gain employment in the local area. • Employing these part-time teachers at NOSSEF contributes to reducing unemployment in the area.

Financial update

St Canice's funding ensured that the activities outlined in this report could be implemented during January-December 2023 for the benefit of children and youth in Railaco and nearby communities.

In 2023 Jesuit Mission has sent to \$82,949 to support the activities in Railaco. This amount is made up of \$57,088 donations received from St Canice's Parish during 2023 and some funds carried forward from 2022 donations. 100% of St Canice's Parish donations in 2023 have been spent.

Feeding	NOSSEF costs	TOTAL
A\$37,542	A\$45,407	A\$82,949

Challenges

- Attendance of children at the feeding program is impacted by the rainy season and difficult travel conditions and at time of harvesting coffee when the parents and children are otherwise engaged. At other times, the average attendance is over 80% of expected numbers of children for whom meals are prepared.
- Educating the parents of the children in the program about the importance of a balanced nutritional diet to support the growth and development of their children.
- Increasing costs of food items and fuel for the transport of meals impacts on the program – also on teachers' salaries as there may be requests for a higher rate and reduced staff retention. NOSSEF has recently revised the teachers' salary system to better retain teachers. This has been managed by good budget monitoring and planning.
- At times, reaching remote communities for the feeding program has been hampered by damaged and flooded roads. The team makes every effort to reach these communities as often as they safely can. Efforts are also being made to improve food security knowledge in communities so they can also produce their own nutritious food locally.

Conclusion

Thanks to the support from St Canice's parishioners 350 disadvantaged young children from and close to Railaco have received protein-rich meals during the period of January to December 2023. Your generous gifts have enabled the NOSSEF school to continue offering quality educational opportunities to 338 students. 16 teachers, and their families, from the local area are benefiting from improved employment conditions.

Your generosity is making an impact assisting in the development of Timor Leste through nurturing and developing the future leaders of the country. You are assisting to break the cycle of poverty for some of the most disadvantaged community members, offering them a stronger education, improved health and wellbeing, and a brighter future.

Hear their stories

Christina

Christina, born and raised in Indonesia, moved to Timor-Leste after marrying her husband who is from Ermera Municipality. Christina and her husband have seven children and live in Railaco. She is one of the staff of the feeding program. Christina is a trained nurse but after moving to Railaco, she felt the call to work in the feeding program.

She enjoys the interaction with the many children the feeding program assists.

"I enjoy listening to the stories from children. When I see a malnourished child grow to be healthy, it brings peace and joy in me. Every time the team shows up, children are happy to see us."

Christina has witnessed the growth in children through the program. However, she also acknowledged that the fight against malnutrition in Ermera Municipality is still a struggle. A lot of children are still undernourished because families do not have financial means to provide them with nutritious food, and families still have poor feeding practices because of limited knowledge about healthy meals for their children at home. At this moment, there are around 350 children relying on the feeding program. She wants to extend this program to many more villages in Railaco region; however, the challenge is limited budget, poor road condition and limited transportation and personnel to work in this program.

"I am grateful that I am still working in this feeding program where I can share my experience and knowledge with the children. I want to motivate their parents to prepare good food for their children. I hope more generous donors will continue to assist and support us in making more children live better lives."



Christina preparing the nutritious meals inside the kitchen at NOSSEF.

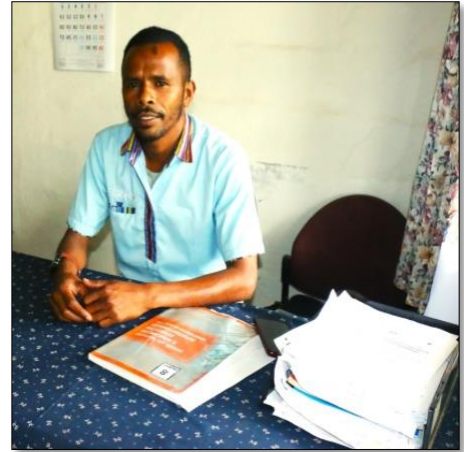


Geraldo

Geraldo, a graduate of NOSSEF has been teaching at the school since 2017. He first joined the school community as a student in 2011. During his time as a student, he was a dedicated student and keen participant in extracurricular school activities. After graduation he gained a bachelor's degree in economics from the "Universidade de Paz" (University of Peace) in Dilli graduating in 2016.

Through the support of donors from St Canice's Parish and Jesuit Mission, NOSSEF has sufficient funds to be able to employ Geraldo as a part-time teacher.

In 2017 Geraldo returned to Railaco to work as a part-time teacher teaching economics to Year 10 and Year 11 students. Based on his commitment and dedication to NOSSEF, he was accepted as a full-time teacher in 2022.



Geraldo in the staff room at NOSSEF

"I am grateful to all the graces I received. At NOSSEF, I am not only teaching but also, I am given more opportunities to enhance my knowledge of Jesuit education, to deepen my relationship with God through the spiritual formation of retreat and recollection."



Geraldo inside NOSSEF school compound.

Geraldo strives to be a good and dedicated teacher who can help the students to learn better and prepare them for their future careers.

"I would like more young people to come and learn at NOSSEF because the school will not just help a student to learn about science, mathematics, social studies, it develops one's character to be better."

I thank you for your generous support to NOSSEF so the school can offer better quality education to the Timorese in Railaco."