

## Secondary schooling for young people in Hatobuilico

In 2011, having held its inaugural Trek, the Blue Mountains held a consultation with the people from Hatobuilico about what they would like to do with this opportunity. John Telford and Mary Waterford travelled to Hatobuilico and Jude Finch, living and working in Timor as an AVI volunteer, organised the meeting with the support of Timorese colleagues.

The resounding first priority for the people of Hatobuilico was assisting with the development of a senior secondary school. There was no opportunity for school children to continue their schooling in the entire sub-district. This meant finishing at year 9 or leaving home to study in Dili or Ainaro.



What did we agree to do? The community and the existing presecondary school worked together to find space for classes, local teachers put up their hands to teach extra students and the Blue Mountains funded stipends for volunteer teachers, bursaries for poor families to ensure access was set in place and necessary funds for text books and equipment for the school were provided.

The school has had its ups and downs. Things started out well but strains in the system appeared. The load was huge for too few teachers and space became a big issue. Key people changed and culture and priorities changed with them. Student numbers dipped as parents chose to send their children to other schools. We wondered back here in the Blue Mountains if we should exit at one point where morale was low and student numbers down to 17.



Then, as we have done with other projects, we got together and designed a strategy to boost numbers and the quality of education. The Timorese government provided funding to build a new school and a 6 classroom school was quickly constructed. Teachers were head hunted and provided with incentives to stay on in the small community and some champions surfaced. Leadership also emerged and quickly student numbers burgeoned.

And now ... this year there are 140 students enrolled. The community are building an extra classroom and a teacher's room. Results in end of year exams last year were excellent and

better than any other school in the district. One student achieved the perfect score and 7 others gained prestigious entry to the national university. Inter-school sporting competitions are in place.

The school needs our support to survive. Perhaps in the future this might not be the case but still 13 teachers need a stipend to hold them at the school and poor families still need support for uniforms and the minimal fees. Hatobuilico is a very poor community but they prize education. The government is trying to get education for all up to speed but there is a long list of priorities and the development of the current education system started in 2002



with a very low base – few trained teachers, school buildings destroyed, inadequate curriculum.



Some standouts? The Blue Mountains have provided the opportunity for over 300 young people to finish their secondary schooling. Two previous scholarship students have returned to the school to teach and contribute to their community. Following a marvellous donation from Keith Wolfson, the school boasts the only computer lab (17 donated laptops making this possible). A school kitchen has been constructed. Girls who live far from the school can stay on site in a girls' dormitory. There are new bathroom and toilet facilities

for boarders.

The Hatobuilico Secondary School, ESCANFER (Escola Sekunadria Catolica Nain Feto Ramelau) is a credit to the determination of the Hatobuilico parents, teachers and community. We are proud to be associated with them. We hope one day that they are able to be self-sustaining.

