

Peter Trust Appeal - Autumn 2018

Last August, as you know, I was invited to attend the priestly ordination in East Timor of a seminarian I had been sponsoring during his many years of training. The visit gave me the chance to visit several of the projects being supported by the Peter Trust, that is by your generous donations.

Today I want to tell you specifically about the *Ahisaun* foundation which has been set up and developed by a Diocesan priest for the welfare of young people with various serious physical handicaps. The priest is Fr Adriano Ola, known as Fr Adri for short, who is an Indonesian from the island of Flores who was incardinated into the East Timorese Diocese of Dili in the 1990s.

Visiting the villages of his parish he became concerned about the number of disabled young people he saw in each community, and about how they seemed to be excluded from so much of village life. They were not attending school, or - as they grew up - given any role in society, for which they were well able. They were also regarded with shame by their own families who looked on them as a sign of God's disfavour, and wondered what sin had been committed within the family circle for them to be afflicted in this way.

Fr Adri was concerned that proper dignity should be afforded to these young people, and that their families should be encouraged to help them in their personal development and in their engagement in the life of the community. He raised the subject with his bishop, Dom Carlos Belo - who was soon to receive the Nobel Prize for his efforts to achieve a peaceful relationship between Indonesia and East Timor. Bishop Belo urged Fr Adri to discover the numbers and the whereabouts of young disabled people and to propose ways to respond to their needs.

In 1999 the *Ahisaun* foundation was established to promote the welfare of young people with disability and the first hostel was soon in operation in which the residents were given a sense of their human dignity and of being held, along with their families, as precious in the sight of God.

One of the principles guiding *Ahisaun* provision is that there should be an equal partnership between those with disabilities and the able-bodied. The name *Ahisaun* was chosen for this enterprise because traditionally this title was given to the formal agreements reached between regional kings pledging to respect each other's peoples and customs and lands. The Agreement was signified by the lighting of a Special 'Fire of Friendship' or *Ahisaun*. In the work of the *Ahisaun* Foundation mutual respect is paramount.

Thus its Charter states, amongst other important values, that 'everyone must appreciate the dignity and creativity of others, consider themselves to be servants of each other, and to act always for each other's benefit, giving heart and strength to one another'.

Ahisaun, it says, is 'not a place for the disabled to be lazy or spoiled but rather it is a place where they can build on whatever abilities and knowledge that they have. They have an obligation to think and work for the benefit of others, including the able bodied'.

'It must be recognised that those with healthy bodies still have personal limitations and handicaps, and spiritual defects - so no one should look down on or humiliate those with physical handicaps'. Disabled people who accept their condition in a positive frame of mind and then dedicate themselves to care for others will 'have a real strength to offer the community'.

Representatives of **The Peter Trust** have visited *Ahisaun* regularly since 2004 and each time have seen evidence of progress in this important area of social concern. Particularly impressive has been the steady engagement of young people with disabilities in the management and promotion of the *Ahisaun* enterprise.

Also the manifest spirit of collaboration and mutual respect between the able-bodied and those with - sometimes very severe - physical handicaps.

The Trust has therefore supported the development of *Ahisaun* in various practical ways that have been within our means. For example...

[We (that is you, the donors) have provided funds to equip the *Ahisaun* hostels with the means to acquire skills in **information technology** by the purchase of computers, keyboards, monitors, and power point projectors. *Ahisaun* members now tutor other young people and neighbours living in their vicinity in these same skills, enhancing their own sense of worth as they do so.

We have provided seeds and bulbs for the **cultivation of vegetables** to help with the preparation of healthy meals in the hostels. We have paid for the acquisition of powered and hand tools for use in **shoe making and repair**, and in the production of **communion wafers** for use by local churches and convents.

We have also contributed towards the provision of **musical instruments** such as a keyboard and guitars and drums - together with amplifiers and loudspeakers to enable gifted members acquire musical skills. They are now often called upon to assist at special occasions in the locality such as significant birthdays and weddings.

The Trust was also able on one occasion to come swiftly to the rescue when funds were urgently needed to deal with a serious **sanitation and drainage** issue in the main hostel in Dili.]

The spiritual focus of *Ahisaun* is also evident in their offer to engage in prayer of intercession for anyone with particular needs or concerns which they undertake in the hostel chapel, and in the fact regular meditation is included in the foundational Charter as an important self-discipline 'to help control feelings of frustration'.

During the past decade *Ahisaun* has become well established in the capital city of Dili and latterly has been committed to expanding its work and ethos elsewhere in the country.

This August I was able to see two of the four projects currently in development at different localities - which are at some considerable distance from each other. The main organisers of these projects are young adults who have themselves benefited as people with disability from the *Ahisaun* ethos and are eager to spread the word and the good practice of the institution.

The Peter Trust has been able to sponsor the further training of several of these young managers at tertiary level educational institutions in Dili. The Trust has also funded the purchase of motor bikes to enable them to travel between the several locations.

These young *Ahisaun* leaders also involve younger members of the hostels in the meetings they convene in villages when they speak to local people about the dignity and value of persons who have physical disabilities, and how much potential they have to contribute to the welfare of the community as a whole.

In Europe, and Great Britain in particular, we have become used to affording to people with disability the respect they deserve, and providing opportunities for them to participate in the activities of daily life including access to education and travel. We have been encouraged in this endeavour by the inspiration of such shining lights as Jean Vanier and the *L'arche* movement, and by *Faith and Light* communities.

These organisations are unknown in East Timor, but Fr Adri Ola and the *Ahisaun* foundation which he initiated and has consolidated over the years is undertaking the same very necessary work, and shares the same spiritual focus: *viz.* All human beings are precious in the sight of God, and need one another to develop their full potential, whether they be able-bodied or disabled. **The Peter Trustees** see great value in supporting the expanding work of *Ahisaun* and we appeal for your generous support.

[I emphasise (as usual) the value there is in even the smallest of contributions; the especially helpful nature of regular bank-mandated donations for our budgeting; and the importance of Gift Aiding any donation you make - one off or regular - if you are a tax payer, which enhances your gift by 25%! And I re-iterate our gratitude for your continuing generosity which has enabled so much to be done for the impoverished people of East Timor.

