

**From:** Kim Dunphy and Holly Schauble [contact@manyhands.org.au](mailto:contact@manyhands.org.au)  
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**To:** [kim.dunphy@manyhands.org.au](mailto:kim.dunphy@manyhands.org.au)

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# Many Hands International

culture based community development



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## Great news about the Lospalos Cultural Centre

Dear friends

Since last you heard from us, we've made the most excellent progress towards our goal of establishing a Centre for Traditional and Contemporary Arts and Culture in Lospalos, Timor-Leste.

Many Hands hosted a team of building experts in Timor in early February funded by a University of Melbourne grant. Richard Blight and Josh Ho, architects; Paul Callum, engineer from BlighTanner Consulting Engineers and Andrew Lucas, builder, came over to scope building requirements for the Lospalos Centre. During their week long stay they managed to achieve; complete measurement and assessment of existing buildings and site, development of detailed plans and a comprehensive project approach, connections with local suppliers and tradespeople, observation of successful and challenging infrastructure projects in Lospalos and other similar locations, meetings with potential project partners and collaborators and understanding of the unique situation and challenges of infrastructure projects in Timor.



In their final two days, the group made excellently researched presentations to senior staff at the General Directorate of Culture and the Prime Ministers' senior advisors. One week later, we received the marvellous news that our project had been awarded \$250,000 from the government of Timor-Leste, the total amount needed for Stage 1. Even better, we were asked to provide, as soon as possible, Plans for Stages 2 and 3, indicating that the government is interested in these as well.

We are delighted to be working in partnership with the Government of Timor-Leste, particularly the General Directorate of Culture, to deliver this project.

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## Our Culture: Many Different Stories performance, February, Lospalos

Melbourne based theatre director Catherine Simmonds worked in Lospalos between December and February, developing a community theatre project, *Afi Kultura: Storia Lafane Mamene Jejene (Our Culture: Many Different Stories)*. Catherine's work with local participants explored and re-presented the traditional *ratu* (tribal) stories of the Lautem district. The show brought together *lia-nain*, (knowledge-keeping elders), expert women weavers and 40 young performers from Sangar Haburas performing arts company.



It was unique in many ways: the first time that *ratu* stories had been performed in public in a theatrical setting; the first time that six *ratu* leaders had shared stories in public together, thus making it the first time the local community has ever heard these stories together. It was the first time that the oral story-telling had ever been accompanied by another artform and the first time that many people in the community had ever witnessed live theatre. Feedback from audiences and participants was very positive, like these comments from a youth worker in the audience: *This performance was very important for our community. When we learn more about our culture, our culture teaches about what is right- and what my rights and my responsibilities are to live in the community.*

Many Hands thanks Asialink for supporting Catherine's residency, and the UN Mission in Timor and the Ministry of Education, Lautem District for their invaluable support for this project .

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## Providing professional development opportunities

Catherine's residency also included significant professional development activities. To kick off the *Our Culture* theatre project, *Nafo Fila* youth theatre company from Ainaro visited Lospalos for a week in a successful learning exchange with local theatre group *Sangar Haburas*. One young participant commented: *The experience I got from this project was like a miracle. We had to be very patient and learn a lot from this experience.*



Catherine spent the last part of her time in Timor providing training and leadership ideas about community theatre making to staff from disability group ASSERT and Ba Futuru peace-building organisation. On her very last day, she was keynote speaker at a public forum on community theatre organised by Many Hands. Other speakers included Ba Futuru theatre workers and leaders Kay Gandara from Sangar Haburas and Alo from Nafo Fila. Speakers' ideas about their work provoked lively discussion from the 40 people who attended.

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## Community publishing project: First Language First

This project was developed in a collaboration between Many Hands, Alola Foundation, World Vision and the Ministry of Education in Timor, and Kids' Own Publishing in Melbourne. The project combines development of children's books in mother tongue language with promotion of education and engagement in reading and learning. Sarah Daley, who was an AYAD volunteer hosted by Many Hands in 2011, is now employed by Alola full-time for a year to support Alola's staff, local teachers and other educators to run this project. Creative input and training will also come from Victoria Ryle and her staff at Melbourne based Kids' Own Publishing. The first activity was a community workshop for the Melbourne East Timorese community in early February 2012, running concurrently with a professional development placement of four Timorese staff visiting Melbourne for a three week training with KOP. These were very successful.



This week, the first workshops were held in the Lautem district, near Lospalos. Co-ordinator Sarah reports: *All is going amazingly well, just spent the last three days with Mana Kirsty (Sword Gusmao) and the team in Lospalos who were facilitating socialisation and teacher training and coordinating the book making project for April when Victoria is visiting. The support from the community was amazing, the teachers were so receptive to the training, the teacher trainers are full of energy and really there is a massive momentum of excitement. Everyone is incredibly excited about the book making project component of the mother tongue project.*

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## Traditional music project for education and sustainable livelihoods, Ainaro

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February also saw the commencement of the traditional music project in the mountain town of Ainaro, to be led by local NGO Haburas Timor. This project intends to address sustainable livelihood issues through a training program to assist young people learn skills of traditional instrument making. A later stage will involve purchase by the project of instruments made, and professional development workshops in schools so that teachers can use them in the classroom. Some instruments will also be donated to community music groups for shared use. We thank the US Ambassadors Fund, Friends of Ainaro groups from Ballarat, Madison USA and Blue Mountains and donations received at Lina Andonovska's music concert for support for the first stages of the project. Further funding is required to complete Stage 2 of the project, the schools and community workshops.



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## University of Melbourne researchers' visit, February

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A team of University of Melbourne academics were hosted by Many Hands on a scoping visit to Timor, including Lospalos, during February as well. Dr. Violeta Schubert, Development Studies; Professor Helen Herman, Orygen Youth Mental Health Service; Lindy Joubert, UNESCO Observatory of Multi-Disciplinary Research in the Arts and Simon Malcolm, research assistant, have a seeding grant from the University of Melbourne to explore ideas around youth leadership and empowerment in rural East Timor. They are particularly interested to explore a creative arts approach to sustainable community development. Many Hands looks forward to interesting outcomes from this visit, which we hope will contribute to the evidence base for our work.

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## Coming up

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There are lots of new projects on the boil: a community festival for Lospalos; museum scoping project, more community theatre; dance-movement therapy professional development workshops; the creation of more picture books in Fataluku language; a youth exchange project between young people from Australia and Lospalos; visiting artists to Lospalos and more. Contact us if you'd like to be more involved, we'd be pleased to hear from you. [contact@many.hands.org.au](mailto:contact@many.hands.org.au).



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## How you can help us: seeking artists to lead activities in the Lospalos Centre

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Now that the buildings in the Centre are gradually being made

Now that the buildings in the Centre are gradually being made ready for use by the community- we need to start developing some programs to put in them. Many Hands is keen to hear from artists and cultural development workers who would be interested to volunteer their services with us.

And as always, we are happy to have donations to support our work. This month, donations would be used for the Ainaro traditional music project. Visit our website for easy ways to support us: [www.manyhands.org.au](http://www.manyhands.org.au).

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Many Hand International | Suite 1201, 377 Burwood Rd Hawthorn, VIC, 3122, Australia

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