

For immediate release



Christmas appeal to give the gift of care

For most of us, thankfully, Christmas is a time for celebration and good cheer.

But it's not like that for everyone.

Many children living with a disability in Asia and the Pacific are impoverished, cannot attend school, and experience bullying and discrimination.

To help these children get the services they need now, Australian Marist Solidarity has launched a Christmas appeal.

The *Give the gift of care this Christmas* appeal will fund disability services projects in our nearest neighbouring countries.

According to AMS Acting CEO Deirdre Looney, the inspiration behind the appeal is a quote from the Marist Brothers' founder, St Marcellin Champagnat.

"He said: 'To raise children, we must love them and love them equally forever'," she said.

"Unfortunately, for many children living with a disability in Asia and the Pacific, it's not equal.

"The ongoing COVID pandemic, lack of support services and infrastructure, means more children than ever in our neighbouring countries are finding themselves in a very tough situation.

Ms Looney said AMS had a strong history of supporting inclusive, all-access educational opportunities for vulnerable young people in Asia and the Pacific.

"These projects include the Marist Champagnat Institute in Fiji, which offers programs to young people with learning disabilities who have struggled to fit into mainstream schooling. And LaValla in Cambodia, which is a boarding school that caters for children and young people with physical disabilities," she said.

“These projects enable children living with a disability in these regions to get the services they need.”

Funds from the AMS appeal will provide support that means children with a disability will:

- be able to attend school
- have improved health and education outcomes
- experience less discrimination
- increase their feelings of self-worth and confidence.

Donations will help children like Bopha, who is in her early teens in Cambodia.



Bopha lives in the north of Cambodia with her mum, dad, three sisters and two brothers. She was diagnosed with polio at a young age and now uses a wheelchair. Bopha used to attend a local primary school, but it was difficult because she wasn't treated well, and other children discriminated against her because of her disability.

Her parents enrolled her into LaValla, a school funded by AMS, and it has been life changing for her. She's made lots of friends and can now move around more easily with her wheelchair.

Bopha completed primary school education at LaValla and because of that was able to graduate to high school where she's very happy and has lots of friends. She hopes to continue

her studies to become a primary school teacher.

Ms Looney said donations would change lives.

“Funds raised will help children with a disability gain the care and skills they need to achieve their potential,” she said.

“I can't think of a better Christmas gift.

“With the help of our generous supporters, we will be able to bring inclusive educational opportunities to vulnerable young people in Asia and the Pacific.

“Together, we will change their lives.”

This campaign follows on from AMS's successful mid-year appeal, Let Children Learn, to fund the expansion of St Joseph's College in Bougainville.

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Australian Marist Solidarity (AMS) is the agency for the aid and development work of the Marist Province of Australia throughout Asia and the Pacific Islands. AMS works with the people in this region on a combination of long-term and short-term development projects. These projects aim to develop, or support, locally sustained education opportunities for the young people in these regions.