

# MEDIA RELEASE



## STEM week kicks off with bright lights

One hundred and eighty students from Holy Family Primary School in Indooroopilly are making a simple but potentially life-changing difference in the lives of students in Papua New Guinea.

As part of their Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) week, the school has for the second time joined Australian charity SolarBuddy to fund components and construct portable solar-powered lights that will allow children in energy-poor countries the ability to do their homework, read and even get a glass of water after dark.

Guided by parents, teachers, SolarBuddy representatives and volunteers from the Origin Energy Foundation, the student-made solar lights will be delivered to their global peers who usually rely on unsafe means like kerosene lamps.

Holy Family Primary School Teacher Rebecca Scott said the school was excited to be involved in the incredible program that has a huge impact on the educational outcomes of the children receiving the lights.

“It’s such a life-changing experience for both the children in developing countries as well as ours,” Rebecca said.

“The program not only teaches our students about renewable energy and what goes into a piece of technology like these solar lights, but it also ties in with the Catholic ethos of social justice held strongly at the school – it’s great to be able to connect that to our STEM week.”

The students each write letters that are attached to the lights which Rebecca says, “helps to connect and bring an awareness to how others live in the world and inspires our children by knowing they’re making a difference”.

The school’s previous involvement provided more than 300 SolarBuddy lights to Papua New Guinea.

SolarBuddy Event and Partnerships Manager Magdalene St Clare who spoke about energy poverty, solar and renewable technology, said they are incredibly pleased when they’re invited to schools to facilitate sessions.

“Energy poverty is the worst kind of poverty in the world, yet it is such an unknown issue,” Magdalene said.

“Our solar lights are sustainable and last for 10 years. The energy partners we work with from around the world tell us that these very simple solar lights have enabled children to study 78% longer after dark.

“So as our homes get decked out with festive cheer, baubles and festive lights, it’s heart-warming to know that we are also bringing light to families in energy poverty,” Magdalene said.

Once the students have finished the assembly of the lights, SolarBuddy will do a quality control check before they are shipped off to ensure they are in perfect condition.

Learning about energy poverty and renewable sources wasn’t the only activity the students were immersed in on day 1 of STEM Week.

Guest speaker, multi-award winner and venom scientist at the Institute for Molecular Bioscience at the University of Queensland, Dr Samantha Nixon gave a fascinating presentation on her research “that takes spider venom and turns them into new medicines to protect us from parasites”.

“The reason I come out to schools like Holy Family, is because I want to help be that role model for the next generation of scientists,” Dr Nixon said.

“I never imagined I could be a scientist because I had never met one.”

“Events like STEM Week are really important for showing kids how important science is in the real world and that they can actually have a real career pursuing their interests, their passions, their curiosities and actually make a difference in the world.”

Students Lucy, Chloe and Olivia said the presentations from Dr Nixon and Magdalene were both interesting and eye-opening.

“SolarBuddy is such a good project as it not only helps people in other countries, but we also feel good about doing it,” Lucy said.

“I think it’s important because we need to make a difference, and both Dr Nixon’s work and SolarBuddy are a really good way to do that,” Chloe said.

“We make the lights so that they don’t have to use the kerosene lights which are really bad for your health,” Olivia said.

Principal Terese Shephard said Dr Nixon and Magdalene kicked off an exciting line-up of industry professionals who will present and run workshops throughout the week.

“We’re very lucky here at Holy Family – many of our parents work in fields related to STEM at the University of Queensland or other universities around, so we have a strong connection already,” Principal Shephard said.

“Our focus here at Holy Family is collaboration, problem-solving and critical thinking and this is exactly what happens when we have these experts come and talk to us. It’s so inspiring and ignites the students’ minds.”

“We’re going to have specialists talk about soil fertility, erosion, designing sustainable products for the future including lunchboxes and getting rid of single-use plastics, a father who was engaged in developing the Hungry Jack’s Rebel Whopper to talk about the process of food design, right through to PhD students talking about their research into native foods like bunya nuts, wattle seeds and seaweeds.”

“A lot of variety for our learners to be engaged in. We want to make sure that our students have every opportunity to engage in STEM-related fields if that’s what they desire to do.”

Next year the school will incorporate its already strong arts program to expand STEM to STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics).

More information on SolarBuddy and donating a solar light can be accessed at [SolarBuddy.org](http://SolarBuddy.org).

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