

Caritas Australia CEO shares stories of impact following a visit to disability projects in Vietnam.

Kirsty Robertson CEO of Caritas Australia made a recent visit to partner Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and the Centre for Sustainable Rural Development (SRD) in Vietnam to see some of their disability projects in action.

During her time there Kirsty Robertson visited the Organisation of Persons with Disabilities, where people with disability are supported in producing goods they can sell. This includes pillows and handbags, as well as paper flowers which Kirsty then learnt how to make.

In Vietnam, up to 8 percent of the population are people with disability, with 75 percent living in rural areas, and experiencing lower rates of literacy and paid employment. The projects run by [CRS](#) and SRD and supported by Caritas Australia aim to provide support for those with disability by addressing education, employment, rehabilitation, and health services.

The CRS school inclusion projects have seen the enrolment rate of children with disabilities increase from 50 percent to 70 percent. Of the 1,450 youth with disabilities CRS supported over a ten-year period, 70 percent of them now have high paying jobs in the technology sector.

SRD also provides rehabilitation and health support, from home-based care to the provision of assistive devices, which have increased the confidence and social participation of beneficiaries.

One woman Kirsty Robertson met is a beneficiary of such programs as she lives with a fused spine and is confined to a wheelchair in the prone position.

She gave Kirsty a dream catcher and said, "I give you this in the hope that your dreams come true. I know your dreams may be big but mine are simple. I wanted a wheelchair to live an independent life - go to the toilet and have a shower without my dad to help me. I wanted to go to physical therapy - in the distant hope of one day walking again. Kirsty through you all my dreams have come true. My hope is rekindled, and my dignity restored."

Kirsty Robertson, CEO of Caritas Australia, said of the meeting, "It is easy to think about big projects and big problems. To dehumanise poverty. But this reminded me that we will be remembered by how we make people feel. Through the power of Caritas Australia and its partners our generosity can make people feel safe, loved and content. We are a beacon of light for people and so every small act of service, every donation, it matters, and it contributes to creating a more just world."

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