

Media Release

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Holy Spirit Northside Orthopaedic Surgeon, Dr Bill Donnelly, is one of the many charitable people, who have changed the lives of two young East Timorese children, with life changing surgery.

15 year old Afonso de Jesus learnt to walk on his untreated broken tibia after he was shot as a toddler during the Indonesian militia violence in East Timor in 1999. Despite his injuries and inadequate medical care, Afonso walked about 2kms to school on a shin bone bent at 90 degrees.

Eliana Maia, 12, also from East Timor, suffered a tuberculosis infection of the right hip joint some 4 years ago which made her right hip very short, stiff and inward curving. She was not able to attend school as she could not walk.

The children were 'discovered' in 2011, when Year 10 students from St Joseph's College, Gregory Terrace went on an East Timor Immersion to the Railaco Village in the Eastern Highlands. Dr Bill Donnelly, one of the accompanying fathers and orthopaedic surgeon at Holy Spirit Northside, was introduced to the children by Christian Brother Bill Tynan.

Dr Donnelly said, "Word in the region got around that a doctor was in the area and each night the local people would line up outside my tent asking for assistance. This is when Brother Bill introduced Afonso and Eliana to me- they were the most serious of all the children".

Afonso and Eliana underwent x-rays at Dili Hospital and were flown for surgery to Holy Spirit Northside, which provided the services at no cost. At the time of surgery, Afonso's infected bone was visible through the broken skin.

Orthopaedic Surgeon Dr Paul Pincus, Anaesthetist Dr Andrew Nussey, Limb Reconstruction Nurse Noelle Coleman and Dr Bill Donnelly all donated their services.

Dr Donnelly said the surgery was reasonably straightforward however this type of medical treatment was not possible in Timor. They are our closest neighbour- a 50 minute flight from Australia, and yet they are a third world country."

This life changing surgery for Afonso and Eliana now means their life will never be the same. Before their surgery, they had never travelled in a plane, and were not used to running water and electricity. Now Afonso wants to play soccer and Eliana looks forward to jumping and walking.

Two host families from St Joseph's College, Gregory Terrace agreed to accommodate the children and their fathers prior to and after their surgery. Gregory Terrace will also host Afonso at school once he is well enough to attend school and before he returns home to the Highlands. (approx. 8-12 weeks after surgery.)

HSN General Manager Daniele Doyle said, "The children really have touched the lives of our hospital staff. The theatre staff have fundraised; to provide the children with soccer balls, games and money- more money than the fathers would make in one year. Their generosity of spirit has been overwhelming."

Daniele Doyle continues, "This has really been a truly wonderful outcome for the children enabled through the collaborative efforts of a supportive catholic community. Christian Brother Bill who works with the Terrace Timor Network, Communicade Edmund Rice has been integral to this whole journey and without his tireless efforts and unwavering support, the children would never have been able to have the quality of life they are about to experience when they return home".

The Gregory Terrace network of parents, the Rotary Oceania Medical Aid for Children, the surgeons and the medical equipment companies has changed the future of these children.

Daniele Doyle said, "It has been our pleasure to care for Afonso and Eliana and to be involved with this wonderful catholic network."

Dr Donnelly hopes to establish this as ongoing philanthropic medical work.

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