

Your Compassion in Action

 Caritas
AUSTRALIA |  60 YEARS
1964-2024

Change starts with you | #3 September 2024

Emergency update

Learn more about the urgent humanitarian crisis in Sudan.

Women for the World

Read about Memory's story of determination and resilience.

Together for change

Find out more about the impact of your support in Vietnam and Papua New Guinea.

In the spotlight

Read about Caritas Australia's former CEO's recent visit to our partners in Vietnam.



Content

#3 | September 2024

03

Words of Gratitude

Hear from Caritas Australia's Interim Chief Executive Officer, Kirsten Sayers.

04

Emergency update

We bring you an urgent update from Sudan, with communities grappling with conflict and famine.

06

Women for the World

Find out more about Memory's story of determination and resilience, and the way that your generosity is helping women forge a path out of poverty.

10

Women in Vietnam

Get to know Phuong's story and learn more about our Vietnam partners' work for people with disabilities.

14

In the spotlight

Read about former Chief Executive Officer, Kirsty Robertson's recent visit to our partners in Vietnam.

15

Events and fundraisers

To celebrate 60 years of Caritas Australia, we hosted a morning tea for our incredible community.

Editor: Connie Zehender

Design: Ellie Wong

Cover: Memory at her technical college near the city of Blantyre where she completed a course in carpentry in Malawi.

All photos belong to Caritas Australia unless otherwise stated.

Students learning carpentry at a technical college near Blantyre, in Malawi.

Words of Gratitude

My name is Kirsten Sayers, and it is my honour to represent Caritas Australia as its new Interim Chief Executive Officer.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank and acknowledge the former CEO Kirsty Robertson for her dedication to Caritas Australia over the past five years. She guided the organisation through a global pandemic and a time that saw many emerging and escalating challenges globally. Thank you to Kirsty for all her contributions in advancing the mission of Caritas Australia and supporting vulnerable communities here, and across the world.

I join Caritas Australia with many years of experience in the international aid and development sector as a CEO, Board Director and international lawyer as well as holding senior diplomatic appointments. I have taken leave as a Caritas Australia Board Director to take on this position - I am humbled to be here and so thankful to serve such a wonderful organisation.

Through my work over the years, I have become acutely aware of the inequalities that women face. Despite how far we have come, women and girls are still disproportionately impacted by poverty, food insecurity, climate change, gender-based violence and have limited access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

Caritas Australia's annual Women for the World campaign gives us an opportunity to tackle these inequalities so that every woman and girl can have a brighter future.

For more than six decades, Caritas Australia has been working hand-in-hand with our partners to create a more just world where all can thrive. A world where women and girls can exercise their strength, resilience and determination, and become leaders in their communities. Your kindness and generosity have been instrumental in forging us closer towards gender equality.

This edition of Your Compassion in Action is dedicated to women and celebrates the achievements, resilience and determination of some very special women. We revisit the story of Memory from Malawi - whom you might remember from Project Compassion 2024. We also share stories from our programs in Papua New Guinea and Vietnam, as well as updates on the conflict and famine currently spreading through Sudan.

On behalf of everyone at Caritas Australia, I would like to thank you for your unwavering generosity and hope that you enjoy this edition of Your Compassion in Action.



With gratitude,

Kirsten Sayers

**Kirsten Sayers
Interim Chief Executive
Officer, Caritas Australia**

Sudan's severe humanitarian crisis



Sudan is currently experiencing one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world with civil conflict and famine spreading through the nation. The impact on innocent civilians in and across the African nation has been severe, and shows no sign of improving in the short term.

Civil conflict between the army and a powerful militia broke out in Sudan in April last year. The power struggle has continued, with violence escalating and the situation on the ground deteriorating.

- **Almost 14,000 people** were killed in the first 12 months of the conflict.
- **Nine million people** have been forced to flee their homes.
- Major damage to essential infrastructure has affected provision of food, water and health services.
- **25 million people** are in need of acute humanitarian assistance.

Sudan has traditionally been a host country for refugees from neighbouring regions and conflict has further exacerbated the scarcity of resources that were already stretched to breaking point.

The United Nations (UN) has declared that Sudan is facing a severe hunger crisis, with famine being declared in parts of Northern Darfur. Famine is declared when 1 in 5 people or households severely lack food and face malnutrition, starvation and death.

To make matters worse, Sudan is also facing what the UN has called the "largest displacement crisis in the world" with about 16 percent of the entire population being displaced either within Sudan, or across the border into neighbouring countries.

Caritas Australia is supporting our partners CAFOD and NCA (Norwegian Church Aid) to help displaced communities access food, clean water, hygiene and sanitation support, and other urgent needs. They have been on the ground since the start of the conflict, providing vulnerable communities with essential support. Every donation helps, even the smallest amount can make a life-changing difference.



To learn more about this humanitarian crisis and to support the people of Sudan, please visit our Sudan emergency appeal on the Caritas Australia website: [caritas.org.au/sudan](https://www.caritas.org.au/sudan)



500 people returning to South Sudan via boat as a result of the conflict in Sudan. Photo: Caritas Diocese of Malakal, South Sudan.

“Growing up in the village was not easy. My parents don’t have a job, so they depend on farming. When the season goes wrong, we suffer a lot and become food insecure. Sometimes we need to bathe without soap. Sometimes we need to walk without shoes,” – Memory said.



Memory outside a hydroelectric power plant in Malawi.

Women for the World

Your support helps provide women like Memory with education

You might remember Memory from Project Compassion earlier this year. Memory, 27, grew up in the Mwanza district in southern Malawi, with her parents and her four siblings. Her parents are subsistence farmers who depend on their crops for survival.

As the eldest child in her family, Memory encountered numerous challenges in her daily life. She had to support her family with domestic chores such as farming, carrying water, cooking and cleaning, and taking care of younger siblings, alongside her own education efforts.

Economic opportunities for girls in Malawi are constrained by high levels of early school leavers and women typically tend to work in lower paying jobs or have no source of income. Statistics have shown that for every 100 girls who start their education, only three will finish. **Twenty-seven will leave** because their families are unable to afford school fees, **16 will leave** due to early pregnancy and **27 will leave** due to child marriage.

“When I was in primary school, I went to school barefooted because my parents didn’t have money to buy shoes for me. But I told myself I can’t stop going to school because this is the only way I can get a better life,” added Memory.

Having to support her family meant that her education was hanging by a thread. Memory feared that she would be stuck in an endless cycle of poverty and meet the same fate as so many other women in Malawi. But thanks to the generosity of supporters like you, Caritas Australia worked closely with our local partner Catholic Development Commission in Malawi (CADECOM) to bring the A+ program to Memory’s village.

After being identified by local leaders in her village as a capable candidate for a vocational skills course, Memory was referred to a technical college near the city of Blantyre with support of our partner. The A+ program helped her with tuition and boarding fees, thus she decided to pursue vocational training in carpentry to support herself, her family and prove to her community that women can work in male-dominated industries.

Memory graduated with an advanced certificate in Carpentry and Joinery. With the knowledge and skills acquired, she secured a job as a carpenter at one of the largest hydroelectric power companies in Malawi. She has become the very first female carpenter in her village and a trailblazer for other girls and young women wanting to pursue a career in a male-dominated industry.

Thank you for standing with determined women like Memory.



Memory (centre) with her parents, Lector and Lute, and siblings in their village in Mwanza district, southern Malawi.

About the A+ Program*

Since 2016, through the support of generous people like you, the A+ program has helped **7,397 families (33,287 people)** across Malawi and **3,428 families (16,454 people)** in the remote Karatu district of Tanzania. With the work of our partners Catholic Development Commission in Malawi (CADECOM) and the Diocese of Mbulu Development Department (DMDD), the program has helped rural communities improve their food security, access to water and sanitation, boost women’s education and income generation, and strengthen child protection.

The program’s new phase, the A+ Successor program, has already begun and will help a further **10,184 families (56,096 people)** over the next four years across Malawi and **3,993 families (19,967 people)** in Tanzania. The program will have a strong focus on school children and maternal health clinics, disaster risk reduction, as well as improving food security and women’s livelihood in vulnerable rural communities. The program will directly benefit girls and women and help reduce climate change impact locally and across the globe.

*Along with your generous support, this program is also supported by the Australian Government, through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

Your impact: Aunties at Grassroots Action Palmerston lead the way in healing intergenerational trauma



(L to R) Serena Dalton, Kat Lee and Jody Mummery from GAP

"A lot of people have a misconstrued idea or understanding of what generational trauma is. Generational trauma is still happening today,"

– GAP's General Manager, Kat Lee.

Caritas Australia supports our partners to help First Australian people access employment opportunities, heal from intergenerational trauma and to continue to share their culture. Thanks to your unwavering generosity, the Aunties at Grassroots Action Palmerston (GAP) are leading the way in healing intergenerational trauma through the Grassroots Youth Engagement program (GYE).

"GYE gives opportunities to kids who ordinarily wouldn't have them. We do social emotional wellbeing and employment pathways for kids that ordinarily wouldn't get the chance to work," says GAP's Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Serena Dalton.

GYE works collaboratively with local community members, businesses and government to create positive outcomes in key areas that young people have identified as important to them.

The program actively responds to the significant challenges that Indigenous young people face and connects them with employment opportunities that help build their skills and confidence. This is paired with activities and mentorship to strengthen connection to culture.

"The misplacement of families, the removal of families, has flowed onto the youth that we deal with today. That's why there is so many cases of incarceration. There are a lot of special needs or sensory issues going on that no one has diagnosed. But at the root, they are just kids. They just want someone to love them and respect them."

All of this is supported by the kindness of people like you and by the enduring love and commitment of the GAP Aunties, who created a home away from home called Aunty's Place. Their HQ is a residential property complete with a kitchen, living room, and sensory areas.

"When they come to Aunty's Place and they deal with GAP, they're such different kids. They just want to be kids and they see that they all have potential. We can see the change that we bring to them whilst they're attending our programs," says Operation Manager, Jody Mummery.

When asked what works for the young people GAP serves, founder and CEO Serena Dalton said, ***"Respect is on the top of the list, because they don't get that often. Love because what kid doesn't want to be loved and understood. Helping them find who they are in a world of chaos is essential."***

Serena described the program participants as some of the most ***"loving, loyal, and respectful"*** kids she has ever worked with. ***"I couldn't be prouder of the women that I work with, the other Aunties. I couldn't be prouder of the kids that come to the program,"*** she adds.

Thank you for helping promote healing and for supporting First Australians.



(L to R) Serena Dalton, Kat Lee and Jody Mummery from GAP Australia.

Women in Vietnam

Phuong's story made possible by your generosity

Phuong*, 24, lives in the Quang Tri province in Vietnam. Her disability has left her fully paralysed from below her arms and needing to use a wheelchair. As a result, Phuong finds it difficult to exercise her leg muscles, which is vital to maintaining her health.

Sadly, Phuong lost her mother to cancer at the start of 2023. Her mother had always been by her side, helping with daily activities and offering support. With her mother gone, Phuong often felt hesitant to ask her father or brothers for help, so she turned to online resources to learn how to manage on her own.

Approximately 80 percent of people with disabilities live in countries that lack the infrastructure and facilities to support them. Without access to basic services, people with disabilities in rural Vietnam often experience discrimination or exclusion, affecting their future education, health care and employment prospects.

Prior to joining the Together We Can program**, run by our partner the Centre for Sustainable Rural Development, Phuong often felt less hopeful and had to drop out of school because of her paralysis. Additionally, the costs of her treatment, hospital fees and medication, caused financial strain to her family.

Thanks to the generosity of supporters like you, our partners organised a therapist to visit her once a month for rehabilitation. This helped improve her health by exercising her muscles. The program also helped support her family with generating income from her father's grocery shop.

The program also empowers people with disabilities to actively participate in their communities and access



Phuong using a stick to pick up her cactus.
Photo: Centre for Sustainable Rural Development.

"The program has helped my father and I make more money for the household through the shop. I also feel happier and more encouraged."

– Phuong.

parental training, community engagement, vocational training, and livelihood development.

"By the end of this year, I hope to be able to stand. I do my exercises every single day and I can point my feet now. My father helps my practice by raising my bed up, so that my feet touch the ground. The first thing I would like to do if I can stand and walk is visit my mother's grave," said Phuong.

Thanks for helping young women like Phuong gain access to the support they need.

**Names have been changed to protect their identity.*

***Along with your generous support, this program is also supported by the Australian Government, through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).*

Merry Christmas

Celebrate the Spirit of Christmas with Global Gifts!

Give a Gift That Makes a Difference

This Christmas, give a gift that makes a difference and changes the lives of people living in poverty. Each Global Gift supports life-changing programs for those in need around the world. From providing clean water to empowering women and children, your gift can bring happiness and lasting impact to the most vulnerable communities.

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How your support helped provide a new roof for healthcare centre in Lemakot



Dr Kari and Matron Florence in the maternity ward.

“Now, safe drinking water can be collected from the rain into the tank and be used for the health centre staff and patients.”

– Dr Kari Athanasius

The Lemakot Health Center is located on the east coast of New Ireland. The centre was first established as an aid post in 1912 and has a long history of delivering healthcare to people in the province. By the 1970s, under the stewardship of the Missionary Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, it became the Sacred Heart Health Centre.

Beyond a few paint jobs, the last maintenance work done to the facility took place in 1987. According to Father Aminio Justyn of the Kavieng Diocese, they had been writing proposals for renovation and maintenance since 2000, but nothing fruitful had come out of that effort. That is until earlier this year, where thanks to your generosity, our partners Catholic Church Health Services were able to replace the facility’s roof.

In Papua New Guinea, rural health centres face an enormous amount of challenges in addressing work of this magnitude. Over 90 percent of people in the Pacific nation live in rural areas and use local health centres like the one in Lemakot.

The government in Papua New Guinea largely funds health centres in urban and more regional areas. Additionally, the cost of supplies in Papua New Guinea is high, with record inflation reducing purchasing power for everybody, especially for those on low incomes in rural areas.

“Papua New Guinea has a very high mortality rate because of the many challenges that affect the healthcare services in a health centre like Lemakot. We would like to provide quality and very safe delivery or childbirth for our people,” said Dr Anthanius Kari from Catholic Church Health Services.



Matron Florence (far left) and staff from the Lemakot Health Centre at the reopening ceremony following the roof replacement.

“However, circumstances where the resources become a challenge, such as old equipment and lack of running water in the health facility, can all contribute to the ongoing high mortality rate.”

“Women deliver in very challenging circumstances, even though they are in a health centre. Old and malfunctioning equipment can affect the way we deliver our health services. These can improve through the support of donor partners and through the support of the Government and the Church to be able to deliver quality and efficient care to our people,” he added.

The work done to the Lemakot Health Centre was incredibly overdue. The rusty roof was full of holes, creating serious impediments to the delivery of adequate healthcare to patients.

Prior to the instalment of the new roof, rainwater leaking into treatment rooms and equipment storage areas were evidently a hygiene concern. Nurses having to manage buckets of water and fight to keep areas dry for patients was also a clear source of frustration, and a poor use of

their skills. However, the condition of that roof held up other fundamental improvements to the health centre. It had no running water because harnessing rainwater from the roof to fill water tanks was not an option. Not only would the water have been rusty, but most of it would never have reached gutters for catchment, as most of it would often end up inside the buildings. To make matters worse, without watertight buildings, a safe electricity supply was not possible.

“We are happy to say that through the work of Caritas Australia and the funding that has come through, and the support of the Catholic Health Services and the Kavieng Diocese, we have been able to fix the roofs of the health centre,” said Dr Kari.

Thanks to your support and the work of our partners, the new roof has been firmly installed, sealing the building – which had also been newly repainted. As a result, several water tanks are now in operation, and there are no electrical hazards.

Kirsty Robertson's visit to partners in Vietnam



Kirsty Robertson and Ms Le Pham from CRS with a pillow made by program participants. Photo: CRS.

Caritas Australia's former Chief Executive Officer, Kirsty Robertson, visited our partners Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and the Centre for Sustainable Rural Development (SRD) in Vietnam to see some of their disability programs in action.

During her time there, Kirsty visited an 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.

One of the women that Kirsty met is a program participant who 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..."

"My hope is rekindled, and my dignity restored."

Kirsty 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."**

60 years of Compassion in Action

This book tells the story of your support and impact across the world through 60 hand-picked photographs of participants from Caritas Australia's international and Australian programs.

Join us in celebrating 60 years of lives transformed.
You can purchase the book at: www.caritas.org.au/60-faces.



Caritas Australia's 60th Anniversary morning tea

Earlier this year, our wonderful community came together at The Royal Exchange in Sydney for a special morning tea to celebrate Caritas Australia's 60th anniversary and to commemorate six decades of impactful work with vulnerable communities across the world.

In the 1960s, lay Catholics initiated efforts to combat hunger and global poverty, leading to the formation of the Catholic Overseas Relief Committee in 1964, which eventually evolved into Caritas Australia. That same year, Catholic parishes in Adelaide launched the first Lenten appeal, raising funds for a fishing boat to aid the communities in the Tiwi Islands.

The event featured speakers including Caritas Australia's former Chief Executive Officer, Kirsty Robertson, and Mission Facilitator, Michael McGirr.

It was an opportunity to celebrate supporters like you and for us to express our gratitude for your unwavering generosity. A way for us to express our gratitude for your ongoing dedication to helping build a better and brighter tomorrow for all, and for helping us fulfil our mission.

It was also a perfect occasion to reflect on our past achievements together, to celebrate the present, and to continue working towards a brighter and better future for all.



Kirsty Robertson and Caritas Australia supporters at morning tea. Photo: Zara King.

We would love to hear your stories of compassion!

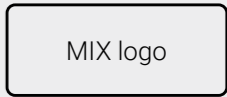
If you would like to be featured in the next edition of Your Compassion in Action – or would like to nominate someone from your school or parish community, please reach out to the Publications Editor at **connie.zehender@caritas.org.au**.



ACFID
MEMBER



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island readers should be aware that this publication may contain images or names of people who have since passed away. Caritas Australia acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians, past and present, of the land on which all our offices are located.





THANK YOU

For being a partner in compassion and helping vulnerable people around the world build a brighter future.

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