



Meg Hanlon, of the Rotary Club of Inverell, with some of the curious Timor Leste locals.

# TEACHING IN TIMOR

Last July, a team of five volunteers from the Rotary Club of Inverell, NSW, travelled to Timor Leste to enhance the technology and numeracy teaching skills of local teachers.

**GROUP** leader was teacher Kerri Tom, who was inspired to return to Timor Leste after visiting a school there in 2015 and seeing how deeply the children wished to learn.

"There were six little boys sitting on the bottom of a bookshelf just so they could have a seat and be part of the classroom," Kerri said. "That melted my heart."

Students value education to the extent that many walk up to two hours from home through rugged and rocky country, usually without shoes.

"It's been so exciting to work with the kids," said volunteer Lauren Holder, whose aspiration has been to work with children overseas.

"It's been a huge eye-opener to compare lifestyles of the Timorese and

Australian children."

"I am so in love with the country – the people smile with their whole faces," said graphic designer Meg Hanlon, the youngest Rotarian in her region and two-time RYLarian.

The group also delivered 500 hand-knitted dolls made by Rotary volunteers for use by the local dentist as a treatment incentive for children.

The Rotary Club of Inverell has a long-standing relationship with the area. The club has been responsible for numerous construction projects, including a preschool, computer lab, orphanage and teacher accommodation. They have also installed solar hot water in a hospital and donated numerous computers, printers and laminators.

Retired principal and club member

Bob Neich, who is also Kerri's father, has been the organiser and veteran of 13 Rotary visits to Timor Leste so far. He, with other members of a building team, travelled alongside the teaching volunteers to work on a separate project in the area: creating a new ablution block for the small hospital at Bairo Pite Clinic, as well as upgrading existing facilities.

The new bathroom, with one shower and toilet, adjoins the new maternity ward the team built last year. Previously, only one toilet existed for patients, meaning pregnant women wanting desperately to use it had to queue – now the women have a choice of three toilets.

"I keep going back, because the need is so great," said Bob. •