

Word on East Timor

On March 15th, after missing their connecting flight in LA, a team of three from East Timor finally made it to Colorado. Their arrival had involved a year of selling coffee, collecting used printer cartridges and cell phones and soliciting interested people in the community to serve as host families, ambassadors and mentors. For those able to meet these three, it is clear any work and effort was worth it.

Betty Da Silva, tiny (4'6") and beautiful, came to improve her knowledge of basic healthcare. Betty helps to run the Bakhita Center clinic, keeping it going between visits from volunteer doctors and nurses, inventorying medications, taking vital signs of patients and translating for patients and doctors, as many of the volunteers are from Australia and the US. She had hoped to learn how to do suturing and injections and how to help mothers with well baby care. Betty worked with 4 different medical professionals: a nurse practitioner, a family practitioner, an EMT and a well baby care specialist. In addition she was blessed with three retired nurses who acted as ambassadors and loaded her up with books and guides for use in Timor. All of this was possible because the Gilbert-Albright family opened their home to Betty for her five weeks in Fort Collins.

Arno Maia, the youngest of the team, was a quiet thoughtful man whose first impression of Fort Collins was his happy amazement that most everyone gets up each day and goes work. He was contrasting this with the fact that nearly 50% of the people in Ermera are unemployed and this has left not only a difficult financial situation for the community, but also created an emotional drain, making it hard sometimes to continue with the hard work of rebuilding this new nation. Arno came to gain experience in many areas like construction, electrical systems and aquaculture. I found out he is also quite interested in dairy cows!

He worked directly with people from 4 different professions: shadowing an electrician, a construction foreman, a plumber and a fish farmer. He also toured numerous businesses and operations, including the Cozy Cow dairy, Grant Family Farms, the CSU Engines Lab and the CSU Engineering Research Lab. Our own Roy Mongelli served as Arno's ambassador and the Noon and Linn families shared their homes and time with him. Sophia Linn, a geography instructor at Front Range, brought Arno to her class where he talked and answered questions about his country.

In an email last month, Arno wrote this (remember, English is his fifth language)...

Hallo How you all going? I Still miss all of you and Fort Collins and also every thing you did to me. Since we arrived till now I tried to work hard to keep my self busy to forget what I saw and what's happening whit people are life in us, but that make my head still hard forget and make me confusion why in this country very hard to make life but in some other place it seems not hard to make life.

This message inspires my to continue to find ways to make connections with and bring opportunity and resources to his community in Ermera.

Our last team member was José Miguel Madeira and our family had the great fortune of having him in our home. José is the father of three little girls and so having him with us, with Grace and Liam, just seemed to be the perfect fit. José could seem quiet and shy but that was only due to language limits. Once he became comfortable, he was a big “talker” and full of ideas. He and I carried around little notebooks for the many times we resorted to pictures to help explain ourselves.

He loved what he was seeing and was always picturing ways the information he was gathering could be used back home. José’s experience was much more about touring than shadowing. Still, he met with eight different professionals from businesses and organizations including Trees Water and People, Larimer County Work Force, Grant Family Farms, Watson Fish Hatchery. In addition he went to a class at CSU on budding and grafting (he just mentioned that class last week on the phone), spent three days in Alamosa with aquaculture professor Ted Smith and his family touring the valley and seeing the various ways aquaculture can be done and spent the afternoon with a tropical fruit tree enthusiast is Greeley who has green houses full of tropical fruit trees – In Greeley? Who knew?

Norm Illsey was José’s ambassador who sent him home with a tool box full of tools – and for those of you who know Norm, you know how passionate he is about making sure people have the tools, literally, to get things done.

Jiny Lin and Taryn U’Halie, both grad students in the TEOSL program at CSU volunteered for a week of teaching intensive English. Their energy, enthusiasm and gentle welcome was a great start to the 5 week trip.

Edie Mc Sherry and a group of volunteers from the Larimer County Cooperative exchange spent two days with the team. Having prepared a special workshop for them, they taught food preservation and showed how to can fruits and vegetables as well as meat and dry meat and fruit. Mary Bergman, a nutritionist, spent the morning with Betty and José, talking and asking about the nutritional needs of different groups in their community. Good information came our way from Betty and José and many things were learned as well.

Finally the team ended their time in Fort Collins by meeting with Village Earth. Their time visioning was well spent and an experience they commented was very helpful as they have always had ideas and a desire for positive change but haven’t had the clarity yet to make the kind of difference they wanted.

In all, 21 different professionals, 5 ambassadors, 2 CSU students, 4 families and the families of the original PeaceJam youth who made this all possible took part in Phase One of Creating Connection. While some of these nearly 40 people are members of FCIC, most were not, which means our community has many people interested in getting involved with “things” international – willing to share their time, their knowledge and even their homes. I have to say I was pleasantly impressed. It wasn’t really that difficult to find people willing to help. Sometimes fitting the need with the right person was a trick but once asked, most everyone responded that it sounded like an interesting experience and they would like to participate. We truly live in a great community!!!

So the team is back in Ermera and we begin planning for Phase Two. What Phase Two will look like is still forming. José left, having talked to the Griswold's son David about coffee, excited to get something going that will benefit this community of coffee growers. He is also working on a tree nursery which the community center hopes will provide work and income to the community. Bringing access to resources about how to create and continue viable/sustainable businesses is one thing we will be focusing on.

Arno is still trying to find his niche. His English being so good and his mind so open has made him the one many projects fall to but he has yet to figure how he would best like to focus his efforts. Supporting people like Arno and the folks who run the community center with training in organizing and planning may be another area we can help with.

Finally Betty is eagerly using the new skills she learned. The clinic is working on a plan to start a mobile clinic to reach the many people isolated in this mountainous region of the country. The plan involves providing direct care, increasing healthcare workers' skills, providing community health education and a community literacy program. Being able to support this effort would be great as well.

If you would like to be involved in Phase Two of Creating Connections, contact me at 490-2434 or obermurray@comcast.net.

Thanks to all who helped!!

Nancy Murray