

BUILDING A LIBRARY IN BALI



Tyas Latra (left) and Samara Welbourne

Sixteen-year-old SAMARA WELBOURNE has just returned from Bali, where she spent the last week of her school holidays helping to build a library for which she raised \$18,000. Samara tells us more.

I started on this project with a 15-year-old Balinese teenager, Tyas Latra. The library is being built in Bungaya, Tyas's village, which is on the east coast of Bali, about 15 minutes drive from Candi Dasa. It's scheduled to be finished this month, and you can watch it's progress on the Facebook page of Puspadi Bali (bit.ly/2s1NsdL), Bali's leading NGO working with people with physical disabilities.

Puspadi is run by Tyas's father, I Nengah Latra, who my mum calls one of the most inspirational men she has ever met. My mum was a volunteer with Puspadi Bali for two years, through a volunteer program, Australian Volunteers for International Development, when we lived in Bali from 2014 to 2016. This is how I met Tyas. You can read my blog, *An Aussie Teen Living in Bali* (bit.ly/2rFw2ay) if you'd like to know about things that tourists don't get



to see, like stories on black magic and demons roaming the skies.

Tyas, a student leader at her school, started an Interact club, which is the Rotary Club for teenagers. Tyas loves reading, but there are not many libraries in Bali, and books are a luxury for most families. When we heard the Indonesian government had mandated that children must read for at least 15 minutes a day – because the reading skills of Indonesian children are so bad – we decided that we should raise money to build a library. The project appealed to me because I had formed a relationship with libraries where I lived at the time. When I was 12, a children's craft book I wrote called *How to Make Fairy Houses* was published by Boolarong Press, and most of the libraries in my area stocked the book. I used to do a free fairy-house class every school holidays at a library, so I knew a lot of the people who worked there too.

Once Tyas and I decided to raise money to build a library, I heard about Journeyman International, a group of architects in the USA who do free building design for NGOs if they like your project. They loved our project, and the lead architect, Nicole Thompson, flew to Bali to meet Tyas and I at the library site. So we got a beautiful design.



But that meant we now needed to raise \$20,000, which was a bit scary.

In Bali, I had used my small business doing fairy-house classes to raise money to help local families. The Australian Consul General had heard about some of my humanitarian work, so she suggested that Tyas and I apply for an Australian government grant for the library – and that was how we got the first \$5,000.

Tyas and I also spoke at every Rotary Club in Bali, and I continued my public speaking when I was back in Australia. We were lucky to get some other partners, such as Rotaract on the Sunshine Coast and Immanuel Lutheran College in Buderim. I also used my fairy-house business to raise money. I held Australia's first Fairy House Festival, and this alone raised \$2,000.

All up, we had \$18,000 in March this year, so I went to Bali with my mum, dad, 80-year-old grandmother, Graeme (the librarian from Immanuel Lutheran College), Graeme's wife, and five of their friends, and we spent a few days helping to build the library.

The library will be finished this month – July – and the opening will be in September.

The library will change the life of over 4,000

people. A library and access to books, in both English and Indonesian, will help to improve the reading skills of children. If they can read better, they will get a better education. And a better education will mean better jobs so that they can help to lift their families out of poverty.

It makes Tyas and I feel very proud that we have done what we can as two teenagers to help achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals relating to poverty reduction, better education, gender equality, decent work and good health and wellbeing.

Our next goal is to raise the money for books for the library. The library will hold between 2,000 and 4,000 books, so if anyone knows of any international organisations who would give money for books for libraries, I would love it if you could please let me know. And if you ever go to Bali, I hope you travel to the beautiful village of Bungaya and visit the library, a gift from the teenagers of Australia. 🙏

SAMARA WELBOURNE

Mountain Creek High, Mountain Creek
Sunshine Coast, Qld
sammiwelbourne@gmail.com