



## Our trip to Timor Leste with TCF Dental Team

by Fiona Christ

On September 26th, Stuart and I joined the 2025 TCF dental team, flying from Brisbane to Dili and meeting other team members along the way. Only three weeks before, my brother, John Ruhle, from TCF, invited me to join last minute, and both Stuart and I decided to accept. Though neither of us work in dentistry, we were eager to contribute—me as a nurse and Stuart helping as Jack-of-all-trades (IT, fixing cars, changing tyres!).

Our trip focused on supporting Octavia, the local dentist at Balibo, and demonstrating how to run a mobile dental clinic serving remote areas. After working at the Balibo clinic, we travelled to the village of Cowa, marking its first ever dental visit, with most villagers never having seen a dentist before. We also visited Maliana to further support local dentists. Our goal was to empower local professionals and deliver quality care, not just treat as many patients as possible.

Despite challenges like long days and rough roads (tyre changes and breakdowns!), we saw firsthand that dental health—and compassion—can reach even the most isolated communities. We also attended church services in Dili and discussed TCF's scholarship program. It was rewarding to serve alongside dedicated dentists and see the impact of TCF in East Timor.



Fiona Christ  
in Balibo

## Balibo Five - 50th Anniversary:

His Excellency, José Ramos-Horta speaks at Victoria University

by Karen Flynn

Victoria University (VU) hosted an event on 20<sup>th</sup> October commemorating the 50th anniversary of the killing of the Balibo Five journalists in Timor-Leste, and Dr Malcolm Campbell and I had the honour of representing TCF at this function. The evening, chaired by VU Chancellor Steve Bracks, featured Timor-Leste President and Nobel Laureate Dr José Ramos-Horta delivering the Jean McLean Oration, honouring politician and activist Jean McLean AM.

Highlights included a Q&A with Nick McCallum (Channel 7) and Dr Ramos-Horta; tributes to the Balibo Five families; remarks from John Milkins (son of Balibo Five cameraman, Gary Cunningham) and Monica Ferrie from Balibo House Trust; and acknowledgements of Dr Malcolm Campbell and TCF's Dental Program. The event was a great opportunity to meet Dr Ramos-Horta and other significant people, as well as strengthening our ties with Balibo House Trust.

For me, it was both a wonderful and humbling experience to meet dignitaries and politicians, as well as many others who have played crucial roles in shaping the nation of Timor Leste. Representing TCF at such a special function gave me a greater appreciation for the dedication and commitment shown by so many in Timor-Leste's ongoing development.



# 2026 Summer Newsletter



Balibo Clinic dental technician, Manuel,  
carrying TCF van tyre.  
Photo: Mal Campbell



## TCF's Dental Project update: Strengthening local dental care in Timor-Leste

The 2025 TCF dental program in Timor-Leste was one of our most encouraging visits to date, not because of patient numbers, but because of what local teams are now able to do themselves.

This year, two TCF dental teams worked consecutively to support the Balibo House Trust Dental Clinic. Balibo staff were supported over an extended period as they developed clinical skills, improved infection control and administration, and, most importantly, learned how to plan and run mobile outreach clinics.

One of the most significant outcomes was the deployment of a mobile dental clinic to Cowa, a remote community of over 2000 people that had never had access to a dentist. For the Balibo team, this was a practical training exercise from start to finish. Together, we planned the outreach, transported equipment, set up a functioning clinic, treated patients, and packed everything down again. The focus was not simply on providing care on the day, but on equipping local staff to repeat this process themselves in the future.

The second TCF team played an important role in consolidating this work. They continued mentoring in clinical care while also helping streamline workflows and administrative processes within the Balibo clinic. All of this work was done alongside local staff, reinforcing skills rather than replacing them.

TCF also supported the establishment of a two-chair mobile clinic at Maliana Hospital. A visiting Singapore NGO planned to operate in Balibo, but scheduling conflicts required an alternative at short notice. TCF loaned equipment and shared systems so they could work from Maliana for the week. This enabled dental care to be delivered in a poorly resourced setting and demonstrated what is possible using portable clinic models. The visiting team was impressed by the equipment's capabilities and is keen to build on this approach in future visits.

For us, this work confirms that the most lasting impact comes from building the capacity of local providers. Supporters' donations are not just funding trips. They are helping develop skills, systems, and equipment that remain in Timor-Leste and continue to benefit communities long after visiting teams leave.

## TCF's Dental Project update: (cont'd) Looking ahead in 2026

·Two TCF teams are scheduled to visit Balibo: the first in the first half of the year, and the second in September.

·The highest priority will be placed on developing Balibo-led mobile outreach initiatives.

·We will support a return visit by a Singapore-based NGO, within a Balibo-focused model.

·Ongoing coordination will be maintained with other dental NGOs and Timorese health authorities as we navigate complex governmental procedures.

·Our strategy includes supporting local teams to provide safe and sustainable dental care for communities that may not otherwise have access to dental services.

Dr Malcolm Campbell

Aerial view of the village of Cowa



The new Cowa Medical Centre

## Table of Hope: Reflecting on Our Annual Luncheon

What a lovely afternoon at our 2025 Annual Fundraising Luncheon. It was a joy to see so many familiar and new faces gather to share a meal and a common vision: empowering the youth of Timor-Leste.

### Making a Tangible Difference

During the event, we shared the profound impact your generosity has made over the past year. From mobile dental clinics reaching remote mountain communities to educational scholarships that pave the way for future leaders, your support is the bridge between potential and opportunity.

Key highlights from our recent work include:

- Health and Nutrition: Our Dental Project under Dr Mal Campbells' leadership continues to provide vital care and mentor local healthcare professionals.
- Education: We are proud to support scholarships for university and high school students, ensuring that poverty is not a barrier to learning.
- Vocational Training: We continue to provide support for trade programs in carpentry, mechanics, and administration to help tackle high youth unemployment.

### A Community of Compassion

The luncheon isn't just about fundraising; it's about connection. Hearing stories of "real impact and shared hope" reminds us that while Timor-Leste remains one of the world's least developed nations, its children are full of resilience.

Thank you to everyone who donated, volunteered, or simply attended to learn more. You are helping us provide more than just infrastructure; you are providing hope.

## 2026 Annual Fundraising Luncheon

SATURDAY 5 SEPTEMBER 2026

Tickets \$25

12pm presentation - 1pm light lunch served  
The Gap Uniting Church  
1050 Waterworks Rd. The Gap

RSVP: [info@timorchildren.org](mailto:info@timorchildren.org) by 4 September 2025

Ph 0406 123 498



Hear about our most recent trip to Timor Leste as well as future plans for our Dental and Scholarship projects.



<https://www.timorchildren.com/events-1>