

[International Presentation Association Response to COVID -19 in Waga Waga Australia](#)

Sr. Sheila Quonoey

"I live in the Blue Mountains not far from Sydney. Along with a group of volunteers, I have been visiting the **Immigration Detention Centre** in Sydney each Thursday and attending Mass there on a Friday. This Immigration Detention Centre is a facility located in the suburb of Villawood in Sydney, New South Wales in Australia.



It caters for adult male and female asylum seekers who have arrived by boat without visas, whom the Australian government refer to as "Illegal maritime arrivals". Also included are those who came by plane, overstayed their visa permit or who had their visa cancelled because they have had time in jail. Detainees are awaiting for an appeal to be accepted into Australia but if unsuccessful face deportation.

3 paintings by Asylum Seekers

During this time of Covid-19 restrictions, we have not been allowed to make our regular visits, as the detention centre is in lockdown. Our group tried to think of things we could do to maintain contact with the people we knew there. Five of the detainees had birthdays in April and, as in the past, we would celebrate the occasion with a cake. This was not possible, so instead we sent each one a birthday card.

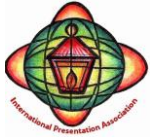
Phillip, our coordinator, compiles a newsletter, **Postcard to Villawood**, to which we all contribute. We are able to email a copy to the detainees just to keep in touch. It is so hard for them having further restrictions in place but they are amazing how they care for each other.

I also belong to two other groups

- **ANTAR Aboriginal Reconciliation Group** is a national advocacy organization dedicated specifically to the rights – and overcoming the disadvantage – of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- **Blue Mountains East Timor Sisters** are a group of volunteers who work in friendship with women in East Timor to help develop opportunities in their country.



We raise funds for projects to improve the education, health and wellbeing of women and



children, and to support the empowerment of East Timorese women. As volunteers, we have few overheads and 99% of funds raised go directly to our projects in East Timor.

We hold our meetings on Zoom for both of these groups. We are even beginning to plan events for the future. With the easing of some lockdown restrictions in the past week, I am now allowed to visit an Aboriginal woman whom I have given support to for some time. I find I am using my phone and email a lot more to remain connected with group members and others.