What has AFAS become?

AFAS, you may recall, was founded in 1992 by three Villanova teachers who attended an Augustinian conference in the Philippines. Having established a friendship with fellow Augustinians they looked for ways in which the Villanova community could support their work with the local people. But over the years it has become so much more than that. From scholarships to building and construction projects, the Australian Filipino Augustinian Solidarity has emerged as a life changing opportunity for boys and teachers alike to experience education and living on the other side of the world. Relationships, friendships and bonds are built that will last a lifetime. AFAS for many of us has changed our lives for the better. This newsletter will inform you about some of last year’s experiences as well as the newest proposal for the advancement of AFAS: AFAS Elders.

The Proposal

In light of the success of recent exchanges, demand has begun to grow for an exchange not limited to school students. As such, the idea of a post schooling AFAS experience – AFAS Elders – has emerged and begun to build momentum. Under the watchful eyes of Fr. Pete Wiencke, John Holroyd, Campbell Muir, Liam Edgerton and with the continued support of Tony Hindmarsh, the concept has found traction...

“AFAS Elders will be a group of adults, consisting of Villanova old Boys, staff and parents, who undertake projects in the Philippines. The group will complement the work of AFAS, but not overlap with AFAS in terms of communities visited nor in terms of funding. Like AFAS, AFAS Elders will seek
to establish a good relationship with a local community where the Augustinians have a presence. The longer term aim is to create a productive partnership within that community. We also hope to offer a permanent alternative to ‘Schoolies’ for graduating students in the near future years. “

John Holroyd: Vice Principal – Ministry, Mission and Evangelisation

AFAS Elders would be a great opportunity to rekindle some lost friendships, provide a hand up to those less fortunate than ourselves or just a chance to try something new. With this in mind, staff member Mr Tony Hindmarsh is exploring the possibility of the first AFAS Elders exchange occurring at the end of the school year in 2016 (late November for around 12 days). Watch this space for further announcements in the near future.

**Fundraising**

As always, it is important that the funding source remains entirely separate from the ongoing commitments of AFAS and to remind ourselves that these exchanges do not come without a price. Opportunities for fundraising need to be explored and any help that can be offered by you or your business would be much appreciated. It is hoped that in the future, AFAS old boys can gather once a year to attend a dinner in recognition of the work has been able to achieve over its many years. Any suggestions, ideas or queries regarding funding should be addressed to:

AFASElders@gmail.com
AFAS Elders

**Mark Stower**

Attending the 2015 AFAS Immersion to the Philippines was one of the major highlights for me during my first year as principal of Villanova College. To share this opportunity with the staff and students was a real privilege. I personally found the level of poverty we saw first-hand in the various communities we visited to be very confronting. We have so much in Australia that we take for granted and to see how the Filipino people make do with so little really challenges one’s ideas about wealth and possessions.

It was great to meet the children, families and communities members who benefit enormously from the help we were able to provide. Some of the communities have a long association with the Villanova College AFAS teams and they appreciate the assistance that has been provided over the past twenty-five years.

Young people when they mix together often find a common bond through their interests of music, dance, sports and singing. Many new friendships were forged in the heat of battle when the Villa boys competed in the sports and dancing competitions when meeting new communities during our travels.

“AFAS is the true difference between a hand-out and a hand up.”
~ AFAS 2015
2015 Experiences

All AFAS journeys have a story, a heart wrenching moment that grabs you by the shirt and demands that you listen. These are just a few of those stories from the 2015 exchange.

The Story of Sam
An instant hit with the boys, Sam was one of the 6 Scholars at Divine love. The only boy among the group, Sam’s cheeky personality and infectious smile instantly captured the attention of many of the AFAS boys and teachers. Schooled at Divine Love in Cebu, Sam and his sister, with mum and dad, live in an elevated wooden hut in flood plains. With their weekly household income resting on Sam’s ability to sell small token items that his mother made off the back of his bike after school, it was hard to see how Sam kept it all together. When the AFAS boys visited Sam and his family at his home for the first time, they were astonished at how someone who lives in such poverty, could remain so optimistic and joyful. To this day, AFAS remains a strong present in Sam’s life with his continued scholarship to Divine live school and newly organised lunch meals for each day of the schooling week.

Hanie Abitong: her new life begins
Hanie Abitong is a 5-year-old girl we met who attended Makilan Elementary School – a partner of CSA – in Bago City. During the 2015 exchange and interaction with the preschool students, the AFAS boys and students observed that Hanie was stricken with a clubbed left foot. Students a special ‘health fund’ for Hanie’s medical assessment as a preliminary step towards Hanie’s surgery. To this day, Villanova staff and students continue to support Hanie with funds for medical procedures and rehabilitation.

Trish’s Farewell
Mum,
On behalf of all of us who has been on the receiving end of your nurturing ways, we would like to thank you for all you have done. Your caring and nourishing nature has made more than a few of us feel at home in a foreign and often at times unwelcoming environment. You became more than just a teacher to many of us. Whether it was your mothering ways of giving us that much needed hug when we felt alone, your graciousness to lend an ear or just becoming a friend to lean on you enhanced all of our experiences for the better. And even when you yourself where down, you never ceased to help others in not only the AFAS community, but all those around you. We will be forever grateful for all your love and AFAS exchanges will never be the same without you...

With love, AFAS
Hitting the ground running...

As part of our ‘first steps’ initiative, we are in the process of creating an AFAS Elders stall at Villanova College on Mission Day (Aid day); May 20th. AFAS Elders invites any young old boys – whether interested in the AFAS Elders exchange or not – to donate home baked produce, such as biscuits, cakes or slice. If baking is not in your repertoire, we invite you to attend the 2016 Mission day and ‘man the stall’ to not only sell the baked goods, but distil experiences and foster enthusiasm within the senior cohort.

All profits on the day will be divided equally between AFAS and AFAS Elders. Please contact Campbell Muir through AFAS Elders if you are interested in donating.

AFASElders@gmail.com
AFAS Elders

Community Life @ Villanova

As part of the ongoing efforts to rekindle lost relationships between old boys, parents and Villanova, the college library established icentre@vnc.qld.edu.au. Among a variety of resources that are available at any time to the wider community, the ‘Community Life @ Villanova’ has been designed to allow old boys to remain in touch with school life. Along with hosting times and dates of old boy rounds and events held at the college, the tab will provide information as to how to stay in contact with ministry’s outside of the Villanova community. Offering a wide variety of choices, the tab will be accompanied with a calendar to confirm any upcoming events or forums that may be held at the college. See below the tab icon.

“I knew that everyone would treat us hospitably, but I can’t even put into words how amazed I was and how at home they made me feel. Going to sleep some nights I found myself thinking things like, ‘I may be thousands of kilometres from home, but I don’t feel like I am at all.’

~ AFAS 2015