

Len Avard Award nomination: Jan Pryor

Jan Pryor is the founder of The Didi Foundation Inc., a Rotary Australia World Community Service project 60/ 2012-13, a high school teacher on the Central Coast and President of the Rotary Club of Northlakes Toukley, D9685. Jan is District 9685 RAWCS chair. Jan founded a Non-Government charitable Organisation (NGO), Didi Foundation Nepal, which focuses on developing sustainable futures for women and children in Nepal.

Jan lives and breathes humanitarian service, and this is demonstrated in many ways. Jan is on the RAWCS Eastern Region executive and is active in many aspects of RAWCS. Jan has been instrumental in developing systems for reporting for District chairs. Jan developed the online booking system for our face-to-face meetings.

Jan overseas some 80 projects in D9685 and continues to maintain District 9685 high rate of RAWCS project registrations. Jan as RAWCS chair provides support, guidance, and information to project managers. She is always available and helpful with any RAWCS queries and makes sure she follows up and provides answers.

Jan has participated in the RAWCS annual strategy meeting and communicates directly with RAWCS executives on issues and activities relating to RAWCS.

Jan regularly travelled to Nepal (pre-COVID). From her very first visit to Nepal in 2009, Jan fell in love with this beautiful country and the humble and inspiring Nepalese people and felt so much 'at home' in the community she was staying in.

Then in Nepal in 2011, Jan was confronted with a heart wrenching story of two children whose parents had died and who desperately needed to be cared for. Jan's heart ached as she listened to the sad story of these two small children. Nepali friends looked at Jan and said, 'Why don't you help', so this saw the birth of Bright Future Learning Centre (RAWCS project 10/2012-13).

In Nepal Jan then developed a strategic plan, set about to find a home, employ staff, source everything you need for a home for ten children. Registering the project with RAWCS Jan was able to engage sponsors to ensure the stability and longevity of the children's home. Many sponsors have shared the highs and lows of this journey from the early days of sick and emaciated children to beautiful and healthy children who are well educated and now live in a stable home full of love and kindness.

By 2012 Jan had a greater understanding of the social structures of Nepal and it became evident that some children were being abandoned due to mothers, for what-ever reasons, being unable to care for them. This realisation empowered her to oversee the birth of The Didi Foundation Inc. The aim was for the creation of sustainable, self-funding lifestyle programs, to educate and empower disadvantaged women and with a vision to enable mothers to better care for their family.

Together with Rotarian Sudip Koirala they established the Didi Foundation Nepal, which was registered as a charity in 2013. What began with four donated sewing machines has

blossomed into many areas of humanitarian aid, maternal and child health and basic education for underprivileged women and children.

Having lived through the tragic earthquake of 2015, the Didi Foundation embraced new challenges and proudly did what they could to assist disadvantaged communities.

Jan was in Nepal during the 2015 earthquake, and this is Jan's survival story ...

On April 25, 2015, two Didi Nepal volunteers Yvonne Lamont, founder of WOW Girls (Waves of Wisdom), her daughter Summer Lamont and myself commenced an eight-day road tour from Kathmandu to Tibet. On this glorious day and ten minutes after crossing the border into Tibet, our life changed from a sense of adventure to that of fear, isolation, and imminent danger in the Nepal earthquake.

Out of the blue, a landslide hit our tour vehicle. Bewildered and shocked, we became surrounded by plummeting rocks as the hill was violently shaking and there was an incredibly loud foreign noise that added to our heightened sensory overload. Cars and trucks were bouncing on the road, and we witnessed our first landslide which was tumultuously pelting down the opposite valley. Sadly, this landslide demolished the quaint little town of Kodari where we had a cup of tea half an hour earlier.

For hours we waited anxiously through violent tremors, landslides, and the road cracking around us. Fear generated us to be instant strategic planners of survival tactics, but in amongst all of this fear came an incessant Aussie sense of humour. Laughing became our saving grace over the next five days.

The first frightening night was spent at the Chinese army base where the next morning we were given five minutes to pack our small bag of essentials and trek through the completely annihilated town of lower Zhangmu.

We spent the next four nights in an unstable and dangerous Chinese evacuation camp. We slept on the ground under a plastic makeshift tent, lined up for rice, had no drinking water and stayed in the same clothes and boots for five days. Sanitation was a very big issue until someone built a toilet. Our world became full of anxiousness as we graciously accepted the fact that we were going to die - we just did not want it to hurt. After being listed as missing by our families for five days, we were gratefully evacuated to Lhasa on April 30.

Post-Earthquake:

Jan guided Didi Foundation and they carried out immediate relief aid to devastated villages, including teams of medical personnel, food, tents and then iron. Jan returned to Nepal June 2015 to commence the rebuild the Nepal program and finish the women's centre in Kathmandu.

The Didi Foundation runs various programs to ensure that disadvantaged women, especially those from the lower caste, have opportunities to be educated and learn life skills. Didi Foundation currently run a sewing school, computer training and a women's co-operative to

manufacture various products to sell. In conjunction with the Nepalese Government, they are running a traditional weaving course and an education course to prepare women to apply for government positions. They have also joined with the Nepalese Health Department to run workshops and health clinics specializing in women's reproductive education. This is all under Jan's amazing guidance and leadership.

Jan began a successful "schoolies" program, where she led RAWCS volunteer teams of post year 12 or uni students on humanitarian trips to Nepal. Jan took many other RAWCS volunteers to visit Nepal to participate and see firsthand the amazing impact Jan has had in Nepalese communities.

At home on the Central Coast Jan is in her 2nd term as President of her Rotary Club. Jan supports the local community and in 2016 Jan registered the D.A.L.E. school as RAWCS project 25/ 2016-17. This project runs a school for young parents who dropped out of school because of their babies. D.A.L.E school gives these young parents a chance to complete their education.

Jan is a member of Zonta and provides incredible support to this organisation helping disadvantaged women and girls. Last year she registered a groundbreaking project by connecting Rotary and Zonta - project 10/ 2021-22 to maximise the support to be given to girls and women.

Jan is a powerful and enthusiastic advocate of RAWCS. Jan encourages and involves herself in the active use of social media for RAWCS, Rotary, Zonta and Didi Foundation.

Following are Jan's comments from Didi Foundation website:

"I never imagined that saying 'YES' in 2011 would impact and change the lives of thousands of Nepali people. I still have a stress attack before I say 'YES' but once I have said it out loud, the universe, my awesome friends and RAWCS just seem to take care of the rest. With such a wonderful Nepali team and fantastic supporters, the future is so exciting, and I cannot imagine what we will be doing in the near future. I do know one thing..... it will be fantastic...empowering Nepalese through education".

PP Sue O'Neill

RAWCS Eastern Region Projects co-ordinator