

EAST TIMOR HEARTS FUND

Australians supporting a
healthy Timor-Leste

9 July 2014

Life-saving heart help a lesson in generosity for Timorese teacher

Melburnians are rallying to help an East Timorese schoolteacher receive life-saving heart treatment.

Maths teacher and father of three Tomas Pinto is gravely ill with mitral stenosis. The heart valve condition is easily treatable but not in Timor-Leste (East Timor), which lacks specialist cardiac facilities.

The community-based medical aid charity East Timor Hearts Fund has launched the \$20k for Tomas appeal to raise money to bring Tomas to Australia to have his heart valve repaired.

"The response has been overwhelming," board chair Ingrid Svendsen said.

"Several hundred people attended a benefit event in May; bands and entertainers performed for free; people donated goods to auction and a top flight auctioneer also donated his services to assist," she said.

"We've also got a team of medicos, Timorese and Australian heart patients and other supporters doing Run Melbourne to help raise money.

"Tomas is scheduled to have surgery at MonashHeart in Melbourne later this month and I'm very confident, based on the generosity and enthusiasm people have shown, that we'll get to \$20,000 by then. We may even raise enough to help a second patient."

Ms Svendsen said the runners would include Timorese student Joaninha (Nina) da Silva Faria, who came to Australia for life-saving heart treatment last November with the help of East Timor Hearts Fund. After learning of Nina's wish to help Tomas by doing Run Melbourne a sponsor pledged to pay her airfare.

Nina, 17, who was critically ill before her heart valve procedure at MonashHeart, is now running 10k twice a week in preparation. She said the chance to help Tomas was "a wonderful thing" and she was doing the run to "promote awareness of heart disease; to celebrate my new life since the operation and to inspire previous and future ETHF patients" .

Ms Svendsen said Tomas had long lived with debilitating symptoms, including breathless, blood noses, lethargy and headaches. "As a devoted father he also carries the terrible worry that he may not be around for his three young children," she said.

Tomas said he looked forward to being able to return to teaching to support his family, and to doing daily activities like playing basketball again.

"I would like to say thank you very much to the doctors, donors, and everyone who have given me help to make the treatment successful. I can't repay them but I will pray for them so that they can be healthy always."

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