

New heart, hope and life for Alia – thanks Warrnambool

14 January 2017

Warrnambool cardiologist Dr Noel Bayley and Timorese teen Alia Borges have given a “heartfelt thank you” to people from Warrnambool and the south-west who supported a crowdfunding campaign to give Alia life-saving surgery in Australia.

Alia, 15, has made a rapid recovery following a four-hour double heart valve repair operation last month. She returned to Timor-Leste late this week, ready to go back to school and pursue her dream of becoming a doctor.

Dr Bayley, honorary medical adviser and co-founder of the medical charity East Timor Hearts Fund, described the response from local people to Alia’s plight as truly humbling.

The crowdfunding campaign, launched in late September, aimed to raise \$20,000 in 20 days but ended up generating more than \$30,000, with around one-third of the total contributed by individuals and foundations from Warrnambool and the south-west.

“I’ve always known my home town has a big heart, but this has demonstrated just how big,” Dr Bayley said. “It has been especially touching to have so many of my patients and their families share their good health and good fortune by contributing to transform Alia’s life and allow her to pursue her ambition of studying medicine.”

Dr Bayley acknowledged the Warrnambool-based AL Lane Foundation, A & M Crothers Foundation, A & H Graham Foundation and Ern Hartley Foundation, which gave generously.

He thanked Professor Yves d’Udekem and the team at the Royal Children’s Hospital for their outstanding work. Relieved of the debilitating symptoms of rheumatic heart disease, Alia could now breathe easily, walk and move freely, eat well and enjoy life.

Alia’s mum Octavia said she could not believe her daughter’s transformation. “My family and I would like to say a big thank you to the East Timor Hearts Fund team and volunteers, the surgeons and medical team, all the amazing donors, including people from Warrnambool and the south-west, and everyone involved for helping saving my daughter's life,” Octavia said.

“The world needs more people like you.”

Alia said the donors, medical staff and East Timor Hearts Fund volunteers “will always be in my heart”.

“I am looking forward to going back to school and hopefully achieving my dream of becoming a doctor.”