

## Evening with Gemma Sisia



*The School of St Jude past students Winnie and John Stanley with founder Gemma Sisia (centre). (Supplied)*

### Rotary Club of Murray Bridge

The Rotary Club of Murray Bridge recently celebrated an 'Evening with Gemma Sisia OAM', to raise awareness and funds for The School of St Jude in Tanzania, Africa which she founded in 2002.

St Jude is the patron saint of hopeless causes and in the early days of the school, some would say that providing free private school education in Tanzania, Africa was also a hopeless cause.

The Rotary Club of Murray Bridge was the last club she visited on her whirlwind visit to Australia covering the east coast and South Australia.

Ms Sisia grew up with her seven siblings in Armadale, New South Wales and was educated in Australia before relocating to Africa at the age of 22.

Her outstanding contribution to education in Tanzania has been recognised in Australia and Africa.

She has featured in two episodes of Australian Story (ABC), Conversations with Richard Fidler (ABC) and 60 Minutes (Channel 9).

Ms Sisia lives in Arusha, Tanzania with her husband, Richard and four children.

Her parents put a huge emphasis on all the children's education and in doing that, Ms Sisia felt that children from poor families should also have access to a good education, hence St Jude's.

In its earliest stages, Ms Sisia's desire to help in Africa arose from the coverage of the famine in Ethiopia.

After seeing images of starving children, she decided she would work in any capacity to help the people of Africa who needed it the most.

After receiving her Diploma in Education, Ms Sisia volunteered at a girls' centre in Uganda, teaching maths, science, and sewing.

This experience would eventually pave her way to Tanzania and starting The School of St Jude.

Ms Sisia established The School of St Jude in Arusha, Tanzania, with funding from Australia.

It was through this fund raising, Ms Sisia was introduced to Rotary.

Armidale Central Rotary commenced their support of the school through a 'Buy A Brick' campaign with immense support from the Armidale community.

Many other Rotary clubs have been supportive in the years since, with sponsor support, donations, and visits to the school to assist with programs.

The school opened with one volunteer teacher and three students.

Today, it provides free education to more than 1800 students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the primary and secondary levels.

Ms Sisia outlined some of the difficult aspects of building a school in Tanzania.

Her response covered interacting with the community leaders, businesses, local workers and adapting to the culture.

"For a foreign, white woman to suddenly begin constructing and operating a school in Tanzania, there were more than a few hurdles I had to navigate," she said.



“The most important step I took was reassuring parents that we weren’t another charity that was here one minute and gone the next.

“I wasn’t going anywhere and was fully committed to providing their children with the best possible education.”

Rotarians and their guests also heard from John Stanley, an alum of The School of St Jude.

Mr Stanley has six siblings and started at St Jude’s Primary School aged eight.

He completed his high school education at St Jude’s Secondary School, Smith Campus and received a full scholarship to study at the African Leadership University in Mauritius.

Ms Stanley is an active St Jude’s alum who has returned to the school to inspire others to dream big and turn those dreams into action.

Staff at the RSL Club provided a sumptuous two course meal – after catering for another event in the afternoon – and Rotarians organised a silent auction to raise more funds for Ms Sisia’s work.

Ms Sisia, Mr Stanley and their team had signed copies of the journey Ms Sisia had taken for all to purchase.

Members of the Rotary Club of Murray Bridge wish to thank sponsors of the silent auction goods and those who attended and participated in spirited bidding for an amazing array of items.

Want to consider sponsoring a child?

Visit [schoolofstjude.org/australia/](https://schoolofstjude.org/australia/) where you can learn about sole sponsorship, co-sponsorship; shared sponsorship; class sponsorship or make a valuable donation or contact The Rotary Club of Murray Bridge [murraybridgerotary.org.au](https://murraybridgerotary.org.au) or phone 0417 846 176

