



A MESSAGE FROM GEOFF AND LYNICE

“Have you opened your new shop in Melbourne yet?” is a question we are hearing from time to time. The answer at this stage is “No”. We have been on an interesting journey, having being frustrated, excited, fearful, challenged, determined, confused... and that was just in October! We all but had a lease signed up in late October, only to have the Landlord renege on the terms of the agreement. We had a clear sense that it was not to be and so we decided not to proceed. In many ways it would have been easier to push on and sign the lease, but the longer term consequences may well have been very detrimental to the future work of Empower.

You might have your own experience of this dilemma when contemplating a life changing decision. On the one hand, we want to have a “can do”, positive attitude, to just step out and expand what we are doing and to make it happen, “a la Richard Branson style”. There is something inspiring and motivating about people who see an opportunity and take risks to make things happen, even when many of the answers (like financial resources, location, personnel and financial viability) are not immediately apparent. These flamboyant people who dance in the rain are so much more appealing and magnetic than the mediocrity of negative doomsayers who do nothing for fear of failure or ridicule and who are prone to criticize and smugly say “I didn’t think they would be able to do it”.

On the other hand, we need to consider the reality of a difficult retail environment, a substantially lower Australian dollar and the need to protect an appropriate work/life balance. We continually remind ourselves concerning what we are about and why we are doing it. There are many producer groups, as well as children at risk, who are reliant on us. We must make wise choices to ensure that Empower will be as effective as possible over the long haul.

At the moment we are taking a step back to consider our options and to look at other ways to increase our turnover. It may well be that we proceed to open a retail shop in Melbourne, or elsewhere. At the right time, the right way to proceed will be apparent. In the meantime, we are very positive and excited about the prospects of 2016 and extremely grateful to our team of volunteers and supporters who help in so many crucial ways.

Geoff and Lynice Wigney





ARTIS ALTAI

The purpose built workshop for the producer group “Artis Altai” located in rural Mongolia has been completed and opened. The women are now settled into their new building and are managing the business themselves – learning the skills necessary to operate a successful business.



This group photograph (left) is the 9 women who have formed the legal work cooperative that we call Artis Altai. They are an inspiration and role-model to all women in their province and town of Gobi-Altai. The best part of the story is that it continues and you have an ongoing opportunity to be a part of their story also by purchasing from their collection of beautiful hand felted and crafted products.

GEOFF CLARKE

Geoff Clarke (a champion of Empower) passed away in November. Geoff had been on Empower building trips to Thailand and Cambodia as well as travelling to Thailand on a separate occasion with Geoff Wigney to assist and visit some of Empower’s partners. Many of the photographs used to promote Empower have been taken by Geoff. He completed a renovation at his and Ronda’s home in Croydon to display and sell Empower products. His dry humour and willingness to do anything to help out with Empower will never be forgotten. Our condolences go out to Ronda and her sons and grandchildren.





WHO ROCKS? EMPOWER ROCKS!

Hidden away in the text of the last Friends of Empower Newsletter was the following:

“Do people read this newsletter? The first person who sends us back an email with the words “Empower rocks” will receive an Empower gift voucher for \$50.00.”

Thankfully, we received quite a few emails in response, the first of which was from Cathy Welsford of Armidale, NSW. So... Congratulations Cathy – you rock!

BEAUTY EDU

Recently, Beauty EDU, a training beauty salon situated in Melbourne and Bairnsdale, ran an internal competition to select a charity to support as part of their contribution to charitable causes. There were approximately 20 different charities under consideration and Empower International was chosen as the winner! In the coming months we will work with Beauty EDU, with the plan being for funds raised to be provided for vocational training for girls in Cambodia in the vocations of beauty and hairdressing.

WHAT HAVE WE BEEN UP TO?

Empower has funded projects in excess of \$31,500.00 over the last 5 months, including:

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| • Clear Skies House- child sponsorship | \$12,303.00 |
| • Mother’s Heart – vocational training | \$5,000.00 |
| • Artis Altai – final building fund donation | \$4,535.00 |
| • Rainbow Tree – Manager’s wage | \$3,969.00 |
| • Tertiary sponsorship- University students in Thailand | \$1,582.00 |
| • Streams in the Desert-small business development | \$1,445.00 |
| • Bright Solutions- small business development | \$1,000.00 |
| • House of Dreams- child sponsorship | \$1,000.00 |





We sincerely thank those who have made donations to Empower to make these projects possible. One hundred percent of donations made to fund projects are used for this purpose. We encourage you to make a “one off” donation or to set up a regular direct debit to Empower’s bank account, the details being as follows:

Account name: Empower International

BSB: 063 832

Account No: 10133769



House of Dreams
Photographs by Geoff Clarke

The Financial Statements for Empower for the year ended 30th June 2015 have been prepared and the independent audit has been completed. If you would like a copy of the Financial Statements please let us know and we will email them to you, or you can access them by searching “Empower International” in the Australian Charities and Not-for Profit Commission website www.acnc.gov.au.





HEY GOOD SPENDER

In October, Empower joined an organization called “Good Spender”, which is Australia’s first online marketplace for social enterprise. Their aim is to grow the movement of social enterprise and empower consumers to use their spending power to change lives. There are quite a few social enterprises represented...including Empower. We encourage you to check out the website www.goodspender.com.au. We have a selection of Empower products on the Good Spender website. For a greater range of Empower products, check out our online shop at www.empower.org.au. This year we are hoping to greatly increase our online sales...that is where you come in!!! Please keep us in mind when you need to buy gifts and recommend our website to your family and friends.

SILLY SEASON

December was a very busy month for Empower, with a big increase in retail sales in the lead up to Christmas. It is an exciting time of the year for us – very important from a financial perspective and a great encouragement to see so many of our producer’s handmade products around Bairnsdale and the wider community. Ronda Clarke attended a couple of fair trade markets which were well supported and Geoff and Lynice attended a fair trade market in Melbourne also.



HOW YOU CAN HELP

If you are interested, there are some ways you can assist us in our vision to “empower the privileged to empower the poor”. You could:

- Purchase products from our retail store at 188 Main Street, Bairnsdale
- Purchase products from our online store at www.empower.org.au
- Donate funds for a specific project or by way of a general donation – either in person at our retail store or online. (100% of funds donated are used towards projects)
- Assist in the cost of Empower establishing a retail presence in Melbourne
- Promote Empower to your family, friends and associates
- Forward this newsletter to those who may be interested in Empower
- “Like” Empower on Facebook and encourage your online friends to follow us



Children from the House of Dreams