

# Demonstrating the credit union difference

By Bill Field, Deputy Chairman CUFA Trustees

**A**t a time when credit unions are continually challenged to demonstrate how they differ from profit-focused financial institutions, the Credit Union Foundation Australia (CUFA) continues to train credit union staff in giving practical effect to the values and principles of the Credit Union Movement. This is done through its Development Education Program.

To become a CUFA Development Educator, you must participate in an intensive 5-day workshop and then go on to design and work on a community project on behalf of a credit union or the Credit Union Movement generally.

The most recent Development Education Workshop was held in October 2002 and participants nominated some exciting projects to undertake. Some of these innovative projects include:

- BBQs for the underprivileged in the Fitzroy community;
- introduction of a Youth Savings Club to Tongan youth;
- development of appropriate indigenous banking activities;
- increasing World Vision child sponsorship levels at a credit union;
- identifying and implementing a project in Bougainville; and
- broadening awareness of disability issues in the community.

These are just a few of the 25 initiatives that will go forward in the name of the credit unions that participated.

Many unique projects have been completed through Development Education (DE). A major benefit for those credit unions that have supported DE by sending along a number of participants is the esteem garnered by the credit union when their DEs work as a group in communities.

This involvement and commitment is a major outcome of DE, one that credit unions can point to when promoting social responsibility and demonstrating

how credit unions are different from the big banks.

Another major benefit of DE is the cross-cultural exposure and raised awareness that as credit union people we are part of a worldwide family which is recognised and valued. Participants at DE workshops get to learn about how credit unions are providing support to people all over the world.

When a DE participant successfully completes their nominated project, a framed certificate is mailed to the CEO of the credit union they represent for presentation on a suitable occasion, or in the case of a Director participant, the certificate is sent to the Chairman of his or her Board.

The October DE Workshop was attended by a great mix of enthusiastic credit union people from a variety of backgrounds and cultures.

We were pleased to welcome Katherine Cheng, CEO of the Credit Union League of Hong Kong. Katherine has been a valued friend of CUFA for some years now and everyone in attendance appreciated her experience and participation. Agnes and Joseph came from the Bougainville Micro Finance Project and really enlightened us all on the sacrifices their people make to help each other in the quest for higher living standards. Monika from Credit Union Coordination Indonesia (CUCO) attended and shared information about credit union development in her diverse country. Balan, representing SSB Credit Cooperative Thrift & Loan Society of Singapore, also contributed interesting perspectives about credit union development in the South East Asian region. From Tonga we had the amiable Sione, Registrar of Cooperatives in the Kingdom and also in attendance was Raylene. Raylene, from First Nations Credit Union, was able to share her commitment and passion for the establishment of financial services for indigenous Australians.



A recent credit union DE project is working towards increasing world vision child sponsorship levels.

Australian credit unions were there in force but still representing considerable diversity in size and location, while Karen, Graeme and Raul were very welcome representatives of CUSCAL.

Back at work, workshop participants can share their new knowledge regarding the origins of credit unions, our difference and why it is such a privilege to be part of a credit union.

This workshop brought the total number of CUFA Development Educators to 622, representing 20 countries from the Asia/ Pacific region, with 204 (33 per cent) of the graduates being from outside Australia. DE participants are now regularly returning to their homes and workplaces to carry the credit union message as advocates for something we all believe in.

It was with this thought in mind that the Association of Asian Confederation of Credit Unions (ACCU) with assistance from CUFA established Asian DE. To date 104 Asian credit union leaders have joined their Australian counterparts.

The Development Education Program will continue to produce advocates with the ability and knowledge to carry the message about the credit union difference. ■

**CUFA's next Development Education Workshop will be conducted on 14 – 20 March 2003.**