

Australia Cuba Friendship Society

MELBOURNE BRANCH NEWSLETTER



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Contact us via email: admin@melbourneacfs.org

www.melbourneacfs.org

Dear Comrades,

For many years Joan Coxsedge has done a wonderful job presenting her reflections on world events for us on the front page of this newsletter. I spoke to her recently on the phone and she told me that due to her circumstances she is unable to continue writing for us, but she will never stop defending Cuba.

Joan is 91 years old and has a long history of fighting for human rights, peace, and justice. She was a greatly respected member of the Save our Sons movement defending conscientious objectors to the US war in Vietnam and in 1971 went to jail for her efforts.

She is a talented artist and writer and has produced a range of stimulating books and numerous beautiful drawings. In 1994 she held a successful exhibition of her drawings of Cuba in the Palace of the Captains General in Havana. Many Australians have been introduced to Cuba through their fascination with Joan's detailed drawings. Joan was the founding chair of the Committee for the Abolition of Political Police in 1973 and co-wrote a book on the clandestine element in Australian politics titled 'Rooted in Secrecy.'

Joan was a member of the Victorian state parliament from 1979 to 1992 working on many progressive issues and contributing to a wide range of community projects. She is a highly articulate and passionate public speaker and for many years was president of the Melbourne ACFS branch. We thank Joan for all her beautifully crafted writing on these pages and will miss her valuable and insightful comments as Editor-in-Chief of our Newsletter.

I think this quote from Joan explains her approach to life: "We must continue working for a better world. I want my grandchildren to live in a society with a spirit of independence, a society that puts people before profits and looks after the environment"

Joan has visited Cuba numerous times and I know there are many Cubans who would also like to send Joan their very best wishes. Joan is very proud of what Cuba has achieved despite the sixty-year US blockade of the island nation. This includes the successful development of its own COVID-19 vaccines and its continual humanitarian support of other nations in need. Although it is no longer possible for Joan to provide the editorial piece for our newsletter, she will of course continue her involvement as a committed member of the Melbourne ACFS branch.

Maree Dellora
President, Melbourne ACFS



Joan Coxsedge: Editor-in-Chief



Promoting Friendship between the People of Cuba and Australia

KEEP THIS DATE FREE!

After nearly 2 years, the Melbourne branch of the ACFS is coming out of lockdown

ACFS Melbourne Branch Meeting

Monday 4th April - 7.30pm

Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church

(Zoom link emailed to members the week beforehand for those who cannot attend in person)

We look forward to seeing everyone soon



*Cycling, Running, Walking, Swimming
and Dancing our way to Cuba*



Campaign to End the US Blockade of Cuba **1 Jan — 15 Apr 2022**

SIGN UP HERE → <https://from-australia-to-cuba-with-love.raisely.com/>

Australia – Cuba Friendship Society

On January 1st. 2022 the Brisbane ACFS launched their national initiative. The campaign supports Cuba by asking people to participate in a range of activities collectively cover 14886 km, the distance between Australia and Cuba. This event aims to raise awareness of the devastating effects of the United States government's economic blockade of Cuba and to raise money for much needed medical supplies.

There is still a month to go so please consider registering for their campaign or donating to support someone who has already registered.

<https://from-australia-to-cuba-with-love.raisely.com/>



Cuba: President Praises Alzheimer's Treatment



The conditional sanitary registration of the NeuroEpo molecule for mild and moderate Alzheimer's disease was approved in Cuba by the national regulatory entity.

One of the most promising, current research projects underway in Cuba involves the development of a novel formulation of recombinant human erythropoietin (NeuroEpo), with characteristics similar to those produced by the brain, an achievement of the Centre for Molecular Immunology (CIM), in collaboration with the Center for Research and Development of Medicines (Cidem) and other institutions.

Doctor of Science Tania Crombet Ramos, director of Clinical Research at the CIM, detailed to Granma that the medication is administered nasally, making it very convenient and simple for the patient's caregiver.

<https://www.telesureenglish.net/news/Cuba-President-Praises-Alzheimers-Treatment-20220309-0019.html>

She emphasized that between 2017 and 2020, different phases of clinical trials were conducted with NeuroEpo to treat Alzheimer's disease, producing results that confirmed its safety and efficacy, with improvements in the degree of cognitive impairment, and a tendency to detain the disease in the mild or moderate stage.

After obtaining the results of the third phase of the clinical efficacy study, its registration was confirmed by the Centre for the State Control of Medicines, Equipment and Medical Devices. It will be valid for three years, starting from the date of issue of the registration certificate, informed the general director of the CIM, Eduardo Ojito.

Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel expressed his admiration for Cuban science, praising its scientists for doing such great work regarding the product developed by the Molecular Engineering Center (CIM).

COVID-19: Cuba 3rd Most Vaccinated



Cuba is the third most vaccinated country against COVID-19 at 94% according to the Oxford University's data base. The United Arab Emirates and Portugal ranked first and second, respectively.

"This data shows the feats of a vaccination campaign whereby over 10,5 billion people have been immunized with Abdala, Sovereign 02, and Sovereign Plus, the Cuban COVID-19 vaccines" said Ileana Morales, the director of Science & Technological Innovation at the Health Ministry (MINSAP). New cases of COVID -19 on the island have also dropped dramatically over the past few months with new daily cases on March 1st down to 396.

President Miguel Diaz-Canel's administration made the development of coronavirus vaccines a major priority because it did not want to rely on the whims of international pharmaceutical corporations to fight the pandemic.

<https://www.telesureenglish.net/news/Cuba-Ranks-3rd-Among-The-Most-Vaccinated-Nations-20220210-0009.html>



Promoting Friendship between the People of Cuba and Australia

Cuba Condemns US Sanctions Against Russia



"Continuing to use such sanctions as coercive policies do not solve the current crisis, but exacerbates it," President Miguel-Diaz Canel highlighted.

On Monday, Cuba's President Miguel Diaz-Canel condemned the U.S. and European Union (EU) economic sanctions against Russia and called for a diplomatic and peaceful solution to the armed conflict in Ukraine. "Continuing to use such sanctions as coercive policies do not solve the current crisis, but exacerbates it and further aggravates the economic recession prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic," Diaz-Canel stated.

"We are clear that international principles oppose unilateralism," he added, recalling that Cuba has faced a U.S. economic blockade since 1962.

He also condemned the prohibition of the outlets Russia Today (RT) and Sputnik in Europe, a strategy seeking to create a monopoly on information by eliminating alternative journalistic coverage of the war. "The armed conflict could have been avoided if U.S.-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) had correctly complied with the security guarantees required by Russia, which feared this military alliance's expansion towards its borders," he recalled.

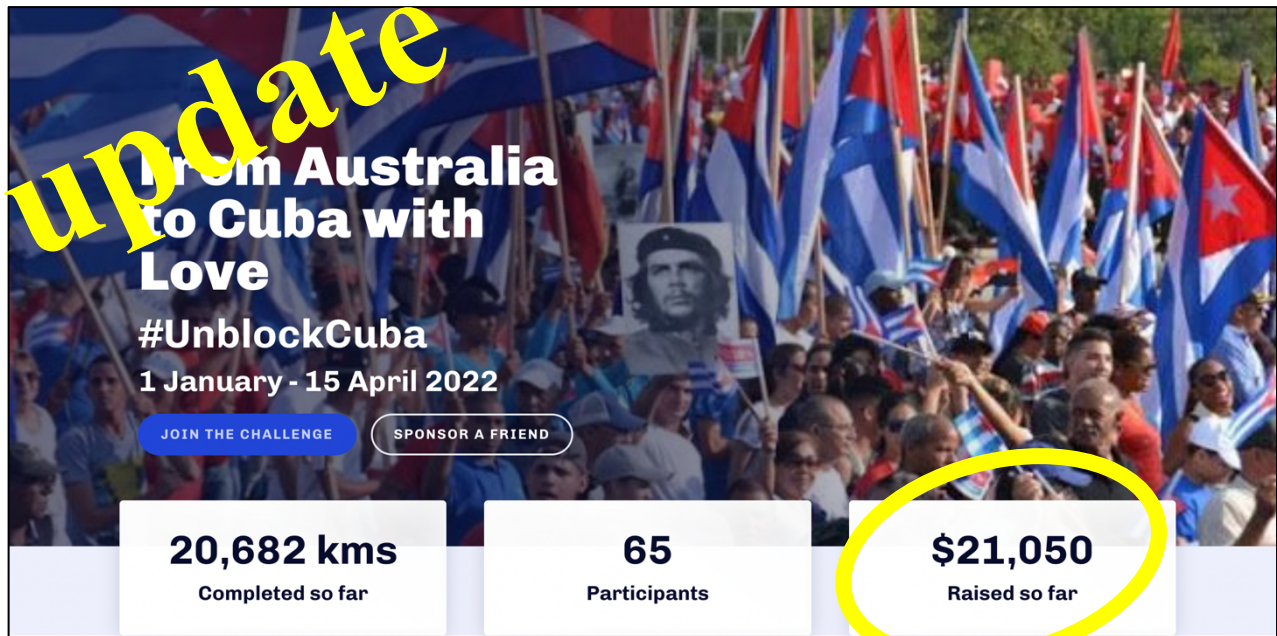
Diaz-Canel also called on all parties involved in the armed conflict to protect the Ukrainian civilian population, their properties, and infrastructure, as the rules of international humanitarian law establish. "Our position is clear: we advocate a serious and constructive diplomatic solution to the conflict, which takes into account the position of all parties, guaranteeing all countries' sovereignty," the Foreign Affairs Minister Multilateral Affairs Specialist Yailin Castro stated.

<https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Cuba-Condemns-US-Sanctions-Against-Russia--20220308-0007.html>



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Supporting Cuba



And still a month to go.....



Thank you, again
to everybody who donated to the
2021 campaign to help Cuba fight
the COVID Pandemic

In 2021 the Australia Cuba Business Council joined forces with the ACFS to raise funds for a pallet of medical goods to be sent to Cuba. The response from Melbourne ACFS members and their friends was heartening raising an amazing \$11,550 toward the total \$74,954.

The pallet consisting of more than 26,000 syringes and needles, 150kg of wound dressings, bandages and topical wound creams, 100Kg of vitamin C for COVID-19 health support, paediatric multivitamins and other sundry medical items arrived in Cuba in October 2021.

The outstanding humanitarian work and solidarity of Cuba's medical brigades have been praised by millions. A big thank you to all those who contributed!



Promoting Friendship between the People of Cuba and Australia

“Yes, I Can!” – the Cuban literacy campaign empowering Aboriginal Australian communities for over a decade

Since 2012, Aboriginal non-governmental organisation, the Literacy for Life Foundation, has run the “Yes, I Can!” (“Yo, sí puedo”) adult literacy campaign in communities in New South Wales, Queensland, and the Northern Territory. “Yes, I Can!” is a method developed by the Latin American and Caribbean Pedagogical Institute, used to teach literacy to ten million people in over thirty nations, including Aotearoa (New Zealand), Angola, Bolivia, and Timor-Leste. Cuba sends resources and advisors to assist in Australia. Focusing on the experiences of colonisation and marginalisation shared by Cuba and First Nations, the collaboration is an example of South-South Cooperation.

“Yes, I Can!” uses an innovative mass-campaign model based on the experiences of Cuba’s 1961 Literacy Campaign and international cooperation in adult education. The Foundation must be invited into a community for a campaign. They train local staff to run campaigns and interview community members about their literacy needs. This is followed by literacy lessons, and literacy-based activities designed with local businesses to create further education and employment pathways. A key aim is capacity-building, so communities control their own literacy efforts.



Literacy for Life Foundation Coordinator Katy Jasper (right) assists graduate Sheila Adams.

Photo - Adam Sharman

So, why is Cuba’s assistance in Australia needed? Whilst the national adult low English literacy rate (defined as at or pre-level 1 of the Australian Core Skills Framework) is 14%, it ranges from 40-60% for First Nations adults. In some remote communities, it might reach 80-90%. The reason for this uncertainty is that current data sources exclude people living in very remote areas and do not differentiate between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. To understand the scale of the issue, the upcoming OECD PIAAC survey should include data specific to First Nations communities.

Lifting literacy levels significantly improves the lives of First Peoples. Many speak multiple languages, including Aboriginal English, but Standard English literacy is essential to engage with settler society. It is needed for everyday tasks, such as reading medicine labels, shopping, paying bills, getting your license, and understanding legal documents. Low literacy is linked to over-representation in the justice system. Pat Turner, CEO of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation explains that “as Aboriginal people, we walk in two worlds: one that recognises our cultural connection to Country, community, language, family, kinship, spirituality and our ancestors, and one that the wider Australian community also walks in. We need to be able to walk in both worlds to be effective in both. Good English literacy helps us do that.”

Improving literacy is an important step in confronting colonial injustice and promoting community wellbeing. Low literacy in First Nations communities is a reflection of government failures to address the historical legacy and ongoing experience of colonisation. Fifty years ago, official policies included the forceful relocation of First Peoples to reserves and missions, the removal of children from families, exclusion from public education, and labour exploitation on stations. Ongoing systemic issues include mass incarceration, insufficient housing, and inadequate provision of community services. As a





IMPROVING LITERACY IS AN IMPORTANT STEP IN CONFRONTING COLONIAL INJUSTICE

result, across several generations, many have experienced underachievement in education and low literacy. However, currently no national policy exists addressing adult literacy in First Nations communities, or for the wider population.

The issue of adult literacy is a concern for all Australians. The federal government is required to provide appropriate adult literacy education, according to its legal commitments, including the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Literacy also benefits the economy by contributing to the income and productivity of individuals and the whole nation. Pat Anderson, an internationally recognised activist on Australia's First Peoples health issues, claims it is the "perennial issue for the nation that we still haven't really dealt with".

The campaign has had remarkable success in Australia. Over 270 students have graduated, with retention rates five-times higher than local Vocational Education and Training (VET) program averages, and higher than other courses identified as successful. There is evidence that literate families assist children with schooling. It has resulted in health outcomes and reduced interactions with the criminal justice system. Over fifty local staff have been trained and employed. Graduates have participated in further training and found employment. Through the campaign, individuals and communities come to understand literacy learning as a transformative journey which sets in motion a longer healing

Students and educators have reported improvements in confidence, self-esteem, self-control, community engagement, respect for others, and cultural advocacy. "Yes, I Can!" often represents a first positive experience of education. Students realise that past educational difficulties do not reflect personal failure, but the failure of educational systems not built for their success. This motivates them to make other changes in their lives. According to campaign educators, many are driven by "a strong belief in the possibility of a better future".

The distinctly Cuban nature of the campaign model is a major reason for its success in participating communities. "Yes, I Can!" has grown from the experiences of generations of resistance to injustice through collaboration between nations of the Global South. A principle of solidarity underpins the campaign, as Cuba's own history of colonialism resonates with Aboriginal communities. The campaign's genuine engagement with communities, flexibility to adapt to local needs, and focus on community-control, have been extremely effective. These elements of Cuba's educational philosophy are central to the empowerment the campaign produces.



THE DISTINCTLY CUBAN NATURE OF THE CAMPAIGN MODEL IS A MAJOR REASON FOR ITS SUCCESS IN PARTICIPATING COMMUNITIES



Despite its success, the campaign has faced challenges. It has struggled to sustain long-term literacy or change the national adult literacy rate. This will be difficult to achieve without national adult literacy policies. Non-accredited community-controlled programs, such as “Yes, I Can!”, do not have the resources to meet demand nationally. Campaigns are funded using multiple sources, including government grants and corporate sponsors. However, this funding model is unreliable, and many communities’ requests for campaigns remain unanswered.

The VET system is flawed. Currently, it does not offer literacy courses pre-level 1 on the ACSF. This discourages many First Nations adults with pre-level 1 literacy from engaging with formal education. Before a campaign, participants are typically at or pre-level 1, and are assessed to reach level 2 upon completion.

A policy vacuum exists on this issue. It is important the federal government develop a national strategy for addressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adult low literacy, and that it be included in Closing the Gap targets. A national campaign building on the experiences of “Yes, I Can!” can work as a pathway

into VET programs, without interfering with its existing structure.

By listening to communities, Australia can overcome adult low literacy. Executive director Jack Beetson estimates that adult low literacy in Aboriginal communities can be eradicated at a cost of approximately \$1.3 billion over fifteen years. For perspective, over seven times more (\$9.7 billion) was spent on Indigenous incarceration in 2020 alone. This figure will likely reach \$19.8 billion in 2040. Yet improving literacy addresses some of the underlying causes of incarceration.

“Yes, I Can!” is a transformative international approach to community development, strengthening the links between Australia and Latin America. Cuba’s collaboration with First Nations is bringing communities together, empowering people to take control of their education, find their voices and pursue social change. The partnership, built on mutual understanding, generates possibilities for future cooperation. It provides a path forward for addressing adult low literacy, an issue of the utmost importance, so far largely ignored in this country.

To see the campaign in action, you can watch the documentary *In My Own Words*.

Collarenebri graduate, Joyce Sands, takes part in a Literacy for Life Foundation session designed to encourage students to read to children.

Photo credit Adam Sharman



By Andoni Laguna-Alberdi, 9 February 2022.

<https://www.australialatam.com/latam-link-articles?author=62026b1f0398310d2daa3cc1>



Promoting Friendship between the People of Cuba and Australia

Education in Cuba: A Comparative Regional View

Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study ERCE-2019, conducted by Unesco, confirms Cuban education as one of the great achievements of the Revolution

"In Cuba, education is truly inclusive, there is gender parity and when any difference between males and females is noted, those doing better are the females," stated Minister of Education Ena Elsa Velázquez Cobiella, referring to results of the Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study ERCE-2019, conducted by Unesco, in terms of socio-emotional indicators.

She added that the research also confirmed that in our island country, there is no difference between rural and urban education, or in the achievement of students

"We are convinced that we have met the sustainable development goals through 2030, on the quantitative order." Accomplishments like these make clear that Cuban education remains one of the great achievements of the Revolution and one of its fundamental pillars. Referring to the research conducted, the Minister said, "One factor studied was the acceptance of diversity on the part of students. In the case of Cuba, this indicator is well above the average. We are at 93%, and the regional average is 85%. The same can be seen in terms of self-regulation in school, in which we showed 87%, higher than the regional average (74%), as well as in empathy, which 70% of our students demonstrate, higher than the average of 55%.

<https://en.granma.cu/cuba/2022-01-19/education-in-cuba-a-comparative-regional-view>



IWD: Cuban Women: Accomplished and Celebrated



In Cuba, there is no better way to celebrate International Women's Day on March 8, than the growing activism of accomplished women in a society that increasingly offers more opportunities to play a leading role.

It is almost a year since the implementation of the National Program for the Advancement of Women, the cornerstone of efforts to develop policies that better support Cuban women. In that year more than 55,000 women joined the workforce and 53,000 young women became new members of the Federation of Cuban

Women (FMC), which includes 91% of women over 14 years of age on the island. This development was highlighted by Teresa Amarelle Boué, member of the Party Political Bureau and FMC secretary general, who stated that March 8 this year provides an excellent opportunity to participate in the popular consultation underway of the draft Families Code, and reaffirm the principles of equality and non-discrimination. She announced that International Women's Day will be celebrated for several weeks, February 24 through March 15, with a broad program of activities that will also be dedicated to the 60th anniversary of the Young Communists League and the centenary of the Federation of University Students.

<https://en.granma.cu/cuba/2022-02-24/cuban-women-accomplished-and-celebrated>



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Family Code puts Cuba at the Forefront of Rights Protection



Niuva Avila, a doctor in Sociological Sciences, speaking about the Cuban Family Code, emphasized that it will guarantee the country's position at the world level in protecting people's rights, particularly those of children.

The legislative proposal is revolutionary and in line with international laws by complying with the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most ratified treaty in history, Niuva Avila also pointed out.

The doctor stressed that the proposal constitutes a guarantor of gender equity and the protection of children, affirming that it is in tune with the Millennium Development Goals. She said that the norm would be under widespread consultation until April.

She recognized that the approval of the family code in question would put Cuba at the forefront of the world in terms of protection of rights. It considers problems that affect all members of the society in Cuba, bearing

in mind the current characteristics of Cuban families, Niuva Avila said. Avila added that the norm dates back to 1975 and allows for the legal regulation of marriage, divorce, paternal-filial relations, food responsibilities, as well as adoption and the duties of guardians. She acknowledged that fundamental principles such as the right to education, care and health are also contemplated in the code.

The doctor argued that the code would give voice to children, who will have the opportunity to make decisions on issues that concern them. Besides, it contributes to visualizing different life cycles within childhood and embraces guarantees for co-responsibility in care.

Finally, she disclosed that the project aims to protect digital environments. Avila remarked that it is necessary to guarantee safe digital spaces for minors, as they are nowadays exposed to online networks for long periods.



<https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Family-Code-Puts-Cuba-at-the-Forefront-of-Rights-Protection-20220311-0022.html>



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CUBA: Ending 2021 in Solidarity

Cuba, Marching United



Cuba honours the eight medical students unjustly murdered on November 27, 1871, by supporters of the Spanish colonial power in a failed attempt to quell the revolutionary effervescence of the Ten Years' War. On the 150th anniversary of the injustice, thousands of students from universities across the country, high schools, the Revolutionary Armed Forces, the Ministry of the Interior, and the people marched and held commemorations honouring the eight Cubans

<https://en.granma.cu/cuba/2021-11-29/cuba-marching-united-photos>



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Díaz-Canel joins Red Bandana Sit-in



On November 14, President Miguel Díaz-Canel arrived at Havana's Central Park to join the sit-in organized by the Red Bandana collective, an initiative of young Cuban revolutionaries, social network activists and members of Cuban civil society organizations, who came together in a public action against the blockade and in defence of the revolution



<https://en.granma.cu/cuba/2021-11-15/diaz-canel-joins-red-bandana-sit-in>

Fidel with Cuba's Youth



President of the Republic Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez joins the city's youth at the University of Havana, on November 24, to honour the life of the historical leader of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro Ruz, on the fifth anniversary of his death.

<https://en.granma.cu/cuba/2021-11-25/fidel-with-cubas-youth-photos>



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DATES CONFIRMED ...



SOUTHERN CROSS BRIGADE TO CUBA

29 DEC 2022 – 17 JAN 2023



The Southern Cross Brigade offers the opportunity to experience the history, culture and achievements of socialist Cuba firsthand.

This year the Brigade will travel to the provinces of Mantanzas and Villa Clara, as well as spending time in Havana

For more information please go to:

www.cubabrigade.org.au



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TUNE IN to LATIN AMERICAN UPDATE

The official program of the ACFS
EVERY SUNDAY AT 10.30 AM

3CR
Community
Radio

855 AM

CUBA NEEDS YOU!

Join the Australia Cuba Friendship Society

The Australia-Cuba Friendship Society aims to promote and encourage friendship, understanding and cultural exchange between the peoples of Australia and Cuba.

We support the Cuban people by raising awareness of the illegal economic and political blockade imposed by the US in its attempts to subvert the revolutionary achievements of the Cuban people in their own country and abroad.

You can become a member by:

- joining online at www.melbourneacfs.org
or
- filling in the membership slip below and returning it with your cheque/money order to:
ACFS, PO Box 1051, Collingwood, Victoria, 3066

CURRENT MEMBERS

You can now pay your annual membership online.

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Victorian Branch

BSB No.: 063011

ACCOUNT No.: 00900817

BANK:

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ACFS Membership Form

Name: _____

Address: _____ Postcode _____

Phone/Mobile: _____ Email: _____

☐ I wish to join the ACFS - \$30 (full membership), \$15 (concession)
Newsletter preference (*please tick one*) ☐ Email ☐ Mail

☐ I am interested in the annual work/study trip to Cuba. Please send me information.

☐ I wish to donate \$ _____ to the ACFS campaign for Cuba.

Please send this membership form and payment details to: ACFS PO Box 1051, Collingwood, Vic, 3066

Or email us on: admin@melbourneacfs.org



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