

Tsunami's lessons taken to heart

Linda Doherty
Education Editor

The devastation of the Asian tsunami has unleashed a surge of philanthropy in schools: NSW students and teachers have raised \$1 million in the past eight weeks.

About 80 schools have formed partnerships with Sri Lankan schools and are sending money, books, sporting equipment and volunteers. Since last month lessons in NSW have been structured around the disaster and principals say most fund-raising has been led by students. More than \$46,000 was raised in five weeks by two schools - Epping Boys High and Cheltenham Girls - which competed against each other for dollars.

Another \$150,000 came from the donation of a half-day's pay by public school and TAFE teachers. The Education Department is awaiting the final tally of the week-long fund-raising effort in 2240 public schools last month, which is expected to be hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Bill McKeith, principal of Presbyterian Ladies' College, Sydney, is co-ordinating the linking of Australasian schools with Sri Lankan schools through the Adopt a School aid project.

About 15 private and public schools have formed partnerships with schools in southern Sri Lanka, where 80,000 students were affected by the disaster.

Dr McKeith said PLC's Overseas Aid Fund had received \$150,000 from student, school and corporate donations. Next month 22 PLC students in year 11 will spend their holidays working at the Ruhunu Children's

RAISING DOLLARS AND AWARENESS

- Taren Point Public School in southern Sydney had a "day of thoughts", when students hung origami from trees and blew wishes to children in tsunami-affected countries.
- The green and yellow flag of Epping Boys High flew for a week from Cheltenham Girls High when the boys won an inter-school tsunami fund-raising challenge. Epping raised \$24,475 and Cheltenham raised \$21,859 in five weeks.
- Presbyterian Ladies' College,

Sydney, collected from its students and other private schools a pallet of sporting equipment and 60 second-hand cricket kits for Sri Lankan students. The school's overseas aid fund has raised \$150,000 from schools and corporate donors, including a \$60,000 anonymous gift.

- Other school fund-raising activities included sponsoring fully clothed teachers to jump into pools, shaving and dyeing hair, crazy hat days and gold coin days.

State Receiving Home, an orphanage in Galle caring for baby and child tsunami survivors.

During a trip to Sri Lanka last month to identify needy schools, Dr McKeith said he saw many traumatised children who had lost both parents. Many schools had been "wiped out" and were operating out of huge tents.

"Some of the schools need everything, and the monsoon is coming in May so they are worried because of the temporary nature of the accommodation," Dr McKeith said.

Adopt a School and another link-up scheme run by public school principals aim to develop longer relationships with the Sri Lankan schools and involve Australian students in philanthropic and humanitarian activities.

The president of the Secondary Principals Council, Chris Bonnor, said more than 60 public high schools twinned with Sri Lankan schools had each raised \$500 to \$2000 by the end

of last month. Another scheme, School Aid, has mustered \$150,000 from simple fund-raisers such as sausage sizzles and uniform-free days. Its founding director, Sean Gordon, said he had expected "gifting fatigue" when schools returned last month but students moved by images of the tsunami "just wanted to do something".

Robyn McKerihan, the Department of Education's general manager of access and equity, said all public schools had access to teaching materials to study the tsunami and other natural disasters.

In some schools, she said, students had lessons under trees to show what it was like for children whose schools had been destroyed. Others sent origami wishes or sponsored teachers to shave their heads.

"Values have been important in this," Mrs McKerihan said, "because it's about caring, respect and knowing that not everyone is as fortunate as us."