



Vista

Volunteer Service Abroad
2019

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AOTEAROA
NEW ZEALAND
VOLUNTEER SERVICE ABROAD TE TŪAO TĀWĀHI





Vista is a celebration of our amazing volunteers in the Pacific and beyond.

We send skilled Kiwis to share their experience and knowledge directly with local people and communities. Right now, all around our region, VSA volunteers are working on everything from mental health in Kiribati to safe water in Vanuatu. Together with our partners, our volunteers build local businesses, provide education and improve health, safeguard the environment and foster good governance.

Working together with our regional partners, our volunteers create new opportunities for people that will continue to ripple across communities and generations to come.

Connecting people – transforming lives.

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Front cover: Peter in Choiseul, Solomon Islands. Photographer: Patrick Rose. Contents

page: Beach fales in Samoa. Photographer: Benjamin Bowles.

Opposite: Jackie Cronin and Elmah Panisi in Solomon Islands. Photographer: Patrick Rose.

Back cover: Timor-Leste. Photo: Kaitlin Scott

Connecting people – transforming lives





Kia ora,

Welcome to this edition of *Vista*. The year has started off busy and exciting, with 99 volunteers currently around the Pacific, Timor-Leste and Cambodia. We now have our first volunteers working in Tuvalu) and a growing number of opportunities in Kiribati and Samoa where we're expanding our programmes.

Looking ahead, one of our objectives this year is to strengthen how we engage and work with youth across the Pacific, and include more young New Zealanders in our mahi. This will build on our successful UniVol programme, but also explore how we can create more opportunities for a wider group of younger people who have so much to contribute to a world with thriving communities. We look forward to updating you more about this over the year.

I hope you enjoy this latest copy of *Vista* and from it gain a sense of the great things happening in Pacific and wider communities through the efforts of our many volunteers.

Stephen Goodman, VSA CEO

Volunteer Service Abroad Te Tūao Tāwāhi

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Our values

- commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi
- respectful partnerships
- working and learning together
- cross-cultural understanding
- fairness, social justice and self-determination
- the power of volunteering

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VSA's new Programme Manager in Solomon Islands, Morgan Hanks and VSA's Country Programme Officer Lydia Dentana.

Meet our new programme managers

Over the last year, we've expanded the number of offices we have around the Pacific, with more staff based in the field, to enable us to grow our relationships with our partners throughout the region. Trevor Johnston is our first Programme Manager in Kiribati, and will also look after Fiji and Tuvalu; Tina Mackie is based in the Tonga, and overseeing Niue and the Cook Islands; and Samantha Hoskins has joined long-time Programme Officer Faleolo Leo in the Apia office.

Meanwhile, Morgan Hanks has replaced Kesaya Baba in Solomon Islands, former volunteer Christine Ramsay is the new Bougainville PM after Paul Bedggood's departure, and Loren Rutherford has moved from the Wellington office to Dili to take the reins from Victoria Gregory. Johannes Gambo and Nadine Tuipulotu continue their roles in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. Check out our website for fuller profiles of all our Programme Managers.



Trevor Johnston
Fiji, Kiribati and Tuvalu



Tina Mackie
Cook Islands, Tonga and Niue



Samantha Hoskins
Samoa



Christine Ramsay
Bougainville



Loren Rutherford
Timor-Leste

VSAConnect It's even easier to stay in touch with fellow returned volunteers now – we have set up a Facebook group, where VSA alumni can make contact, share memories and keep up-to-date with what's happening with current volunteers. **Just search Facebook for "Friends of VSA", or email vsconnect@vsa.org.nz.**



On the cover

We asked current and recent volunteers to send us their top photos for this issue of Vista and Patrick Rose's portrait of Peter was our cover pick. Patrick writes, "Peter rows the ferryboat between Taro and Supizae in Choiseul. Every year the distance gets longer because both islands are shrinking as the sea level rises. Hundreds of times a week, Peter rows his passengers across the short stretch of water taking people to work and returning them home. Because of climate change, the township of Taro will relocate to the mainland leaving Peter facing an uncertain future." Our other picks are on pages 26-27, and you can see more of Patrick's photos at www.beforetheflood.org



VSA on film

Earlier this year, we premiered a set of new short videos featuring volunteers and their colleagues and communities. Most of the films were shot by local videographers, with music also provided by local artists. Watch them at: <http://bit.ly/VSAvideo>





Practice at the Dili Cricket Ground. Photo: Adam Constanza



Lara Akbaba and Mark Young. Photo: Adam Constanza

Cricket mad in Timor

Timor-Leste is a soccer-mad country, but in the last few months volunteer Mark Young has been helping to grow a youth cricket programme that kids are so keen to join, they travel long distances and play on a dusty, stony pitch.

“They’re so passionate, they practice three or four times a week – they’ve even made their own bats!” Mark says. Mark went to Dili in January 2018 with his partner Lara Akbaba to work as an Organisational Development Mentor with TradeInvest. As a “cricket tragic”, he quickly sniffed out a fledgling local cricket programme started by a couple of expats and joined in outside of his assignment.

Inspired by Afghanistan, which joined the International Cricket Council in 2001 and is now ranked 8th in the T20 competition, Mark saw a future for Timor-Leste cricket to grow, and offer new opportunities to young people.

Around 100 youth practice and play regularly, and nearly half of those are young women. Mark says, “The cricket is important, but it’s also an enabler to give kids a sense of purpose and get them into education.”

Successful fundraising by Mark and VSA over the Christmas period saw Mark return to Dili after a break with 150kg of quality gear - thanks to generous supporters including DHL.

The next step is using their brand new portable pitch, which will give them a better surface to play on and more options of where to play, which is vital to continue building skills.

“The players, coaches and administrators of Timor-Leste Cricket are very excited about where all this could lead !”

The story has attracted interest in established cricketing countries - after coverage here in Aotearoa, the story was picked up by Agence France Presse and run in India, Pakistan and Australia. When Channel 7 Melbourne took a film crew over to get footage, the players were so keen to get the story out that they were at their Dili ground before 7.00am, ready to play among their

unique pitch hazards - pigs, dogs and traffic.

Mark says the players are unfazed by their new fame, though “the exposure has resulted in approaches to Timor-Leste Cricket from potential local sponsors, an offer from NT Cricket Association (Darwin) to participate in some coaching courses and Timor-Leste coming onto the radar of the ICC as a potential new member. The players, coaches and administrators of Timor-Leste Cricket are very excited about where all this could lead!”

If you would like to make a donation to support VSA programmes like these, visit www.vsa.org.nz/donate or email fundraising@vsa.org.nz



Anne Bellingham with students. Photo: Vasti Venter

Enterprising women in Bougainville

In 2015, the future was uncertain for five young women from villages near Chabai in Bougainville. Four years on, thanks to volunteer Anne Bellingham, things are looking brighter.

At 24, Ludwina was clever, but she'd left school early with no qualifications and no job to go to. "I was at home doing nothing," she says.

Today, she couldn't be busier. Ludwina sews clothes, bags and sanitary products which she sells for a small profit – and when she's not doing that, she's running workshops teaching other young women the same skills.

"My life is different now," she says. "Everything I know, it is easy to do. I feel proud."

Much of that is down to Anne. She first came to Chabai as an accompanying partner to her husband Peter, on assignment with the Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation. Founded by the formidable Sister Lorraine Garasu, the centre runs three safe houses for victims of sexual and family violence, as well as training workshops and peace-building initiatives for the wider community.

Sr Lorraine shoulder-tapped Anne, a former school technology technician and scout leader, and asked if she'd consider teaching sewing and English to a group of at-risk young women.

Anne and her girls have designed and developed a product desperately needed in Bougainville: reusable sanitary pads.

Stigma around menstruation and poor access to sanitary products create huge barriers for women and girls in Bougainville.

"If they haven't got pads, the girls don't go to school, women don't go to meetings, they won't leave their homes because of the embarrassment," says Anne. After six weeks of trials the group developed a simple pattern. Made from flannelette pajamas and cotton shirts, and umbrella or shower curtain fabric, fixed with a single button.

"We wanted to develop a sanitary pad that women in remote villages, if they didn't have a sewing machine, could make by hand," says Anne. The girls sell a pack of six pads for 15 kina, \$NZ7.50.

The 12 girls Anne started with gradually reduced to five core members. Eventually, after much encouragement, they began running workshops teaching other women how to make the pads and care for them.

"When we ran our first workshop," says Julia (22), "we had 30 women and two sewing machines. I felt scared because I [wasn't] used to standing and talking in front of people... [Now] I feel confident. I feel very happy and interested in running the workshops in different places."

Celine (27) ran her first workshop while Anne was away; it was "very



Anne and Peter Bellingham

scary". These days, "I feel far more confident talking to people."

The girls are now busy planning for their next big challenge. Anne has secured a generous grant from the Norman Kirk Memorial Fund, which supports 'second chance' education or training. It will enable her and the girls to travel for two weeks in June, running workshops for women in isolated areas in Bougainville. As usual, they'll sell along the way to cover their costs.

For young women who until recently had never left their home regions, it's a huge step. All the women say they're happy and excited at the prospect.

Both Celine and Julia plan to start their own small businesses from home, and all the women are determined to continue sewing and teaching others. As Celine says: "The skills and knowledge I get from Anne make my life different and I can do things by myself now."



Building back in Tonga

After Cyclone Gita struck Tonga in February last year, generous VSA supporters made it possible for us to provide grants to our partners to enable their recovery. In March, VSA's Fundraising Manager Fiona Smith visited Nuku'alofa to see what our supporters have made possible, one year on.

Volunteer Bruce Johnson had just finished an assignment in Tonga and was due to return to New Zealand when Cyclone Gita struck. He says, "The devastation that Cyclone Gita left in its wake was horrifying and the impact it had on friends here was heartbreaking. It was hard to imagine how things could be put right, certainly in the short term. Some of the food crops were badly damaged or destroyed during the cyclone and it was very clear that local production of food crops would be negatively impacted."

Bruce had already undertaken horticulture and agriculture assignments in Papua New Guinea and Bougainville, and having decided to stay on to work on the Cyclone Gita recovery, is now on his sixth assignment. He says, "Having worked on a farmer education/food security assignment here in the past, I had some knowledge that could



A Nuku'alofa woman outside her house, built by MORDI

compliment the local skill base. So when asked to help with a food security and livelihood program I was more than happy to agree."

His post-Gita assignments have been with Mainstreaming of Rural Development Innovation Tonga Trust (MORDI), a community development organisation. MORDI works alongside communities in Tonga to enable them to fight poverty by developing livelihoods and ensuring good health and self-sufficiency. To work with MORDI, communities must show they're engaging all their members, with an emphasis on giving voice to women and youth. They will establish community and school gardens, educate people in maintaining their own food gardens and spread information about health, wellbeing and the environment, particularly climate change resilience.

Soane Patolo, MORDI General Manager, and Bruce Johnson. Photo: Sarah Gardenier

VSA provided MORDI with financial grants to support communities with seedlings to re-establish those household and community gardens after Cyclone Gita, and to support the plant nursery in Tongatapu. Because Sunday is a day of rest in Tonga, and young seedlings need seven-day care in a tropical environment, grants were also made to build an automatic irrigation system. This enabled Sunday watering, but also freed up nursery staff to upskill in more areas. While the nursery had eight staff, only one had agricultural training. Now, all eight have the skills to manage a nursery, and a team of four has re-established MORDI's nursery in 'Eua.

"I'm fortunate," Bruce says, "to be working with a great team of committed, hardworking and supportive colleagues." He says that Soane Patolo, MORDI's General Manager, shows "The difference that good leadership makes. The success of MORDI comes down to exceptional leadership- making the impossible happen."

Soane, in turn, is complimentary of Bruce: "It is the way that Bruce transfers the knowledge. It is well and good to have knowledge, but you have to be able to share it."

Another victim of Cyclone Gita was extracurricular school activities, as the Ministry of Education was concentrating on rebuilding damaged schools. The Tongan Health Promotion Foundation, where volunteer Marg Armstrong is working, was trying to expand the "Mai e Nima" (Five+ a day) pilot to all schools in Tonga, to encourage healthy eating, but found that in the recovery, teachers simply didn't have the capacity to take it on.

Marg says "Because Mai e Nima and the NRL share a common goal, they formed a partnership.

"Thanks to good feedback and the NRL's track record, they were given permission from the Ministry of Education to increase these and Mai e Nima has been able to use a portion of that to teach students about the benefits of healthy lifestyles and good nutrition."

Marg and Bruce have also connected their assignments - when a school goes through the Mai e Nima programme, MORDI helps them to put a school garden in.

If you would like to make a donation to support VSA programmes like these, visit www.vsa.org.nz/donate or email fundraising@vsa.org.nz



Marg Armstrong delivering a Mai e Nima workshop. Photo: Sarah Gardenier



Returned volunteers survey

Late last year, we surveyed our returned volunteers about their VSA experience, what motivated them to volunteer and what they have done since.

We received wonderful, thoughtful responses – thank you to everyone who took part. We'll share more insights over the year, but here's a flavour:

84%

of respondents gave their assignment at least **8 out of 10**

Of the people who found their assignment "very challenging",

46%

gave their assignment a **10/10**.

Left: VSA volunteer Ashlee Gross in Bougainville
by Adam Constanza

85%

of respondents have kept in touch with friends and colleagues made on assignment - some for decades.

“As a Pasifika person born and bred in the Pacific I wanted to give back to the Pacific and share my experience and knowledge.”

“I had recently lost my wife and the opportunity came for a volunteer to work in the area of my expertise which was not common. So I thought I would take the opportunity, otherwise I might regret in the future. And my late wife would have thought it was a good idea and indeed it turned out to be so.”

72%

of volunteers who've returned since 2010 would go again.

Opposite: VSA volunteer Ashlee Gross in Bougainville by Adam Constanza





Gordon Botha at work



One of the (almost) completed houses. Photo: Gordon Botha

It takes a village to build a village

Volunteer Gordon Botha headed off to Papua New Guinea thinking he was going to be an administration adviser to the Catholic Archdiocese of Rabaul. Little did he imagine he'd end up a building project manager.

A primary school principal and teacher for nearly 40 years, Gordon had been told he'd be providing administrative support to the project manager of the archdiocese's low-income housing build, planned for Kokopo.

"But I got off the plane and everyone said 'hey hey, our project manager's arrived!' So that's what I was. With a lifetime in teaching and school administration!"

The Low Income Housing Project is the brainchild of Rabaul's Archbishop Francesco Panfilo. Gordon says the Archbishop – an Italian – has taken to heart Pope Francis's pronouncements on alleviating poverty, and decided it's time for the Church in Papua New Guinea to divest itself of some of its sizeable land holdings.

To help fund the project, Panfilo sold some valuable church land to the provincial government for a promised K4 million (NZ\$1.7 million). This was to be paid out in tranches, and other promised funding had never arrived.

So the challenge Gordon faced was to build as many homes as possible within the drastically reduced budget. Incredibly, he and his team managed to build 10 new houses – at a cost of roughly NZ\$26,000 each.

Archbishop Panfilo will meet half the cost of each house with money from the sold church land, leaving K30,000 to be paid by each new homeowner – an amount that would be out of reach for most. So at the suggestion of the archdiocese's administrator Doug Tennent, they adopted the Habitat for Humanity concept of "sweat equity".

Under the sweat equity system, homeowners can work off up to half of their debt through labour or some other contribution to the new community.

The new homes are completely off-grid: the power comes from solar panels and water is collected from the roof into tanks.

One of the first houses went to Dean, a younger Archdiocese worker who was in the construction crew.

Married with two children and a third on the way, he and his family had been living in one room of a house they shared with three other families.

"Dean moved straight up there: he started doing things to the place, adapting it for his purpose. And it was wonderful to see. He went from living in a single room with his whole family to living in a three-bedroom house."

The last house was completed in July, and Gordon says the village is now buzzing.

"I went up to visit on the night of my farewell party, and to see the solar security lights on and everybody sitting under their solar lights and all the kids out running around, it was really great."



VSA goes to the Pacific Games

“Samoa, We On!” The rallying cry from the Pacific Games 2019 Organising Committee has pulled together the entire country to do what the Committee calls “the unimaginable - organising the 16th Pacific Games in 14 months.”

With an expected 3000 delegates representing 22 countries in 28 sports, it was a huge ask for Samoa to take on hosting after Tonga, the original host, withdrew in early 2017 due to the cost.

VSA recruited and sent six volunteers in record time to work with the Office of the Pacific Games. They’re supporting the Office for seven months, having started in February, then seeing the Games through July 7-20.

Rachel Milroy, who’s volunteering as

Games Office Transport Coordinator, says a big part of the volunteers’ work will be ensuring that the experience of organising the Games is captured: “There are lots of people with the knowledge, but it’s in their head,” she says. “I’m trying to get all this on paper and leave a reference guide for transport so for future events in Samoa there’ll already be plans in place.”

Not content with putting on a great Games, the Committee has also committed to “greening the games”, looking at alternatives to single-use plastic at events and using it as an opportunity to get schools involved.

Schools have “adopted” competing countries in order to learn about different Pacific cultures and the environment. New Zealand’s adoptive guardians, the students at

Sala’ilua Primary School on the big island, Savai’i, are recycling plastic containers as planters to green their school and community. Principal Tapuai Filipo told the Games’ news team that “You take care of the environment, it will take care of you. It’s become one of the core aspects we are trying to develop in families.”

Our volunteers are relishing the challenge: Rachel says “The job description could’ve been written with me in mind- I really want to share my knowledge and help in any way I can on an event that is very significant to the people of Samoa.”

Find out more:
www.samoa2019.ws
www.facebook.com/samoa2019

Samoa athletes prepare for the Games.
 Photos: Benjamin Bowles



Motivated media in Solomon Islands

Philippa Stevenson is an award-winning journalist with more than 30 years' experience in print, radio, television and online media. Over a six-month assignment with Isles Media in Solomon Islands, she found a media scene that is motivated but poorly resourced.

Isles Media is a locally owned business founded in 2009 with the birth of the Sunday Isles Newspaper, a weekly general newspaper. They then expanded into sports reporting with Raw Sports, published weekly, and introduced women's affairs reporting with Solomon Women Newspaper, also published weekly.

There are two other newspapers in Solomon Islands. Philippa says "the mix of venerable publishers and broadcasters in Solomon Islands alongside feisty start-ups and lively entrepreneurs makes for a small but vibrant media scene."

While Philippa's assignment was to work with Isles Media, she also looked into ensuring its publications are compliant with practices and ethics under the Media Association of Solomon Islands (MASI). She wound up writing a review and recommendation paper for MASI.



The workforce is young, she says, which is not unusual internationally as wages in journalism are low and more experienced reporters are lured to higher salaries offered by Government and private Communications and PR roles. In the Solomons, 69% of journalists are under 29. Isles Media mostly employs young graduates from the School of Journalism at Solomon Islands National University (SINU), however less than a fifth of the media workforce overall have a tertiary qualification and Philippa says that in her six months of being an "active consumer" of Solomon Islands media, simple errors, lack of substantiation in stories and language barriers were apparent - journalists tend to conduct interviews in Pidjin and translate to English for publication, which leads to nuance getting lost in the process.

Despite the challenges, Philippa says, "their eagerness to learn and be the best journalists and photographers they could be is inspiring."



Danielle Petrie-Deely is on her second assignment with World Vision Timor-Leste, working as a Design, Monitoring & Evaluation Assistant. She writes about a new nutrition programme.

Anaemia is severe here, and has far-ranging consequences. It causes mental and physical stunting (Timor has the third highest rates of these, globally), as well as increasing the risk of maternal and child mortality. It decreases IQ by a whole standard deviation, and reduces productivity, which leads to a drop in wages and decreases GDP. It disproportionately affects women and children.

The World Health Organisation has said it is one of the biggest issues facing global health. I had done a University assignment on the "Lucky Iron Fish intervention" - a cost-effective, safe and sustainable method to decrease anaemia.

I bought these Iron Fish (pictured above) with me in January (the first ever in Timor). I managed to find

funding for most of them, and they have since been distributed to staff to use in their homes. Cooking with one in your water or cooking pot for 10 minutes, three times a week for six months has been proven to significantly increase iron measures. I have been working with my team here, especially the maternal and child health and nutrition specialist, to design a pilot to test if these Iron Fish will be effective and culturally acceptable in this context.

We have done cooking demos and created a short basic video about how to use them, and plan to start our 12-month pilot in July.

Photo: L-r: Abrao Pinta, District Programme Health Officer for Health Promotion at the municipal level Ministry of Health, Baucau; Danielle Petrie-Deeley; Louisa Cabral, DPHO for Nutrition at the municipal level Ministry of Health, Baucau; and Junilda Maria Vila Nova, World Vision Timor-Leste Baucau Area Manager





Vista cover competition

This page (left to right)

1. VSA Volunteer Mike Peters drinks a coconut at a cultural show in Samoa by Ben Bowles.
2. A beach scene with a family and a coconut tree by Matthew Lambie in Bougainville.
3. Learning the step by step of traditional cooking with the women from the Wairiki village (Gazelle District, East New Britain) Papua New Guinea, by Carolina Sales

Opposite page (left to right)

4. Local fisherman casting his net in the shallow coral reef off the island of Tongatapu, Nuku'alofa. In Tonga by Graeme Atkinson.
5. Three beauties selling veges outside Dili Institute of Technology in Timor-Leste by Sue Marshall.
6. VSA Volunteer Rosie Watson & pikinini at Tamboko High School, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands.



Fresh water after the volcano

VSA was delighted to form a partnership with Engineers Without Borders (EWB) in 2017, and our first two VSA/EWB volunteers are in Vanuatu working as Provincial Water Sector Advisers with the Department of Water Resources.

Chris Hartnett has been in Vanuatu since July 2018, and Michelle Knappstein since February this year. Chris's arrival in Luganville, on Espirito Santo, was not long after 11,000 people had been displaced from Ambae, following the volcanic eruptions. Absorbing thousands more people, forced to abandon their homes often with nothing, has been a challenge, though Chris says he's been humbled by the generosity and resilience he's seen.

Providing fresh water for the new villages that popped up has been a priority. Vanuatu aims to have 100% clean water access by 2030.

In the last month, he and his team have had a win, when, he says, "After endless months of assessments and patiently getting on with their business, the community at Manaro St (named after the Volcano that displaced them from Ambae island) are now the proud owners of a solar water pumping system."

The system of solar panels and pumps will replace a small petrol generator the community has been using to pump water, and "brings water closer to home for nearly 400 residents that previously faced an 800m walk to a slow trickle at a hand pump down the road."

Chris is a practical sort (he has been upcycling materials to build compost bins and coconut scratchers, among other things), so he was pleased to do "some real work," he says, alongside the team doing panel installation and pipe-fitting.

"The community at Manaro St (named after the Volcano that displaced them from Ambae island) are now the proud owners of a solar water pumping system."

"The systems provided by Savvy Solar in Port Vila are surprisingly easy to install for anyone with a bit of DIY skills," he says, and the community will be involved in the final stages of installing the tanks and facilitating the Drinking Water Safety and Security Plan workshops, to ensure longevity of the system. "There's a long way to go," Chris says, "but these kinds of systems show a lot of merit on an island like Espirito Santo."

Opposite: Chris Hartnett (right) with Demas Jerethy.





Nauti Primary School. Photo: Denise Eddowes

Back in Tuvalu

Denise Eddowes is one of VSA's first volunteers to go to Tuvalu in 20 years. She's working alongside the Ministry of Education to support them to bring in Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L), after corporal punishment was made illegal.

The Taupō local, accompanied by her husband Mark, has quickly become involved in the community in Funafati, even joining a clean-up in her first weeks as part of a Government initiative to tackle the country's dengue outbreak.

Mucking in and taking time to observe classes has been valuable, she says: "I love doing this as it means I get to develop my skills in terms of learning a new culture and putting my feet into the shoes they walk in."

Denise says she's already seen real strengths in Tuvalu's teachers, but they work in challenging conditions. "Nauti Primary has over 800 students

and is going through a rebuild so only half the classrooms are available." Due to this, juniors attend in the morning and seniors in the afternoon. "There's no air-con in the classrooms and by 9.00am it reaches 30-33 Celsius. By the afternoon, children (as Kiwi teachers are aware) struggle, so I feel a huge amount of empathy for these teachers."

Denise is planning workshops adapted to meet the resources available. "I have not found one shop that sells stickers and everything is expensive." Denise, Mark and fellow volunteer Hillary Boyes come up with a solution together (which fits Hillary's assignment with the Ministry for the Environment), to re-use tin cans "and create an 'I can' can where teachers and students pop in a small note of what they achieved and then take it home at the end of the week to share their family. It's about adapting PB4L strategies we use in NZ to fit the culture here in Tuvalu."

Resettling in Kiribati

Frances Hermann is on her third assignment with VSA, returning to Kiribati after two years to work with the Kiribati Ministry of Education (MOE).



Frances Hermann with her MOE team

Frances and husband John, who has undertaken two assignments as a Land Survey Trainer with the Ministry of Environment Land and Agriculture Development, were excited to return to Tarawa after two years away. "It has been special," she says, "as we were welcomed by past friends and new workers. We feel very blessed to have settled in quickly- there were even two bikes waiting at the house for our use!"

As an Early Childhood and Care Education (ECCE) Adviser, Frances travels the country with an MOE team to meet with ECCE providers. An ECCE Act has just been passed in Kiribati, with the intention of regulating all centres and creating the teacher registration system.

The benefits of the relationship Frances began building in her first assignments are making themselves clear, she says: "The teachers ask to hear my ideas and are really welcoming, as they know me more from last year's training."

Investment in good ECCE is one of the most significant things a

country can do for its people, setting its children on a positive, resilient path and providing a centre for a community. At St Marian Catholic preschool in Buota, Frances says she "chatted with a lovely Sister, and we could sense that her investment into the preschool made it the hub of that remote community." She adds that she recently spent a morning with the Seventh Day Adventist preschool. "There were groups of children two to five years old, all joining classes for one to two hours. The roll is well over 100, with children attending two to three days a week. Many parents join in the younger classes to listen to songs, or they wait in the shade of a mwaneaba (open sided hall)."

"We feel very blessed to have settled in quickly - there were even two bikes waiting at the house for our use!"

Frances will finish this assignment in June, and is confident that the MOE team is in a good place: "These are motivated, educated, supportive women who give me the feeling that I'm in Kiribati at the right time!"



VSA sends skilled Kiwis overseas to share their experience and knowledge directly with local people and communities.

Working alongside our amazing partner organisations, together we create new opportunities for people that will continue to ripple across communities and generations to come.

Costs covered. Diverse industries



volunteer/ donate at www.vsa.org.nz

Connecting people – transforming lives

