

Vista

Volunteer Service Abroad Te Tūao Tāwāhi
2021



Connecting people – transforming lives



Vista is a celebration of Volunteer Service Abroad's amazing volunteers.

As it has for everyone, the past year has challenged VSA. But out of this challenge has come the opportunity to reflect on the work we do and the value we have brought to communities across the world and to Aotearoa over the last 59 years. And, vitally, to prepare well to meet change ahead.

That reflection and planning is captured in the pages of this edition of Vista along with the optimism we feel for our future. We hope you enjoy reading it.

Connecting people – transforming lives

Get in touch

Email vsa@vsa.org.nz

Call 0800 872 8646

PO Box 12246, Wellington
6144, Aotearoa/ New Zealand

www.vsa.org.nz



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Printed and supported by Wakefields Digital.

Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua

*I walk backwards into the future
with my eyes fixed on my past*

Front cover- "Untitled" by Maryam Al-haseny

Volunteer Service Abroad Te Tūao Tāwāhi 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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Volunteer Service Abroad Te Tūao Tāwāhi

Patron: Her Excellency the Right Honourable Dame Patsy Reddy GNZM QSO DSTJ

President: Dr Simon Mark **Council Chair:** Hōne McGregor

Council members: Kirikaiahi Mahutariki (Deputy Chair), John Bowis, Deidre Brookes, Kirsty Burnett, Peter Elmsly, Tarita Hutchinson, Evan Mayson, Jose Luis Sousa-Santos, Dana MacDiarmid, Simon Trotter

Chief Executive Officer: Stephen Goodman MNZM



Hōne McGregor and Stephen Goodman

Rising to the challenge

For VSA CEO Steve Goodman, the urgency and effect of the pandemic on the organisation's operations has been profound but has also offered some opportunities. "One of the things about Covid is it brought into sharp and immediate focus the need for changes to the way we do things. Changes that were, in retrospect, inevitable."

"The changes in the way the world connects, demographic change, climate change - all of these issues were, over the next five to ten years, going to force us to reassess how we do things and what good outcomes look like."

In its 59 year history VSA has evolved to meet the changing needs of its partners, and this change has long been part of the organisation's internal conversations. VSA Chair Hōne McGregor says the pandemic has been an opportunity to look at VSA's work through a new lens. "We've had ongoing discussions with our partners, with our volunteers, with our key stakeholders. There's no silver bullet but we have this mosaic of modalities and approaches that reflect a new best practice that we were already reaching toward before the pandemic."

One of the questions in that conversation has been "what does a good development outcome look like?". "Localisation is the big shift," says Steve, "it's a global shift, and I think it's part of the maturing of the development sector. It's the understanding that enduring capacity building and enduring change has to be driven locally."

And VSA's work doesn't just have to be joined up at a local level. There's also a recognition that there has to be greater coherence within the sector in New Zealand. Hōne describes this in terms of a platform, "We've looked internationally as part of our review process and we've picked up a gap in New Zealand's strategy around aid and development - we need a national volunteering strategy that we can launch from."

Steve says a key component of establishing that joined up strategy is the work VSA does with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT). "With our partnership with MFAT there's a lot we can do in that space to build something that's quite succinct but operates as a framework for what we do."

"COVID-19 brought into sharp and immediate focus the need for changes to the way we do things. Changes that were, in retrospect, inevitable."

"It's been a tough year and we've had to make some tough decisions like the decision to, for the first time in our history, bring all of our volunteers back home. And I think what we've learned is that the work that we do is needed and has a place, but it needs to work differently so we've been reconfiguring ourselves to meet the challenges of this new environment."

"This is something that a lot of organisations in this space are realising now. That to work in a dynamic space, you have to be able to work dynamically within your organisation. I'm really proud of how VSA and our people have adapted to this, and I'm looking forward to our future and the change it will bring."

From the past to the future

Rachel Harrison's experience as a volunteer could have been cut short by the COVID-19 pandemic, but instead it led to e-volunteer work that has in turn led to development work for Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand.

Rachel was just six weeks into her UniVol assignment with the Youth Development Division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Tonga when the call was made to bring all VSA volunteers back to New Zealand in March 2020.

with some analysis around that. To be honest, it was early days, so unfortunately I was only just starting to figure out what I was doing when I had to leave."

Rachel initially carried on volunteering remotely, but distance from a very hands on team made things difficult, and after a few months she stopped working on this assignment, although she still stays in touch with the team. She has, however, continued doing some



"a relational approach to development is so important"

Rachel E-volunteering

as 55 years of VSA's presence in Tonga. The work for the High Commission was helping to organise the celebration of this milestone year, and was originally a side project for Rachel while she was on assignment.

"Even though most of the planned anniversary events had to be cancelled in Tonga, there was still scope to have some kind of celebration, and so I worked on highlighting the depth and breadth of the relationship between New Zealand and Tonga across that period of time.

"It started with talking to past VSA volunteers who had volunteered in Tonga, from 1969 at the earliest, right up until the last couple of years. I spoke to them about their assignments, what they did, what they learned, what knowledge, skills and experiences they brought back to New Zealand, and if they had maintained any kind of connection with Tonga. I then used this information to write a profile on each volunteer, and these were shared on the High Commission's Facebook page.

"All the volunteer profiles then became part of an exhibition in December, which coincided



Tonga Volunteers return to New Zealand (March 2020)

"The Ministry of Internal Affairs gives out youth grants to different youth groups right across Tonga's islands for livelihood and income generating activities, and I was helping out

work for the New Zealand High Commission in Tonga.

The year 2020 marked 50 years of diplomatic relations between New Zealand and Tonga, as well

with International Volunteers' Day. The profiles were printed and displayed both in the VSA office in Wellington and also in a cafe on the main street of Nuku'alofa, which was a bit of a social hub. We then had a simultaneous launch event in both locations, with a Zoom link connecting the attendees – volunteers, partner organisations, government employees and community members – at the two celebrations, which was very special."

Rachel is now working on profiling members of the Tongan

community in New Zealand. This assignment focuses on the relationship between the two countries. The connections and networks she has made, has stood her in good stead for her work at Caritas, looking after their Tonga programme. "The work I did with the Tongan community totally translates into what I'm doing now, whether it's working with people in Tonga, or Kiribati, or Fiji, or Tangata Whenua partners in Aotearoa - those cultures are all different but it's about recognising that a relational approach to development is so important."



At the launch (L to R): Tonga volunteers and Programme Manager (PM) Bruce Johnson; Sally Drager; Rachel Harrison; Tina Mackie (PM); David Cramp



The VSA event for the joint launch of "VSA in Tonga- celebrating 55 years of partnership" exhibition. 10



Returned volunteers reunited (L to R): Michael Monti; Clive Kenyon; John Faisandier



Dancer: Ana To'iahi Havea



(L to R): Sokopeti Sina (lay pastor and community leader), Stephen Goodman (VSA CE, Jackie Frizelle (MFAT Divisional Manager)



Jackie Frizelle speaks at the event



Matt on assignment

People at the forefront

In 2018 Matt Lambie took up a UniVol assignment in Bougainville as a Programme Quality Officer with World Vision. “So I was there for about 18 months and I mean it just it’s such a far cry really from life back here but I do miss it, I miss it a lot. I say that to people all the time and I think that’s where I come back to saying VSA is the most incredible organisation for enabling you to have those experiences.

“I met VSA people in Bougainville, in Papua New Guinea and in Vanuatu and each time what really stood out is that

VSA’s got such long-standing relationships throughout the region. That gives them the ability to really understand the issues at hand and to support a whole range of local organisations and agencies.

“I just think it’s the most sustainable and the most ethical model for development and it’s probably the most cost effective as well.”

For Matt the personal impact of the assignment was huge. “That’s a massive thing and I think it’s something that’s probably not immediately

“You can get so much more done and really help people just by being open and empathetic.”

obvious to you once you finish an assignment. For me it probably took well over a year for that stuff to really settle in, to start to properly see how it did impact my worldview and my ways of thinking.

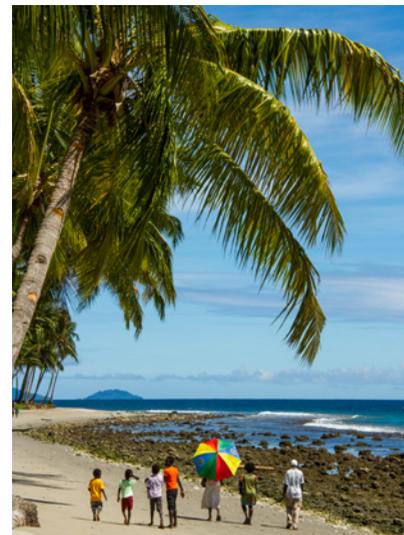
“Probably the biggest thing I think that stands out for me would just be the importance of relationships. It really instilled in me this desire with everything I do to really put the person, the people, right at the forefront of things.

“I learned in Bougainville that it takes considerable time to

build trust and build those relationships but if you really make an effort at doing that at the outset it paves the way for the success of that work.

“The nature of VSA assignments is all about collaboration, partnership, and capacity building, and that model is really underpinned by taking the time to understand the people you are working with at the outset. That way of thinking has really influenced my work as a public servant, you can get so much more done and really help people just by being open and empathetic.”

Bougainville



Matt with his teammates from Arawa Football Club



The Public Good

Any VSA volunteer will tell you the assignment you embark on isn't always quite the one you end up doing. But for Dana MacDiarmid heading into Timor-Leste to do a communications assignment led to a longer stay than she had anticipated, a change of career focus, and to building skills that are now helping many Kiwis when they are at their most vulnerable.

Dana now works as a senior emergency management advisor with the Planning team at the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA). Put simply, her job is to make sure that people caught up in national emergencies have the support they need.

She says her time in Timor-Leste was a turning point in her career. "I did a one-year VSA assignment with a grassroots NGO called Empreza Di'ak which focused on communications.

"I did do some of the traditional marketing and communications work - writing plans and strategies, managing social media as well as a lot of training, but I also got some great extra exposure into things like social enterprise and small business development, gender-based violence programs and empowerment.

"The unexpected bit was that at the end of my assignment, and because of the relationships I'd built during it, I got an opportunity to do a six-month

"Volunteers are contributing back through public service here - the work just keeps giving and giving"



Dana MacDiarmid



Dana on Assignment with Empreza Di'ak

maternity cover contract at the New Zealand Embassy in Dili as a local staff member."

"The embassy role was covering for the Deputy Head of Mission - it's a very small mission and so the work included a bit of everything; it was managing the finance team and then it was trying to source a brand-new work car and then managing the residences and then policy advice and meeting with businesspeople or politicians...

"So it was really broad and one piece of it was doing a revision of the contingency plans for emergency evacuation. When I came back to New Zealand and wanted to do something new I was able to draw on that experience to shift into what

I do now in peacetime and during emergencies.

"That's basically coordinating and working with agencies to support people that have been affected by national emergencies and provide them that emergency relief and safety net when they need it. Working to ensure we have more resilient communities and provide support to those in need really aligns with VSA's values.

"I'm also on the VSA Council so I'm getting to see how other volunteers are also contributing back through public service here - the work just keeps giving and giving. I think that's really special and really good for our volunteers and also for Aotearoa New Zealand."



Chris and villagers on Khon Kaen student led work camp – Ubonratchathani province

A half century connection



50 years ago Chris Hawley took up a VSA assignment at a newly founded

university in Khon Kaen, Thailand. An assignment that was to inform the rest of his life.

“I was assigned as an English language specialist to help develop curriculum and teach at Khon Kaen university up in the northeast of Thailand,” says Chris. “This is the early 70s when the war was raging across the Mekong river just to the north of Khon Kaen in Laos and Cambodia and particularly Vietnam and

northeast Thailand, looking back now, was seen by the western world including our government in New Zealand as the next vulnerable domino to fall.

“The university was new, only about three years old when I arrived, it only had two faculties and they wanted to get quality English language teaching going there because their students needed English in order to do postgraduate work, especially young staff, and to graduate and get jobs.

“I loved it - I made many good friends with students and staff, which has continued until now

but my other passion that developed in the first year through my students was development projects in the countryside.

“There was communist insurgency around us in the northeast; there were a few parts of the northeast that were regarded as not safe to go; Khon Kaen was absolutely fine but that political ferment was not that far away.

“There was military rule then in Bangkok and some of my students were angry and frustrated with the corruption and the lack of freedom of speech and they channelled their idealism into negotiating with remote villages in the northeast and developing agreed projects with villagers to, for example, build a school or a library or something like that which they'd never had before.

“I was asked to join them and so I spent my breaks in very remote parts of Northeast Thailand living in the temple with a hundred students and three or four hundred villagers building something together. So for me there were two

aspects to my life: one was the professional job teaching English and developing curriculum and the other one was this wonderful rich experience out in the countryside.

Deeply involved in Thai society and engaged with his work, Chris did two two-year assignments back to back at the university. “I didn't feel I had enough time to do what I wanted to achieve in two years so I went back for a second assignment, at the invitation of the University of course. After four years I had this yearning to go back to my family roots. I travelled on a truck with other young people for four months across Asia from Kathmandu to London.

“In London I found a job almost immediately. It was under the Harold Wilson Government and involved dealing with workplace racism in British industry. My experience in Thailand and learning Thai - to look at the world in a different way - was vital to that and I spent a lot of time working with Muslim and Hindu and Buddhist immigrants who were suffering a lot of prejudice in the workplace at the time.

“When I returned to New Zealand a few years later, the first people from Chile were arriving as refugees from the Pinochet dictatorship. I somehow connected with people who were asked by the government to do the on-arrival program for Chilean refugees so I got involved with that and within a few weeks of that happening the first refugees began to arrive from Vietnam.

“That led to me getting involved in establishing the Mangere Refugee Centre Education programme and then coordinating refugee education based in Wellington for ten years. And of course the VSA work I had done meant I could speak in Thai with many of the Cambodian and

Lao border people who were arriving, had been where they lived, and understood where they were coming from. I like to think that helped them in their resettlement here.”

Chris’ refugee work led to another stint at VSA, this time as a staff member. “I joined VSA again as a Development Director and I persuaded the VSA Board and the government that we should go back into Indochina and start going to the top of the cliff. I’d been working with the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff for 10 years with refugees here and I thought it was time we Kiwis went back to those countries to work on projects that helped people earlier on.”



Chris and villagers on Khon Kaen student led work camp- Ubonratchathani province



Chris and students at Khon Kaen University

Those programmes ran for more than 20 years. In the 90’s as New Zealand’s international outlook expanded beyond its traditional Anglo western partners, Chris began to play a role in building relationships between New Zealand and Asia.

“I was talking with John Hinchcliff, he was the President of what was then called the Auckland Institute of Technology and he encouraged me to go and work there to develop an international strategy from scratch for them.

“I brought with me all my connections with the Asia Pacific region and spent a lot of time visiting and travelling in Asia, Latin America and the

Pacific to develop a whole range of exchange and cooperation programmes. And of course there was a business element to it, but I wanted to build friendships between my people and this country and the people of the Asia Pacific for the future benefit of all of us. I guess I’m still idealistic like that.”

“I think that all goes back to my time with VSA. I’d grown up reasonably conservatively and I think Thailand was where I first really understood what it is like to be able to look through other people’s eyes. And with it to understand that the world is not black and white but that with a bit of effort and care you can connect with anyone and find remarkable friendships.”



Kumeroa (Cooms) White - farewell



In Choiseul

Leading real change

Ask Downer Talent Development Manager Ryan Jacobs about the partnership the firm has had with VSA for the past six years and he's effusive and enthusiastic. "I like to think of these programmes as incubators and accelerators for future leaders and so for me a huge part of that development and that acceleration into leadership is by being exposed to real personal growth.

"That's what you get when you step out of your comfort zone and experience the unknown, whilst using the skills that you've harnessed. Seeing how that impacts a community or a society allows you to come back with a completely different perspective on where your career is going and why you're doing everything that you're doing.

Kumeroa (Cooms) White – knows that first-hand. In 2019 she was one of four Downer young professionals on assignment to the Solomon Islands. "I know my 'why'" says Cooms, "I mean why I want to do engineering, why I want to specialise in water. Water literally gives life - you can't live without it and spending time on assignment really made it clear how important water and good sanitation is."

Downer's VSA assignments involve in-country partnership with the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development's asset management team. Cooms' work focused on developing procurement contracts for school infrastructure including ablution blocks and dormitories.

"On my last school visit, we went to one of the top schools in the Solomon Islands and discovered that all of the students were defecating over the ocean. That need for infrastructure is really eye opening"

Cooms has brought that back to New Zealand with her and is now a Water Site Engineer within Water Construction in Tauranga - a career path she credits to her experience on assignment.

VSA Stakeholder Engagement Director Mary Curnow works closely with Downer on the programme. She says working with the infrastructure firm has had huge benefits for all involved. "We're seeing the kind of professional development opportunities for cadets and development gains for local communities that you'd expect, but we're also seeing a broader and deeper set of gains.

"In the Solomon Islands six years of structured infrastructure development has provided certainty and continuity that's really putting agency in the hands of locals.

"I like to think of these programmes as incubators and accelerators for future leaders"

"And we're seeing Downer volunteers bringing back new skills to New Zealand and a matured worldview that benefits their work and communities here."

For Cooms, that gain has included adaptability and resilience, and also a new way of looking at her work. "One of the things I took away from my time on assignment is that for the locals culture is everything. To do the job you've got to understand the culture and add value."

Ryan describes it as a maturing "It's about their [young professionals'] outlook and the way in which they're actually approaching their work and then when they're looking at what opportunities come up down the road this all plays into the decision making. They develop a different sense of maturity and understanding.

"It would be great if we could send more people on these assignments."



Paul in Tonga - 1967

Enduring relationships

“By 1970 I was married to the lady I met when I was a VSA volunteer at the age of 18 and we’re still together after 50 something years of marriage but we got married in 1970 and by the time 1978 came around we had three daughters.”

If anyone can lay claim to their VSA assignment being a life-changing event it’s Paul Karalus. As a new school leaver in 1967 he and a group of other school leaver volunteers embarked to Tonga to work in partnership with St John’s High School as a student teacher.

“Well I really don’t know whether we were the teachers or the students were teaching us but it was a good working

two-way relationship. Many of those students have remained good friends and I still see some of them are still on almost a day-to-day basis.

Paul still sees his former students - many now in their seventies - because of the decision he made in 1979 to return to Tonga with his wife Tafolosa and their children after a decade back in New Zealand studying to become, then working as, a teacher.

“The object was to come back to Tonga to give our daughters the opportunity at some later point in life to be able to decide whether they wish to devote themselves to New Zealand or to Tonga.

After so many decades as part of the Tongan community Paul looks back on his VSA assignment fondly. “I really feel the VSA experience was the opening of the door to a very valuable cross-cultural experience and becoming over time a fluent speaker Tongan. I’ve also been able to gain a very good perspective and to find that often what one sees and what one believes one sees differs quite markedly when you look at it from the different perspectives than that of a European.”

So what has changed in Tonga over a half a century? “A lot of changes of course but most of these changes are surface you know, you see more vehicles you see better houses you see different agricultures etc etc. What’s of more interest to me is not so much those changes but actually the continuities, the underlying continuities that I think when you recognise them leads to a much-much deeper appreciation and understanding of a culture.”

And it’s clearly a culture and a country that Paul loves and has dedicated his life to. “I would hope that I’ve contributed

“Many of those students have remained good friends and I still see some of them on almost a day-to-day basis”

something to Tonga. I’ve been engaged here in a wide range of activities. I was in education as a teacher and also as Director of Catholic education and as an educational administrator. I’ve done 40 years in the aviation industry both in airlines and now and ground handling.

“I’ve also been a farmer first of all as a market gardener and later in growing of watermelons and so on for export, and then also been part of reinvigorating the coffee industry, ran a tissue culture laboratory to try and improve propagation, and even to today we’re still involved in propagation now doing vegetable seedlings and my wife is a very keen and very successful florist and so our next venture will probably be more into floriculture.”

For Paul, a one year assignment many decades ago has led to a life rich in enduring relationships and experiences.



Through VSA skilled Kiwis 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.



Connecting people – transforming lives

