



Vista

Issue One 2018

The magazine of **Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA)**



VSA volunteers work with people in the Pacific and beyond to create lasting, positive change for everyone

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 disaster recovery in Tonga to mentoring lawyers in Bougainville. Together with our partners, our volunteers build local businesses, provide education and improve health, safeguard the environment and foster good governance, delivering nearly 200 community- driven and owned projects – transforming lives, including their own.

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

You can be part of a story that began more than 50 years ago with our founding President, Sir Edmund Hillary. Your skills and support will make a difference to people who want a better life for themselves and their children.

Become a
VSA **volunteer**



Become a
VSA **donor**



Go to www.vsa.org.nz to find out about application criteria, to register to receive vacancies matching your skills, or to see what assignments are being advertised.

Your donation will enable us to send more great volunteers and change lives forever. Visit www.vsa.org.nz to donate or to find out about becoming a VSA member.

Get in touch

Email: vsa@vsa.org.nz
Call: 0800 872 8646

PO Box 12246, Wellington
6144, Aotearoa/New Zealand

www.vsa.org.nz

Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Liz Hicks at the Nazareth Rehabilitation Centre, Bougainville; Emma O'Neill and fellow international volunteers plant mangroves in Kiribati; Peter Brown in Vanuatu; Andrew Baker at the Catholic Archdiocese of Bougainville.





Kia ora,

In March, I was invited by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) to travel on the Prime Minister's Pacific Mission to Samoa, Niue, Tonga and the Cook Islands. It was a privilege to be able to travel with the delegation, see some of our volunteers in Samoa and the Cook Islands, and talk to local people and organisations about their challenges and priorities, as well as see some of the innovative things they themselves are doing to meet those.

It became clear to me that there are so many more opportunities for meaningful development partnerships that we can embrace in Polynesia, and that's something we'll be looking at doing over the next year.

Tonga, especially, is looking for good support. I was struck by Cyclone Gita's impact – especially to agriculture, as crops were destroyed. The generosity of our supporters to our Cyclone Gita emergency appeal (see page 4) was extraordinary, and means we have already been able to support a volunteer working within Tonga's agricultural sector, as well as a range of recovery projects other volunteers are undertaking with their partners. I thank you for that support – it is making a difference.

We know that we are likely to face more cyclones like Gita, as the Pacific is vulnerable to climate change, but on the Mission we also saw first hand the day-to-day effects climate change is having around the region. In Moata'a Village, Samoa, a mangrove swamp separates the village from the main centre, where businesses, churches and schools are. We took a lengthy drive around the mangroves and other settlements to get there, but the villagers traditionally use a much shorter walkway that cuts through the swamp. Twice a day however, tidal flooding means the walkway is submerged and inaccessible. The walkway is a lifeline for the village and so because of the flooding, kids are missing school, and older people are becoming increasingly socially isolated, particularly as going to church becomes more difficult. I saw first hand how climate change is impacting these people. It really struck me that this village's whole way of operating has completely changed.

There will be many more stories like that around the Pacific, and there are and will be many opportunities for us to continue to work alongside local people and organisations to build their resilience in the face of this impact. It was a privilege to see the work already underway, but also to see how much more there is to do.

Stephen Goodman, VSA CEO

Volunteer Service Abroad Te Tūao Tāwāhi

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

President: Dr Simon Mark. Council Chair: Evan Mayson
Council members: Deidre Brookes (Deputy Chair), John Bowis, Kirsty Burnett, Dr Jo Cribb, Peter Elmsly, Dana MacDiarmid, Kirikaiahi Mahutariki

Chief Executive Officer: Stephen Goodman MNZM



The New Zealand Government is proud to provide significant support through the New Zealand Aid Programme for New Zealand volunteers who work in a development capacity overseas.



Seventeen goals to transform our world. Read more at www.vsa.org.nz/related-sdgs

Volunteer Service Abroad Te Tūao Tāwāhi Inc is a registered charity (CC36739) under the Charities Act 2005.

© VSA. All rights reserved. ISSN 1176-9904 Reproduction of content is allowed for usage in primary and secondary schools, and for tertiary studies.

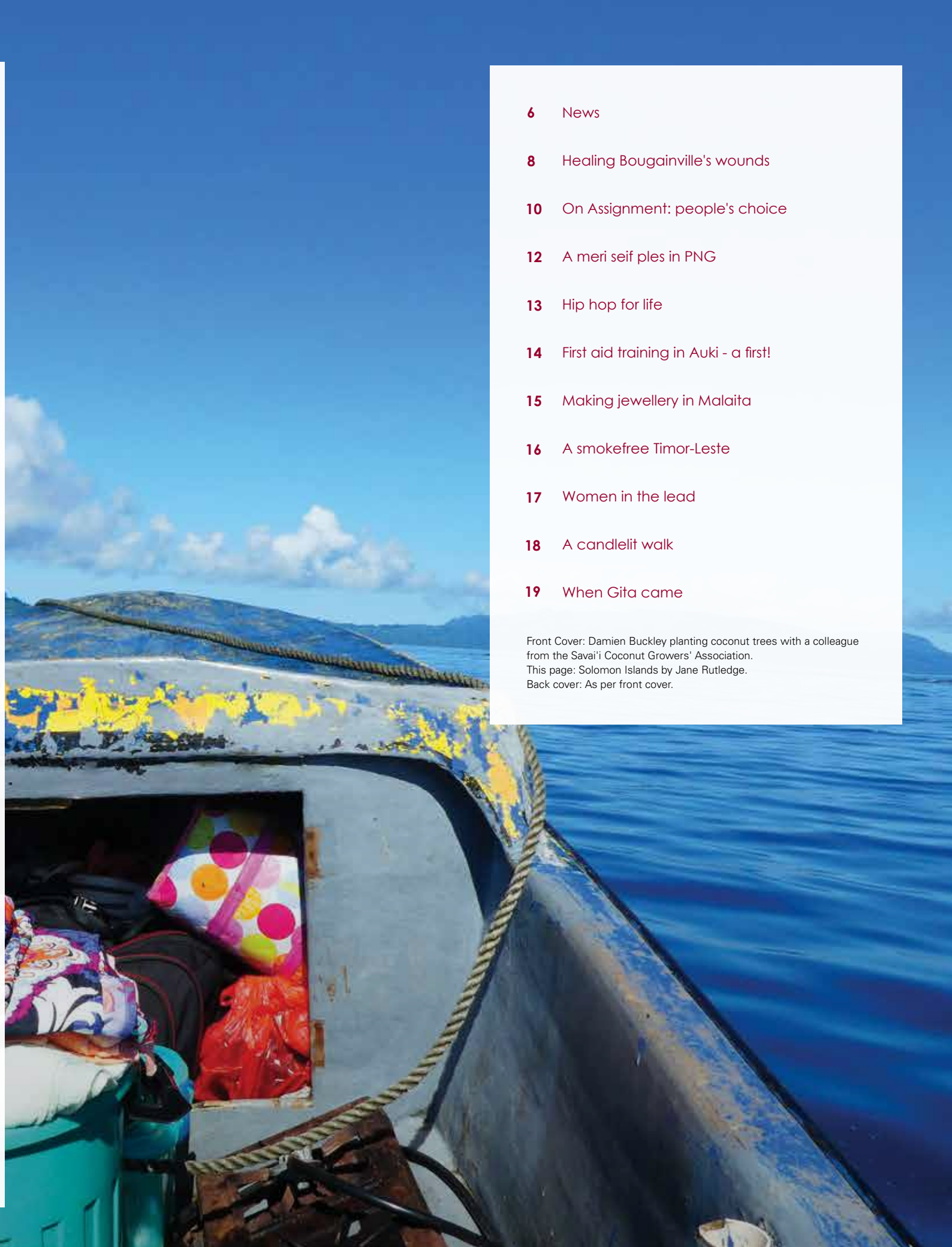
Vista is printed on environmentally responsible paper. It is chlorine free and manufactured using sustainably farmed trees. This material has been printed using vegetable oil-based/mineral oil-free inks.

Vista is the official magazine of Volunteer Service Abroad Te Tūao Tāwāhi Incorporated. Please note that views expressed in Vista are not necessarily the views of VSA.

Editorial and photographic submissions to the magazine are welcome. Queries and submissions to the Editor, Vista, at vsa@vsa.org.nz.

- 6 News
- 8 Healing Bougainville's wounds
- 10 On Assignment: people's choice
- 12 A meri seif ples in PNG
- 13 Hip hop for life
- 14 First aid training in Auki - a first!
- 15 Making jewellery in Malaita
- 16 A smokefree Timor-Leste
- 17 Women in the lead
- 18 A candlelit walk
- 19 When Gita came

Front Cover: Damien Buckley planting coconut trees with a colleague from the Savai'i Coconut Growers' Association.
This page: Solomon Islands by Jane Rutledge.
Back cover: As per front cover.





After the cyclone. Photos: Anna Ravendran.

Your generosity supporting Tonga

We know from experience that recovering from a severe natural disaster can take years, so when Cyclone Gita swept through Tonga in February, we launched an emergency appeal to support our partners with projects vital to their recovery.

Thanks to your generosity, at the time of going to print, we had raised over \$35,000. We will report throughout the recovery on how we're using the funds raised, but we have already supported the first assignment created in direct response to Gita: former volunteer Bruce Johnson has taken an additional eight-week assignment in Tonga with Mainstreaming of Rural Development Innovation Tonga Trust (MORDI) as a horticulturalist.

The aim of his assignment is to help address the need in Tonga following Cyclone Gita to re-establish food security. Bruce says "I was in Tonga and due to return to New Zealand when Cyclone Gita struck. The devastation that Cyclone Gita left in its wake was horrifying and the impact it had on friends here was heart breaking. It's hard to imagine how things could be put right, certainly in the short term... Having worked on a farmer education/food security assignment here in the past I had some knowledge that could compliment the local skill base. So when asked to help with a food security and livelihood program I was more than happy to agree."

Bruce says the impact on fresh fruit and vegetables is marked, with many markets having little-to no produce available. The appeal has funded an irrigation system at MORDI's plant nursery, which is working to grow seedlings to help Tongan farmers re-establish their livelihoods.

Watch your mailboxes

This year is an election year for VSA's Council. In May, we will be asking for nominations, with voting papers to be distributed in August. If you are a member of VSA, you'll receive information about the process soon. As a member, you are entitled to stand for the election; to nominate someone else to stand, and to vote on the confirmed nominees during the voting period.

Important dates:

April 30: Council nominations open.

June 30: Nominations close. Membership expires; membership renewal notices will be sent prior to this date.

August 31: Election information and voting papers sent to members.

If you're a member and have not heard from us, or if you'd like to become a member, please email vsa@vsa.org.nz.



Stay in touch

Stay in touch with other returned volunteers and with VSA. VSAConnect, our volunteer alumni association, is keen to hear from former volunteers who are not yet members. Email vsaconnect@vsa.org.nz or call Pat Martin on (04) 4725759

The Prime Minister's Mission



Left-right: Stephen Goodman; Hon Aupito William Sio, Minister for Pacific Peoples; VSA Cook Islands volunteers Christie Raymond, Annika Lane, Hilary Boyes, Mike Mills, Victoria Clark; Pacific Youth Parliament leader Josiah Tualamali'i

In March, VSA CEO Stephen Goodman was invited to join Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's Pacific Mission to Niue, Samoa, Tonga and the Cook Islands. The group included Members of Parliament, senior Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade officials, and 15 community, NGO and business leaders. In just five-and-a-half days, they attended formal functions, visited various community initiatives and projects, observed Tropical Cyclone Gita recovery efforts, and had the opportunity to engage with local leaders from all sectors. For Steve's thoughts on the trip, see page 4.

Mortar boards in Dili



Our UniVol programme offers students from Otago, Victoria, Massey and Auckland universities the chance to put development theory into practice with 10-month assignments. It's the chance of a lifetime, but can mean missing your graduation date while you're away.

VSA's Timor-Leste Programme Manager Victoria Gregory realised that the three Timor-based UniVols, Kaitlin Scott, Danielle Petrie-Deely and Hugo Egan would miss theirs, and decided to organise a celebration. Following this, the New Zealand Embassy offered to host a special ceremony in May in Dili for the UniVols, alongside Timorese students who are also graduating from New Zealand universities.

Kaitlin says "We feel extremely lucky and grateful for this opportunity. The meaning of our graduation has developed into something much more than a celebration of our degree. We will now also be celebrating our time in Timor-Leste, the special friendships we have formed with our kolega Timor and the uniqueness of the New Zealand community here. We are so happy to be graduating here in Timor, it will be an experience which we never forget and an amazing story to share back home."

On Assignment

In December last year, our photographic exhibition "On Assignment" ran for two weeks in the foyer of the Asteron building, over the road from the Wellington Railway Station. Our curator Fiona Morris found some real treasures from the last five years, showing volunteer work and life, and a side of the Pacific that is not all palm trees and beaches. Free to the public, the exhibition was well-attended, with over 100 people voting for people's choice. To see the top 10, go to page 10.

Would your community be interested in hosting an exhibition of these photos? Please contact us at social@vsa.org.nz.

We're listening!

We ran a survey with Vista last year to see what you're most interested in reading, and the overwhelming feedback is that you want to hear more from our partners in the countries where we work. So, in issue two later this year, expect just that – an issue dedicated to our partners and their voices.



Healing Bougainville's wounds

Left-right: Helen Hakena holding her granddaughter, Bianca Hakena

“Leitana Nehan’s story began with three women giving birth on the same day in 1990 (in an empty warehouse, hiding from the fighting). One of the women was myself, giving birth prematurely to Max, my fourth child. I was seven months pregnant when I gave birth. I survived while the two other women died in childbirth leaving their two sons behind. I could not let other women suffer the way I did. Through my experience, I began to advocate for peace together with my friends.” Helen Hakena, co-founder of Leitana Nehan Women’s Development Agency.

Leitana Nehan Women’s Development Agency (LNWDA) was formed in 1992 in an attempt to prevent and overcome violence caused by the Bougainville Crisis. It has grown to be an influential NGO, with 91 volunteers, including 38 counsellors, working in the districts to implement the Agency’s programmes. The 38 counsellors are mobile and provide confidential counselling to victims and survivors of all forms of violence against women.

VSA has worked with LNWDA since 2007. In 2010, a fire destroyed the LNWDA headquarters, offices and counselling space in Buka. Since then the Agency has occupied a “temporary” office space which has allowed their work to continue but has no water nor toilet facilities.

VSA Volunteer Christine Ramsay is working alongside Helen and her team as a Business and Office Management Mentor as they build a new purpose-built space. This will provide not just much-needed facilities for the services they offer, but income-generating conference space for rent. Christine spoke to several members of the LNWDA team, to hear their inspiring stories.

Bianca Hakena

When I was in high school, our class matron told us one day that we had to attend an awareness-raising session on social issues and Human Rights by a team of Human Rights defenders. The whole school gathered at the assembly hall waiting for the Human Rights group that day. To my surprise, there they were.... my mum and dad, plus several other young people. As they were addressing the school and talking about homebrew alcohol, rape, child abuse, etc, I was slowly moving from the centre where I was sitting, to a corner where no one would know that they were my parents. I felt ashamed and hated what they were doing. After the session that day, I didn’t want to be seen with them in school.

After I completed Grade 10 at Hutjena Secondary School in 1996, I had a lot of opportunities to continue my tertiary studies but I was too scared to leave home as there was still fighting between the Bougainville Revolutionary Army, Papua New Guinea Defence Force and Resistance forces on the island.

Having nothing better to do at home, I joined the Losei Village Catholic Youth Group. At one of the meetings, the Parish Chair told us about an invitation to attend an outreach programme at Hahela Parish. Upon arrival at Hahela, I was again surprised that my parents were there running the programme. This time I thought to myself, I better concentrate and know what these two are up to. When they did the campaign in high school, I wasn’t listening because I was too busy hiding. After the programme, I realized that I was wrong about being ashamed and hating the work they both were doing. I started following them around Buka Island.

At first, I used to be very shy in speaking publicly. Sometimes I would hide and pretend to be sick. After years of being trained and coached, I gained the confidence and became the organisation’s trainer.

I am now the Programme Director of Leitana Nehan Women’s Development Agency. I joined the organization in 1998 as a young feminist woman leader. I continued to work as the trainer on Gender and Human Rights and as a counsellor to assist victims/survivors of all forms of violence against women and girls.

Left-right: Louise-Anne, Clayton, Brenda. Photos: Kayt Bronniman.

Louise-Anne

I am a radio announcer with Radio Bougainville, and the chairperson of the Genext Club, a young women’s network in Bougainville. When I completed my secondary high school I had no opportunity to continue my education. I stayed at home for almost a year. Leitana Nehan Women’s Development Agency hosted a training workshop for young women which empowered me. My interest grew and when the opportunity arose, I applied to be a volunteer with the organisation.

Leitana Nehan sent me to FemLink Pacific in Suva to be trained as a media correspondent. Through this international exposure and the skills I learnt, I participated in formulating policies for Women’s Peace and Security for the Pacific.

I gained so much confidence in working with young women and collating their personal stories. So when the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) advertised the position, I applied and was accepted. I am now earning a good salary which supports my young family. I am now married and have two children and a supportive husband.

“I gained so much confidence in working with young women and collating their personal stories.”

Clayton

I have worked as a male advocate for Leitana Nehan Women’s Development Agency since 2010. I was working in the private sector prior to 2010 after completing high school. Leitana Nehan was conducting awareness-raising in the area about Human Rights, Gender Based Violence, and Women and Girls’ rights.

I have changed my attitudes towards women and girls in terms of seeing them as equal partners in life. Having to work under the supervision of a woman was challenging at first but training that I have had with the organisation has helped me in so many ways.

Conducting training on masculinity, Human Rights and Violence against Women to other men in the community brings comfort and satisfaction when men are keen to learn more about social issues and their effects and how to try to end these issues.

I am now married and share the ideas and knowledge with my wife, my equal.

“Training... brings comfort and satisfaction when men are keen to learn more about social issues and their effects and how to try to end these issues.”

Brenda

I am a single mother with one daughter. My boyfriend, the father of my daughter, lied to me and left me when I was pregnant. His parents did not accept me as their son’s girlfriend. I was verbally and mentally abused by his parents. This caused me a lot of pain and suffering. My parents also disowned me. I carried the burden of looking after my daughter alone. I was always worried until today.

I was brought in for counselling by my friends who knew about the counselling services offered by Leitana Nehan Women’s Development Agency. I came in for several counselling sessions and I gained the confidence to take my ex-partner to court for child maintenance. He is now paying monthly maintenance for my daughter.

My daughter is now in school and the monthly maintenance fees help to pay for her school fees and other needs. I am very confident and have moved on with my life.

To read more visit: vsa.org.nz/leitana

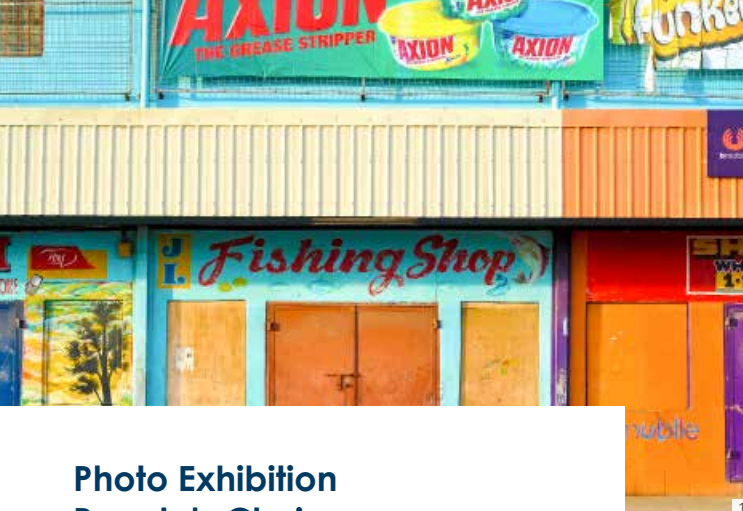


Photo Exhibition People's Choice

1. Shop fronts in Solomon Islands, by Lance Cash.
2. Leaf umbrellas in Bougainville, by Vasti Venter.
3. Bingo the dog makes an appearance during reading time with VSA volunteer Wendy Griffin in the library corner, by Murray Lloyd.
4. Lucy and Lynette walk on the old wharf pier in Bougainville, by Neelum Patel.
5. VSA volunteer Olivia Benton-Guy and children are splashing around on a hot day in Bougainville, by Richard Green.
6. Children let loose after class in PNG, by Chris Mitchell.
7. Children playing after school on a stormy day in Solomon Islands, by Rachel Skeates.
8. Still smiling after the flood in Solomon Islands, by Lance Cash.
9. Coconut commute in Tonga, by Lesley Young.
10. Decorated man with painted face, by Vasti Venter.





A meri seif ples in PNG

Laura Barnett (right) with Sister Wilhelmina Sundu and Sister Serah Malaivuye

The creation of East New Britain's first safe house for women and children escaping domestic violence has been a long time coming. In the last issue of Vista, we reported on Laura Barnett's assignment with the Catholic Archdiocese of Rabaul, working with The Daughters of Mary Immaculate (FMI Sisters) to open the first safe house in East New Britain. Laura and a group of five FMI Sisters from Kokopo went on a study tour of safe houses in Bougainville hosted by another VSA partner – the Nazareth Rehabilitation Centre in Bougainville, which runs several safe houses.

Since then, fellow volunteer Finn Egan has completed a fundraising walk along the Te Araroa trail, running the length of New Zealand, raising over \$23,000 for the project, and Laura and the Sisters have been working to bring their dream to fruition.

Laura, whose assignment finished in February this year, has remained in close contact with the Sisters, carrying on her work from New Zealand. She says "the advice we got from the Nazareth Centre was to start small, with what we have, and not to try to do what they're doing, as they've been running for more than 18 years."

To that end, the planned safe house will be created out of two 40-foot shipping containers, with plans to add more small buildings in the future. Local architect Iain Stevenson has provided the plans, and local materials and tradespeople will be used, wherever possible. Laura says it can't come soon enough.

In Papua New Guinea, studies suggest that the rate of violence against women and girls is more than double the global rates, with two in every three women abused. A study in PNG found reported rape at 44%. A meri seif ples is tok pisin for "women's safe place"

The safe house will not just be a refuge, but also a point for women to access healthcare, counselling, and legal assistance, and plan for their next step. Laura says survivors from all over East New Britain belonging to all cultures and religions will be welcomed at Coupe House, and they will be seen as important stakeholders in the project. Ultimately, Laura says, "women and children need the freedom to participate in the development of Papua New Guinea."

"Women and children need the freedom to participate in the development of Papua New Guinea."

VSA works with local organisations and mana wāhine throughout the Pacific to address gender-based violence: not a single place or country, including New Zealand, is immune. Your support means that organisations like FMI and the Nazareth Centre, as well as the Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency (page 8), the Kiribati Family Health Association (p 18) and more are able to provide better futures for the women and children (and men) they work with.



A planning workshop.



Sister Wilhelmina in one of the containers



Laura (right) with the team



Top-bottom: elevation views of Coupe House, one of the shipping containers, an example of how the containers can be adapted.

Hip Hop for life



Top photo: Josh Mitikulena and VSA's Vanuatu Programme Officer Brigitte Olul. Bottom: Dance class at Wan Smolbag. Photos: Josh Mitikulena.

VSA's first hip-hop assignment is on a roll – trainer and choreographer Josh Mitikulena, who's been working with Wan Smolbag in Vanuatu, has renewed his assignment to continue the work he started in 2017.

Wan Smolbag is a grassroots NGO based in Port Vila, Vanuatu that started with a group of six volunteer actors in 1989 and now employs over 100 staff and over 200 volunteers. They use theatre and dance to educate the public, particularly young people, about sexual health, the environment and other issues – blending traditional story-telling with modern methods.

Taking part in activities like sport and dance has a huge role to play in growing resilient communities. It not only contributes to health and well-being, but in societies where women and girls are marginalised, joining a group is empowering, helping to build confidence and community.

One of Josh's aims for his first assignment was to involve more girls in hip-hop, so he began taking girls-only classes, which made them more likely to attend. He says "I also created a girls dance crew that entered one of the biggest dance events in Vanuatu called Battle of the Year... By the end of the year I had small workshops where some of the more experienced girls taught the other younger girls."

Josh's new assignment will focus on continuing to upskill the experienced dancers to become trainers, and to look for ways to use performances to provide an income for the dancers.

Wan Smolbag's project manager, Jodi Devine, says "Josh has been a fantastic member of the WSB team, all the kids love coming to his classes and the staff really enjoy working with and learning from him."



First Aid training in Auki, a first!



The first aid workshop participants were from across Malaita Island.

Elisabeth Degremont volunteered as a Tourism Adviser with Auki Lodge on Malaita Island, Solomon Islands. Part of her assignment was reaching out to other tourism operators in the remote area – she says “the community is so motivated, but they need so much support.”

Sometime last year, with Jackson Leabury from the Provincial government, we listed some of the important training needed for the tourism operators in Auki. To me it was clear that First Aid training was most important because it would not only benefit their businesses, but would also benefit each family, their communities and villages, thus reaching more people.

It was to be a very practical training, accessible to all participants and delivered in Pijin.

I discovered that the Auki Red Cross had some trainers and we managed to set up a programme.

The two Red Cross trainers delivering the training were excellent; engaging and fun and very quickly the whole group was asking questions and very actively taking part in the practical sessions.

During the two days, a great camaraderie developed between the people. There was fantastic energy and non-stop conversation about tourism, village life and community. The participants were thankful for having been invited and taking part in such a practical training. Checking in with the participants, they told me, “I can apply this in everyday life; I feel more confident,” and “Great training ... useful if anything happening in the villages”

In a place that has so much to offer to tourists, this was something tangible we could give to the people: practical learning that could be applied any day and everywhere.

Tourism in Malaita

Called “hauntingly beautiful” by Lonely Planet, Malaita Island lies north-east of Guadalcanal in Solomon Islands. The Solomon Islands National Tourism Strategy has identified strong potential for tourism in and around Malaita, as the island offers good surfing, exotic bird-watching, and traditional culture-based experiences.

At present, just 3-4% of Solomon Islands’ available accommodation is in Malaita, and there are very few registered tour operators. There is huge potential to grow tourism in Malaita, although that is true across the whole of Solomon Islands: tourism is a small part of the country’s economy, compared to other Pacific nations like Samoa and Vanuatu.

The provincial and central governments have a goal to grow tourism’s contribution to 7% of GDP over the next few years, with an emphasis on sustainable tourism that spreads opportunities, employment and income to the smaller regions.



At the coast on Malaita. Photo: Elisabeth Degremont.



Making jewellery in Malaita



Left: Sophie Lewis-Smith in the workshop. Right: Using the local flora as design inspiration. Photos: Sophie Lewis-Smith.

Sophie Lewis-Smith returned from her assignment as a Jewellery Making Adviser at the Malaita Institute of Technology (MIT) earlier this year.

Just before she came back, she posted a selection of her students’ work for sale on Facebook – chunky jasper rings and pendants, delicate copper Frangipani-shaped earrings and more, all handmade in their tiny workspace in remote Auki, Solomon Islands.

Many of the pieces were quickly snapped up, with the funds raised going directly to the makers and reinvested into tools. Sophie feels confident that the two students she worked most closely with, Charlie and Jackson, will be able to build good livelihoods, and pass their skills on – “they just have to keep producing!”

Sophie says the market in Solomon Islands for quality local jewellery has great potential, particularly among tourists and expats. Sophie emphasised the creativity and design aspect of jewellery making, alongside the technical. Copper and silver were introduced, leading to the creation of the frangipani and pawpaw flower earrings, the most popular products in the Facebook sale. Old air conditioning units are a useful local source of copper.

Anyone wanting to purchase their own pair will have to make the pilgrimage to Solomon Islands. While the Facebook sale is a success, Charlie, Jackson and Philip (Head of Department at MIT) are currently concentrating on the local market, and have found places to display their work in the capital, notably the Lime Lounge Café, with scope to exhibit at the Art Haus Gallery (The National Gallery of the Solomon Islands). for the tourist and expat market. “There’s nothing like it in the Solomons, so the opportunity is huge.”



Sophie, Charlie and Jackson in the workshop.

Top: Jasper pendant. Bottom: Copper frangipani earrings.



A smokefree Timor-Leste



Sabino Soares, of the Nazareth Foundation, which supports the project.

Marion Smith believes that everybody has a chance to make change, even if the task ahead looks insurmountable.

The 66 year old from Tauranga is trying to help reduce tobacco use in Timor-Leste, which has one of the highest smoking rates in the world. Sally Round reports.

Marion had just arrived in the capital, Dili, when we met in November at the small brightly painted office of the National Alliance for Tobacco Control, where she's acting as mentor and coach.

The advocacy group, run by just a handful of staff and supported by the Australian charity Many Hands International, is pushing to get the two-year-old tobacco laws enforced and coax people off smoking. In Timor-Leste, 70 percent of men and nearly a third of women smoke. And the rate is high among children – a 2013 survey showed about 40 percent of 13- to 15-year-olds smoked regularly.

Cigarettes are cheap and children trawl the streets offering them at 10 cents each.

Marion said, in a low profile way, she is passing on what she has learnt as a director and a CEO in local and central government and the corporate world. "I'm a lateral thinker. Whether I've worked with government departments or private sector, it's outside-the-box thinking that gets you out of the starting gate and far ahead of the other players." Through role playing, brain-storming and other techniques, she is helping to build confidence among the advocates and campaigners.

Four months later and she is excited about the changes she sees among the organisation's staff and the progress they have made. "They're having fun. They're actually now beginning to think "what if," instead of thinking 'oh my goodness, they've said no'.

Marion's skills in capacity-building and financial know-how have also helped the National Alliance to get over the first hurdle to receive funding from the prestigious Bloomberg Initiative, which provides grants to countries worldwide to prevent tobacco use. The group has also petitioned the government to neither allow cigarette sales to under 17 year olds nor allow the sale of single cigarettes, ending up with a march to Parliament, good publicity and ministers promising to deal with the issue this year. "A small organisation doesn't mean you don't have a chance to influence change," she said.

Marion said she had always wanted to be a VSA volunteer but hadn't had the time. "It's so lovely to be able to stand aside and say, yep, now there's the time to do it. And there is nothing to pull me. My children have grown up and my grandchildren are growing up so it's a great time. Sixty-five is a retirement age in New Zealand but it's not a retirement age for most individuals."

"A small organisation doesn't mean you don't have a chance to influence change."

She is learning Tetun, one of the main local languages, teaches English, sings in a choir and enjoys the strong and active expat community. "I enjoy working with different cultures. I have done all my life," Marion said.

She said the polite and respectful Timorese culture has its drawbacks when it comes to getting things done in the office and she has encouraged a little more pushiness among the advocates. "They don't ring or email, they write a letter asking to go and speak to somebody. You hand deliver the letter and they sit and wait. When I first encountered that I couldn't believe it. Now we deliver the letter, two days later you ring them, email them and you keep doing that every day until you get your appointment. Now we don't wait more than a week. We get our appointments very quickly now.



L-r: VSA Timor-Leste Programme Officer Novi Noviani, MHI Team Leader Nelinha Pereira, VSA Timor-Leste Programme Manager Victoria Gregory, Sabino Soares.

"You've got a chance to make amazing stars out of people who are 20, 30 who can actually go in bigger leaps and bounds than you have done."

"Yes, it is pushy, but it's actually important to both the parties. It took them from 2004 to 2016 to get the (tobacco) law in place. You don't want another 12 years before it starts being enforced. Now you've got the law, let's get it started. Two years have gone passed and it hasn't happened. This year it will happen."

Marion said while she still has plenty of energy she wished she had started her volunteering adventure a little earlier. "I had not realised how important it is to share information other than just do a job. This is something that matters and they will make use of this information. You gather a whole lot of experience in life. If you had it when you were 20 you'd be an amazing star and you've got a chance to make amazing stars out of people who are 20, 30 who can actually go in bigger leaps and bounds than you have done."

Radio New Zealand reporter Sally Round travelled to Timor-Leste, with the support of Orbit World Travel, as a winner of VSA's Excellence in international development journalism award.



70% of men and nearly a third of women smoke.

40% of 13 to 15 year olds smoked regularly

Women in the lead



Front: Hon Selina Napu MP; Hon Tetangi Matopo MP; Hon Niki Rattle, Speaker; Christine Ross. Back row: Helen Maunga, Acting Clerk; Ruta Pokura, Gender Division Advisor, Ministry of Internal Affairs.

On March 8, International Women's Day, we celebrated the work our volunteers and their local partners do every day around the wider Pacific to support women and girls. Our volunteers support local projects that provide safety, good health, education, legal help and access to an income.

Women's equality is an issue that exists even at the top: In the Pacific, just 7.2% of parliamentarians are women – lower than any other region in the world.

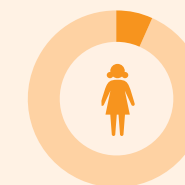
VSA volunteer Christine Ross is working as a Gender Governance Specialist with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Pacific Office in Fiji. She says that the rate of representation is "rising very slowly, or going backwards in some areas. Last year, Papua New Guinea went backwards, from three women MPs out of 111, to zero."

Through its partnerships with UN Women and the UNDP, VSA has worked to support current and potential women parliamentarians throughout the Pacific, including a workshop Christine facilitated in the Cook Islands in February for their four women MPs, plus Speaker of the Cook Islands Parliament, Honourable Niki Rattle, to form a Parliamentary Women's Caucus. Hon. Rattle said the caucus "is a proactive approach that advocates for equitable outcomes for all through law-making, budgeting, oversight and representation."

The Caucus was launched on International Women's Day, and "the significance of the launch was underscored with the visit of the Prime Minister of New Zealand, the Rt Honourable Jacinda Ardern - a woman holding the highest political office," Hon. Rattle said.

Christine says around 80 parliaments worldwide have women's caucuses, recognising cross-party commitments to advancing gender equality. The vision of the Cook Islands caucus is that women parliamentarians will advocate for equality through their work as MPs, and reach out to Cook Islands women to encourage more to stand for election.

Hon. Rattle says, "I hope that women of Cook Islands will be able to see that they too, can stand and lead."



Of 559 MPs in the Pacific (not incl. NZ or Australia), just 41 are women.



A candlelit walk



The candlelit walk in South Tarawa, Kiribati. Photo: Holly Coulter.

In November last year, more than 100 people took to the street in South Tarawa for a candlelit walk to raise awareness of gender-based violence in Kiribati.

In the Pacific, a region with high rates of gender-based violence, Kiribati has the highest, with 68% of ever-partnered women experiencing violence from a partner in her lifetime.

The candlelit walk was part of the Kiribati Family Health Association's (KFHA) Ending Sexual and Gender-Based Violence programme, which covers everything from awareness-raising to establishing a service centre for women and children leaving violent relationships.

VSA volunteer Holly Coulter, who worked with KFHA last year as a Cervical Screening Systems Adviser, was able to organise funding from VSA's partner the Tindall Foundation for a significant community outreach programme, which was launched by the candlelit walk.

KFHA Executive Director Norma Yeeting says gender-based violence is a significant issue. "It impacts on women's and children's health and well-being, including negatively affecting reproductive health. It also creates broader social and economic issues and limits the development of our country." In a more gender equal society, women are valued and able to contribute to society and the economy, improving the economic development of the country.

The programme of events began on November 25th, White Ribbon Day (to encourage male advocates to work against gender-based violence), and was developed in collaboration and partnership with the Ministry of Women, Youth, Sport and Social Affairs, the police, island councillors, traditional leaders, and local businesses among others. This, Holly says, "made for a coordinated and effective approach. It galvanised the strength of many groups and individuals to work together to end gender-based violence."

In South Tarawa, the walk was followed up with a radio panel discussion, held in the public square and broadcast around the

country, and community awareness workshops were held across 12 communities on South Tarawa in the form of a roadshow.

The Tindall funding allowed KFHA to deliver their outreach programme beyond South Tarawa for the first time, visiting the atolls of Abemama and Butaritari. This was the first time outreach in the area of gender-based violence has been offered to many of these communities.

By involving the traditional leaders in each place, as well as local police, health professionals, social welfare officers, and teachers, Holly says "activities on the outer islands were very successful. Attendees were engaged with the sessions, shared their local insight and participated in honest discussions.

"The community leaders were grateful for the cultural processes and respect shown by the visiting team and were more open to listening and participating in discussions as a result."

On Butaritari, she notes, the performing of a song about gender-based violence was extremely well received by the attendees. In Kiribati culture, songs act as gifts, where visitors to a place will often perform a song for their hosts to thank them, and are a powerful tool for communicating messages in Kiribati.

While the programme was successful, and the communities visited have committed to addressing the issue locally, Holly says there is urgent need for extended outreach, so outlying communities aren't left marginalised.

"In partnership with other stakeholders to eliminate violence so that all I-Kiribati are able to be safe, healthy and happy."

Norma Yeeting says addressing gender-based violence will remain at the heart of KFHA's work. "We are determined to work together in partnership with other stakeholders to eliminate violence so that all I-Kiribati are able to be safe, healthy and happy."

When Gita came

*When Gita came,
Up went the grass
And the roots
And the trees
Away hid the birds,
And the bats
And the bees
In came the water,
And some fish from the seas
All because of Gita's crazy as breeze*

*And electricity had no chance
When Gita came,
She came strong
With all her might
Not giving us humans
A chance to fight
Her blows were notorious
To even face for a second
Her eye brought more disaster
Once it went at winds beckon*

*When Gita came,
She came in alone
Furious and wild
She banged on all doors
Like an abandoned child
She ripped up the roofs
Pulled out stone poles
And just like that – poof!
Tonga was filled with emergency "oh's"*

*When Gita came,
We were left in ruins
Confused and amazed
At how much damage was brought
By this feisty hurricane
The only way up
Is to work together in unity
And that is what we shall do
To become the immunity.*

*When Gita came ,
Homes were destroyed
And roads were flooded
Markets were no more
Injured were the beloved
Trees had become bald
Waves lost their balance
Communication was different*



By Juliet Vynka'aki Uera

13.02.2018.

Juliet (left) is Meleoni Uera's daughter. As VSA has no staff based in Tonga, Meleoni provides on-the-ground support for our team, including orientation and village stays when they first arrive.



VSA volunteers work with people in the Pacific and beyond to create lasting, positive change for everyone.

[volunteer/donate](#)
www.vsa.org.nz

