



Lukluk

Volunteer Service Abroad
2020

vsa 
AOTEAROA
NEW ZEALAND
VOLUNTEER SERVICE ABROAD TE TŪAO TĀWĀHI





Lukluk is a celebration of our amazing partners in the Pacific and beyond.

Across the Pacific and beyond VSA volunteers work with people whose passion and aspirations are making their communities better and stronger. These are a few of their stories.

Lukluk — it's Tok Pisin for "Vista"

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Front cover image - Francis Bill showing his locally grown cowpeas (also known as black-eyed peas) introduced to add to plant-based protein to the local diet.

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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Kia ora,

This year's *Lukluk* comes at a very unusual time for VSA when we find ourselves with no volunteers in the wider Pacific (apart from one on-going assignment in Cambodia). COVID-19 and its impact hasn't meant we have stopped working however – VSA remains completely committed to our work across the wider Pacific, something we have been doing for almost 60 years, and we are actively planning and working to return to our partner communities and organisations when we can.

In this issue of *Lukluk*, which reflects the view from the Pacific, we have focused on some of our long-term partnerships, and we also feature Vicki Poole from MFAT (who is a previous Ambassador to Timor-Leste), as well as two of our own programme managers who have remained in their Pacific countries throughout the pandemic.

While we do not know when things will return to normal or when we will be able to send volunteers out again, we are working hard to develop innovative, practical and positive ways of engaging and working with Pacific communities for the next year or so, and beyond. We are looking at this time as an opportunity to do things differently where we can.

I would like to personally thank you all for your support which will help us and our partners in the Pacific to overcome the challenges we are currently facing.



Stephen Goodman,
Chief Executive

Our partners and stories

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Volunteer Service Abroad Te Tūao Tāwāhi

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Mr Bauk in front of the newly constructed house for the Ward Officer.

Creating sustainable communities by developing skills

East New Britain Deputy Governor, Mr Cosmas Bauk, is passionate about improving the lives of the people in his Province by increasing their skills.

Mr Bauk, who first became involved with VSA around five years ago, was elected Deputy Governor in the newly elected East New Britain Government. He is also the Local Level Government President.

Mr Bauk’s vision and focus is in the villages in the provinces.

“We want to improve the livelihoods of people at all levels. Unfortunately, funding and financial resources often do not reach or have an impact on the village level,” he explains.

“We have lots of resources in the villages such as good soil, coconut plantations, land, rivers, gardens, sea – but the people do not always have the right skills to make the most of these resources and improve their lives and livelihoods.

“We want people, families and communities to be sustainable and self-sufficient and not have to rely on external forces and aid. We want them to be self-reliant and in control of their own lives, destinies and resources.”

Mr Bauk believes in grass roots development – working in partnership with communities to ensure people have the life skills to thrive by providing skills training.

“We don’t need solutions from outside and it’s not sustainable to rely on outside solutions. We need skills - people need life skills to learn to look after themselves and control their own lives and communities.”

“It’s a fundamental priority,” says Mr Bauk. “For example, teaching mothers basic hygiene, health and nutrition not only changes the life of the mother but in turn improves family livelihoods.”

This development is also more sustainable as it is a “bottom up” approach rather than top down. It’s driven by need and not supply – so it is more successful.

“The best approach is that communities must tell us what they want and need (not others telling them what they need).”

In Mr Bauk’s view, the only way to achieve this successfully is to come and work with directly with the people in communities and provide them with training to increase their skills.

“We don’t need solutions from outside and it’s not sustainable to rely on outside solutions. We need skills - people need life skills to learn to look after themselves and control their own lives and communities,” he reiterates.

And this is where the VSA approach and volunteers can help.



Coconuts Nursery at Korai Ward, East New Britain.

“I first came in contact with VSA in my previous role as Minister for Education in the Province (in the previous government),” explains Mr Bauk.

“VSA is one organisation that is serious about working in partnership with communities and building capacity by sharing skills.”

Each VSA volunteer has had a different impact. While VSA has worked extensively in education and vocational education with colleges and secondary schools, the VSA “footprint” is much wider, including health.



Cocoa Nursery at Korai Ward.

“VSA’s approach is based on practical needs in our communities and working together to boost communities. Volunteers can provide technical advice and demonstrate skills and ideas. It is a sustainable way to address issues village level issues and improve the practical livelihood of our people.”

It’s a simple, but powerful equation – life skills lead to empowering people and creating confidence, which in turn creates strong communities.

Mr Bauk’s long term vision is that every individual and family is self-sustaining.

“We don’t need big roads, we need access to clean, safe water. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of hygiene and the need to be health conscious. Our approach in the Province for the next five years is to develop a policy framework to guide donors such as VSA.

“We will also draw up programmes in villages for life skills training, including improving literacy and hygiene. Our approach is to leave a visible footprint and guide people so they have a sense of worth and pride. In the end we want to create sustainable livelihoods in modern rural communities.”



An outdoor kitchen at the Community Resource Centre.



Top - Mr Bauk inside the new community-built Community Hall and Learning Centre.

Bottom - Selected coconuts for coconut breeding.



Vicki being greeted by the chief of Suco Buibau – Mr Francisco Ximenes.
World Vision project in Buibau Village – Baucau.

VSA and MFAT – working together in Timor-Leste

Vicki Poole, former New Zealand Ambassador to Timor-Leste

There is something special about Timor-Leste and its relationship with New Zealand and VSA. While Timorese people have real ambition to develop their country, many don't have the formal education and entrepreneurial experience to support this goal. Many small enterprises or organisations are set up to improve people's livelihoods or standards of living, yet many face difficulties in growing and making a real, sustainable difference.

VSA's commitment to building capacity in Timor-Leste and responding to the nation's needs saw the number of volunteers increase to over 30 during my time there.

The individual VSA assignments were very varied and seemed to fall into two main categories. Some were about bringing in people with specific technical skills to improve how

activities were delivered and to train staff. Others were intended to build the capability of staff and improve the governance of the partner organisations.

By using these two approaches VSA was able to make a real difference and help our Timorese partners on the way to achieving at least some of their development outcomes.

The partnership between the VSA team and the New Zealand Embassy is based on manaakitanga and shared values. We would get together regularly to chat about politics, the economy and social development challenges. Three or four times a year we would meet for formal planning sessions to ensure that we were aligned in as many areas as we could, including tourism, education and sustainable development. This didn't mean

that our programmes mirrored each other's but we did try to identify potential synergies and build on these.

Many people in Timor-Leste saw us as one team, with all of us representing New Zealand in our day to day lives and work, as well as at large events. People sometimes commented that we had a large and very effective staff at the Embassy, but we were only nine in total. It was our New Zealand Defence Force, Police colleagues and the VSA team that helped us achieve a similar public profile to much larger embassies. I really appreciated this New Zealand support at our events, which we often used to showcase VSA and other New Zealand projects. We simply couldn't have done this without our VSA friends.

There are many standout assignments. I particularly liked the hub and spoke approach where one volunteer supported several organisations. This was probably challenging for the volunteers but meant we could spread the talents of a single volunteer across several smaller organisations.

VSA's early childhood education support has been critical, with VSA educators working alongside UNICEF, CARE, the Ministry of Education and other small NGOs for the past 10 years or more. This has complemented our New Zealand government-funded education programme and helped us to have

a positive impact on the future lives of young children in Timor-Leste.

VSA volunteers are highly valued because they come with their manaakitanga, kotahitanga and can-do approach. VSA tries really hard to carefully identify assignments that will make a difference and be a good placement for a volunteer and this is usually successful.

One of VSA's strengths is that it keeps a close eye on how things work out. Sometimes, despite efforts to put in additional support, an assignment might have to end early. Despite this, the assignments were still usually of benefit to both the organisation and the volunteer. Another thing that sets VSA volunteers apart is the way they network over and above their volunteer roles – helping out other community groups and small businesses, promoting tourism, developing Tetun language children's books, and running training courses – all on top of their formal VSA roles.

My time in Dili would not have been as rich and as interesting if the VSA volunteers had not been there. My husband, Rick, and I made some good friends and they introduced us to people we would not otherwise have connected with. We visited more of Timor-Leste, met with remote communities, and got to see first-hand the difference VSA can make.



Cyclone Harold damage in Vanuatu.

The view from Trevor

Trevor Johnston, VSA Vanuatu Programme Manager

Since VSA's decision to repatriate all volunteers in Vanuatu on the 14 March the events that have unfolded here have been a blur of chaos and calm. Through the forced repatriation, closing of international borders and the suspension of international flights due to the global pandemic, an earthquake and a devastating cyclone, Vanuatu has proven to be a country of remarkable resilience. This is not a value or quality that we can teach NiVan citizens but rather a virtue that we can learn from.

Being a programme manager on the ground as an observer and being engaged has proven eye-opening and a huge learning opportunity. Sustainable development is seen as the balance between our financial resources, our social responsibilities

and the need to protect the environment. Yet, in Vanuatu, through each crisis, it has been much more than that. Here sustainable development is a moral duty of care towards its citizens. The deep cultural connection between communities, tribes, and islands galvanise the country into a devotion to care for their people.

The leadership of early decision-making in stopping all cruise ships in early March, the immediate messaging around social distancing and hand washing, and closing the borders, probably saved Vanuatu from a COVID-19 outbreak. Handwashing stations outside every store in Port Vila were up and available in mid-March, as well as curfews, signs and media notifications. The speed and



Cyclone Harold damage in Vanuatu.

Here sustainable development is a moral duty of care towards its citizens. The deep cultural connection between communities, tribes, and islands galvanise the country into a devotion to care for their people.

efficiency were unbelievable. This is the level of efficiency, that is usually attributed to a developed nation, yet Vanuatu proved to be equal to that and better prepared.

Being "stuck" in Port Vila, as flights were cancelled to New Zealand on 25 March, proved to be a blessing as the rest of the world went into lockdown with restricted movement and freedom. Yet in Vanuatu we were in a glorious bubble of relative normality compared to the rest of the world. Coupled with its unspeakable beauty, Vanuatu felt like a safe haven.

Life seemed normal until Tropical Cyclone Harold hit Vanuatu on 7 and 8 April. All international and domestic flights had been cancelled so assistance to the most devastated areas was difficult. Some aid arrived from New Zealand and Australia,

and even though domestic flights resumed on 11 April, the logistics of providing humanitarian aid would have been challenging for any country.

The photos and stories of devastation were heart-wrenching and the decision to stay and assist was an easy one. On my return to Luganville in late April, I was stunned by the extent of damage and destruction. I volunteered my time for a local charity to deliver food and supplies to remote villages and with Santo Medical to do medical outreach in the community and in remote villages. While there was physical damage, it was the remarkable resilience of the people that I saw and met along the way that opened my eyes to the deep sense of community of the NiVan people.

For most of us, losing our home and possessions can be emotionally devastating. To the NiVan people it is something they have lived with for hundreds of years; it's a part of life. They help each other; share resources, offer a kind word or a beaming smile, plant some island cabbage and manioc, and find time to share in the joys of life over a bowl of kava. They are used to disaster and overcoming it.

A local told me that he lost his entire house in the cyclone, and then he laughed. I asked why he was laughing? He said, "Trevor my house is in Fiji, I hope someone finds it and uses it. It's a good house!" And then he burst out laughing again. He then said, "Tomorrow, they (meaning the community), will come help me rebuild my new house."



Josh and Brigitte lose it at Santo airport!!

Resilience is not only about enduring hardship; it's about letting go and bouncing back. In Vanuatu bouncing back is always with the community at your side. It's a beautiful country of beautiful people.

The head of the Vanuatu Government, Prime Minister Bob Loughman, had encouraged every business house and all Vanuatu citizens to take time under the conditions of the State Emergency to do whatever is necessary to ensure that families are safer when a next cyclone strikes and to plant and raise food. "During good times, we must work extra hard to prepare for the next cyclone season," he said.

As they prepare for 40 years of Independence, Vanuatu has proven through these current challenges that they can stand as a proud and independent nation, founded on resilience to any challenges yet galvanised in a deep sense of community. It's a country that cares for its people and its future.

It is Vanuatu.

Vanuatu volunteer departure groups

Top image: left to right: Michelle Knappstein, Nicole Colmar, Beatrice Pearce, David Hart, Julie Peake, Andrea Carr, Gerard van de Ven, Jessie Gartner, Frith Walker, Elly Govers, Alison Tu'i'onetoa.

Bottom image: left to right: (back row) – Chris Hartnett, Michelle Johnston (PM partner), Josh Mitikulena, Trevor Johnston (Vanuatu PM). (front row) – Natasha Thanwalla, Thomas Gillman, Helena Ireland, Brigitte Olul (In Country Officer).





Francis Bill - Farm Owner.

Supporting the community during COVID-19

Johannes Gambo, VSA's Programme Manager in Papua New Guinea (PNG), was on holiday when VSA decided to repatriate all its in-country volunteers due to COVID-19. He immediately returned to East New Britain (ENB), the province where VSA is based, to manage the departure of all volunteers back to New Zealand.

"I had to get back to PNG to ensure all our volunteers were able to return safely," he said. After the safe return of all the volunteers, Johannes remained in PNG where he continues to support VSA's partner organisations and communities. With no volunteers in the country, Johannes is now directly supporting different partner organisations in the health, education, and agriculture sectors.

"I have been meeting and working with our partners to, firstly, understand their challenges; secondly, co-design solutions to help address their needs and emerging issues; and thirdly, strengthen their capacity to deal with similar issues in the future. However, this is no substitute to having volunteers in the country and our partner organisations are desperate to have VSA volunteers return. This highlights the importance of our volunteers and the high regard our partner organisations and communities have for their skills, knowledge, and experience."

It has been a busy time for Johannes as he deals with multiple issues including helping partner organisations implement e-learning systems and enabling communities

VSA was at the forefront of supporting the Province in its pandemic response by working with the ENB Provincial State of Emergency Committee and Department of Education to create resources for educational institutes and partner organisations.

to improve nutrition, food security, and livelihoods. Unfortunately, as in many other countries, there has been an increase in domestic violence over the lockdown period, so in the absence of volunteers, Johannes has also supported the work of the FMI Sisters who operate the Meri Seif Haus (women's safe house) in Kokopo.

Johannes says that enforcement of domestic violence laws is vital to curbing domestic violence and piercing through the shell of impunity. It is well known that gender-based violence laws are 'paper tigers' without enforcement.

But this hasn't been the only work that has kept Johannes busy over this time. In fact, VSA was at the forefront of supporting the Province in its pandemic response by working with the ENB Provincial State of Emergency Committee and Department of Education to create resources for educational institutes and partner organisations. These resources included pandemic planning checklists for universities and colleges which were developed to ensure they could play an integral role in protecting the health and safety of students, employees and their families during a pandemic.

"We wanted to help our partner organisations be better prepared in their pandemic prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery plan, so we worked on creating different resources including flyers, posters and a website. We also used these resources to support the provincial government before and during the lockdown," explains Johannes.

Although COVID-19 has fortunately not yet spread widely through the community (despite many people not having easy access to running water for hygiene) there have been serious impacts. "The eight-week state of emergency had a severe impact on people's livelihoods."



Michael Pineri displaying freshly picked Aibika (Island Cabbage) from Francis's farm.

In PNG, subsistence agriculture and the informal economy support the livelihoods of over 80 per cent of the population. While the lockdown measures played a vital role in mitigating and containing the spread of the coronavirus, they also created major difficulties for the most vulnerable people. For some people, the lockdown was an existential threat and the sudden loss of income combined with hikes in transport and food costs created serious economic and social problems.

“Many people do not have refrigerators, so rely on going to market every day – not just to buy food for themselves but also to sell food for their livelihoods,” says Johannes. As the main markets were closed, farmers were unable to bring their fresh fruits and vegetables to the market. The perishability of fresh fruits and vegetables resulted in post-harvest losses and significant loss of income.

The market women were also deprived of income-generating opportunities. The loss of income combined with the absence of social protection continues to have major consequences, especially for women-headed households. With the existing high levels of poverty, there are concerns that the pandemic countermeasures such as the lockdown will drive vulnerable poor people into deeper poverty. However, the pandemic response

did highlight some positive things such as community spirit.

“People worked together to support affected communities with food, masks, and financial donations,” says Johannes.

VSA has always been involved with nutrition and food security challenges but the high cost of living caused by COVID-19 reinforces the importance of locally produced food in connection with healthy eating and food security. “So, in addition to providing 1000 bars of soap to ensure communities are protected during this time, I also assisted by donating beans and rice seeds to communities who are now growing, selling, and consuming their own produce,” says Johannes.

Nutrition, food security and cooking skills have a major impact on family well-being. “If a family can eat well, this can minimise or eliminate diet-related diseases, which in turn, reduces disease burden. Taking an holistic approach is important – recently I was involved in organising cooking lessons in various villages, and it was great to see both men and women coming together to learn how to cook.”

The leaders of some of the communities recently wrote thanking VSA and the New Zealand government for support in “changing and developing the living standard of the indigenous people of ENB”.



Communities from Gaulim Ward learning how to establish a mat nursery for rice seedlings.



Communities from Gaulim Ward present their constructed mat nursery for rice seedlings.



Communities from Gaulim Ward learning how to establish a mat nursery for rice seedlings.



Locally grown cowpeas (also known as black-eyed peas) introduced to add to plant-based protein to local diet.



Johannes with women farmers at Ramale Ward preparing the land for planting.



Clint Smyth with Cambodian farmers.

A beneficial association

Senghorng Tout was the Enterprise Development and Marketing Facilitator of iDE's Cambodia Agribusiness Development Facility and was tasked with strengthening the Melon Association of Siem Reap Meanchey (MASC).

That involved everything from improving market access, to helping develop growers' business, finance and marketing skills, to personal coaching of farmers to become more sustainable. His background is in animal science and veterinary medicine and he holds a Masters degree in animal production, hygiene, quality and environment from François Rabelais, France.

Before his involvement with the Melon Association, Senghorng worked with crop and livestock farmers to grow their businesses. In his iDE role he was working with

VSA volunteer Clint Smyth. Clint's a horticulturalist and exporter with immense experience with produce marketing and exports as well as on the ground agricultural skills.

Senghorng says working with VSA has helped the association make real improvements for growers both on the farm and in the market. "[We've been] reaching our target sale of 30 tons a month. Our farmers feel happier with our melon association since we got so much good advice and recommendations from Clint regarding the proper way to run the association business as well as individual farm management matters.

"He brought good solutions to the melon association to deal with the shortage of working capital which has been a barrier for the association getting more supply and members for nearly two years."

Senghorng says working with VSA has helped the association make real improvements for growers both on the farm and in the market.

Senghorng has now been promoted to team leader for the production team and Clint continues to support the Association. Clint's new colleague, Miss Vann Chanthan, is an experienced field agronomist and Clint is mentoring her in the role.

"The first phase of my work involved stabilising and strengthening the business so that it could become profitable, creating more confidence from the farmer suppliers and being able to access more retail markets. This foundation work enabled MASC to survive the impacts of COVID-19 when sales dropped by about 50%," says Clint.

Phase two involves establishing a formal business structure for MASC which includes formally registering with the Ministry of Interior and then the Ministry of Commerce. Registration will give the Association a voice and representation at a national level and the ability to advocate on issues that affect its farmer members.

Senghorng speaks warmly of the relationship with VSA. "I've noticed the VSA volunteers are openminded and friendly people and willing to provide as much support as they can. Moreover, VSA sends good candidates that we like and have the right background for what we want."



Cambodian market.



Vocation Unit Class with some of the products for sale inside the Display Room.

Loto Taumafai Society for People with Disabilities

Loto Taumafai Society for People with Disabilities (LTS), one of VSA's longest standing partner organisations, has come a very long way since it was first set up in Samoa in 1981.

"In those days all we could offer was essentially a day care centre and basic education services, helping out families caring for the disabled by allowing them some free time," says LTS CEO and Principal, Leta'a Devoe.

"Today we run a school and a community disability service combined with an early intervention programme and a vocational unit. We're known as the face of disability in Samoa because of our long history."

Leta'a himself joined LTS in 2003 as treasurer before taking up the role of CEO. He says the professionalism of the volunteers provided by VSA since 1998 has been pivotal in guiding the organisation from its humble beginnings to where it is today.

"When I came along I wanted to have specialist advisers to help us differentiate and adapt the curriculum to try and meet the diverse learning needs of children with disabilities, as well as give us advice and training on teaching strategies that

actively engage the children through interactive and visual learning, both at school and in their own homes," he says. "I can honestly say that without VSA's assistance we wouldn't have been able to raise the standard of our teaching and our community disability support service.

"All of our VSA volunteers have been a success story– it's hard to single any one out. One would leave, and then another would arrive and build on the legacy of their predecessor. LTS has benefitted from the wonderful capacity building support by all the volunteers over the years who provided such extensive training programmes and mentoring sessions for our staff – directly meeting a real need which is not available in Samoa."

"I can honestly say that without VSA's assistance we wouldn't have been able to raise the standard of our teaching and our community disability support service."

LTS' doors are open to all children with disabilities, from physical to sensory and intellectual - all are welcomed. Its mission is to provide access to inclusive, equitable and quality education and support services, enabling all people with disabilities to function as independently as possible and to realise their hopes and full potential. But the challenge has been to wrangle the right expertise to achieve this.



Some of the products for sale inside the Display Room created by the Vocation Unit Class.

"Even the Bachelor of Education course at the National University of Samoa just touches the tip of the iceberg when it comes to disability," Leta'a says. "The lectures are very general, and there's no instruction on specific disabilities and how to deal with them educationally. So we don't produce trained teachers who can deliver the curriculum at three levels: catering to those who are hard to teach, those who struggle and those who can learn more easily."

The LTS school currently caters for 90 students up to Year 11, or around the age of 18. Not long ago they catered for up to 140 pupils, but under Samoa's inclusive education policy

introduced in 2016 LTS has been able to place some of its students into mainstream schools. VSA advisers have also helped set up therapeutic support and educational programmes for children with disabilities in their homes and LTS Community Disability Services currently visit 186 clients in the islands of Savai'i and Upolu.

After their Year 11 many older students transfer to the LTS vocational unit, **where they learn to make handicrafts like carving or screen printing based on traditional Samoan "elei" designs. The sale of these items helps the school to purchase resources.**

"We haven't been able to achieve the level of education to enable our pupils to go beyond Year 11," Leta'a says regretfully. "But after consultation with the Assistant Principals and teachers we have selected some students who have the potential to assist in the classrooms as trainee teacher aides. I am a great believer in that.

"For the first time we now have a trainee teacher aide who is close to completing his internationally recognised, accredited Australian qualification through the courses offered by the Australia Pacific Technical College. And we have three



Secondary class at Loto Taumafai Society for People with Disabilities.



Primary class at Loto Taumafai Society for People with Disabilities.

more in the pipeline ready to start," Leta'a says proudly. "That is a real success story, and it is all thanks to the help of VSA volunteers in adapting the curriculum so our students can understand it."

Despite all the impressive progress, there is still much work to be done to bring the school to the point where it no longer needs to rely on the help of organisations like VSA. Leta'a says Samoa is in desperate need of a speech therapist who could work with the school for perhaps three days a week and share their expertise with other Disability Service Providers for the remaining time.

"I just want to expand and improve on what we have now," he says. "We need to document what we have done so we can achieve best practice. We need to finalise our curriculum work, and it would be helpful to have an adviser for when one of our assistant principals takes over from me as principal.

"It's a long process that can't be achieved overnight. But I am hopeful that VSA can continue to help us to upskill and upgrade so we can improve our services. As long as I am here it will be my mission to do things better."

Some volunteer memories



The village cats often joined our classes, Smiley was a regular! Shaun Bowler, Solomon Islands.



Mary Tuhaika, Lewis Johnson (VSA), Eddien Delay and Di Paki at the Honiara City Council Youth Desk with Childfund New Zealand explaining their role in Honiara during Deputy Prime Minister of New Zealand The Hon. Winston Peters' official delegation to the Solomon Islands.



VSA volunteer Rolf Huber at a business coaching meeting in 'Eua, Tonga, with a local wood carver.



Roi Burnett and Julia O'Connor cutting up oranges at the VSA stall in Bairiki Square on International Volunteer Day, Kiribati.



Lauren Griffin becoming an Island girl in her lavalava in Falealupo, Samoa.



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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



Connecting people – transforming lives

