



Vista

Volunteer Service Abroad 2020

vsa
AOTEAROA
NEW ZEALAND
VOLUNTEER SERVICE ABROAD TE TŪAO TĀWĀHI



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

We send skilled Kiwis to share their experience and knowledge directly with local people and communities. VSA volunteers normally work on everything from mental health in Kiribati to safe water in Vanuatu. Together with our partners, our volunteers have built local businesses, provided education and improved health, safeguarded the environment and fostered good governance.

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

Connecting people – transforming lives.

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Front cover – “Hi 5” – working with children under five to improve hygiene through better handwashing practices. Photo: Live & Learn.

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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Tuvalu. Photo: Hilary Boyes.

Kia ora,

As we write this edition of *Vista*, I am conscious that all of us across New Zealand and the global community are facing a difficult and unprecedented time. As for everyone, 2020 has so far been an extremely challenging year for VSA. In March, we made the very difficult decision to return all current VSA volunteers and accompanying partners to New Zealand in response to the New Zealand Government’s advice relating to the COVID–19 pandemic.

As events developed over the following days, that decision was confirmed to be the correct one. We know it was very disappointing and unsettling for everyone, but this was a unique situation and we made our decisions based on the welfare of our volunteers and the communities where we operate.

VSA has been working in the Pacific since 1962 and we remain completely committed supporting our partner organisations across the wider Pacific. We will be returning to these partner communities and organisations when we can.

An increasingly important aspect of our support, and one that is particularly relevant as we face crises such as the COVID–19 pandemic and the climate emergency, is providing volunteers to build capacity for critical water, sanitation and health (WASH) related projects.

WASH projects support a number of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals, in particular achieving universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all by 2030. We have partnered with a number of organisations to support these projects including Downer, Engineers Without Borders (EWB) and various government agencies in the Pacific.

Water and sanitation projects are so critical that this issue of *Vista* solely focuses on WASH and some of the WASH related assignments VSA volunteers have worked on over the last year.

One of these volunteers is Jules Scott-Hansen, who was working on improving community resilience by providing access to clean water in Kiribati.

Kiribati is one of the Pacific nations facing potentially severe climate related impacts, in particular from sea level rise. “There are predictions that Kiribati may disappear under the rising sea by the end of the century,” says Jules. “However, when you see the love and pride the I-Kiribati have for their country, you realise that this is first and foremost their home and all efforts should be made to help them stay here as long as possible.”

I hope you enjoy this issue of *Vista* and thank you for your continued support of VSA over this difficult time.

Stephen Goodman, VSA CEO

Volunteer Service Abroad Te Tūao Tāwāhi

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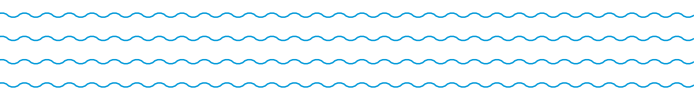
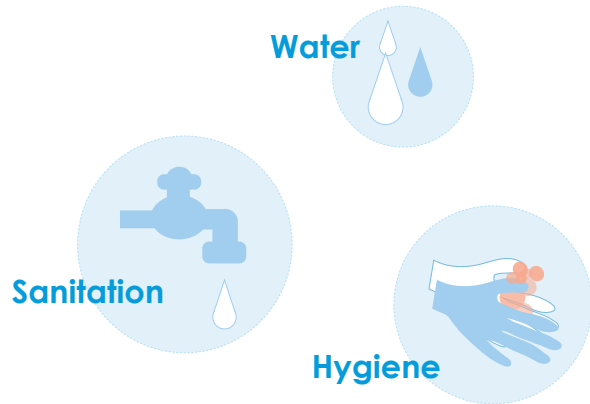


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“Hi 5” – working with children under five to improve hygiene through better handwashing practices. Photo: Live & Learn.

Why We WASH?



With nearly two and a half billion people worldwide still without access to adequate sanitation facilities, the need for WASH – Water, Sanitation and Hygiene – projects is unabated.

VSA volunteers have worked on many WASH projects; from engineering work to build critical infrastructure and local expertise in the Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste, to teaching children in Tonga good handwashing practices.

And with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic still playing out around the world, the need for WASH improvements has increased.

VSA CEO Steve Goodman says that water and sanitation projects will feature largely in VSA's work for some time. "Unfortunately the needs are there and they are not going away. There are so many development needs that have water, sanitation and the subsequent improvements in health at their core.

"Having good reliable systems for water and hygiene available is fundamental to allowing all other development to happen. All other development benefits from improving the health of the community."

Ryley Webster recently joined VSA as its Operations Manager – a role which includes overseeing parts of WASH assignments. He has previously worked on several WASH projects, including an urban project to curb water pollution in Port Moresby.

He says that WASH projects can offer huge development gains. "Hundreds of thousands of children die every year from diarrhoea – it's tragic and it is preventable with clean water and good hygiene."

The threat of COVID has emphasised the need for clean water. "People aren't going to wash their hands if that risks making them sick because the water isn't clean.

"To achieve the best results, we need people to be able to manage their own water. Without that ability we risk the infrastructure falling into disrepair over time or good hygiene habits being lost once the project is over. That's why our model of working closely with communities is so important."

Steve agrees, "We have good partnerships with organisations including Live & Learn and Engineers Without Borders, and the value our volunteers add is the ability to work closely with communities and to make sure that these projects are owned by the people they benefit.

"Our approach, coupled with our partners' expertise, is changing the lives of communities. When it comes to development there is a hierarchy of need out there and it can often be a juggle to prioritise these needs, but because they underpin so many other development outcomes, WASH projects are a clear choice. It doesn't come more fundamental than water."



VSA Volunteer Joanne Lentfer showing the children handwashing practices. Photo: Live & Learn

Living & Learning together

With offices in seven Pacific Islands and a focus on six key areas of development, Live & Learn covers a lot of ground. It's a network of local organisations in the Pacific and Asia and is a relatively new partner for VSA but talking with Live & Learn Executive Director Christian Nielsen it becomes easy to see how the two organisations gel.

"Having spent most of my career in the Pacific I have seen the power of development approaches that focus on building confidence and connectivity, and that use strengths that already exist.

"In the Pacific, we work with more than 500 partners including local schools, health clinics and local institutions. Many of these partnerships are a decade old. Localising development efforts and allowing space for people and communities to grow in their own time leads to change that lasts.

"The challenges facing the Pacific can best be addressed by building strength from within and allowing space for local communities and people to lead, localise development solutions and build relationships between communities, and governments."

Before her assignment was cut short by the coronavirus pandemic, VSA volunteer Joanne Lentfer had spent eight months helping Live & Learn establish its Tonga office. "In Tonga water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) is Live & Learn's first project, having said that it's a big project that spans infrastructure, education, and climate resilience."

With a background in business management and development, Joanne's focus has been on building capacity in the Tonga office. "Part of the role has been developing systems and processes, but like all VSA work you end up doing a bit of everything.

"We've worked with village water committees on how to manage finances and provided plumbing training and we've been working with pre-schools and kindies, teaching children about handwashing. We've put together operating manuals and educational resources in Tongan and worked hands-on with people on how to keep their rainwater systems maintained.



Live & Learn campaign launch. Photo: Live & Learn.

"Tonga has a 'cluster' system where government agencies and NGOs form a network to respond collectively and collaboratively to humanitarian disasters. Live & Learn is very involved in the WASH cluster, not only supporting recovery and rehabilitation of water and sanitation following a disaster, but building long term resilience and better preparedness for climate change. When you see the damage done by Cyclone Gita and now Cyclone Harold you see how important that is."

Christian agrees, "Protecting local ecosystems is the most important survival mechanism for Pacific Islanders as these provide water and foods resources. This is highlighted in the COVID response where local food systems have provided a lifeline to local populations as borders are closing and imported food supplies in decline.

"In a post COVID world the role of VSA volunteers within the Live & Learn network will be even more important as local populations in the Pacific are rebuilding their economies and lives"



Water tank delivery by boat to Mauke. Photo: Bruce Corbett.

Resilience in the face of climate change

As his 65th birthday loomed over the horizon, engineer Bruce Corbett decided it wasn't time yet to become "a boring old fellow". His answer? Signing up with VSA to help put together a water and sanitation management strategy in the Cook Islands.

Rhodesian-born, Bruce came to New Zealand from South Africa in 2009. "I've worked since the 80s on water systems in developing countries in Africa," Bruce says.

"My VSA contract was originally a year, but I extended to 16 months because things were at a point where the extra time allowed me to kick the ball over the line. I could walk away saying I'd achieved what I set out to do."

Bruce was assigned to work with the division in the Office of the Prime Minister responsible for the outer islands, or Pa Enua. Spread out over a vast area – the Northern group is 1300 kilometres from the Southern group – the islands have limited access, declining populations and variable climates.

"To get from the main island of Rarotonga to Rakahanga atoll in the Northern group by air and boat return can cost you more than a round-the-world airticket," Bruce explains.

"Supplies to these islands might not arrive for months, which creates complex and difficult problems. If you have a piece of machinery with a missing part it can sit idle for a long time, and I think that influences the way people plan their lives. If the boat comes in, everyone stops what they're doing and their whole world changes for two days."

Resilience in the face of climate change was a key part of Bruce's remit. He helped develop a Green Climate Fund proposal presented at the Round-Table meeting held in Rarotonga.

Also, soon after he arrived he found that the four mobile desalination units New Zealand had provided to help combat the 2012 drought had gone into a container and not been maintained, to the point that one was beyond repair.

By the time he left the three remaining units were up and running and a new one had been brought in. Crucially, local training was undertaken and responsibility for ongoing maintenance had been written into the relevant job description and budget set aside.

"As VSA volunteers we're not consultants to tell people what to do," Bruce says. "We provide mentoring assistance. You have to be interested in the local culture, recognise the constraints people face and adjust your expertise accordingly. If you go in and insist people do things your way, it will all come to a halt the moment you fly out."

"The key missing element I picked up was the lack of coordination between the people responsible for different aspects of water and sanitation management – health officials, education, engineering and government. So rather than more resources, there was a need for more coordination."

Bruce's response was to build relationships and trust by talking with the various people involved about how they might work together. "By the time I left, they were telling me what the problems were and what they would do to fix them," he says.

For Bruce and his wife Anita, the whole VSA experience was about engagement with the people they met.

“In the West, you worry about imposing on other people,” Bruce says “but in Rarotonga we became part of the community. Kids shouted ‘hello’ as we drove around. We were invited to family functions. You greet everyone and you share.

“Anita volunteered as a school aide working with children with educational difficulties. And she’s become a very good hat and ei (garland) maker after being taught by the local women on Mauke and Rarotonga.”

The economic boom in the Cook Islands on the back of tourism worries Bruce, as does the move away from local production in favour of imported foodstuffs. “The growth in tourism is a real challenge and the effects are sad to see,” he says.

His VSA assignment was Bruce’s first experience of volunteering and he says he and his wife loved it and would do it again, whether in the Cooks or elsewhere. That 65th birthday was spent in Rarotonga, where Bruce’s visiting brother laid out a birthday greeting in coconut pieces on the lawn. Two days later, the pieces were rearranged to mark Bruce and Anita’s 40th wedding anniversary.

“I’m lucky,” Bruce says simply.



Arrival on Mauke with late NZ High Commissioner Tessa Te Mata and her sister with VSA Volunteer Bruce Corbett, and accompanying partner Anita Corbett.



Mauke Transport with VSA Volunteer Bruce Corbett.



Aunty Mii – teaching Anita hat making. Photo: Bruce Corbett.

Clean water, resilient communities – and biscuits!

One of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals is to achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all by 2030 – and VSA has partnered with Engineers Without Borders (EWB) and the Ministry of Infrastructure and Sustainable Energy (MISE) in Kiribati to help achieve this goal in the country.

VSA/EWB volunteer, Jules Scott-Hansen, was on assignment in Kiribati as a Water Supply Adviser implementing a trial project with solar distillation technology. "The goal was to assess whether this technology is viable in Kiribati as an alternative way of producing fresh water," says Jules. "Kiribati faces many challenges with access to fresh water and this project is aimed at helping communities be more resilient in times of drought and other water shortage situations."

Improving community resilience by providing access to clean water was a crucial goal of this project. This will ultimately help communities to be healthier and have more time and energy to spend on other priorities such as family, work and education.

Jules worked in close collaboration with her colleagues in the Water and Sanitation Engineering Unit (WSEU) as well as the local community. "My colleagues were mostly engineers and several of them are female which was really great to see. We worked closely with the local community and arranged meetings with them through their respective Councillors. As I don't speak much Kiribati my local counterpart was a huge help in translating and engaging with them."

The work also involved visiting various sites across Kiribati, and each site visit could provide some interesting experiences.

"Meetings with the local Mayors are formal in a Kiribati-style so the formalities usually didn't last long," says Jules. "If you can get someone to laugh in the first five minutes that's usually a good sign. In true New Zealand fashion I made sure I brought a pack of biscuits along to the meetings which always went down well!"



Jules working with colleagues to promote Global Handwashing Day



Jules with the Mayor of North Tarawa.



Jules visiting a gardening project developed by her colleagues

Clean water, lasting community impact

According to a sanitation and water report by the World Health Organisation (WHO), people living in the Pacific region have lower access to improved drinking-water than anywhere else in the world.

When water comes from improved and more accessible sources, people spend less time and effort physically collecting it, meaning they can be productive in other ways.

In the three months of Andrew Baker's assignment as a Sustainable Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Engineer in Tonga, Andrew and his team installed 194 water tanks to communities across Tongatapu and 'Eua, who now have access to clean water.

"One house I went to there were two donated tanks, but one was badly damaged during Cyclone Gita, so the women and children of the house carried their water quite a distance to wash and cook with. The woman there had a baby probably six weeks old and I thought, I've got to do something about this. We improvised and got running water for the family, knowing that made a real difference." Andrew says.

Andrew is a 'repeat volunteer'. He first volunteered with VSA as a Technology Education Advisor to the Tokelau Department of Education in 2009. After the devastation of Cyclone Evan in Samoa in 2013, he advised on the construction of 200 cyclone shelters for the Adventist Development and Relief Agency and European Commission. After volunteering as Building and Maintenance Adviser in Bougainville in 2016, Andrew started working with Live & Learn Tonga. Since the destruction of Cyclone Gita in 2018, Live & Learn Tonga has been working with communities towards the recovery of WASH facilities.

Andrew's assignment was to provide technical support and mentoring to a group of four graduate students from the Tonga Institute of Science and Technology. The role also involved building skills and sustainability to ensure the WASH facilities will be maintained into the future.

"It got to the stage where our team could talk to the owner of the house and tell them about the various aspects of the stages. I was doing that originally, but then I asked my team to pass that on, by the end, we had all four team members doing it and that was a big achievement really."

One of Andrew's most memorable moments on assignment was when he met a group of women from the Haáteiho community. Meleoni Uera, who works for VSA to support and train volunteers while in country, reached out to Andrew.

"The community was granted funding and had received sixty 5000 litre tanks, but had no technical knowledge or resources to install them," said Andrew.

"Meleoni had heard how past projects in other communities had not ended so well with communities rushing in to build foundations, only to find problems later down the track."

"We didn't have the technical expertise to begin with to understand and know where would be the best place to put a foundation and all the technicalities involved," said Meleoni.

"With Andrew being around and his willingness to give up an entire day as well as other days for planning we set out to visit each house in my village that was to receive a tank. "A hundred percent of those houses agreed with his recommendation."

Andrew's knowledge and support has made a real impact to the entire community, and an even greater impact for women and children (particularly as the task to collect water usually falls on women and children of the household).

"My community will be forever grateful to Andrew and to VSA for the assistance and willingness to share their expertise with us," Meleoni says.



Collaborative projects with Live & Learn and VSA Volunteer Andrew Baker.



Collaborative projects with Live & Learn and VSA Volunteer Andrew Baker.



One example of building capacity was Michelle’s involvement in the Department of Water Resources Plumbers’ Training. “One of the older DoWR staff was retiring and the training was run to pass on as much of his knowledge as possible to other staff members. I helped with some of the theory sessions on engineering design and surveying systems and also participated and helped out in the practical sessions. We built a ferrous cement tank and connected it with guttering to an existing community hall in one community (Hog Harbour), we built one new Rainwater Harvesting Structure in Sara and also connected some tanks and guttering to existing buildings in Sara and Kohle.

“Working closely with communities can be challenging for a variety of reasons. Some of the most rewarding experiences were watching how my counterparts deal with these difficult situations and make the most of them. I also loved watching some of the graduates in the team grow and take responsibility for their work and making decisions.”

Water for communities in Vanuatu

VSA/EWB volunteer Michelle Knapstein worked closely with her partner organisation counterparts and with communities in the Southern Provinces of Vanuatu to help build capacity within the Vanuatu’s Department of Water Resources (DoWR).

This joint assignment with Engineers Without Borders (EWB) focused on completing surveys, designs and procurement without assistance

“I helped my Ni-Vanuatu counterparts collect information from the field to use in design, prepared designs for rural water supply systems, prepared documents to procure materials and construct and monitor projects,” Michelle explains.

“We generally went to a community to monitor a Drinking Water Safety and Security Plan (DWSSP) workshop occurring in one of the communities or to collect information following a DWSSP to help the community with the water supply improvements in their improvement plan that was prepared during the DWSSP. It’s all about improving accessibility and safety of rural water supply to communities.”



Building a ferrous cement tank connected with guttering to an existing community hall in Hog Harbour, Vanuatu as part of the Department of Water Resources Plumbers Training

Facing energy and geological resource challenges in the Pacific

Developing sources of sustainable and renewable energy is critically important in the Pacific. Most Pacific nations rely heavily on petroleum and there is an urgent need to move away from this reliance as well as to manage petroleum importation safely and cost-effectively. There is also an urgent need to use geological resources to develop resilience to the impacts of the climate crisis including sea level rise.

These are some of the key challenges for The Pacific Community (SPC), the major leading scientific and technical intergovernmental organisation in the Pacific region. The SPC is owned and governed by its 26 Pacific country and territory members and provides technical, advisory, statistical and information support to its member governments and administrations. Much of its focus is on major cross-cutting issues, such as climate change, disaster risk management, food security, gender equality, human rights, non-communicable diseases and youth employment.

One of SPC's programmes is the Georesources and Energy Programme (GEP) that sits within the Geoscience, Energy and Maritime Division, which develops critical data, applied science, and technical solutions to overcome challenges facing SPC members. The GEP is committed to reducing the carbon footprint of existing energy networks and use and developing more sustainable energy solutions into the future.

To face these challenges GEP is involved in a number of major programmes including developing sustainable energy programmes, managing energy data, providing governments with petroleum management advice and conducting bathymetric (ocean floor) and similar geological surveys to source sustainable construction material and manage coastal retreat in the face of sea level rise.

Of course, to effectively develop and implement these programmes the GEP needs funding.

This is where VSA volunteer Charlie Inggs has been able to help. During his 2019 12 week assignment based in Fiji, Charlie developed a funding strategy for SPC's GEP programme.

"I worked on producing a practical working document and toolkit for the organisation to use and share with others," said Charlie. "The focus of my work was to help SPC find ways to sustain and grow funding for the critical SPC energy and geological resource programmes."

To ensure the strategy was relevant and workable, Charlie worked closely with the GEP programme team to identify their requirements. He also consulted across the SPC and the donor community to understand what was achievable.



Fijian Ilovo. Photo: Charlie Inggs.

"The assignment was really collaborative, and it was great to work and interact with my colleagues in the strategy team to produce the final document. The onus was on me to initiate collaboration across the organisation and with other partners.

"In the end I was proud to have delivered a document that the team desperately needed but had not been able to do on their own."

This is not the first time Charlie has supported organisations and communities in the Pacific. He has been on assignment with VSA three times, including two assignments in Strategic Planning roles and as a Policy Adviser for the Ministry of Infrastructure in the Cook Islands.

"My background is in local government in New Zealand and Zimbabwe where I worked with a number of international volunteers. I have also volunteered with other organisations such as the United Nations. I applied for my first VSA assignment as it came up just at the time that I was looking for a new role.

"I believe volunteering gives people a real opportunity to make a difference and I will be going on assignment again with VSA this year, to again assist SPC, this time by reviewing the entire geological resources and energy programme."



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Costs covered.



Connecting people – transforming lives

