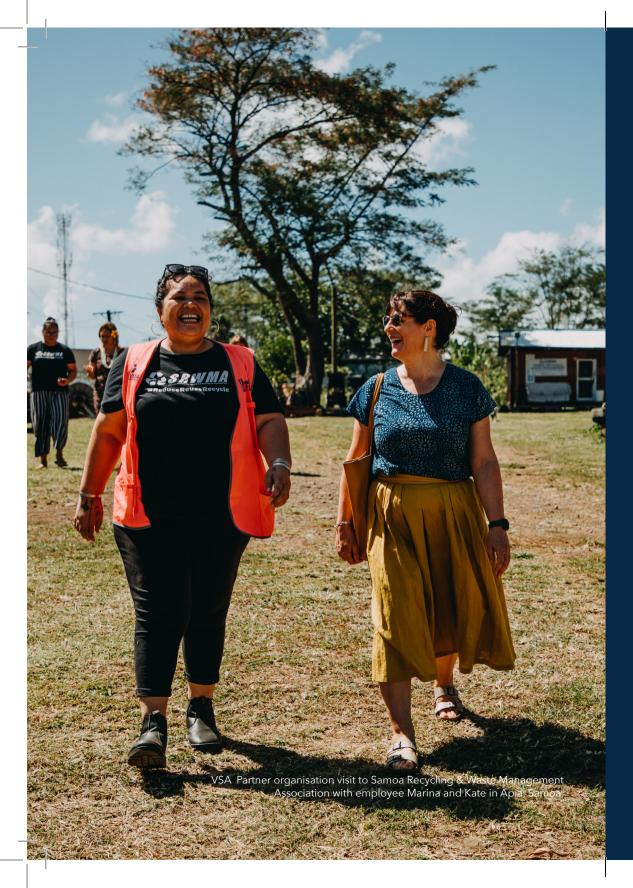


### **Our Stories**

X	A year of growth at Volunteer Service Abroad	5
X	Communication in the Cooks	8
X	Art and ongoing opportunity in Vanuatu	12
X	Turning lives around	16
X	We're going on a jungle hunt; we're trying to find a preschool	18
X	None of this was planned	22
X	Promoting sustainable development across the Pacific	24
X	How volunteering changed my life	28







## A year of growth at Volunteer Service Abroad

Connecting People - Transforming Lives is why we exist as Volunteer Service Abroad / Te Tūao Tāwāhi (VSA), and this year there are so many examples I can draw on that show how this has happened. It's been a year of growth for us both in our volunteer numbers and in the depth of our valued partnerships. This is a new phase, and we are seeing record numbers of New Zealanders interested in volunteering to make a difference in communities we partner with across the Pacific and in Timor-Leste.

Our organisation is in a strong position to do our best work as a team - selecting skilled volunteers and partnering for impact.

Vista is our flagship publication, dedicated to sharing some of the stories of the past year from our partner organisations and volunteers.

We hope you enjoy reading this year's edition! Thank you for your continued support of VSA, I'm proud of our place in the world and ability to make a real difference.

Kate Wareham

Te Tumu Whakarae / CEO, Volunteer Service Abroad Te Tūao Tāwāhi

Cover image: Family on the beach in Koromira, Bougainville, taken by Programme Manager Matt Lambie

Back cover: Photo of children in canoe by VSA Volunteer Vasti Venter



Cambodia

Timor-Leste



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# Communication in the Cooks

As a Speech-Language Therapist at the Cook Islands Ministry of Education, Jenna Ryan is making a difference to youth speech, language, and communication.

Signing up for a volunteer assignment as a Speech-Language Therapist at the Cook Islands Ministry of Education, Kiwi Jenna Ryan knew she would have a fantastic time - but she didn't know just how fantastic.

'I'm having a ball,' she admits, speaking from Nikao on the island of Rarotonga. 'I don't think I quite knew what I was going to get out of it, personally and professionally. Being able to help in this community...I just think it's the best thing I've done in life, to be honest.'

Jenna's day-to-day involves a wide variety of tasks, working as part of the small but mighty Inclusive Education team to support tamariki across the Cook Islands who have additional needs.

The team has never had a Speech-Language Therapist onsite before and Jenna is in hot demand across the Cook Islands. 'I've been able to visit some of the Pa Enua (outer islands) in the Southern Group, where I've been able to visit lots of schools and give those students in need some ideas to help with their speech, language, and communication,' says Jenna. 'It's been just amazing. I feel so privileged to be here.'



Much of Jenna's work has been concentrated on Rarotonga, the country's most populous island. There, she has been working alongside the Inclusive Education Advisor, initially Andre Hansen and then his successor, Shelley Berry, to increase capacity for young people with additional needs.

'It's been really cool to pass on some of my knowledge that can help those young people,' says Jenna. She has also enjoyed going directly into schools to support teachers, teacher aides, principals, and other staff.

Jenna initially signed up for a 12-month placement, but found her assignment so rewarding, she has since extended for a further six months. What have been some of the highlights so far?

'Gosh,' she laughs, 'there have been so many. It's been especially rewarding and exciting to support the young people who are non-verbal or who don't have spoken language, and give them some tools or strategies to get their message across.'

In her time in the Cook Islands, Jenna has done a fair bit of work with Autism Cook Islands, suggesting techniques for some of the children they support and running workshops on communication tools. Watching those children flourish has been 'really wonderful', she says. 'There's one boy, he was one of the first children I did some work with, and recently his Deputy Principal was telling me he's been talking so much. He's come so far.'

There have been wins on a structural level, too. 'In New Zealand, we just take it for granted that every baby has their hearing screened when they're born,' Jenna explains. 'Over here, those luxuries don't exist. It's been really special to work closely with the Hearing and Vision Technician at Te Marae Ora - the Cook Islands Ministry of Health - and write a proposal to the Health Secretary so that she can get out to Aitutaki in the Pa Enua (the outer islands) and do some screening there. That's very exciting because it's a massive gap and area of need. Giving these children and their families the resources to make communication easier...I think that's so important. Every little bit counts.'

Jenna is looking forward to another six months of service in the Cook Islands and we're so glad to have her on board - keep up the great work, Jenna!



Communication tools for the Cook Islands Ministry of Education and Autism Cook Islands in use





# Art and ongoing opportunity in Vanuatu

Katy Buess spent a life-changing nine months working in Vanuatu as an Art Programme Advisor in 2009, followed by 12 months working as a Rehabilitation Art Programme Advisor at the Vanuatu Department of Corrections in 2022-2023. She found the work so rewarding, she's since returned for a further six months. Here, she shares a bit about her experiences, which contain 'joy and challenge'.

Image: Ni-Vanuatu detainee working on a mural project under Katy's quidance

### Tell us a bit about your partner organisation. What did your work with them involve?

The Vanuatu Department of Corrections has a Low Security Rehabilitation Centre for men and Te'a Silae Centre for women located in one part of town, while the high security, medium security, and remand centre are currently together in another suburb of Port Vila.

The focus of Corrections at the low security centres is offender management with rehabilitation at its core. Detainees take part in a number of programmes: addressing family violence, vocational skills and education, crime prevention programmes, and many church activities. The goal is to provide each detainee with a variety of life skills to set them up for when they return to their communities.

My role as a Rehabilitation Art Programme Advisor is to develop the scope of art activities, figure out what works best and what has potential for income-generating opportunities. At the men's Low Security Rehabilitation Centre, the primary art programme focus is on mural painting | pablik penting. Along with the art programme,



I tutor English literacy classes there and at the women's facility, and have set up a small library to complement the lessons.

## What has your day-to-day life been like on assignment? Did you get involved in anything outside of work?

Day-to-day life at work is sometimes unpredictable with detainees having to follow work rosters, attend other training sessions, make occasional hospital visits, leave prison for parole etc. - so I never assume I'll be working with a full group.

I have a small printmaking project on the go outside of work. Vanuatu is renowned for its woodcarvers, so I've been encouraging some local artists to produce relief prints using lino blocks. The art forms have some similar applications even though the result for one is 2D and for the other, 3D. I would love to showcase this contemporary work in New Zealand one day.

#### What have been some of the biggest highlights and challenges of your time in Vanuatu?

A highlight of coming back to Vanuatu is reconnecting with some people I first met in 2008 [Katy was initially in Vanuatu as her partner Rob Wait's accompanying partner, then held her own first VSA assignment in 2009].

At work I've enjoyed seeing detainees and officers pull up a chair to watch someone paint a mural within the prison compound. The art of watching paint dry is alive and well and a positive experience at the Department of

#### Corrections in Port Vila!

A few weeks after arriving in Port Vila and getting to know the neighbourhood where I live, I met a young woman working in a local shop. After describing my role with Corrections she told me that she had spent time in the women's prison. She was grateful for the education she'd received while serving time. It meant her history was not a barrier to employment and gave her the chance to also set up a small business alongside her retail job.

Before arriving here I envisioned the main focus of the art programme would be drawing and printing, so was mightily surprised when the officer in charge of rehabilitation programming informed me that the art group would concentrate on 'pablik penting', i.e., mural painting. Right there is the joy and challenge of a VSA assignment, what is written in your assignment description can be changed in a moment! Never having painted a mural led to some initial apprehension on my part, but looking around the grey walls of the Low Security facility, it seemed that painting on-site was a good place to start.

The detainees in the art programme had little knowledge and experience of practical art from a schooling perspective, however they had a strong connection to their culture and traditional arts. We started out with a



crash course in practical art - drawing, painting, design, colour theory. We looked at images of traditional and contemporary art of Vanuatu (streets around Port Vila showcase an array of vibrant mural paintings, many by well-known local artists). One of the first mural projects undertaken was painting a map of Vanuatu on the outside office wall of our Principal Corrections Office. Many discussions and storian | storytelling happened around this map.

### What advice would you give to those considering a volunteering assignment in the Pacific?

Like many other volunteers have said, personal growth and the rewards of an assignment often outweigh the challenges and setbacks.

Change happens at a slower pace than you might be used to, so you need to pull back and take the time to talk with your counterparts and really get to know them. It can take a lot of patience and listening to make effective progress.







4 15



Matt and the team from Mabiri Juvenile Rehabilitation Centre

#### VSA volunteer Matt Brittain tells us about his part in developing the very first juvenile rehabilitation centre in Mabiri, Bougainville Island, Papua New Guinea.

Bougainville Island is the main island of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, which is part of Papua New Guinea, with an estimated population of between 400,000 and 500,000. The region faced a devastating 10-year civil conflict from 1988 to 1998 and became one of the least developed regions in the country. VSA consistently hopes to send more volunteers to build capacity in the region.

When Matt Brittain applied for a volunteering role in Bougainville,

he was unsure what to expect. He was based in Arawa, Bougainville's largest town, as an Operations and Management Advisor at Mabiri Juvenile Rehabilitation Centre. The Centre, the first of its kind in Bougainville, had only recently been established so that juveniles could be accommodated closer to their families and not lot located in adult correctional facilities.

Matt was involved in helping the Centre develop its operational systems and procedures - with the ultimate



goal of helping juveniles turn their lives around in a safe and supportive environment, aligned with local values and customs as well as international legal standards.

Day to day, Matt was involved in mentoring the Centre staff about service design, operations and general management. 'I worked with the staff in a co-design approach,' he explains. Ultimately, they developed policies and procedures that culminated in the operations manual – a guiding document to ensure the Centre's ongoing success.

Matt found the experience extremely meaningful, he says. Some of his biggest wins included running a threeday leadership and management course on the fly for the whole organisation with no technology – and, at one stage, cooking pork belly for the New Zealand Police. Beyond his role at Mabiri Juvenile Rehabilitation Centre,

he has been involved in establishing a community exercise initiative, teaching English at a local high school, and supporting the women's safe house and men's advocacy hub.

He says a major highlight of his time in Bougainville was being able to learn about a different way of life and work closely with the locals. Bougainville is an incredibly culturally rich region, as well as a beautiful one, with lush tropical vegetation and a healthy sprinkling of volcanoes (active, dormant, and inactive). 'Living there gave me time to reflect,' explains Matt. This even led him to develop an interest in health psychology, something he's taken away with him post-assignment.

While Matt's assignment was a few years ago now, he still reflects on his time in Bougainville regularly. When asked what advice would he give to those considering a volunteering assignment? 'Go for it,' he says, without missing a beat.

#### 'Embrace the journey and its various twists and turns. Adapt!'



# We're going on a jungle hunt; we're trying to find a preschool... \( \)

Jude de Waal initially volunteered as a preschool teacher trainer in Timor-Leste for 12 months in 2023. She tells us about creating positive outcomes for children, what she's learnt, and why she's extended her assignment until the end of November 2024.

As an experienced ECE teacher, Jude was looking for a new challenge when the opportunity to go to Timor-Leste crossed her path. She is now volunteering as a Preschool Teacher Trainer through partner organisation UNICEF, alongside Alola, a local NGO that holds the contract to support the preschool project.

Jude is involved in meeting key organisational goals that include developing training content for local preschool teachers, having a focus on literacy and numeracy to support readiness for school, training and





mentoring these teachers in area cluster groups plus large group annual training, and growing capacity in field officers who visit and support teachers.

It proved to be a well-received and essential role. 'The Timorese ECE curriculum has shifted from a rote-based style to a play-based model,' explains Jude. 'For teachers this has been a huge mindset and practical shift to understand that learning can happen through play.'

Jude works with these teachers to grow understanding of how small children learn and how they can support that in practice. Most months, she spends a week each in the municipalities of Emera and Viqueque in remote rural preschools, then the rest of her time preparing interactive training materials at Alola in Dili, Timor-Leste's capital.

'With around 100 preschools who have 176 teachers all at differing levels of understanding, no preschool is the same,' says Jude. 'The goal is not to make them all identical but to celebrate their own journey and build from there.'

She says she's seen some fantastic outcomes from the training so far, with teachers eager to try out their new learning with the children. The outcome of this is that children are becoming school-ready in a system where currently 23% of preschool children in Timor-Leste repeat Grade 1 - but not our children.

19

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Recently, Jude has also taken on some other training with UNICEF's school readiness project: Grade 1 teachers and school administrators attend sessions to learn about playbased literacy and numeracy ideas to support six-year-olds starting school that have not had the opportunity to attend preschool.

'My work is varied and humbling,' she says. 'Our teachers are all voluntary and untrained, yet they run these preschools three to five days a week for two to three hours a day, mostly in very basic buildings with very few resources. These communities have a growing understanding that preschool education is crucial for their children to have opportunities in the future. When you see firsthand the need, you can't help but be passionate about what you do and want to give your best.'

Jude has loved her time in Timor-Leste, whose people she has found to be 'warm, community-minded, and faith-based'. 'Everything moves

at a slower pace, people matter,' she explains. 'It aligns well with me.' She has particularly enjoyed getting to know her local neighbors, who took care of her when she was sick with Chikungunya fever and who also offered support when she was grieving the loss of a friend back home. 'Volunteering has been an adventure that brings about growth in you and gratitude.'

Extending her assignment for a further seven months was a nobrainer, she says. 'I could see my work was far from finished, that it was making a difference, and I knew having a consistent trainer would give continuity.' For Jude, it's a unique honour to be part of building capacity in one of the world's most vulnerable communities.

Jude says volunteering is not without its challenges, but she would encourage other New Zealanders to give it a go. 'You'll be richer for it,' she says. I thoroughly recommend



Rural Timorese preschools



from there."



# None of this was planned

Ngaire Tihema shares her amazing journey with Volunteer Service Abroad, delving into how she went from a one-off volunteer, to becoming VSA's Programme Advisor for Papua New Guinea.



When Ngaire Tihema applied to volunteer through VSA in Papua New Guinea, she had no idea it would take up more than a year of her life, and then some.

In 2019, Ngaire had just submitted her thesis in applied linguistics and was looking for a job. She had been a teacher for 15 years at this point and was settled in New Zealand. Years earlier, she'd enjoyed working as an ESOL teacher in Thailand, Indonesia, and South Korea, but had returned home in 2009 and thought her days of working overseas were long gone.

Ngaire was scanning job adverts on Seek when she found a VSA volunteer assignment listed that seemed 'just perfect' for her: 12 months as a TESOL Advisor at Gaulim Teachers' College in Papua New Guinea.

Ngaire admits her initial assignment was intense, an eye-opening introduction to the unique challenges of volunteering in Papua New Guinea. 'I was warned I'd be the only expat for miles and I was,' she explains. Gaulim Teachers' College is located in a rural area, and Ngaire was at least an hour's drive from any other volunteers. But she soon found there was plenty to keep her busy. With Papua New Guinea's population increasing exponentially, the demand for teachers is also growing. Gaulim Teachers' College trains primary school teachers from every province in the country.

At the end of her 12-month stint, Ngaire decided to stay on for an additional six months - which then turned into another six months at a university as a Literacy and Education Advisor, and then another nine months, during Covid, as a full-time e-volunteer. 'None of this was planned,' she admits. So why did she keep staying?

'I think I saw the impact I was making in real time,' she says. 'Sometimes volunteers might not see their impact right away - it might take a couple of years. But I saw the progress my trainees were making and I saw there was a lot of need here. I felt like I could do more good than I'd been able to in my previous teaching roles.'

Ngaire also got involved in the local community, for example by helping out with cooking lessons in rural areas, or aiding the local women's refuge with setting up their security cameras and wifi.

'Volunteers from New Zealand are lucky to come with all sorts of knowledge and experience that can be helpful in unexpected ways,' she says. 'And I think you have a much more positive experience when you can help out beyond your partner organisation, because it's a way to get to know people beyond the workplace.'

She admits there were challenges to volunteering in the Pacific - the tropical heat, for instance, or the inconsistent power and internet. But Ngaire tries to see these as an opportunity to be patient, understanding, and resilient. 'Either accept it for what it is, especially if there's nothing that can be done about it, or try to improve the situation,' she says.

On the other hand, Papua New Guinea is home to a rich array of cultural diversity, which Ngaire has enjoyed learning more about. Her first week in Kokopo, East New Britain, happened to be during the National Mask Festival. 'You have all these different cultures coming together to celebrate and showcase their attire, languages, and, of course, masks,' she says. 'It was clear evidence of the diversity of Papua New Guinea and also how different yet very similar our cultures are.'

When an opportunity arose for a VSA staff role as a in-country advisor for the PNG programme in 2022, Ngaire applied because she recognised that her skills, knowledge, and experience uniquely positioned her to make a significant contribution to the programme.

She says it's been an incredibly rewarding job. The main difference from her experiences as a volunteer? 'As a volunteer, you belong to one partner organisation, and in your spare time you can help others. But as a staff member, we give equal attention to all our partner organisations,' she says. 'It's a full-on job, and a real privilege.'





# Spotlighting The Pacific Community

The Pacific Community (SPC) is the main scientific and technical organisation in the Pacific region and has been supporting international development since 1947. Owned and governed by 27 country and territory members, it operates across the Pacific and supports sustainable development through a people-centred approach to science, research, and technology. You only need to look to SPC's vision to recognise the hard work they are committed to putting into reaching their inspirational development goals.

"We are voyaging towards a resilient Pacific. A region of peace, harmony and prosperity, where all our people and communities live safe, free, healthy sustainable and productive lives. As wayfinders, our paths are intertwined with the culture, environment and resources of our Blue Pacific Continent. We recognise our role as stewards of our Pacific Ocean and are responding with urgent collective action to the threat of climate change."

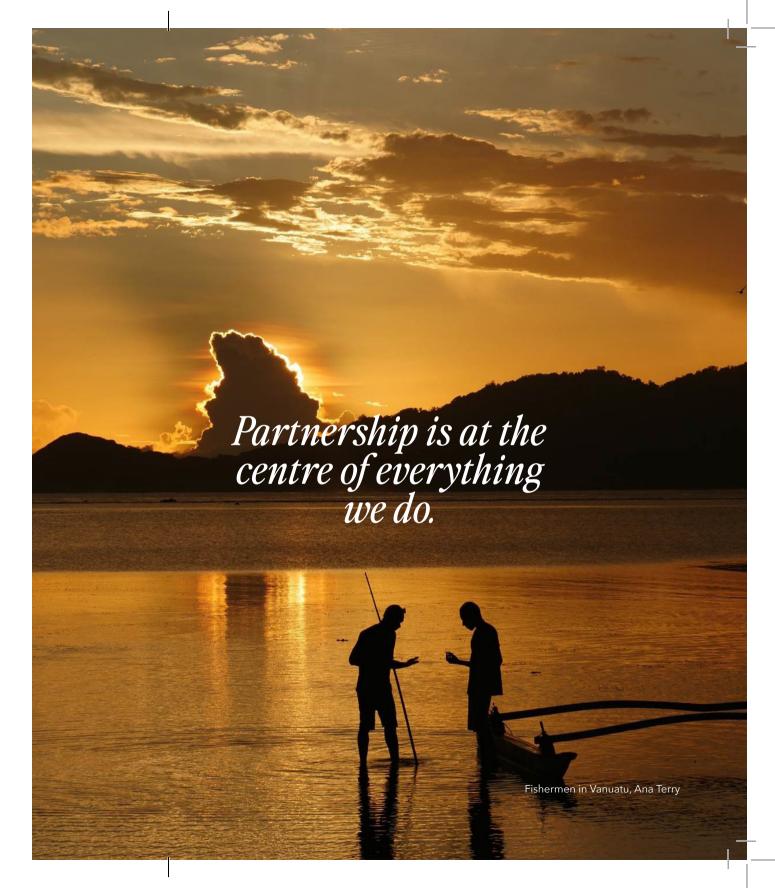
-The Pacific Community Vision

Since 2020, SPC has had 8 volunteers from VSA working in their Geoscience, Energy and Maritime (GEM) department across a wide variety of assignments, mainly out of the SPC Suva offices in Fiji.

A selection of the volunteers we have placed includes a Water Engineering Support Specialist to work with the Water Security Projects Team providing tangible engineering support to enable SPC to deliver more effective and sustainable water infrastructure. There was also a Communications Advisor to work with the Pacific Islands Emergency Management Alliance (PIEMA) project engaging with key emergency management agencies to build Pacific countries' capacity to respond to natural disasters. Georesources and Energy Programme Review Advisers have been assigned over the years working remotely as e-volunteers, and locally, to identify any priority focus areas or gaps allowing the SPC team to continue to implement renewable energy and energy efficiency projects. Currently in-country we have a Bioenergy Advisor expanding on their previous e-volunteer assignment looking into the availability and viability of bioenergy in the Pacific.

VSA is incredibly proud to work with a vibrant and impactful regional partner organisation such as SPC, and we look forward to many more years of partnership and collaboration.





# How volunteering changed my life

### Sue Ngatokorua

VSA brought Sue Ngatokorua to the Cook Islands back in 1977 - and she's still there.



In 1977, Sue Ngatokorua was one of the first VSA volunteers to work in the Cook Islands. Her assignment was with the Cook Islands Ministry of Education, which had requested New Zealand teachers to help implement the NZ School Certificate in high schools on three of the Cook Islands Pa Enua (the Outer Islands): Mangaia, Aitutaki, and Atiu.

Sue arrived in Mangaia alongside another VSA volunteer, Lesley Waugh – who would become a friend. 'I was 20 years old and straight out of university with no teaching experience,' explains Sue. 'Lesley was an excellent teacher and was very organised. She had 12 years' experience as a primary school teacher, plus she'd previously volunteered with VSA in Fiji.'

The pair were placed at Mangaia College under the guidance of principal Bob de Lautour, also a Kiwi, who had arrived on Mangaia in 1976 and worked to prepare the school for the implementation of School Certificate.

'Bob had chosen four subjects to be taught,' says Sue. 'English, NZ Māori - similar to Cook Islands Māori, which all the students were fluent in -Geography, and Human Biology. He had chosen subjects that he could teach because before we arrived, his volunteer teachers were an unknown quantity. He was able to get planning done in all these subjects, which was wonderful for me and Lesley. He was a great support for us both.'

When Sue and Lesley arrived on Mangaia, they initially lived with the de Lautour family, before settling into a house organised for them opposite the school. Soon enough, Sue was teaching human biology at fifth form level and getting to know the staff and students.

'I had never taught before so it was challenging,' she says, 'but very rewarding. I remained a teacher for the rest of my working life.' She remembers her time as a volunteer teacher fondly: 'What better place to learn the trade than on a Pacific island with children who were so motivated to learn and were almost never naughty?'

Outside of work, Sue and Lesley explored the island on a motorbike; Sue counts it as a major highlight of her initial stint on Mangaia. The motorbike was brought over from Rarotonga on a boat - the way everything came, in those days. 'Up until 1977, the only way to get to Mangaia was on a boat,' says Sue. 'It arrived once a month if we were lucky, bringing everything we needed, including the mail.'

In her first year on Mangaia, Sue was also involved in the opening of the new airport. On the day the first plane was expected, she and her students helped collect the small stones off the runway so it could land smoothly - a very exciting day for all involved!

Sue loved her time volunteering so much, she still lives on Mangaia. Her assignment was a driving force in her life: she met her husband (a Mangaian teacher) while volunteering, and learnt to teach, a career she remained in for the rest of her working life.

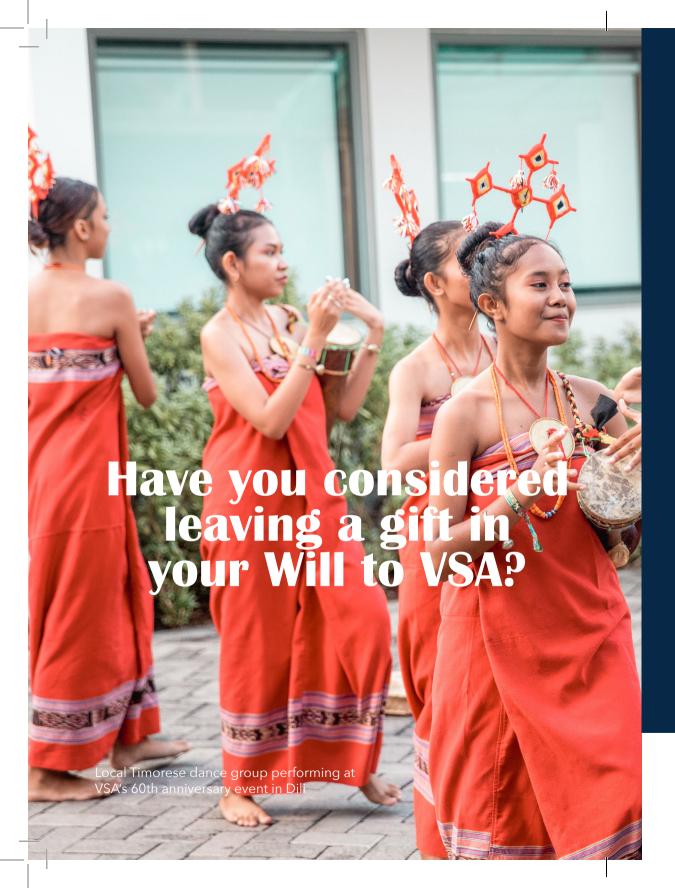
'Volunteering gave me the opportunity to be involved in education at the grassroots level,' she explains. 'It really made me more appreciative of the opportunities I experienced. And I loved having the opportunity to be involved in another culture and to experience how important one's identity is.'

An important takeaway from her time volunteering was a sense of gratitude and acceptance of others, Sue explains.

'If you have the opportunity to live and work in the Pacific, you are blessed. However, you must remember that you have been invited to live and work there so you must not impose your values on people who have their own values. Just because people live differently than you does not mean you're better than them or that your ways are the only way.' It's an attitude she hopes incoming volunteers will bring with them.

Now retired, Sue counts herself 'blessed' to be where she is. 'I'm surrounded by loving people,' she says. She also counts herself lucky to have settled in Mangaia and started a family with a Mangaian.

'Through my children, I am able to see how they navigate biculturalism and how fortunate they are. My mother always said she was envious of my children because they were bilingual and bicultural. Their lives are richer because of this.'



### "Together we can achieve great things."

- Sir Edmund Hillary, VSA founding president

Bequests are a very important part of our funding. Leaving a gift to VSA will support our mission of a world of thriving communities, with VSA working in international development, matching skilled people to opportunities across the wider Pacific with locally identified goals and aspirations. It will help us plan ahead and be more sustainable. By leaving a gift in your Will to VSA you are choosing to make a difference to communities in one of the most vulnerable regions in the world, a difference that will last long after your lifetime.

When making a beguest, please think carefully about what options are best suited to you. That may include contemplating a small legacy (typically 1-5% of your estate) as being more approachable to you and the other beneficiaries of your estate.

We have partnered with Safewill, a leading online Will writing platform that can be accessed from safewill.com/nz/vsanz. We have a 50% discounted price of \$80, typically it takes only up to 20 minutes and 3 simple steps. Join those who have used this option successfully already.

If you have any questions or want more information, please don't hesitate to contact us at info@vsa.org.nz, or visit our website: vsa.org.nz/bequest





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