At the end of February, the Foundation team travelled to Kiribati to supervise the launch of our MDT+ programme in Kiribati. The first year of the programme had been successfully completed in Samoa, and so the team had the experience to roll it out on a much larger scale in Kiribati.

The programme falls into several stages:

- Finding and recording all household contacts of leprosy patients since 2010
- Examining all contacts for the signs and symptoms of leprosy
- Giving all contacts not suffering from active leprosy, or who have not previously had leprosy, a single dose of Rifampicin and recording that on the database
- Repeating this for a second year
- Visiting all contacts for a further three years to ensure that they have not developed leprosy.

It is anticipated that through this programme, the transmission of leprosy will be dramatically slowed, ultimately leading to the elimination of leprosy as a public health risk.

The village of Teaoraereke was chosen to be the first place to implement the programme. The medical workers had carried out their contact tracing, and chose a family of six to be the first recipients of Rifampicin. Their leprosy contact was the children’s uncle, with whom they all lived.

There was entertainment, speeches, music and a really huge crowd of onlookers (thanks to the launch coinciding with the end of the school day!). Finally, a representative from the Ministry of Health formally handed a dose of Rifampicin to each member of the family. There was much applause and rejoicing, including all members of the Team being encouraged to dance!

It was a fitting celebration of a programme of national importance for the people of Kiribati.

Professor Stephen Chambers, Chairman of the Medical Advisory Committee for the Foundation speaks about his dream of a “Leprosy-free Kiribati”.

The first family to receive Rifampicin, with some of the medical workers and the team from Pacific Leprosy Foundation.
RIP Ram Chandra

In April, we received the sad news that Ram Chandra had passed away. Ram Chandra had lived on Makogai and was severely disabled from leprosy having a degree of amputation of all four limbs. He lived with his wife in a small extension to his daughter’s house in Nadi.

He was visited in December by Kathey Foi, our Fiji country supervisor, and Anisa Nasome (daughter of the late Luisa, who worked for the Fiji Leprosy Trust Board for many years). Kathey wrote to us: “When we last visited Ram Chandra in December, to deliver the Christmas hamper, he was well but had lost his eyesight. As usual, he was happy that we visited him and was very grateful for the Christmas hamper we delivered. We had breakfast at his home in Solovi, Nadi.”

A few years ago, following the building of his house extension, he wrote to the Fiji Leprosy Trust Board as follows:

Dear Sir

I take this time to thank the Fiji Leprosy Trust Board for your kind support in approving my request to make a separate house for me and my wife Padma.

Please pass on our sincere thank you to the Pacific Leprosy Foundation in New Zealand and to the donors in New Zealand. It is through your kind support that enable me and my wife to live a happy and comfortable life together in our own home. As you can see in the pictures taken by Luisa recently, we now can cook our own food in our own kitchen, and entertain our visitors at our “own home” thanks to the Board for your support.

May God bless the good work you are doing for helping the leprosy sufferers, old and new patients in Fiji.

Yours Respectfully

Ram Chandra and Padma Chandra
Solovi, Nadi, Fiji Islands.

Ulугia Togagae’s sons

Twenty years ago the Pacific Leprosy Foundation, with the help of Sister Marietta, worked with the Ulугia family of Vaiusu, repairing their house, helping them with food and other necessities and paying school fees for the children.

The last time Sister Marietta met the father, a former leprosy patient, he knew he was dying and he asked Sister Marietta if the Foundation could look after his children’s education because he knew the importance of education in his children’s futures. Since then, the Foundation has paid all the Ulугia children’s school fees from that time right up to today. They have all done extremely well.

Martin will graduate from the National University of Samoa this year in Arts and wants to be a graphic designer.

Matulino graduated from St. Joseph’s College last year as the Dux of the Arts Department and enrolled at NUS this year. He wants to be a lawyer.

Ropati, the youngest brother, is following in his older brothers’ footsteps; he is now in year 12 at St. Joseph’s. Not only is he an aspiring NUS student but he is one of the school’s top rugby players hoping to play for Manu Samoa someday.

The mother of these remarkable boys passed away suddenly last year. She never stopped thanking the Foundation for its unwavering support for her children. “Without the Pacific Leprosy Foundation and the generous people of New Zealand,” she often said, “none of my boys would ever have gone to St. Joseph’s or to NUS. We just would not have been able to afford it by ourselves.”

If she had lived a few months longer, she would have seen Matulino graduate from St. Joseph’s as Dux and would certainly have been very proud of his achievement.

Introducing Amy

When Tony Whitley announced he was retiring, and moving to New Zealand, the hunt was on for someone who could carry on with our work in Vanuatu. Luckily, we didn’t have to look too far! Tony’s eldest daughter, Amelia (known as Amy) was known to us, and she had a good understanding of the work of the Foundation and was happy to take over from her father. Amy is 27 and married to Tolong Lingbu (who has also worked for the
Introducing Amy Continued

Foundation on a number of occasions. They have three children; Ian – 5 years old, Layli – 4 years old and Mia Rose who is eleven months. Amy takes up the story:

“My dad started working for the Foundation when I was 11 years old. I have fond memories of travelling with him to remote areas of Santo to deliver welfare, and visit patients. They would always be so happy when he brought us along and we would be given gifts of fruit or some cooked local food for the journey.

Doctor Roland (Farrugia) also became quite a close friend to our family during his frequent visits to check up on the medical needs of the patients. These visits were always anticipated with great delight, as we began a tradition of chicken black bean dinners, with lots of ice cream after! He and Dad used to charter a tiny single-engined plane and visit the patients in the remotest of places. Doctor Roland became affectionately known to all of us kids as Uncle Roland, and the treasured friendship continues to this day.

As I grew up, Dad would give me odd jobs to do for the Foundation and through this I learned more and more what it was all about. Once I got my driver’s licence, sometimes I would be the one to do a small trip on Dad’s behalf.

After I married Tolong we went to Tuvalu for 2 years as volunteers for a special initiative to help young people in the Pacific. (While there, Doctor Roland came over to visit the leprosy patients in Tuvalu - it was wonderful to see a familiar face again!) After our time in Tuvalu ended, we moved back to Santo and built a small house next to Mum and Dad. I began teaching again, and Tolong looked after our two small children, Ian then 2 years old and Layli, 3 months. During that time, Tolong became quite involved in the Foundation’s work and did a lot of travelling and visits on Dad’s behalf - often taking one of the kids with him. He proved to be very good with the patients due to his knowledge of the Vanuatu culture and some of the local dialects.

Last year things changed quite dramatically and suddenly. Tolong was asked by an NGO which he was already working for part time, to become a full time worker and set up an office in the capital, Port Vila. I had left my extremely busy job of teacher to look after the newest member of the family, Mia Rose, then 3 months old. At the same time, Mum and Dad were retiring and moving back to New Zealand. When Dad asked if I would be able to take over from him, it was perfect timing.

We now live in Port Vila, and I work from home, which I really love. I only hope I can give back to the Foundation a fraction of what it has done for us here in Vanuatu.”

Mele’s House

When Cyclone Gita roared its way across Tonga earlier this year it was described as the worst storm to hit the country in 60 years. One of our patients, Mele Hafoka, saw her kitchen and bathroom completely destroyed. Naturally the Foundation offered to rebuild them and work is currently being undertaken. Mele also receives a small monthly allowance which she relies on to buy food for herself and her four children.
**Lala’s Office**

Once again, the year is rushing past at the speed of light and consequently, my ambitious programme of donor meetings is lagging behind! Last month I visited Gisborne and Whakatane. I hadn’t actually held a meeting in Whakatane for a very long time and it was wonderful to catch up with some of our supporters there, and in Gisborne. This month I will visit Blenheim, and in July I will be in Fiji for a meeting of our full team of Pacific Island workers. With any luck I will be able to visit Waikanae and Masterton in August.

I always have so much that I want to tell you about at donor meetings. I really value the opportunity to talk about our latest work, and also to have the time to explain the background to that work in greater detail than can be done in the newsletter.

Leprosy is such a complicated disease – both in the medical sense, and in the social impact it can have on patients and their families. With your help we are gradually winning the battle against leprosy and the poverty which can be both the cause and the effect of the disease. Thank you so much.

**Update on Vearu**

It was a year ago that Vearu started her treatment regime for the terrible ulcers on her bottom. The ‘treatment’ was to not sit down at all for three months – she could stand, or she could lie, but absolutely no sitting was allowed. She was told that one hour of sitting could undo ten days of healing.

With the help of an elevated bed that she could roll on and off without sitting, and a raised table so she could eat from it without stooping, Vearu managed to go for the whole three months without sitting. The result was complete healing of her ulcers – something that no amount of more conventional medical intervention could achieve! Well done, Vearu!

**Information**

**WHERE IN THE WORLD?**

We currently manage projects to assist those affected by leprosy in the following countries:

- Fiji
- Tonga
- Samoa
- Vanuatu
- Solomon Islands
- Kiribati
- New Zealand
- Tuvalu

Thank you so much to all of you who make this work possible through your interest and generosity.

**DIRECT CREDIT**

We are happy to receive donations by direct credit.

If you wish to use this option, please use your surname and donor number (six figures to the right of your name and address on our appeal coupon) as a reference, so that we know where to send the receipt.

The bank account number is: **02-0800-0037987-000**

BIC SWIFT CODE: BKNZNZ22 Bank of New Zealand, 60 Waterloo Quay, Pipitea, Wellington 6011 New Zealand

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