

# Newsletter

May 2019



pacific leprosy

[www.leprosy.org.nz](http://www.leprosy.org.nz)

## A visit to Santo

In February, Amelia Whitley – our field supervisor in Vanuatu – travelled to Santo to visit our patients and volunteers there. At the time of her visit, Cyclone Oma had recently passed through the area and there were many families all over Vanuatu needing help with food until they could re-plant their crops.

Amy and Verongi – our helper in Santo, and wife of former patient Isaac – decided to deliver food and other items to some of the patients and use the opportunity to assess what other help might be needed.

One of the patients visited was Serah Aruntun. She received some tins of tuna, rice and other food items like crackers. She is suffering from a bad sore on the base of her foot – a very common affliction for people who have suffered from leprosy. It was decided that she should come in to the hospital in Luganville to have it properly cleaned and dressed. Verongi will organise it

with the hospital and pick her up when she next delivers welfare supplies.

Another patient visited was Japhet. He is waiting for the Amputee Association to come to Santo so he can have a new prosthetic leg. He is also in desperate need of a new house. His living conditions are very difficult – particularly for someone with only one leg. He is currently living with his sister and brother-in-law but the house is very high off the ground, and crowded. He had to leave his own home in Ambae following the serious volcanic activity there last year, which also destroyed his home. He is not yet sure whether he wants to stay on Santo or go back to Ambae, although that might not be a good idea with the ongoing volcanic activity and the remoteness of the area. The decision will be up to him, and when he has decided, we will arrange to build him a house.



Verongi (left) and Serah.



In the background Japhet can be seen climbing up onto the veranda of his current home – a big struggle for someone with only one leg.



Packing the truck with food items for patients affected by Cyclone Oma.

# Kurarenga

Kurarenga is a leprosy sufferer in Kiribati who, like many people with leprosy, has had to endure enormous physical and emotional hardship. She was first diagnosed with leprosy in 2010 however, again, like many patients, she didn't complete her year-long treatment. As a result of this, her leprosy became worse and she suffered nerve damage in her leg which caused foot drop. She has now completed her treatment, so no longer has active leprosy, but sadly her disability is irreversible and she has difficulty walking.

A few years ago, Kurarenga started a little business with a fish dryer to support the family as her husband didn't have a job. Unfortunately, Kurarenga's husband began physically abusing her, and for her safety she had to leave him – taking their children with her, to live with her mother and step-father in Betio. While she was there, she started a small roadside food stall which provided good support for her and her children. However, her mother and step-father separated and Kurarenga had to find another home – this time on her father's land.

Soon after this, Kurarenga married again and was happy and secure for a while, but this was not to last, after her new husband refused to care for her children. Kurarenga was forced to move from relative to relative, having no home of her own after her building supplies (which she had kept from her first small house) were stolen by her former husband. Finally she has been able to settle on some family land where the Foundation will build her a new house. Her children have been able to settle in at school and are doing well – one of them is top of the class!

Earlier this year our field supervisor in Kiribati, Wayne Uan and one patient were invited by the Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation to attend the 2019 Regional Assembly of People Affected by Leprosy, in Manila in the Philippines. Wayne selected Kurarenga to attend, as she had shown a great deal of initiative and enterprise herself, especially in earning an income and supporting her children. The purpose of the Assembly was to share experience in the delivery of health services, to come up with ways of reducing discrimination in their communities and ways in which people who had been affected by leprosy could help each other to become self-supporting. The event took place over three days in March and was a wonderful opportunity for



This system grows vegetable plants which are then sold – vegetables are in very short supply in Kiribati because of the lack of soil.



Wayne and Kurarenga work on their presentation to the Assembly in Manila.



The first meeting of the leprosy patients' co-operative.

both Kurarenga – as a representative of leprosy sufferers, and Wayne as a representative of the Foundation.

Since their return to Kiribati, Wayne and Kurarenga have wasted no time in forming a co-operative group of patients. They have met and discussed ways they can support each other and develop income producing ventures. Their first small venture is to grow vegetables hydroponically. The soil in Kiribati is almost non-existent – mostly coral sand – so this is a great way of producing much needed vegetables. The Foundation is pleased to support this venture by supplying the funding for the initial small investment. We'll let you know how the co-operative progresses.

# Seini embarks on a Diploma in Hospitality

Seini Rambuka is 20 years old and the daughter of Vatemu.

Vatemu was a patient in the leprosy ward at Twomey Hospital in 2004 (twice) and again in 2014 and has disabilities relating to leprosy. Thanks to your generosity, the Foundation has been able to help with the cost of school fees for Seini. The family moved from their village of Matokana, Navosa to give their children better access to education and now live with Vatemu's wife's family near Ba.

Vatemu brought Seini to talk to Kathey Foi, our field supervisor in Fiji. Seini wants to study for a Diploma in Hospitality at the Fiji National University campus in Nadi. Vatemu didn't know much about tertiary studies and was anxious that the Foundation might not be able to help. The course which Seini is taking



Seini and Vatemu.

is an excellent choice as it will give her many employment opportunities in Fiji. She will also be helped with advice from Kathey and Anisa Nasome if she needs it during the year. We look forward to bringing you news of her success.

# *The Pacific Leprosy Foundation turns 80 years old!*

On 10th July 1939 the Trust Deed for the Makogai Lepers' (N.Z.) Trust Board was duly signed, establishing the organisation now known as Pacific Leprosy Foundation. This year marks our 80th Anniversary and gives us a wonderful opportunity to reflect on how far we have come – and what the future holds.

The biggest progress over 80 years was the development of a treatment to cure leprosy; firstly in the form of Dapsone, and then with the implementation of MDT (Multi-Drug Therapy) in 1982 which gave the first real hope of eliminating leprosy as a public health problem. Now, the Foundation has implemented the use of Rifampicin as a preventative measure for the household contacts of leprosy patients in Kiribati and Samoa. This is an enormous step forwards and is the first time this has been carried out on a nationwide level. Because of the long incubation period of leprosy, it will be a few years before we know how well the programme has worked, but we are expecting a reduction in new leprosy cases of at least 70%.

Travel around the Pacific and within the countries in which we work has certainly taken a leap forward since the days of the SS Twomey – the ship, named after Patrick Twomey who founded our organisation. Up until the 1950s, this ship was used to take goods and people all over the Pacific and Patrick Twomey regularly travelled on it to visit the leprosy patients in many of the countries where the Foundation worked. The improvement in air travel has certainly made our work easier although within some of the countries in which we work, such as the Solomon Islands and Kiribati, sea freight is still used to deliver building materials and other items to outer islands and areas with no road access.

Communication with the Islands has always been challenging. For many years, all requests for assistance were sent to Christchurch by mail – often taking weeks to arrive. The invention of the fax machine vastly improved the situation allowing a request and response to be sent within the same hour, if necessary! However, now, with the advantages of the internet and modern cell phones, communication has been revolutionised – although it is only really in the last two years that reliable cell phone reception has been available in Kiribati – and the internet is still often quite patchy!

Finally we come to the bedrock of the Foundation – you, our donors and supporters! Without your loyal and longstanding help, none of this progress would have been made. Whereas once there were hardly any New Zealand charities, now we know you are bombarded with requests for help and money. We really appreciate your continuing interest and support – thank you so much!



Patrick Twomey – our Founder.



A family in the Solomons with their leprosy medication.

# Lala's Office

With the theme of this newsletter being "progress", I have been looking back at my 12 years working for the Foundation and the changes over that time. It is wonderful to be able to continue to meet so many of you, and to be able to pass on news of our real progress in the fight to eradicate leprosy in the Pacific. I have also been privileged to see the progress made by many of the families in the Pacific, whom the Foundation assists; seeing the children advance through school, and in many cases going on to tertiary education or employment, and seeing the improved general health of the families with better nutrition and personal care. None of this would be possible without your

generosity and genuine interest in our work, and I really love the opportunity to thank so many of you in person. By the time you read this, I will have recently returned from visiting Invercargill at the beginning of May. My next planned donor meetings will be in Masterton, Lower Hutt and Rangiora.



## Notecards

Our new notecards are proving very popular! They come in packs of 5 cards of one design with envelopes, or a pack of 10 cards – 5 of each design, with envelopes. 5-card packs cost \$6.00 and 10-card packs are \$10.00 each.

These cards can be purchased through our website, or by telephoning the office on 03 343 3685.



Torch Lily Design



New Hibiscus Design

## 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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