

Newsletter

May 2022



pacific leprosy

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The Dr Brian McMahon Scholarship

In last May's newsletter we told you about Dr Joseph Sangatu from the Solomon Islands who was 2021's recipient of the Dr Brian McMahon Scholarship to enable him to study at the Pacific Dermatology Centre in Suva.

His studies lasted a year, learning about leprosy and other skin diseases that are prevalent in the Solomon Islands – and all over the Pacific.

During his stay, Joseph was well looked after by our in-country representative, Kathey Foi. He was even invited to stay with her aunt and uncle for a weekend at Korolevu.

Kathey, and the driver Finau, accompanied Joseph on his journey from Suva to Nadi, to catch his flight home to the Solomon Islands. Joseph was keen to stop at Kathey's aunt's house, (half way to Nadi) to say goodbye and thank you to them.

Once Joseph gets home, he will be in charge of our leprosy program in the Solomon Islands, and the big drive to eradicate leprosy in that country.

The recipient for the 2023 scholarship for 2022 is Dr Alma Ulufonua from Fiji. We wish her well with her post graduate studies this year.



Joseph enjoyed his time with Kathey's aunt and uncle

Skin clinics in the Yasawa group – Fiji

In March, Dr Api from Twomey Hospital in Suva visited the Yasawa group of islands to perform skin clinics, accompanied by Sister Repeka. It was their first visit since 2019.

Regular visits to outlying islands and villages are one of the greatest strengths of the leprosy programme in Fiji. Through these clinics, which deal with all skin conditions, it is possible to pick up the early signs of leprosy, hopefully before the disease has been passed on to others in the family.

Two new cases and one suspected case of leprosy were diagnosed, as well as a host of other skin problems which were also diagnosed and treated. Of the two new leprosy patients, one would accompany Dr Api back to Suva for urgent treatment and assessment, and the other patient would come to Twomey hospital a few weeks later. The suspected case will be watched carefully for any developments.



Skin patches are tested for sensitivity using a light touch with a pencil.



This young man is enjoying the attention!



The team travelled between islands and villages by boat.



The children wait patiently for their turn to be examined.



Dr Api is taking a slit skin smear from this man's ear. The fluid will be examined later for signs of leprosy bacteria.

A new leprosy patient from the Yasawa group

When Dr Apisalome returned from the Yasawa group, he brought a young man with him who had been diagnosed with leprosy. Vueti Nasaumalumu Ratu has just turned 21.

He first noticed unusual skin patches when he was about nine years old. Sadly, nothing was done about them and he has now developed multi-bacillary leprosy. This is on his face, arms and legs and has affected the nerves in his hand, causing his fingers to claw.

Now that his leprosy is being treated, and he is being looked after at Twomey hospital, it is hoped that further nerve damage can be prevented. With the large patch of leprosy on his face, there is a danger of nerve damage affecting his eyelids and the possibility of damage to his sight.

We will keep you up to date with his progress.



Vueti is currently staying at Twomey hospital.



Nerve damage caused by leprosy has made his fingers claw.



The large pale area on Vueti's cheek is a patch of leprosy.

Meresiana

This is Meresiana Dimarama. She is the daughter of a leprosy patient from Savusavu on Vanua Levu in Fiji. She and her father travelled to Suva to ask for help to send her to the University of the South Pacific to study.

Meresiana has a lot to adjust to with the faster pace of life in Suva, studying and learning how to access online information but she is very grateful for the opportunity she has been given, thanks to your generosity. She is looking forward to being able to have a career which will enable her to help her family as well as support herself in the future.



Meresiana Dimarama.

Book Review – Last Writes

A few years ago, the mother of my close friend passed away very suddenly; she was only in her early seventies, her name was Gem. Naturally it was a huge shock to her family who were thrown into turmoil. As they searched Gem's desk for the information they needed about her affairs, they found a notebook. In the notebook were full instructions for what to do in the event of her death – all the contacts which needed to be made, where her will was kept, and what funeral arrangements she would like.

However, this notebook didn't only contain practical information. It contained Gem's thoughts – about her life, about her children and grandchildren, memories, small items she wanted her grandchildren to have, and messages to them all.

The notebook gave such comfort to Gem's family, and the reassurance of knowing that the arrangements that they were making were what she really wanted, not just what they hoped she wanted.

Gem's daughter, in collaboration with a friend, was inspired to create "Last Writes" as a way for people to organise their final



wishes, closing reflections and a lasting legacy. It is a beautiful book – so much more than a notebook, it is a personal journal and family keepsake. We are very grateful to the authors for allowing us to offer the book for sale to you at a discounted price of \$35.00. It can be purchased through our website at leprosy.org.nz/shop/books/, or on our stationery order form.

We hope it will inspire you to create a treasured final gift for your family and friends. All proceeds from our sale of this book will benefit families affected by leprosy in the South Pacific.

Lala's Office

It is so exciting to think that I may be able to re-commence travelling in a few months. It has been very strange not holding donor meetings or visiting people at home, and being unable to go overseas and see our patients has also been very hard. I don't have any news about where or when the next donor meeting will be, but as soon as I do, you will be the first to know!

In the meantime, I hope you all had a happy Easter and have been enjoying the fine weather with your families and friends.

Information

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

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

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

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19 May 2022

Dear

Our latest newsletter focuses on Fiji. It highlights the importance of regular skin clinics in outlying areas to ensure early diagnosis of leprosy cases, reducing the risk of infection of other household members.

One young man had not realised the implications of his symptoms when doctors previously visited his island and now faces a life made difficult by his disabilities. This also underlines the importance of public awareness of leprosy signs and symptoms, and the possible effects of ignoring them.

Without your support and generosity, these skin clinics and the care of leprosy patients would not happen and a great many more families would suffer not only the physical, but also the social and economic effects of leprosy.

Thank you all.

Yours sincerely



Jill Tomlinson
GENERAL MANAGER

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- Making a regular monthly donation

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