

A Year as English Teacher at Talua Ministry Training Centre, Vanuatu

I was a teacher at Talua Ministry Training Centre in Vanuatu for a year in 2017. During my time there I taught English to about 50 diploma students as a support for their religious studies. Most students expected to become pastors when they finish. There were only a few female students and some of them will do youth, children's or women's work, but some want to be pastors.

There is also a 3 year Bachelor of Ministries course with smaller numbers. They have a number of well qualified (and voluntary) lecturers from the Presbyterian Church of Australia who come for two weeks to a month at a time. I enjoyed meeting them. Unusually, one came from Christchurch (Dr. Steve Williams). His daughter April took some lectures too. They specialise in family matters and were able to teach about things that the Ni-vans do not usually mention! Some of them told me it was very helpful.

The APCM (Australian Presbyterian Church Mission) also sends a team for maintenance jobs in June and December each year. Last year they were building an ablution block for the single men and this year they were increasing the usefulness of the solar power supply so that Talua now has a more reliable water supply and lighting in offices. My house and the Australian family's house were the only ones with a fridge and the Ni-van staff and some of the students filled them at the end of every week when they got in meat or fish for their family meal on Sundays. My solar batteries passed their use-by date (and nearly caused a fire) during Term 3 so I had to turn the fridge off overnight when there was no sunlight to keep it going. We were also the only ones with a gas oven so one of my main pastimes was baking which was always in demand (I learnt to eat my share first!).

About half of the students had their wives and families with them. Some of the "singles" had left wives and even families behind and could not always afford to go back to visit them in the holiday breaks. Families who come from the southern islands do not get back even in the summer break. This makes it hard to pay their fees and for their children's fees in the nearby school. There is also a play group for little ones and a kindy for the next level on the campus.

The wives have a course they can do and I took an English class with them each week. They also do weaving, sewing and other practical things that will be useful to them as pastor's wives, including helping the income of the parishes where they will go.



Helen Wells (rear) with staff at Talua

Vanuatu is an under-developed country but has a reputation for being one of the happiest. There was always singing, laughter, bells or gongs to be heard on the campus and flowers in abundance. Everything begins and ends with prayer. That is not to say that there is not a lot of suffering, especially in family life. I learned something of it when we going on our village weekend trips, and also tried to get my students to understand and think about what they could be doing to help when they are in leadership.

I returned to Diamond Harbour at the beginning of December, but there is a need for a replacement English teacher, a librarian and a farm manager to teach a local how to manage the support farm with its plantations and especially the cattle, sheep and goats. The adjacent Navota Farm was started 50 years ago under the Very Rev. Paddy Jansen on a lovely piece of coastline, so it has strong NZ connections from those days.

Helen Wells



Helen with students who were sponsored by Global Mission

If you are interested in finding out more about how you could serve in Vanuatu, contact Global Mission Coordinator Phil King, phil@presbyterian.org.nz.