



Good book guides mission team's Vanuatu library

Christchurch couple Graeme and Maebry Reid didn't let Cyclone Pam distract them from their missionary work with school children in Vanuatu – in fact, experiencing it first-hand made them all the more determined to stay on.

The Reids got involved in Vanuatu after Global Mission Coordinator the Rev Phil King visited their church, St Margaret's in Bishopdale. "He asked Graeme whether we were interested in mission in Vanuatu, and we went away to pray and think about it," says Maebry.

Around that time, the couple spent eight weeks volunteering at a church in Motueka, where they met people from Vanuatu working as pruners in the orchards.

"When God wants you somewhere he keeps knocking on your door, and we eventually opened the door and said yes," says Graeme.

In February, the Reids headed to Onesua College to help students with reading and English. But only eight weeks into their placement, Cyclone Pam ripped through the school. Most of the older staff housing and student dormitories were damaged or roofless.

"Our guesthouse was left reasonably intact, so we returned to Port Vila on the first available bus and gave our house back to the Onesua Principal so he could continue running the school," recalls Maebry.

In Port Vila the Reids were introduced to Principal Daniel of Seaside Community School. "The school is in a very poor area, and we saw that the reading levels really needed improvement," says Graeme.

So the couple decided to stay on and continue their good work. They were



Maebry Reid helps struggling readers at the Seaside Community School, Port Vila.

assigned to help 10 to 12 struggling readers from years two and three.

"We have two classes of renegades, hyperactive and dyslexic children, who, if left in classes of 37 children, would not pass the exam in year 8 to go to high school," says Maebry.

To successfully teach these children, they turned a large room built for woodwork classes into a library and classroom, with the help of an Australian work team. Three other couples helped finish the room and fit book shelves, as well as sorting, unpacking and recording donated books.

"We now have a model library, with many interesting books suitable for struggling readers," says Graeme. "Sarah and Ruth, two local ladies, will continue on in the library when we go."

The couple has also launched a Saturday morning adult class in conversational English, and Principal Daniel plans to use the building for other classes like sewing, cooking, and local crafts, which are useful for students who leave school after year 8.

Graeme and Maebry intend to return home at the end of the school year. In the ten months they've spent in Vanuatu, they say the most rewarding experience has been observing the slow readers' progress.

"When we thought we were getting nowhere, suddenly they'd connect," says Maebry. "Half of it was in the

trusting relationships, fostering kindness between us. God's loving care for every child became evident as we pushed through each lesson."

The biggest surprise was seeing a child who had trauma at birth, and who never used her voice, starting to talk and laugh, says Maebry.

"She's a sweet little treasure, and has taught us many things about Jesus restoring the weak and lonely.

"On our walk from her classroom to the library, she sometimes shares her week with me. She also goes to Sunday School, and her face lights up when you talk about Jesus. She is attracted to all the beautiful Christian books people have given us, and loves to make up her own stories.

"What I will take back in my spirit will be the experience of working with a team of dedicated, passionate servers of Christ.

"We've seen how God loves each of God's children individually, passionately and radically. Like thousands of seeds in a pod, we're gathered together for a season, then dispersed by the wind of the Holy Spirit, each with the potential to grow a tiny new life. Our hope is to see these seeds grow into next year's crops, and a harvest of honest, caring and kind people who will lead the nation of Vanuatu with the love of God in their hearts."

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