



STUDENTS LEARN JOY OF SERVICE

A heartwarming service trip to Vanuatu has left an indelible mark on 20 Saint Kentigern Year 8 students who visited the Pacific island with their parents.

The seven-day trip in July was a first for the Saint Kentigern students involved - 13 from the boys' school and seven from the girls' school. Each accompanied by a parent and with four staff in tow, the students soaked up the local NiVan culture while working across three different sites.

They helped paint containers and install outdoor tables for a café used as a source of income for the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu (PCV). They also did work at two schools outside Port Vila, built an incinerator at Macses School, installed playground equipment, created soccer goal posts using downpipe, and provided desks and chairs for the school's new classrooms. They built another incinerator at Etas School, installed outdoor playground equipment and galvanised football posts there, and helped swell the school's resources.

Each of those commitments brought opportunities to engage with the community. One particular highlight for them was the distribution of supplies transported in a shipping container, from school stationery and sports equipment, to toys, furniture, clothes, medical supplies and even nappies.

Students penned their thoughts at the end of the trip. One of them, Kate Thibaud, described it as a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and added: "I will never forget the looks on the children's faces when we gave them a bag of clothes each ... they clung to them as if they'd never let go. One little barefoot boy didn't want to choose a pair of shoes for himself from those we were handing out, he chose a pair for his dad instead."



Saint Kentigern students getting stuck into their work during their service trip to Vanuatu.

Kate noted how poorly resourced the schools were when compared to those in New Zealand. She wrote of the joy felt by everyone on the day the goods were distributed, when shelves were stacked with books and stationery, toys spread out on the tables. "Even though the children didn't have school that day, they came running in with the biggest smiles imaginable, screaming with laughter."

Fellow students Jamie Mora and Sammy Hart wrote about how much they had learned about the way many other people lived. There were many 'wow' moments, they said, all of which left them knowing they had made a difference and impacted children's lives. "Just looking at the kids' huge grins even when we hadn't done anything yet ... it showed how lucky we are, and that these kids are super-grateful," they wrote.

The service trip was the culmination of six months of planning led in the main by Saint Kentigern chaplain, the Rev Reuben Hardie, and supported by the Saint Kentigern Trust Board and both boys' and girls' school principals, Peter Cassie and Juliet Small.

"Our students are expected to undertake service at home, at school and, as they get into their intermediate years, in the community," explains Reuben, who has organised service trips to the Pacific since 2015. "It is our belief that service is one of the ways that faith makes sense

for our students as they can experience the difference helping others can make."

Saint Kentigern students regularly help at the Presbyterian Foodbank in Auckland, he says, and assist with other Presbyterian Support Northern initiatives and at numerous different schools.

The July trip was supported by the Church's Global Mission co-ordinator, the Rev Phil King, with Vanuatu-based Global Mission volunteers, Gloria and Neville Jones guiding Reuben to the projects in most need.

Funds were raised through initiatives that included shoe shine days at the schools, a movie fundraiser, a silent auction of items donated by members of the school community, and the sale of boxes of eco soap. Additional help from school supporters and the wider community meant organisers were able to fill the 20ft shipping container with a range of materials needed for the projects, including five tonnes of cement, as well as donated items for distribution.

"Our students worked alongside their parents, mixing cement, digging holes, painting ... they also spent time reading and playing with the children, weaving flax and so on," Reuben says. "The students who attend these trips grow in character and perspective. They learn some invaluable life lessons."

Viv Posselt [Spanz](#)