

## Church volunteers continue to help heal Vanuatu

**Cyclone Pam was the most intense tropical cyclone of 2015. It had a devastating effect on Vanuatu. One year on, the Church's mission partnership with the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu, Pacific Vision Vanuatu, is still actively supporting recovery.**

"It's magic having a team up there. They're so confident and contributing so well," says the Rev Phil King, Global Mission coordinator. "And it's great to see how well accepted and valued they are. We have a wonderful partnership model."

Shirley and Don Anton were on their way home in November when a meeting in Port Vila with the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu education secretary Jonathan Tarip changed their plans. They decided to accept the calling to return in February to new roles in the Assembly Office in Port Vila.

"We both felt there were roles that aligned philosophically with our faith – not just 'doing for' but strengthening people and structures," says Shirley.

The PCV has taken over responsibility for some government schools. Don is developing policy and procedures so the schools can become registered training providers while Shirley is developing cross-curricula writing skills and resources for literacy development.

Generous donors have offered to pay the rent for their furnished flat in Vila. Life in Vila, they say, is significantly different to their previous placement at Talua.

"Talua is a beautiful rural setting but 20km from Luganville along a very potholed road. Here in Vila it takes 10 minutes to walk to the central market and downtown."

Joining them in Vila from February to April was Bron Markham, a nurse from Carterton. She tutored students in first



As well as assisting with dental outreach Gloria Jones works with students at the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu's Seaside school in Port Vila.

aid and resuscitation techniques at the Korvan Community Health School. Living in one room of the dormitory for female students thrust her into a level of engagement that was a challenge and a privilege, she says.

"I talked to them about adolescence and the plethora of issues tied up with that 'small' topic," she explains, "as well as caring for ill students and advising them on hygiene and nutrition. They're so open and honest and just laugh in a way that infects the entire room."

While many students have the latest smart phones, Bron discovered none had email addresses or any appreciable level of computer skills. She set about remedying that, so the girls can access online learning websites and improve their typing skills.

Bron has worked previously in Papua New Guinea and says that while some expats may arrive with high ideals about changing the world, she had no desire to do other than stand back, watch and learn.

"Ni-Vanuatu people have a depth of wisdom and life experience that has led to an astuteness that is wonderful to work with. I was very much at peace there and would recommend this type of service to people who have the financial freedom."

Neville Jones agrees. Having been there for more than a year, he says the experience has taught him about taking time to form relationships rather than just get the job done.

"Don't expect it to happen soon," he says. "They're not bound by the clock, so they want to sit, talk and make a friend."

Work has progressed, nonetheless. The rebuild of five staff houses and one dormitory at Onesua College is complete. The houses can accommodate 10 teachers with a small family. Most importantly, the construction has provided work for men whose main source of income from coconut crops was destroyed in the cyclone.

Gloria Jones has taken part in two outreach dental trips. All up, 513 patients had 448 teeth extracted over a period of 24 days.

"Having come from a military background in the dental field it was a privilege to share my knowledge of setting up sterile areas in some primitive locations," she says. "We all learnt a lot from each other and I enjoyed training a local medical team in Lamap Malakula. It's a blessing to enrich other people's lives and I can see the year going by very fast."

Gloria is also helping welcome teams arriving through the Church's Global Mission office and there are still opportunities and travel subsidies, for parishes and schools from New Zealand to work alongside local communities and help resource them.

To discuss volunteer opportunities, contact the Rev Phil King on [phil@presbyterian.org.nz](mailto:phil@presbyterian.org.nz). To stay in touch with news, visit the Jones' blog site at [www.jonesvanuatu.blogspot.co.nz](http://www.jonesvanuatu.blogspot.co.nz) or download the latest Nambawan newsletter from [www.presbyterian.org.nz/national-ministries/global-mission/vanuatu](http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/national-ministries/global-mission/vanuatu)

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