

Reaching the Islands!



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Dear friends,

It's been a while since our last Fiji newsletter as we were away for one year on medical leave; however we've been back since July & have been busy ever since our plane hit the runway! We'll be sending several newsletters over the coming months to catch up on all that's been happening.

As you may remember, in Feb 2016, Fiji was hit by an extremely powerful, category 5 cyclone; Winston was in fact the strongest cyclone ever in the southern hemisphere & caused enormous damage. With wind speeds of over 200kmph & gusts of over 300kmph, it's estimated that 44 people lost their lives, while whole villages were destroyed by high winds or tidal waves....

One of the first things we did after returning to Fiji, was to ask the Ministry of Education for their list of top-priority cyclone-damaged schools that are the most in need of library books & other educational materials. They gave us a list with 24 schools, divided among 3 islands. This newsletter is about our visit to Koro, the first island on the list & the most damaged.

Next, we approached Goundar Shipping with a request for 2 seats on the overnight ship, along with free transportation for the 26 boxes of books we would be taking with us to Koro. 'Thank you' to director George Goundar for agreeing to help us with all 3 of our island trips.

The big remaining question was how on earth to manage the logistics after arriving at Koro? We found that the 8 schools on our list were scattered around the island, but that no map existed to show their location. It wasn't at all clear if we should base out of one school & make trips to all the others, or whether we should do a circular trip around the island, giving out the boxes one school at a time.



Left: Arriving at Kade Primary School, there was no shortage of manual labour to help us!

Right: once a nice house before the cyclone, the owners are now living in the tent behind.

Then there was the challenge of accommodation: where to stay on an island where many of the houses have been destroyed & people are living in Unicef tents? We're very thankful to Mr Joshua at the Eastern Education Office, who helped sort out these problems, arranging for us to visit 2 schools per day & then to spend the night with the head teacher of the second school. He also organized trucks, (we paid for the petrol), to take us from one school to the next.

During the next week, we gave books to every school, many of which were still operating out of tents, while construction was going on to rebuild their classrooms. Both children & teachers were delighted to now have a library of good quality books: a big 'thank you' to John & Heather Mason that collected many of them from Australian schools in their area. Also to Chris Park, along with Jan & Shane O'Brien, that helped get the books from Australia to Fiji!

Here are some of the other smaller challenges that we needed to deal with during our visit: no tarmac roads but only dirt tracks, no electricity except 3 hours of solar generated light in the evening, very friendly mosquitoes, lots of insects & rodents in most of the places we stayed in; limited tap water to wash with & risky to drink, (though we drank it anyway as no alternative!) Of course we were only there for one week, while villagers face these challenges all the time...

All our work is done on a voluntary basis so any financial help would be very much appreciated! Our PayPal account name is gouymarieange@yahoo.fr

Alternatively, donations can be deposited or transferred directly to our charity account: Pacific Outreach, account 9515841, ANZ bank main branch, Suva, Fiji, (international swift code ANZ BFJFX). Many thanks to all those that have helped us over the years!



Above: Sue passing out colourful library books at Vunivasa Primary School.



Above: students at Qalivakabau Primary School hold up their new library books!



Above: a Unicef tent where we spent the night at Tuatua Nassau Primary School.

For more news, please see our website www.pacificoutreach.com

*Yours, Peter & Susan Kingston
Email: pacificoutreach@yahoo.fr*