

Projects Abroad *Fiji*

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER

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Bula Vinaka everyone,

Welcome to the April edition of the Projects Abroad Official Newsletter for Fiji. This month the schools have been winding down towards the end of term, with exams and revision classes. We have also been preparing for our Projects Abroad Holiday School programmes that will be taking place in both Nadi and Suva during the 2 week term break in May.



On a personal note, as I am soon to depart Fiji, April was full of many sad goodbyes for me. The good news is that we have a fabulous new staff member who has joined the Fiji team this month to take over as Assistant Manager (more about her later on), and next month we have another fabulous new staff member who will be taking over as Social Manager, and will be responsible for this newsletter (more about him in the May edition!). Therefore if you have any suggestions, comments or contributions for future editions of our Fiji newsletter please from now on contact jonesolinaikoro@projects-abroad.org, or to keep in touch with me by all means contact annebuglass@projects-abroad.co.uk.

Finally I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the people I have worked alongside here in Fiji over the past 7 months: Volunteers, colleagues, local staff in the projects, and our wonderful host families who have treated me as their very own daughter/sister/aunty since the day I arrived. You have all made living in Fiji an unforgettable experience for me. The kindness of the Fijian people is in my opinion unmatched anywhere else in the world, and for this reason it will always be a very special place for me and so many others who spend time in this wonderful country.

Vinaka vaka levu to you all, and I hope to see you again soon!

Anne xxx



Cover photo: Andrea Kursetjerde with her class 8 pupils on her last day at Namaka Public School.

Treasure House Childrens Home By Franziska Frohberg

At the beginning of my volunteer project I didn't know what to expect behind the lopsided, pink garden gate of the orphanage. I only knew that my new charges would be 12 infants. After I had exchanged a short few words with the manager, a little two-year-old jumped suddenly into my arms and started speaking at me in incomprehensible English. I had expected the children to be more held-back, and was very surprised to learn that they were the complete opposite.

Treasure House Children's home was founded by 2 American missionaries in 2000 in a town called Ba. In 2007 the running of the orphanage was taken over by the AOG (Assemblies of God) church in Nadi and they brought the orphans to Nadi to live.

The seven-roomed house with a big garden lies directly on the main street. The rent is paid for by a local business. In the front garden the children have lots of space to play, and the back garden is used for meals and washing clothes.

At the orphanage, the day begins very early. After getting up and having breakfast the children who are of school age must complete their chores in the garden and house and the younger ones are allowed to play before they all meet for prayer. Until morning tea, the children play in the games room. After morning tea they watch cartoons for 40 minutes and then return to the games room until lunchtime. After lunch they have a 2 hour nap and then hold Vespers. At around this time, the school children return home. Then they all romp in the garden for a little while before they all shower, have dinner and watch some television. At 8pm they say their evening prayers and at 9 o'clock it's lights out. This ordinary daily routine can be spontaneously interrupted if tourists come and visit to take photos of the children and bring gifts. For me, these visits made the orphanage feel a bit like a zoo. We volunteers tried to organise some activities to break from this sometimes monotonous daily routine by planning trips, doing arts and crafts, singing or teaching the children basic numbers, mathematics and colours etc.

Most of the children are in the orphanage because of neglect, abuse or because they have lost one parent (half-orphans). Sometimes cultural background has a role too. The children are between the ages of 0 – 17 and on average there are up to 20 children in the home. In the last 2 months there were never enough beds for all the children.



I must say, that I have never seen such small, bright little fighters who know a distressing amount about the harshness of life. It was a pity to see that the children have no respect for property or a meaningful relationship to toys. The toy is there – and if it breaks then it will be replaced. A Barbie has an average lifespan of half a day, a car amazingly up to one or two weeks. I also observed and reflected upon the way the children interacted with each other. They do not regard themselves as family members, but rather as rivals. Affection and tenderness is quite rare. Generally, there is a lot of shouting and bickering and someone crying. Surprisingly, they learn very quickly and are always very interested in anyone new. The children also have an unbelievable charm with which they drive straight into your heart!

The children are looked after by approximately 30 supervisors (Nannies) who are separated into day and night shifts. There are always 5 nannies in the home, and also the cook, the manager and the housekeeper/property manager. To get a job as a nanny at the orphanage, you don't need any special qualifications in education or childcare. Usually an internship (traineeship) ranges from 3 days to 8 weeks.

Despite its obvious problems, I can see that this home/orphanage is a chance for these children to escape from a horrible family situation and have a chance at a better life. Most of the children are glad to be there. In the four months that I spent there as a volunteer I didn't feel as needed as I thought I might as they do have staff to care for the children, but I appreciate that it does make a difference to the children's lives having volunteers there to show love and comfort and to try and help support their educational needs. The nannies are very shy/held-back at the start and it can be hard to communicate with them especially as they always speak Fijian with each other.

I tried to integrate aspects of preschool curricula in my activities with the children. I did worksheets on a range of subjects with the children for 20 minutes each morning. We also did lots of singing, reading, dancing and painting. I also tried to teach the children polite etiquette in the form of words like "please" and "thank you". However, it was difficult to maintain a routine as things are constantly being changed. On top of this, my materials like puzzles, games, pens etc were lost as the children don't put any value to things.

Despite the difficulties and frustrations during the 4 months that I worked there, I had an amazing time with the children, and I will remember my time with them forever. They are all in my heart and I would dearly love to take them back home with me. Of course that isn't possible so I really hope and wish that each of the children will one day find a place in a loving family.

Franziska Frohberg (Germany)
Care Volunteer – Fiji
Sept 2010 – March 2011



News and Updates

First from Nadi...

Castles at Namaka Public School:

As I was walking by the class 4 at Namaka Public School, the teacher came running to get me to show me what the volunteer was doing in class with the children. The children were up to their elbows in paint and cutting up boxes, cards, ribbon etc. It was then explained to me that they were making castles. Our volunteer Hilary Foster is from Edinburgh, famed for its castle in the centre of the city. I was then told the castles being created in the classroom were "Fiji Castles", the Fijian equivalent of Edinburgh Castle! The children were clearly having a blast and it's great that Hilary was able to bring a bit of Scotland to the classroom. The teacher was also very keen to tell me that Hilary has been helping individual students with their reading, in particular those that were having difficulties. She said she has already seen an improvement in a matter of weeks. Good work Hilary!



Treasure House re-vamp!

Treasure House Orphanage has outgrown the small building that has been housing all of the children, so they have taken over the next door building to make more room. The girls will be moving to the new house next door which has 4 bedrooms and a lounge area. Volunteers Steijn Van der Craats and Lennart Letzel have given the new rooms a splash of paint to smarten it up a little (and signing it with their Fijian names!. They also donated a set of bunk beds and a sofa for the new building.



New Staff member!

As mentioned in the welcome note, we have a new Assistant Manager who will be based in Nadi. Alisha East joined us on 20th April and has already had a busy few weeks being introduced to the placements and host families. Alisha volunteered in India with Projects Abroad five years ago, and is also a qualified TEFL teacher. She is originally from the UK but has been living and working in Australia for the past two years, so it was just a short hop across the water for her! On behalf of all of us at Projects Abroad Fiji, I would like to welcome Alisha to the team. I'm sure she will do a fantastic job and will have a great time.



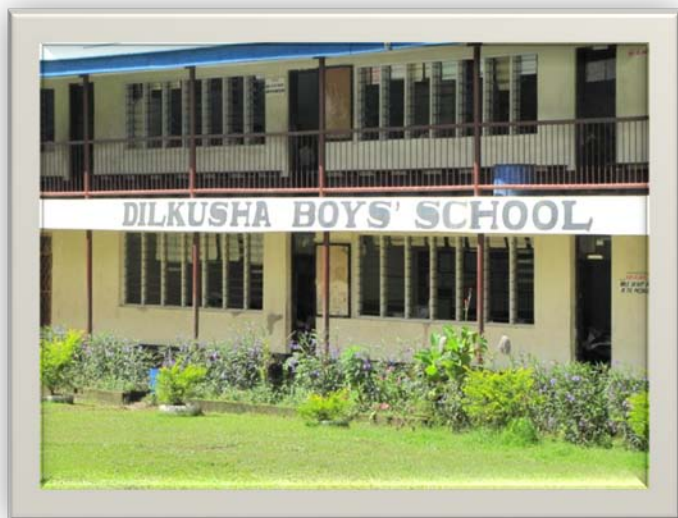
...and now from Suva!

(By Chinnamma Reddy)

“Time flies in Fiji” says our Medical volunteer Lindsay Dubnicek, who is here on a month long mission to learn as much as she can about Fiji’s health system before returning to the chaos of her life back home. This month has indeed gone so fast, and it’s a sad one too as we said good-byes to some of our early volunteers; Joe Hobdell, Simon Stanfield, Andrea Rothenbuehler, Josephine Skat-Rordam, Karen Wardel, and Lindsay Dubnicek. All of them were amazing volunteers and a hearty thank-you to all for your hard work.

The office in Suva is finally up and running, and its great working from the new place after almost four months of being a “mobile” office. So far we have had three volunteers and a host visit us in the first week and I would like to invite all Suva volunteers to visit the office sometime. Next month we will have an official ‘launch’ of the office, so you can read more about that in the May edition.

Star Placement of the month: Dilkusha Boys School



Dilkusha Boys School is our star placement for the month and we say thank you to the head teacher, staff and pupil of the school for giving Joe Hobdell and Simon Stanfield an amazing teaching experience. It couldn’t get any better as the boys were doing what they did best, sports, sports and more sports. So much so that they even organised a rugby sevens tournament at the school and even donated rugby jerseys and a trophy to commemorate the event! Great going boys!

Special host mention...

A big vinaka vaka levu (thank you very much) to hosts Ani and Rocky Fatiaki who gave Joe Hobdell an amazing time in Fiji. He had such a wonderful time with the family and it was certainly difficult to say good-bye towards the end.



Teaching at Namaka Public School

By Tom Smith



I arrived in Fiji on 17th January 2011 and all I can say about my first day is 'Wow, its seriously hot!' But as soon as you get used to the heat, you can really settle down into your placement and do what you came here to do; which is to help the kids.

My placement was Namaka Public School, just across the road from Colonial Plaza in Namaka. If I was asked to describe my first day, I would probably say

that it was massive culture shock, but a good one and not overwhelming. All those wide eyed children looking at you as you go to the canteen at recess to get your chocolate donut for 80 cents (they are epic). And teaching the children about Geoboards in Mathematics was interesting, considering that Maths wasn't exactly my strongest subject and it had been a while since I'd last encountered them.

If you are willing to take responsibility with lessons and with the children on an individual basis then you will succeed in having a rewarding experience. But you have to be prepared to step outside your comfort zone on occasions, once you've done so you'll feel better for it. The children are so humble and kind, for instance on my first day I had nowhere to sit so a child gave up his own chair to let me sit down. Where in the U.K or indeed the rest of the world would you find a student who is willing to stand up for the whole school day because he/she gave up their chair to a complete stranger? It's definitely the little things.

Get the right balance with the children, you don't want to go all that distance to Fiji and be a Scrooge all day long do you? I had them doing poster projects which they could assemble in their free time, which didn't interrupt curriculum and they seemed to enjoy it and it acted as an ice breaker too. But you are in a school and discipline has to be maintained. Otherwise they will run riot and you won't be able to teach them anything. Balancing having a laugh and keeping them focused on their work is key.



I think I had a really good class, they were Class 7P and were around 30 kids strong. 11 and 12 year old children are easier to help in my eyes, I would have been a rabbit in headlights in kindergarten. Their English was quite good along with their manners. The teacher who I was working alongside was called Theresa Prasad and we had such a good time together, it makes it so much easier when you have someone there who is helpful and

easy to get on with. Anyone going to Namaka Public School ask to be with Theresa, although she will make you work hard!

Certainly from my personal experience, the more responsibility you have the more rewarding your experience will be and with Projects Abroad in Fiji it is an ideal location. You will learn to love electric fans also, especially in the classroom! You can't help but bond with the children and teachers, it's inevitable really with the amount of time that you spend with them. I couldn't possibly imagine it at the time but it was really sad to leave; I was actually holding back the tears because, obviously, a young lad from the north of England cannot cry in front of others. Some of the kids even said they would hide in my backpack and surprise me at Manchester Airport when I went to open my bag. They were definitely imaginative children.

My final day in school was absolutely amazing, probably the highlight of my trip to Fiji and one experience that will live with me forever. The children brought in loads of fizzy pop, cake, sweets and treats and considering the poverty that many children live in I was amazed at how much effort had gone into the so-called surprise party. I found out earlier in the week when my teacher let it slip, however, I was nonetheless amazed by it all. They had handmade flower garlands, which they presented to me in front of the class, they were singing for me, they made lots of colourful cards and it was all very personal. At that point I realised that yes I had actually helped these kids and in turn they had helped me as a person.

By Tom Smith (UK),
Teaching Volunteer
Jan-March 2011



The fun stuff!

Nadi Socials:

Our monthly social was held at the Nadi Canoe Club at Wailoaloa beach in Nadi. We were 20 people split into 4 outrigger canoes. The competitive spirit was alive during the sprints, with some teams taking it a bit more seriously than others (mentioning no names!). After the hard work paddling we were treated to fresh fruit and a drink on the beach in time for sunset. Despite the somewhat gloomy skies it turned out to be a great afternoon. Definitely an activity to repeat in the future.



There's been a lot going on in Nadi this month. The Nadi fiesta ran from 16th - 24th March with all sorts of daytime and evening entertainment in the centre of town. There was a regatta on the 23rd at Wailoaloa beach. The annual Sangham convention was held this year in Nadi over the Easter weekend, with people travelling from all over Fiji to take part.



With so many beautiful islands close by, sometimes it's hard to know which one to visit (tough life I know!). A popular island trip this month was Bounty Island in the Mamanuca group. Bounty Island got its name on the map a few years back when it played host to the TV reality show *Celebrity Love Island*.

Please don't be put off by that insignificant fact however, as it's well worth a visit for many other reasons. It's a mere 45 minute boat ride to reach this white sand beach, and the reef is right off the beach so beautiful coral and thousands of types of fish (including reef sharks) are no more than a few meters away. It takes approximately half an hour to circumnavigate the island, so you really do feel like you're in paradise!

Suva Socials:

Suva vols have been quite busy during their weekends doing almost all of the fun stuff and activities there are to do in and around the capital. Simon, Andrea, Josephine and Clare embarked on a weekend road trip around the main island, Viti Levu and had a blast doing it. "Highly recommended" were their comments after the trip as long as you know which side of the road to keep on (Fyi it's the left!!!). Joe, Simon, Josephine and Clare a.k.a "the dilkushans" and Andrea were out and about in Lautoka supporting Joe's host brother playing for the Fiji Rugby team against Samoa. Good on you guys, Go Fiji Go!!

Discovering Fiji, by Karen Wardle

"One of my most memorable Fijian experiences was the Discover Fiji tour that I went on in April. It ran from Navua and started with a canoe ride up the river. The scenery was amazing! They took us to a village where local Fijians demonstrated the traditional way of life. We were welcomed to the village with a traditional kava ceremony. They showed us their kindergarten and demonstrated how they make traditional items such as tanoas, weapons, fans and mats. They explained the many uses of a coconut and demonstrated how to open a coconut without crushing it. Then they unearthed our lovo lunch which we shared with them."

"After lunch the fun really began when it started raining. We passed the time with singing and dancing, they taught us some Fijian dances and absolutely everyone was on their feet. We were then due to take the canoes up river to visit the waterfalls. Even though it was pouring with rain we still decided to go. As we were bailing water out of the boat and getting completely saturated, lightning struck the bank of the river right next to us! It was deafening, but really, really exciting! I was giggling the whole way to waterfalls. The pouring rain had eased by the time we arrived and the rain had turned out to be a blessing as the waterfalls were running very strong. We swam under the waterfalls and jumped into the crystal clear pools. We took a traditional Fijian bilibili raft down the rapids all the way back to the village. It was a white-knuckle experience but so much fun!"

"I arrived home absolutely saturated, exhausted and minus my shoes, which are probably still floating downstream somewhere in the rainforest! My cheeks were sore from laughing too much. It was a phenomenal experience and I would recommend it to every other Fiji volunteer."

Karen Wardle (Australia)
Teaching volunteer
March - April 2010

Fiji Magic

By Maciej Sulek



Bula everyone !!!!! My name is Maciek Sulek and I'm from Poland. I came to Fiji knowing nothing about the country except for palm trees, white sandy beaches and a national rugby team. However just a short time after arriving in Nadi I also discovered Fiji Bitter, dark rum, kava and Martintar (the street that never sleep). I have been living and volunteering in Fiji for 6 months, working at the Nadi Muslim Kindergarten, the best placement I could ever imagine. All the children were just amazing and super intelligent. If it were at all possible I would adopt at least half of them! The staff made me feel like a part of the family, sharing food during the lunch breaks, inviting me for dinner and celebrating lots of different special days together. I also miss the 'Mamas' who were always waiting for their children in the front of the school. They asked me thousands of funny questions everyday: "Magic why are you late again?? What's her name? Did you go out again last night?" My answers were always the same: "I had to wait for breakfast, then there were no buses and now I'm here"!

During my 6 months in Fiji I met so many volunteers, most of whom came to be my really good friends!!! All of these people had a huge impact on my life and for sure I'll never forget them. I wish I could have these kinds of friends back home.

Anyway, work aside, I would like to also encourage volunteers in Fiji to use their holidays wisely, and to go to places where they will discover the 'real Fiji'. From my experience most of the volunteers were choosing closer islands like Mana, Beachcomber, Mala Mala, or the further Yasawa Islands for

their weekend trips. They're easy to get, not too far away, you get discounts with your Projects Abroad ID Card, there are lots of backpackers, and as I remembered no mosquitoes (although don't quote me on this). Thank god at the end of my time in Fiji I had the chance to visit one more island: Javeuni.



The first morning I woke up in Lavena Lodge (backpacker style accommodation located just next to the beach) I slapped myself twice on my face. I couldn't believe what I saw outside. The word "beautiful" doesn't do justice to what I saw. This place is truly paradise. Lavena village is located on the west coast of Javeuni exactly in the heart of the Bouma National Park. They are such friendly people there!! The area boasts stunning beaches, reasonable prices, and very good food. Most importantly it's very close to Javoro Waterfalls, a hike which takes you up into the hills. To be honest it was one of the most memorable places I've ever been! The trail starts out with a 10 minute walk to the first (and best) waterfall, and then continues to the gorgeous panoramic views at the second and third falls.

Air Pacific have regular flights from Nadi and Suva which usually take around one hour to get there, or for people with smaller budget there is always the option of catching a ferry which sails from Suva taking 13-14 hours. I would highly recommend Lavena Lodge to anyone going to Javeuni as I think it is a truly authentic Fijian village. I forgot to mention that from the room u can hear every single wave crashing. What more could you ask for! Of course the lodge is old and very basic but I had a warm shower, clean toilet, a comfortable bed, and that's all I really needed.

Finally, I think places are not the most important thing, but it's the people who you are with and the people you meet along the way that make it special 😊!

*By Maciej Sulek (Poland),
Care volunteer
Sept 2010 – March 2011*



Miscellaneous



In early April Lindsay and Karen Wardle visited St. Christopher's Orphanage in Nakasi. They spent the afternoon getting to know the Sisters and the children and then watched the Fijians, Australians and Americans play each other in the Adelaide Rugby 7's tournament. Karen donated \$50 worth of children's clothes and some Australian Christian teaching resources for the Sisters to use with the children during their Sunday school lessons. During her time at Suva Primary School, Karen also donated a variety of teaching resources that she had bought with her from some of the schools she had worked at in Australia. These included English work books, general subjects text books, educational games and posters along with lots of stationary for the children.

STAY CONNECTED...



Our facebook page is a great way to chat with volunteers who are already here in Fiji, to meet those who may be coming out here soon, or get advice from volunteers who have been and gone.

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=157824798691>

Our blog will keep you up-to-date with the latest stories:

http://www.mytripblog.org/mod/blog/group_blogs.php?gl=true&group_guid=2887



...and of course we have the monthly Fiji newsletter:

<http://www.projects-abroad.co.uk/volunteer-destinations/fiji/newsletters-from-fiji/>

A special thanks this issue goes to Franziska Frohberg, Tom Smith, Maciej Sulek, Karen Wardle and Chinnamma Reddy for their excellent contributions to this issue.

Thank you for reading!

xxx

