

WFF NEWS

The latest news and updates from the Wilkins Family Foundation



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From the Chair

Simon Wilkins

A warm welcome to our latest Newsletter!

Following our first two brilliant years of operations in Vanuatu, like the rest of the world the Foundation faced Covid and all the associated challenges that came with it. I am proud to say we continued our support and although we didn't increase our numbers, we made sure we used the time wisely to plan for 2023 and beyond.

As 2022 draws to a close, we're pleased to give you a snapshot of how our year went, particularly through Sallie's illuminating report. Our CEO Jerry Marston will be adding some detail on our future plans, however I will say that mid way through 2022 when the team met to discuss our future, we unanimously agreed to significantly and purposefully grow the Foundation.

I would like to thank all of you who have engaged with us on this journey, both through your encouragement and financial contributions. I want to recognise particularly the commitment of our school, community and government partners in Vanuatu. Also thanks and congratulations to our wonderful team who freely provide their expertise, enthusiasm and time. And last but not least, our scholars, whose efforts and achievements just inspire us to do more.

We look forward to the years to come!

CEO Report

Jerry Marston



In this edition, we're playing 'catch-up' and sharing with you the main events of 2022 so far and previewing the exciting news we're covering in our Christmas edition.

We were delighted with the success of our first ever fundraising appeal in May which has generated a host of new regular donors, effectively doubled our annual income - which enables us to both continue and improve our support to current scholars AND fund 6 new girls for 2023! Thank you so much to every single supporter - you're really helping us to change lives!

As Sallie's report indicates, as our students progress their education we are building new relationships with Colleges in the towns of Vila and Santo, all of whom are very supportive of our work. We are also strengthening our existing partnerships with Secondary Schools on Malekula and beginning to reach out to explore new opportunities throughout Malampa Province and beyond.

As our Foundation grows, we need to improve our governance arrangements to ensure we have the depth and breadth of experience and skills to effectively oversee our growing operations. With this in mind we welcome two new members to the Foundation Board, Cherie Wilkins and Ian Marston, who alongside their love of Vanuatu and commitment to the cause both bring new expertise respectively in organisational management, IT and business systems. More about them on our website.

2022 will end with a flurry of important activity and around Christmas we'll be sending out our next Newsletter which will:

- update you on the progress our current scholars have made this year
- report back on our upcoming inaugural Summer Camp in mid December
- introduce our 6 new scholars selected for 2023
- announce our exciting new partnerships for 2023

Thanks again for your interest and support. You can find out more about our work on our website <https://www.wilkinsfamilyfoundation.com.au/> and also on Facebook

Country Manager

Sallie Latella

It is normal in Vanuatu that each year schools and families face the disruption and frustration of impeded air and sea travel due to cyclonic weather. The few secondary schools are scattered between the 83 islands that comprise the Vanuatu archipelago, and as nearly all offer boarding, most students have a sea journey to be able to start school.

It's February 7th, 2022 and back to school week, and Country Manager Sallie is expecting four of our scholarship students to arrive in Port Vila, mainly by sea. A low pressure system between New Caledonia and Vanuatu is causing high winds, driving rain and a treacherous sea. All flights are grounded and shipping has ceased.



Georgia just made it in time, arriving on the Vanuatu Ferry, after an overnight trip from Malekula in the north to Port Vila. Sallie and husband John drove Georgia the 60 minute trip around the island, crossing rising rivers just in time, in order to settle her into school. Jenila, Jassinda, Diana and Abigael are all waiting on Malekula to catch the ferry and plane. Diana has a fish for Sallie, a gift from her family which is being stored in a fridge in a village.

Last year, Diana, who is from the village of Taremb on Malekula, had to ford a fast flowing river carrying her belongings above her head, in order to get to the grass airstrip to board her flight to Port Vila. This was her family's second attempt to cross the dangerous river. She was a week late to school and faced the strong possibility of missing out on a bed in the crowded boarding house.

Widespread flooding wreaked havoc throughout the islands. Georgia recalls standing in her thatched, bamboo kitchen hut and suddenly realising the saucepans were floating. In no time there was water up to her waist and she had to hold onto a tree and watch their home disintegrate. She was due to begin her sea journey that day in order to start school in Port Vila

Once again, Diana had to wade the fast flowing river not far from her village, her belongings held high above her head. Upon arrival at the airfield, the family found the flight had been delayed due to flooding on the grass runway. They had to return halfway to their village in driving rain and wait four days for the "all clear". Diana finally arrived at Vila Airport with the 'mostly' frozen fish for Sallie and they drove her to her Aunt's home where they shared a traditional lunch of delicious 'tuluk' and chatted about the year ahead and her goals and dreams. She seemed excited to start Year 12.



Odette, our Francophone student from Lycee de Norsup on Malekula had spent the holidays in Vila babysitting for her Aunt. She was our first student to enrol in school in 2022 and in her case, her final year 13 at Lycee Louis Antoine de Bougainville. Unfortunately, they'd run out of uniforms in her size, a disappointing start for someone hoping to blend in! Odette's move from the rural island of Malekula to the thriving capital Port Vila was a brave one. Her final school year will be significant!

Jenila, Yr 11, and her father Jeffrey, had made several attempts to reach Vila and finally arrived on the Big Sista Ferry. It was a long journey and they were exhausted. The next day, Sallie helped Jenila enrol and choose her subjects at her new school, Malapoa College. So much change for the girl from Retur village on the beautiful untouched island of Malekula!

Sallie met Jassinda and her sister Masindha at the overwhelmingly crowded Port Vila wharf. Jassinda graduated from Rensarie High School last year. The sun was beating down as Sallie pushed through a huge crowd of recently disembarked ferry passengers with woven bags of root vegetables, bound chickens etc and spotted them sheltering in a tiny corner of shade. After loading their possessions they dropped them at their rented room for the year. The next day Sallie met Jassinda at the Market House and they found the Chinese shop that takes cheap passport photos. Once done, they enrolled in her Accounting course at the Vanuatu Institute of Technology where she will study accountancy for the year before applying for a bank position.

Abigael was the last to arrive in Port Vila, a late transfer from Lycee de Norsup to Lycee LAB. She will be staying with her Uncle and is excited to have the opportunity to experience urban life in Vila. Her uncle has offered to board her so she can complete her final year of school. She will be a welcome friend to Odette.

Sallie gathered five of the six WFF students on Efate Island at her home at Paradise Cove. After a short mentoring, journaling and goal setting session, they ate pasta and Port Vila's famous Switi chocolate ice cream and then the girls kayaked and swam, a successful time of bonding! Jenila's dad Jeffrey joined them and thoroughly enjoyed himself. He has committed to supplying us with home grown Malekula vegetables, home grown roosters and possibly a pig for our first leadership camp here in December.

In April 2022 Sallie and John travelled to Santo and Malekula. Sallie said it was great to see our Year 12 students Evalyn and Madlen at Matevulu College in Santo. They have settled in well and achieved great results last year. They arrived at Pakoa Airport only to find their flight to Norsup, Malekula, had been cancelled for the 2nd time. Plan B ensued and thirty minutes later they were at the seafront climbing into a bright orange Banana Boat headed for Wowo, North Malekula. What an adventure!

After three and a half hours of rain, large swells and strong currents in the open sea, the boat glided into the most beautiful river inlet at WoWo, the northern tip of Malekula island. This is the way most people in Vanuatu travel by sea for many hours and in much more uncomfortable conditions, an eye opener for Sallie and John!



The next day Sallie made her way to Rensarie College, in south east Malekula where we have 2 year 11 students, Lewia and Florence. Sallie got a lift and arrived at the flooded river crossing. She joined students and families wading across the fast flowing river, waist high! The staff were surprised to see her and she enjoyed a catch up and mentoring session with Lewia and a meeting with the wonderful academic principal.

The final day began with a very enjoyable visit to Lycee de Norsup, the French high school. The presentation of the school was outstanding as always and they enjoyed seeing the kindy classes in operation and spending time with our year 11 student Joelline from nearby Toutu village. The final mission was to meet with Florence and her father. Sallie really enjoys getting to know the parents and wherever possible visiting them in their villages. The foundation highly values building a relationship with the families of the students, recognising how positive this can be for the student's journey.

The regular visits to Malekula are so rewarding and the highlight of the year! Sadly due to Covid and the borders being closed, our Foundation chair Simon and CEO Jerry have not been able to be a part of the trips as they normally would. However, we are thankful we have been able to maintain contact with our students and continue to support them during these uncertain years. Despite some barriers, we have had a strong 2022 and look forward to continue sharing news throughout the next year.

