

The latest news and updates from the Wilkins Family Foundation



IN THIS ISSUE

- NEWS OF OUR SCHOLARS
- REPORT ON OUR 2023 LEADERSHIP CAMP
- WORKING WITH OUR PARTNERS
- FOUNDATION OFFICE OPENS IN VILA
- EXCITING PLANS FOR 2024

WELCOME TO OUR LAST NEWSLETTER FOR 2023

The Festive season means different things to us all however before our thoughts turn to Christmas celebrations with family and friends, I'd like to take time to reflect on our Foundation journey, what has happened this year and what is to come.

This year has been a momentous one for our Wilkins Family Foundation Scholars and the Team. There was the usual flurry of activity for our girls prepping for the year ahead, a busy and satisfying WFF Australian team visit to Vanuatu in April, the opening of our office in Port Vila, numerous visits to Malekula and Santo by the WFF Vanuatu team to conduct mentoring sessions, meet with families and attend graduations, fielding a WFF Scholars team in the annual Survivor games, the distribution of Solar Buddy Lights to a number of our partner schools, and an amazing leadership camp held in August at Pango on Efate.

The most poignant and memorable thing about 2023 is that 6 of our girls, some of whom have been with us since the start, graduate this year. They will always be part of the Foundation and we will be continuing to support them through our mentoring program and a funding package. We look forward to their ongoing success as they leave their secondary education.

I would like to take time to thank our supporters, partners and friends who all make this possible. Without your involvement and encouragement our 17 scholars would not be where they are today. Thank You.

I would also like to formally thank Sallie Latella (my sister) for her unswerving commitment to and passion for the Foundation and the work she does with our scholars. Sallie and John are returning to Australia sometime in 2024 and a new Country Manager will take over. Sallie will remain actively working for the Foundation and will continue to visit Vanuatu regularly.

Finally, 2024 will be a year of consolidation for us as we move towards embedding the Foundation operations and management in Vanuatu and extending our scholarship opportunities across other islands and provinces.

Have a happy and prosperous holiday break, enjoy time with family and friends and let's look forward to an amazing 2024.

Simon Wilkins



NEWS OF OUR SCHOLARS

The second half of 2023 has been unusually busy. We have really stepped up our mentoring and life coaching and career support, not least because our first group of six students have graduated Senior Secondary School and are moving onto their next challenges. Jinny and I have been working closely with them all to help think through their next steps, study options, and in every case to apply for scholarships and courses in preparation for further studies in 2024. We have also been supporting our university student Jassinda Morsen in her second year of a commerce degree at the University of the South Pacific in Port Vila.



Our most recent mentoring trip was in early December when Jinny and I flew to Santo to catch up with Madlen and Evalyn who graduated from Matevulu College. After a fun boat trip to Aore island, Jinny spent a mentoring hour with each girl and we ended the evening with pizzas and a presentation of their Year 13 Graduation rings.



Arriving at Matevulu College we were met with a festive sight, walkways adorned with woven coconut leaves, bright bougainvillea and hibiscus, groups of colourfully dressed families sitting on mats everywhere. We found the girls' families and sat with them on wooden benches, waiting for the ceremony to begin. It was very moving to see the emotion amongst the families and students. After the ceremony, Jinny and I were able to gather with the girls and their families for photographs and presentations of gifts of thanks from them to the Foundation for our support.

Attending graduations at Onesua, Central and Malapoa schools in Vila and Matevulu in Santo has been a real highlight of my year. What an honour! Words cannot fully convey the enormity of this occasion for students and their families. I witnessed the raw emotions of relief, gratitude, and immense pride in students, parents and family and friends. Much sacrifice and hard work has preceded these achievements. Being able to attend the graduation of four of our first six scholars was very special for all concerned and a satisfying end to another exciting year journeying with some remarkable young Ni Vanuatu women. I am really looking forward to seeing what 2024 holds for all our scholars but in particular, our six school Graduates.



A PERSONAL NOTE FROM SALLIE LATELLA...

What an inspiring, fulfilling year this has been for me. Our achievements have been a team effort, countless hours contributed by Simon, Jerry, John and myself and well supported by Jinny, Jilda, Presila and Sherol and the committee. When making the decision to return to live in Vanuatu after 39 years, I could never have imagined the richness of the experiences of the last five years. I'm very excited to see what 2024 holds for our students and the Foundation!



OUR 2023 LEADERSHIP CAMP ANOTHER GREAT SUCCESS

The 2023 'RISE' leadership camp held at the Scripture Union Camp, Honeymoon Beach in August was a resounding success and the highlight of 2023 for the girls! Fun, friendship, fantastic food and such special times of team building, sharing and learning together. The camp kicked off with sharing a laplap 'sorsor' during which the scene was set for the next two days, with inspirational stories of leadership and commitment shared by Simon and Jerry who gave insights into the foundation's history, purpose and values, and how they can be lived out in our day to day lives and endeavours.

We were delighted to welcome representatives of our generous donor, Life Unlimited Church in Canberra (Life UC), Harry and Meryl McCay, who were able to briefly join in the activities and bring a message of support and congratulation to the scholars.



Day 1 included group workshops, survivor games and 3 inspirational women sharing their extraordinary stories to empower and encourage our young women. 'Tell your story, share your story, make your stories count'... always so powerful. Thank you to Sherol, Minnie and Simone for their unique contribution.

Day 2 included leadership workshops and a session with Wilson Toa which included another impactful 'Tru the Lens' film, then onto a creative craft workshop to say it, frame it and live it.. ending on the finale dinner with foundation friends and family, speeches and performance.



WORKING WITH OUR PARTNERS TO INCREASE RESOURCES TO SCHOOLS

A highlight of the year was the distribution of 550 SolarBuddy study lights for the students of Onesua High School on North Efate. SolarBuddy is an Australian-based charity working to address energy poverty across the world. Their flagship program provides individual solar-powered lights to school students to enable them to extend their evening and weekend study time. Their 'Light Up Vanuatu' campaign aims to provide a light to every student in the country.

Accompanied by Ann Maree from the Vanuatu Foresters' Association, Country Manager Sallie and her husband John delivered and presented lights for every student at the High School. Onesua's Principal Rossie Caleb expressed the thanks of all the students and spoke of the positive impact of the gift of light. 'As we rely on a diesel generator to provide expensive, limited electricity between 6.30 am and 12pm, and from 6.30 pm to 9.30pm, SolarBuddy lights will make a big difference to our students. They will now be able to efficiently study before and after these times and will no longer need bright torches that require expensive batteries. The Onesua community is very grateful to SolarBuddy, The Wilkins Family Foundation and Vanuatu Foresters' Association for this wonderful gift'.

We were also proud to combine with Port Vila Rotary, and South Sea Cargo to provide Lakatoro Primary & Secondary school on Malekula with a shipment of library books in October. Our valued committee member Jilda Shem made the presentation to Principal John Kampai and staff.



FOUNDATION OFFICE OPENS IN VILA

In August we were very excited to open our first official office in Port Vila with Presila Simo - Vanuatu Committee Chair, Simon Wilkins - Our Chair/Founder, Sallie Latella - Country Manager, Jerry Marston - Director and Jinny Ruben - our Mentoring Manager. In a simple opening ceremony, Presila cut a ribbon and Jerry spoke of the significance of the moment, where we were 'planting a seed that will continue to grow'.

This small step represents a significant leap for us. It not only gives us presence and visibility, it also enables us to provide good working facilities for our growing team of staff and volunteers and serves as an easily accessible base to connect and meet with the ever-growing number of our scholars studying and living in Vila.



EXCITING PLANS FOR 2024

While we see 2024 as a year of consolidation, much will be in development to get us into shape for the continuation and expansion over the next 3-5 years. We're building and extending our current partnerships, and actively developing new ones, in Vanuatu and beyond. We're also planning to seriously increase our funding base, building on the excellent results from 2023.....in support of this we have secured funding for a filming project early in the year which will help us to showcase and promote the success of our work. We also have bold ambitions to increase and extend our scholarship program to provide more opportunities for girls in other provinces to achieve their dreams.... and to underpin all this we're accelerating our timetable to fully establish the Foundation in Vanuatu, through an enhanced Committee, working with a locally recruited professional team. We're looking forward to providing regular updates on the progress we expect to make in the coming months.

As always we are really grateful for your interest and continuing support, which helps make it all possible.

You can find out more about our work and how to donate by visiting our website

www.wilkinsfamilyfoundation.com.au

and also on Facebook.