

WINTER 2018 NEWSLETTER

The Fred Hollows Foundation NZ

YOUR VISION



Thank you

25 YEARS
RESTORING
SIGHT



The Fred Hollows
Foundation NZ



Message from Andrew Bell

This year marks 25 years since Fred passed away. He worked selflessly until he died to save people from being needlessly blind.

Over this time, thousands of Kiwis have agreed with Fred that it's 'obscene to let people go blind when they don't need to.' Many have faithfully donated \$25 a month while others have been able to give larger amounts. Some have remembered The Foundation in their wills and community groups have organised fundraising events. Kiwis combining their efforts to keep alive the vision of Professor Fred Hollows – eye surgeon, humanitarian and 'down to earth' Kiwi bloke.

As a result, over two million people worldwide have had their sight restored and over 60,000 of those are in the Pacific region.

Kiwis like you have helped us to train eye doctors and nurses from across the Pacific, enabling us to build an eye care network.

Fred said, "What we are doing is revolutionary... what we are doing is giving these people the chance to help themselves. We are giving them independence."

When you read this newsletter you will hopefully share our sense of pride and excitement with what has been achieved thanks to your support and where we're heading in the future.

For 25 years, we've followed Fred's ethos of not holding back. But our job isn't done, and we're looking to the next 25 years with the same determination and commitment to social justice.

We're not holding back and I hope you don't either.

On behalf of everyone who can see again in the Pacific, I thank you.

Andrew Bell / Executive Director

Gabriella, age 5

We saw the miracle for ourselves



Born at 27 weeks with a congenital cataract, Gabriella's first three years were one battle after another.

Then, in 2016, a squint in her right eye, which made it difficult for her to see, was corrected by having a cataract removed.

The team caught up with Gabriella in Vanuatu a few weeks ago, and what a change! Here was a girl happily playing in the garden with her cousin, who talked to us about mermaids and unicorns and what she loves most about the school she is now able to attend.

Watching on with us is her mother, Errollyn, who tells us that since Gabriella's operation she can see through both eyes

and her world has really grown.

"She still struggles with distances and balancing, but her glasses help a lot."

Gabriella's purple glasses (that are so cute) may be the last visible legacy of her squint, but she is still haunted by the time before her operation. The Fred Hollows visiting outreach team to Vanuatu was truly a godsend for this vulnerable little girl and her family.

Of course, that operation was part of the legacy of Fred Hollows, and another example of the amazing work our doctors and nurses do across the Pacific. It simply would not have been possible without the compassionate support of people like you, here in New Zealand.

Here is a snapshot of what your amazing support has made possible in 2017



114,352

patient eye screenings to detect eye conditions.



7,137

sight-saving surgeries.



29

Pacific eye doctors and nurses trained.



15,754

pairs of new spectacles provided.



New challenges ahead

Clerence, age 22, suffers from diabetic eye disease. Read her story by visiting hollows.org.nz/clerence

Fred once said, “It’s our job to do something about the disparity between nations. We discover our humanity by helping others. Don’t forget that this is what it is all about.” It’s with this attitude in mind that as an organisation we cannot ignore blindness caused by diabetes.

Diabetes is a rapidly escalating problem in low-income countries. The International Diabetes Federation estimate that globally **every 10 seconds three people are diagnosed with diabetes, and every eight seconds someone dies from it***. Diabetic eye disease is a complication of diabetes and is the world’s leading cause of avoidable blindness in the working age population.

*www.idf.org

Diabetes and blindness in the Pacific

In the Pacific, diabetes is at one of the highest rates in the world, despite being uncommon only a generation ago. Throughout the Pacific, diabetes and the devastating outcomes it can have, such as blindness, is often caused by a lack of healthy food choices which can be out of reach for people living in poverty, as well as a lack of awareness amongst Pacific people about what causes the disease.

Maintaining a traditional lifestyle has become increasingly difficult. This has caused a dramatic increase in diabetes in recent years, which has been described as a tsunami hitting the Pacific.

Our teams have seen rapidly increasing numbers of patients turning up to our clinics with diabetic eye disease, straining already stretched eye care services.

The disease is having devastating repercussions on the population in the Pacific.

Associate Professor Jacqui Webster, The George Institute for Global Health, explains why diabetes has become such an issue in the Pacific.

“Diabetes in the Pacific is amongst the highest in the world and this is no doubt partly due to the shift away from traditional diets and increase in imported processed foods. Most people are struggling to consume sufficient quantities of fruits and vegetables. They instead rely heavily on cheap and widely available processed foods including tinned meats, instant noodles and soft drinks. These products are being heavily marketed to children, including through sponsorship of school sports and events. Such products are often more convenient and affordable for families but come at a huge cost to health.”



**Associate Professor
Jacqui Webster**

The George Institute
for Global Health



Patient's leg amputated because of diabetes. Diabetes can contribute to blindness if a patient's eyes are not checked.

Can diabetic eye disease be prevented?

Diabetes can cause blindness, yet in most cases this is largely avoidable with regular eye screening, timely treatment and effective diabetes management.

How are we tackling diabetic eye disease?

Tackling diabetic eye disease is complex as we can't ignore the wider issue of diabetes. We believe the scale of diabetes within the Pacific requires a coordinated approach working with national governments and other key organisations.

- We're raising awareness of the disease, which is a big part of tackling the problem, through health promotion campaigns and events. This leads to well informed patients who are more likely to take action to manage their diabetes.
- We're providing diabetes eye care training to local eye doctors and nurses, as well as general community health workers, to ensure early signs of diabetes are detected and referral systems are strengthened.
- We're funding equipment and facilities, including the extension and upgrade of our eye centre in Vanuatu, which will help cater to the increasing number of diabetic eye disease patients. In 2015 we opened the Regional Eye Clinic in the Solomon Islands, which is already working towards tackling diabetic eye disease.

We're challenging ourselves to provide a solution.

A large portrait of Dr. Biu, a woman with short, dark, curly hair, wearing a dark purple polo shirt. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a textured, light-colored wall.

Dr Biu is the Director of our Pacific Eye Institute in Fiji



She gives her account of blindness due to diabetes throughout the Pacific.

What is your role at The Foundation?

Director of the Pacific Eye Institute in Fiji. I am also the lead specialist eye doctor for diabetic eye disease.

Why has diabetes become such an issue in the Pacific?

So many factors; but unhealthy food being more readily available and more affordable than healthy choices is a big contributor.

What is diabetic eye disease?

Diabetic eye disease is a complication of diabetes that affects the back of the eye. When someone has high and varying blood sugar levels, the blood vessels in the retina can become irreversibly damaged. Diabetes-related eye complications are common. If left untreated, they lead to deterioration of vision and ultimately blindness. In the Pacific, people often don't realise they have diabetic eye disease until it has reached the chronic stages, which is very sad to see.

What is The Foundation doing to control the increasing rates of diabetic eye disease?

Specialist training for nurses, doctors and technicians. Recently we have trained community health workers as they are the first point of contact for the community, so they can educate patients, raise awareness and refer patients for eye screening. The Foundation has also funded equipment to manage diabetic eye disease. Our team also provides eye care services with the mobile eye clinic, visiting local communities who can't reach the hospital.

Who is affected by diabetic eye disease?

Commonly older people but unfortunately we are now seeing more and more young

people being affected.

Are people aware that diabetes causes blindness?

Very few people. The majority of patients who come to see our eye specialists don't realise what has caused their vision loss. Educating the community is key to reducing the rates of diabetic eye disease.

What is The Foundation doing to raise awareness of diabetic eye disease in the Pacific?

The Foundation uses TV and radio adverts, as well as posters and health promotion events, to raise the public's awareness of diabetes and diabetic eye disease throughout the Pacific. The Foundation also works with local government to increase knowledge about the disease.

What impact will the extension and upgrade of the eye centre in Vanuatu have on the treatment of diabetic eye disease?

The centre will ensure diabetic eye disease services are more readily available and help reduce avoidable blindness across Vanuatu. It is also important to have a qualified eye doctor, which will happen later this year when Dr Kasso returns to Vanuatu following the completion of his training in Fiji.

Is there anything you'd like to say to the supporters of The Foundation?

Thank you so much. The impact your support has had across the Pacific is enormous. We have already achieved a lot by setting up training programmes, strengthening local health systems, conducting research, building new facilities and providing equipment. We wouldn't be where we are today without your support, for that I am extremely grateful.

Making a legacy of sight



We are extremely fortunate to have many generous individuals and community groups that support our sight-saving work in the Pacific. Without this, we simply couldn't do what we do.

One of the types of support we receive is through individuals leaving a gift to The Foundation in their will, essentially helping to ensure the long-term sustainability of our programmes in the Pacific. Sheila is one supporter who has pledged a bequest to The Foundation in her will.



Sheila, Bequester to The Foundation

Born in Scotland, Sheila visited New Zealand in her early twenties and has been here ever since.

Enjoying a passion for reading, she worked as a book binder for many years: *"Books are one of the most important things to me, they open pathways and provide the ability to learn."*

In her early seventies, Sheila's sight began to deteriorate, threatening her love of reading. However, with access to quality eye care in New Zealand, Sheila had her

cataracts removed and was thrilled with a renewed quality of life.

"I'm privileged. I know how lucky I am". But knowing that there are many people in the Pacific who live with cataract blindness, Sheila is one individual who has pledged a bequest to The Foundation in her will.

"There is a reward in knowing you're helping people. People who don't have any of the things that I have. Being able to give back, it doesn't need to be a huge amount to make a huge difference, to give someone their life back."

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WORLD DIABETES FOUNDATION