



Takitaki

A NEW PHASE OF THE FRIEND COMMUNITY RE-ENTRY PROGRAM BEGINS

The community re-entry program is now beginning its second phase of activities. Of the twelve participants, two have now been released from prison and one more will be released by the end of the month. To continue to assist the ex-prisoners during their transitions, the program has started community visits to support families and the communities that welcome them home.



A participant who was released early last month was recently visited by program facilitators, who received a very warm welcome from the family. The ex-offender was so excited by the visit and looks forward to more of them in the future. In addition he is interested in being involved with the FRIEND youth program as well. He mentioned that what he went through in this program really helped him to face the real world again in spite of the challenges in his life. Learning about listening, communication skills, and self-esteem helped him to be a better person.

He is now the contact for other ex-offenders in his area and is already talking to his peers about FRIEND's community re-entry program. When we called him for another appointment to visit his community with the Australian Law & Justice Review Team, we were surprised and very happy to learn from his grandfather that he was working at the polling station in Waiyavi. It is a highlight of the program that a person is able to conquer his low self esteem, fight off the stigma of being an ex-offender, and make a change to be the person he wants to be. We have hope that the program is assisting the participants to restore their status as valued members of their communities.

VEILOMANI BOYS' HOME



We wait eagerly for the third Wednesday of the month, as this is when we go to Veilomani Boys' Home in Ba to conduct our regular session with the students, aged eleven to twenty-six. According to the Veilomani administrators, some of the boys have disabilities, while others are slow learners and don't get the opportunity to reach high school. At the end of their two years of studies at the home, they receive a certificate which recognizes their achievement and gives them a credential to help them find jobs.

These boys come from very poor backgrounds and also have very low self-esteem—this is where FRIEND comes in. We do activities and exercises with the boys to build their confidence and teach skills, such as art and crafts. These capabilities will help them to find employment in the future.

The students at Veilomani are an amazing group of boys. They are full of ideas and dreams which, with the right kind of support, can become their reality. Veilomani Boys' Home believes in its meaning "The Home of Love", which is evident each time we enter their premises.

NEWS FROM OUR KITCHEN

Last month, the ladies of the Lautoka kitchen conducted trials of two potential new products: guava jam and lime pickle. These projects were their own, for which they sourced all of the raw materials. FRIEND provided the ladies with the cooking facilities, packing materials and labels, and assisted them in the marketing of their products.



Introducing...Guava Jam

Using local ingredients for making jam and pickles is nutritious and practical, as it allows for the preservation of fruits for use when they are not in season. Projects of this nature encourage the development of small scale enterprises and the use of local, seasonal fruits which are abundant. The new products are available at The FRIEND Shop in Toorak and at the RoC market.

What's Happening?

- May 8**
World Red Cross Day
- May 14**
Mother's Day
- May 17**
World Information Society Day
- May 21**
RoC Market Suva
- May 29**
Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna Day
- June 5**
World Environment Day

MEET TRISH: OUR NEWEST INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER*Trish Hedt*

Coconut palms, succulent pineapples, daily sunshine and the scent of frangipanis are just a few highlights of my first month in Fiji. The sensory overload of being in a new country is always invigorating, but Fiji ... Fiji is not your average cultural shift. Fiji is my very own tropical paradise for the next 12 months.

As the newest volunteer in the FRIEND office, I have been welcomed with open arms and adopted into the ever-growing work family. Sent to Fiji under the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development program, my role at FRIEND will involve working alongside unemployed youth in the Lautoka area. This is where my passion lies and without a doubt, meeting some of

these young people has been the most meaningful part of my experience so far. Their enthusiasm and enormous smiles are heart-warming. Together, we hope to create a plan for the future that will increase their employment opportunities while utilizing their talents and terrific personalities. If anyone is interested in assisting me or may have helpful contacts for my work please contact the office. I'd be happy to meet and talk with you.

I am both blessed and excited to have my husband, Jonny, here with me also. While I am at work, Jonny, a budding author, will be working on two novels. In his spare time he is doing a wonderful job of exploring the markets and taking care of our home. Outside of work hours Jonny and I are both looking forward to exploring more of this beautiful country, eating plenty of your mangoes and pineapples and making lots of new friendships!! Please, if you see us in the street come and introduce yourself.

Come visit us at**The
FRIEND Shop****154 Toorak Road
Suva**Choose from our
Friend's Fiji
Style™

products including:

Chutneys
Mango Pickle
Guava Jam **NEW!**
Handmade Cards
Saris, Sarongs,
Scarves
Calico bags...
and more!**VOTER EDUCATION WORKSHOP**

In anticipation of the 2006 general elections, voter education workshops sponsored by FSPI were held in Lautoka and Ba to help registered voters understand the process and importance of voting. Combined, there were 37 participants in the two workshops. The workshop included discussion about the ballot paper, the way it looks, the different sections, and how to make a valid vote. Participants were given sample ballots and asked to make a simulated vote. There was also discussion about the desired qualities of a good politician according to the participants. Some qualities highlighted were transparency, reacts quickly to requests for assistance, recreates unity, works multi-racially with love, and hears the voices of the poor, among others. Feedback from the participants was that similar workshops in the past had only informed them to tick for their party but did not inform them of how to fill the ballot paper. All of those attending really enjoyed the workshop, felt confident in their understanding of the process and that they would be able to make a valid vote in the upcoming election.

*Voters get educated in Lautoka***SWEET MANGO CHUTNEY GOES TO NEW YORK CITY**

FRIEND's Peace Corps volunteer, Lori Banks, went on holiday to visit friends and family back in the United States recently. While there, she took the opportunity to introduce a group of her former co-workers at Random House Children's Books (RHCB) in New York City to FRIEND and Sweet Mango Chutney.

After hearing that FRIEND made chutney in one of his favorite flavors, the head of the company decided to purchase enough bottles of Sweet Mango Chutney to distribute to his 300 employees. Overcoming the logistical challenges involved in shipping and billing this order took a lot of time and patience from all involved, but the order finally arrived in New York . . . a week *after* it was due to be distributed at the RHCB company meeting.

Well, some things happen for a reason. As it turned out, RHCB rescheduled the distribution of the chutney to employees for their next company meeting, which was held in April. The timing coincided with Lori's visit to NYC. She was able to speak at the meeting and give a presentation on Fiji, FRIEND, our programs and the production of Sweet Mango Chutney. The RHCB employees were excited to see and hear first hand about Fijian culture, and were thrilled to be taking home their own taste of Fiji.

