



SOLOMON SMILES
TOGETHER. BUILDING HEALTHY SMILES FOR ALL

Newsletter for 2023



I'm thrilled to bring you an exciting update on our decade-long journey in the Solomon Islands. Our dentistry projects, after a challenging hiatus, are not only back on track but are now poised for expansion into the next phase of impactful initiatives.

As we reach the ten-year milestone in 2023, it's a pivotal moment to reflect on the significant setbacks and challenges we've encountered. A key lesson learned is the realisation that programs developed in Australia cannot be directly translated into the Pacific context.

Most importantly, these trips to the Solomon Islands have given me insight into the strengths of Pacific culture - including the support and resilience derived from a tight-knit extended family unit, and their incredible ability to adapt and maintain happiness. Additionally, it has highlighted the preciousness of stepping away from the constant distractions of modern communication, television and the chaos that often characterises Australian daily life.

Our commitment to staying in the same communities, and building strong relationships over time has facilitated openness and honesty, paving the way for collaboration. The pandemic further provided an opportunity for a welcoming reset, leading us to pivot and focus on developing local relationships through the improved uptake of Facebook Messenger.

With broad community, government, and health department support in the Solomon Islands, we plan to move our projects to Rotary International, to harness their wealth of expertise and strong governance skills to facilitate scaling up our programme through collaborating with local teams.

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who has supported our mission over the last decade. Special appreciation goes to

- Dr. Ray Khong, our team leader for School outreach programs,
- My founding pillars of support, Dr. Stephen Herriott, David Nunn and Simon Downing;
- My network champions, Dr Susan Wise and Prof Martin Hall.
- My supportive confidants: Paula Constant and Troy Meyers
- Our local Solomon Islanders network - for which there are far too many to mention individually

Dr Som-Ling Leung

BDS(Melb), MIH (Monash) GAICD FICD PFPA



2015: East Makira Paramount Chief invited me to plant a coconut tree, symbolising long term commitment, as they take years bear fruit



Introducing Dr Lenstar Hagatea from Makira Province



We are thrilled to share the inspiring story of Dr Lenstar, a dedicated individual with a passion for making a difference. Dr Lenstar, graduated from the University of Fiji in 2019, has returned to his homeland, Makira Province, to elevate the quality of oral health care.

Embarking on this mission, Dr. Lenstar confronts the formidable task of being the sole dentist for Makira Province, catering to a population of 60,000 spread across 3200 km² and eight islands. The limited road infrastructure, as indicated by the line on the right, underscores the challenges of accessibility. Boat transport is the primary mode, but it is highly weather-dependent and often restricted by surrounding reefs.

Compounding the difficulties, the province lacks both government and traditional aid support. Even the extensive fibre-optic cables installed by Australia in 2020 bypassed this region, leading to prevalent telecommunication challenges.



Undeterred by these obstacles, Dr. Lenstar has strategically divided the province into four zones, ensuring he visits each zone annually and makes a comprehensive round trip to all the "hot spots" at the end of the year. These outreach trips are vital, as they bring much-needed dental care to the doorstep of those who need it the most.

In the face of high demand during these outreach efforts, Dr. Lenstar goes above and beyond, often working late into the evening to meet the needs of the community. This level of dedication is truly commendable and speaks volumes about his work ethic and commitment.

The challenges in Makira Province are substantial, with geographic isolation and a history of short-term dentist stays over the past decade. However, Dr. Lenstar has already devoted three years to the cause, demonstrating his long-term commitment and unwavering determination to elevate the quality of oral health care in Makira Province.

Dr. Lenstar's leadership, effective communication, and tireless efforts are shaping a brighter future for the people of Makira, driving positive change and making a lasting impact on the oral health of this deserving community.

Revitalizing Kirakira Dental Clinic:

The Kirakira Dental Clinic received a substantial boost through the PFA grant in 2022, generously providing essential equipment such as handpieces, an ultrasonic cleaning unit, and restorative materials. However, a setback occurred when the dental unit experienced a breakdown, rendering it unusable. In May 2023, our Australian Dental Volunteer team stepped in to not only repair the faulty dental delivery unit but also to provide additional donations of restorative materials and instrument cassettes.

Dr Ray Khong and Troy Meyers, took the time to guide Dr. Lenstar through the mechanics and functions of each component within the dental cart, empowering him with the knowledge to address issues independently. Dr. Lenstar later reported a minor glitch with the water delivery system, which he successfully fixed—a testament to t



he immense value of training local personnel in maintaining equipment in remote locations.

Dr. Lenstar, juggling a demanding workload without a dental assistant, faced challenges in organizing the clinic effectively. Nerolee Huxham, an Australian Dental Assistant, and Leah, our team member with five years of experience, undertook the task of reorganizing the entire clinic. They categorized items and ensured infection control measures were in place, and meticulously reviewed donated items spanning a decade, optimizing their usability.



The impact outcome of this collaborative effort is evident in Dr. Lenstar's renewed enthusiasm for dentistry. Kirakira Dental Clinic now stands as one of only two clinics providing cleans in the Solomon Islands and one of four offering permanent restorations using handpieces.

This positive transformation has not only elevated the clinic's service delivery but has also rekindled Dr. Lenstar's passion for his profession, a spark that was at risk of fading before the PFA donations.

This journey exemplifies the tangible impact of volunteers going beyond donations, actively engaging in repairs, organization, and knowledge transfer.



Planning a new dental clinic in Kirakira

CURRENT CHALLENGES

Over the past decade, the inadequacy of the Kirakira Dental Clinic has been glaringly apparent, lacking essential equipment, such as an overhead dental light, a moveable and reclining dental chair, a suction unit and an x-ray unit. Furthermore, the dental autoclave has been reassigned to the general hospital. These shortcomings have resulted in the clinic's inability to retain a dentist for more than 1-2 years.



TURNING THE TIDE

This year marks a turning point, thanks to the dedication of Dr Lenstar, who is leading a comprehensive plan to construct a new dental clinic in Kirakira with three dental surgeries. Dr Lenstar's commitment goes beyond words; he even offered free timber from his family's land to support the construction.

Local Government Support: Dr Lenstar has garnered the support of local provincial government, who have committed to cover the labour costs for building the new dental clinic and shipping costs from Honiara to Kirakira.

Experienced Builder's Commitment: Jack Visser, a seasoned Australian builder with 20 years of experience in the Solomon Islands, has design a modern dental clinic and is currently collecting building material. Treated pine and terminate-resistant particle board, as well as galvanised steel posts and flooring will ensure resilience.



Generous Equipment Donation: A retiring paediatric dentist from Hong Kong has generously donated her entire dental clinic's equipment to this project, currently at the Brisbane Rotary storage facility. **Efficient Construction Process:** .Through pre-fabrication in Australia, we aim to complete the building within 2-3 weeks, minimising material waste and ensuring a swift build.

Ongoing maintenance support and training: We are thrilled to have Davis Harara, a Solomon Islander from Makira Province and a biomedical technician based in New Castle, on our team. Through his company, Pacific Biomedical Consulting, he is committed to building capacity in equipment maintenance and repairs for Pacific Nations

ANTICIPATED IMPACT

The new dental clinic will pave the way for a second dentist in the region. This expansion will allow the dental team to offer more services with improved quality and infection control. Importantly, it will create an environment that not only retains dental personnel but also provides a fulfilling workplace for Dr. Lenstar, maximizing his potential to drive positive change.

Makira Province

School dental volunteer programme



We are the sole dental team who traverses schools in Makira Province to provide essential dental care since 2015. We conduct examinations, decay prevention, fillings and extractions.

To better understand the diverse dental needs across different zones, Dr Lenstar strategically selected three schools for our dental outreach efforts in 2023.

- Santa Ana School - (tourism) -known as a "hotspot" for decay, due to its higher disposable income derived from frequent visits by cruise ship tourists.
- FM Campbell School (urban) -the largest primary school in Kirakira, the provincial capital
- Waita School (rural) -situated 30 minutes outside Kirakira, Waita School holds a special place in Dr Lenstar's heart as it is his home community.

School	No. of students
Santa Ana School	149
FM Campbell School	368
Waita School	124
Total	641

These carefully chosen schools represent a microcosm of the broader challenges faced by the diverse communities in Makira Province. Dr Lenstar's thoughtful selection underscores our commitment to gathering crucial evidence and insights, paving the way for a targeted and impactful dental care strategy across the entire province.

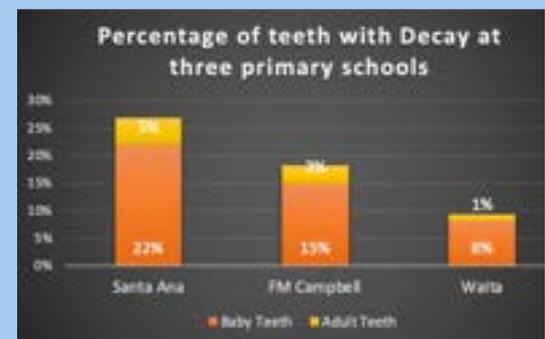
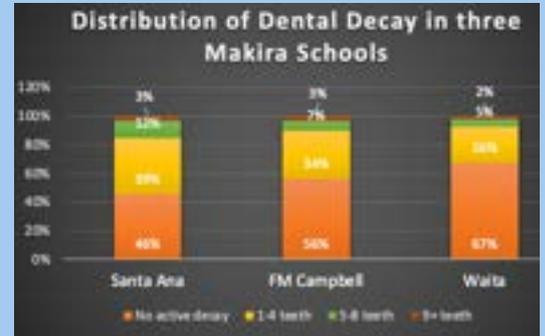


Celebrating impact: Insights from our recent volunteer trip

KEY OBSERVATIONS

Our recent volunteer trip focused on gathering vital data on dental decay revealed profound insights, affirming the thoughtful observations of Dr Lenstar. Additionally over

- **Tourism's toll:** Locations exposed to tourism exhibited a concerning trend, with 56% of the children from Santa Ana School grappling with dental decay, affecting one in three teeth.
- **Capital School Challenges:** FM Campbell School in the capital closely followed, reporting a 43% dental decay rate among children, with one in five teeth bearing signs of decay.
- **Rural Resilience:** Waite School, situated a mere 30 minutes outside the capital in a rural area, demonstrated remarkable resilience. Only 32% of children experienced dental decay, with one in ten teeth affected.



DEEPER INVESTIGATION WARRANTED

Intriguingly, approximately 2-3% of students consistently exhibit a higher decay rate, regardless of their location. Further investigation is warranted, as identifying contributing factors could significantly increase the efficiency and effectiveness of dental programmes.

Previous volunteer trips have hinted that these patterns are associated with children who frequently stay with family members in Honiara, as well as those whose parents hold government positions with steady incomes and limited time for subsistence farming.

BEYOND DENTAL HEALTH

Considering dental decay shares common risk factors with diabetes and can be seen within a few years of lifestyle changes, it prompts the question of whether rural communities also demonstrate lower diabetes rates and whether dental decay could be used as a predictive tool to identify regions at risk of diabetes and other chronic diseases.

GLOBAL COMPARISONS

Santa Ana's dental decay rate is comparable to the global children prevalence of 60%, suggesting that regional and rural areas have lower decay rates at this stage, presenting the rare opportunity for preventive and educational activities.

ADVOCACY AND IMPACT

This data serves as compelling evidence to advocate for oral health promotion to be included in the government's existing Health Promotion teams. It could also potentially lay the groundwork for advocating that tourism companies contribute to health services in the areas they visit,



SOLOMON SMILES
TOGETHER, BUILDING HEALTHY SMILES FOR ALL

FUN ACTIVITIES BY THE MAKIRA VOLUNTEER TEAM





SOLOMON SMILES
TOGETHER. BUILDING HEALTHY SMILES FOR ALL

Bringing Smiles to Guadalcanal Province Schools

We are thrilled to share the exciting news that the Guadalcanal Provincial Dental team now have a new mobile dental truck to service schools in Eastern Guadalcanal Province.



AN EXTRAORDINARY COLLABORATION

Dental Health Services Victoria (DHSV)

DHSV donated a decommissioned dental truck to the Solomon Islands, which generously comes with a commitment of \$10,000 AUD in dental supplies annually for the next five years. Additionally, each year two dental personnel will receive a scholarship to participate in a clinical placement and training

NBSI Health and Welfare Trust (NBSI)

NBSI generously funding shipping costs, truck modifications and fit out, ongoing truck and dental maintenance needs, staff transport and training. These modifications including improved suspension for navigating challenging roads, a generator to supply power to the truck and two water filtration systems for the independent water tank supply, showcasing the Trust's dedication to making this project a success.

We extend heartfelt gratitude to our generous supporters:

- David Nunn (Pacific Koha, NZ) for ongoing mechanical and engineering support.
- Dr. David Goldsmith, Peter Cropp, Ross Huntington (Ballarat Rotary), for preparing the truck.
- Frank Fuller (Rotary Brisbane) for coordinating shipping.
- Cheyne Warren and Billy Emmett for invaluable assistance in Honiara
- NSK Oceania and Queensland Ipswich Dental Department for handpieces and instruments

Commencement of Service

Services kicked off in July 2023. The local team has identified schools with better road access just outside Honiara, marking the launch of the first-ever mobile dental clinic in the Solomon Islands.

The mobile dental service is equipped with cutting-edge materials and equipment to ensure top-notch oral health services. The local team are thrilled to be working in this well set up clinic.





SOLOMON SMILES
TOGETHER, BUILDING HEALTHY SMILES FOR ALL

Colin Riley Scholarships Recipients to Solomon Islands

DHSV created a scholarship to send 2 dental personnel each year for five years to the Solomon Islands, in memory of Dr Colin Riley's dedication and impact to Victorian Health Services.

Dr. David Whelan, a seasoned mentor for young graduates, and Morgan Wyatt, a skilled dental assistant with experience in school dental programs, were the first recipients of this scholarship. Their journey involved a rich exchange of ideas and knowledge, embracing the cultural exchange, fostering a collaborative environment aimed at improving dental care practices in the region.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS:

- Dr. Whelan shared clinical knowledge with the dental truck team and the National Referral Hospital team.
- Morgan Wyatt, leveraging her expertise, reorganized the dental truck for enhanced efficiency and provided essential infection control training.
- Morgan worked with the local team to develop an effective stock management system
- Morgan initiated connections with DFAT's pharmaceutical stock management support officer and the National Dental Stores' manager, exploring opportunities for a digital management system for the dental department.
- A collaborative effort led to the introduction of training in the use of silver fluoride, a cost-effective solution for managing decay progression, generously donated by SDI.

G-PROVINCE OUTREACH TRIP

The collaborative spirit continued during the G-Province Outreach, where the G-Province and DHSV Dental teams worked together seamlessly. Over four days, they provided dental care to two schools, a special needs school, and a health clinic.

CHALLENGES NOTED

- the challenge for 4 dental practitioners servicing a population of 165,000 spread over 5000 square km.
- Using and maintaining a diverse range of donated dental equipment and materials
- Inadequate dental stock to perform treatment and maintain quality
- Lack of training opportunities for dental assistants
- No qualified oral maxillofacial surgeon in the country
- Increasing prevalence of Betel nut chewing, including young children, increasing incidence of oral cancer





SOLOMON SMILES
TOGETHER, BUILDING HEALTHY SMILES FOR ALL

TEAM PREPARING TRADITIONAL DINNER

