

Samoa Program Update 2025

By Philip and Cristy Newall

This was our 25th trip to work in Samoa since 2008.

We arrived on Saturday 5th after leaving for the airport at 3am to catch the flight and spent Sunday getting ready for the clinics. Fortunately, we had paid for an extra 30Kg of luggage as we took test equipment, hearing aids and spare parts. We also had two items of equipment which were from Samoa and which we had calibrated. We met the cost of airfares, accommodation and car hire ourselves, but we had considerable support for spare parts, consumables and equipment from the Rotary Club of Carlingford.

A colleague, Dana Pollard of Hearing Australia and her friend made a really productive visit to Samoa to run clinics in the Senese Centre for Inclusive Education in Apia, Samoa in the last week of February, which was really useful. They saw many cases, fitted a lot of hearing aids and took earmould impressions which we were able to get made up in time for our visit.

We worked from Monday until Friday in the Ear Nose and Throat (ENT) clinic at TTM hospital Apia, thanks to Dr. Sione Pifeleti, the ENT surgeon. His ENT nurses were very helpful in removing wax from the ears of many of the cases. We were fortunate that we were assisted by Naomi Asi and Rowena Faaiuasoo-Brown, who are staff members of the Senese Centre for Inclusive Education. Cristy assessed the hearing of 16 children and 14 adults including a partially sighted child who had proved difficult to test on earlier visits.

We took a Biologic system and we were able to carry out otoacoustic emission tests, which is very helpful in the assessment of auditory function in children.

I saw 10 children and 28 adults, fitted 44 hearing aids and left 4 more hearing aids set up to fit when earmoulds were available. We also took 24 impressions of clients' ears, brought them

back to Australia and sent them off to be made up into custom-made earmoulds, which we will post to Samoa in the next few days.



Cristy conducting a hearing test for a young girl.



Philip fitting hearing aids for a young girl.

Several children who we had fitted earlier attended the clinic for review and we were able to fit some with remote microphones for use by teachers in the classroom. We had three children who has congenital atresia (where the ear canal and external part of the ear are missing) and were able to fit appropriate devices to them. We were able to fit the children with new hearing aids of the latest type due to funding from the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons.

One of the children we saw on this visit was first fitted in 2024 and she came back this year for a

follow-up. Her father reported that he noticed a positive change in her school performance and social relationships. Her teachers were amazed at how her grades had improved. We noticed that her earmoulds need replacement, which indicated that she has been using her hearing aids. She is now enrolled at a college, studying for a bachelor's degree in commerce.



Philip is fitting the hearing aids.

We fitted adults with used hearing aids which have been donated from a number of sources including Attune Hearing and Amplifon. The team of volunteers from **Hearing Matters Australia** also donated hearing aids and checked and cleaned the hearing aids which we took. On rather surprising aspect of the visit was the very large number of severely and profoundly hearing-impaired adults who attended the clinic. On previous visits we had noted cases where the hearing loss was probably due to a history of untreated middle ear conditions which had left the adult or child with a permanent loss. It may be that the many

cases with very severe losses was also due to past infections or possibly cases with a milder loss do not present to the clinic. Whatever the reason, it was very sad to see so many such severe losses, one after the other, but gratifying to see so many faces light up when we fitted a hearing aid.

Some children in Samoa have cochlear implants and we were able to take many spare parts which were kindly donated by NextSense.

On Tuesday evening we attended a meeting of the Rotary Club of Apia, who are our local contact for our Rotary Australia World Community Service Samoa project. Our Rotary colleagues in Apia have been very supportive, Past President Marco Kappenberger and his wife Maria Ines, who is also a Rotarian. We also contacted a dentist, Dr Emosi Ah Ching, in the nearby island of Savaii to discuss the help provided by our fellow Rotarian, John Green, who is involved in this project.

We worked from Monday to Friday in the clinic and on Friday afternoon, we took part in an on-line meeting about the US\$1,000,000 funding from the UN (Scaling up Access to Assistive Technology and Rehabilitation Services for School-aged Children (2024–2027) in Pacific Island Countries). My son John drew our attention to this grant and we encouraged and helped a colleague (Jennifer Pemila) in the Samoan Ministry of Education to make what turned out to be a successful application.



Team of student volunteers for HMA Hearing Aids Bank Program (from left to right): Cassie Bernardi, Charlette Ginu, Elizabeth Ohm, Emily Chan, Sathwika Dontula, Rachael Hickey, and Gwen Keays. They are studying Bachelor of Speech and Hearing Sciences.

