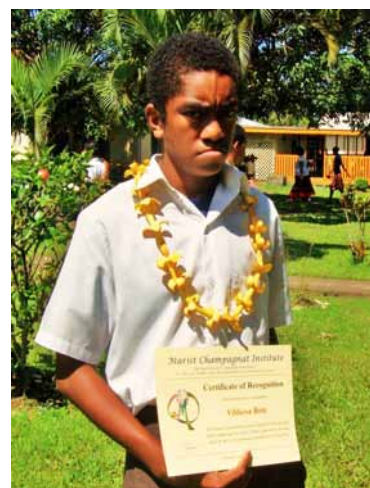


Vilikesa Bete: the boy after his own dreams

When I first started with FENC Fiji I had very little clue of the type of work done by the organisation until I was assigned to write a short article about Vilikesa Bete. He hails from the village of Navuni-ivi, Rakiraki in the province of Ra.

For many young children in Fiji, dropping out of school seems to be the end of the line for them. They tend to think that there is no hope for their future. They turn to drugs and alcohol to fill the void in them. But, for this 15 year old Vilikesa (aka, Bill) a student of Champagnat Institute has a different interpretation of it.

Born and raised in Lautoka the soft spoken young Bill has in the past ten years of his life struggled hard to be something better in the future. He was born with cheiloschisis disease, also known as cleft palate and attended Lautoka Special School because of his disability. His teacher was surprised that he was not only good mentally but also fit to attend primary school like any other child. He then was transferred to Natabua Primary School before moving on to Ellington Primary where he was looked after by his grandparents.



He was in his middle primary school years when his father left them and his youngest sister was just a year old. As his mother struggled to provide for their basic daily needs, he felt neglected and alone since he was the only man in the house. He later dropped out of school because of his school fees. Later, they moved to Suva and his mother asked his uncle, Kitione Bete who is security officer, if he could take care of them. Kitione, who had two children of his own, approached FENC Fiji to help support Vilikesa and his two sisters.

“I am grateful to the Government and FENC Fiji for providing us with support and now I do not have to worry about their school fees, books, uniform.” said Kitione Bete. “The only thing that kept Vilikesa going is his eagerness to learn and achieve his dream,” he added.

Vilikesa Bete who attended Champagnat Institute this year has graduated from SO3 Foundation to Form 3 with a Certificate of Recognition. When asked what his dream was, he said, “My dream is to earn a good living and look after my sisters and uncle Kitione’s family.”

Vilikesa Bete will be attending Marist Brothers High School next year—sponsored by FENC Fiji. There are plans to seek medical advice and treatment for his condition.

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Message from the Coordinator

As we approach another festive season, with all the joy, excitement and merriment that is part of the tradition. I am delighted to extend our Seasons Greetings and well wishes to our generous donors, stakeholders, associates, volunteers, friends and partners of FENC Fiji.

Your support during the year 2010 helped us on the journey to fulfil our Mission and Goals. We thank you for your support and endorsement of our efforts and we pledge to work even more closely with you as we seek to transform this vicious cycle of poverty through education in Fiji.

2010 has been a year of progress for our organisation as we managed to reach many of the poorest children in most parts of Fiji. This year, we took time to examine and review cases on hand and plan out a way to better make our service more competent. As for the year 2011, we are planning for more charity fundraising to provide for increasing number of cases in need of assistance.

On behalf on the Board of FENC Fiji, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you once again for your kind-hearted support.

We wish you all a very Happy Merry Christmas and an incoming year filled with peace, joy, productivity and prosperity.

Mr Irshad Ali
FENC Fiji Co-ordinator
Suva

Editor's Note

Children-Our Tomorrow

Children are the future of a nation. For an emerging and underdeveloped country like Fiji, development of underprivileged children holds the key to the progress of the nation itself. Education for underprivileged children is the key whether we are addressing healthcare, poverty, population control, unemployment or human rights issues.

The reason is simple: when any child fails to acquire the basic skills needed to function as a productive, responsible member of society, society as a whole—not to mention the individual child—loses. The cost of educating children is far outweighed by the cost of *not* educating them. Adults who lack basic skills have greater difficulty finding well-paying jobs and escaping poverty. Education for girls has particularly striking social benefits: incomes are higher and maternal and infant mortality rates are lower for educated women, who also have more personal freedom in making choices.

The problem in many developing countries is that governments lack either the financial resources or the political will to meet their citizens' educational needs. In response, poor parents in some low income countries have organized and paid for their children's education themselves. It is true that school fees and other user payments are a heavy burden for some parents to bear. But, given the alternative—children receiving no education at all—such payments can represent a temporary, if less than ideal, solution to the problem.

Government's determination in addressing education for the underprivileged children in Fiji is a step in the right direction. Fiji has so much wealth and riches hidden in the untapped talents of its uneducated population. The uneducated or undereducated, if you will allow me, contribute to the increase in social problems either directly or indirectly.

We at Fenc Fiji are committed to increase access to education, improve the quality of education, and build capacity and ownership for education in Fiji through a transparent, collaborative and multilateral approach in conjunction with Pillars 8 & 9 of the People's Charter for Change, Peace and Progress.

Seremaia Tavua
Volunteer Editor

Education Empowers

Over the past few months, we have been in touch with various groups as part of the process of developing our partnership with agencies and individuals in our community. I have been very impressed with the openness and generosity of people who have sat down with us to share their comments on our concept of reducing poverty through education. Their views about the education challenges that face the poorest of the poor and their suggestions on what Fenc Fiji can do or do better have been tremendously helpful.

In 2015 we will reach the milestone for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which were set to end extreme poverty and deprivation, reduce mortality, and achieve basic and equal education for all. The poorest children will leave school without being able to read. For these young entrants to the workforce, the transition from school to work is not likely to be easy, especially in today's technological era. Many of the poorest families must also grapple with the problem of providing the basics for their families and find means to adjust to the demands of our changing society.



At Fenc Fiji we recognise education as one of the most fundamental building block for human development and poverty reduction. Education not only creates a better human being but also contributes to the transformation of society. Besides, education is real wealth; it empowers people enabling them to contribute fully to the development of their lives. True education dignifies the individual.

Flashback on Hibiscus Festival 2010



Our champion Adi Lamawaivalu Vesikula with her fans, families, friends and supporters.



Protecting children

Now that the festive season is upon us, children will enjoy exploring the great outdoors. Your own backyard, the sidewalk, and playgrounds become a world of adventure where children love to discover the environment they live in. Parents, guardians, and adults who care for children face constant challenges when trying to help keep children safer in today's fast-paced world. Keep in mind the following precautions for a fun and safe holiday period.

Use equipment that's right for a child's age and abilities: *The abilities of young children change as they grow and develop.*

Don't let children play on dangerous equipment: *Heavy swings, rock climbing is all hazardous for young children. Also, don't attach ropes or leashes to play equipment—these can strangle young children. Be careful of unused refrigerators.*

The danger within: *The concept of staying away from stranger is difficult for children to grasp. It is more beneficial to built children's confidence and teach them to respond to potentially dangerous situation, rather than teaching them to look out for a particular type of person.*

Out Swimming: *Most swimming accidents occur during the school holiday period. Teach your child to swim and ensure they are accompanied by adults whenever they are out in the water. Avoid hazardous swimming spots. Remember children like to take risks when out with their peer group.*

Worldwide Web: *The internet is a different world and can be a dangerous one for children when not monitored. Do not allow your children to surf through website that will corrupt their mind. Block out website that is not beneficial to their development.*



How much time do you have to volunteer?

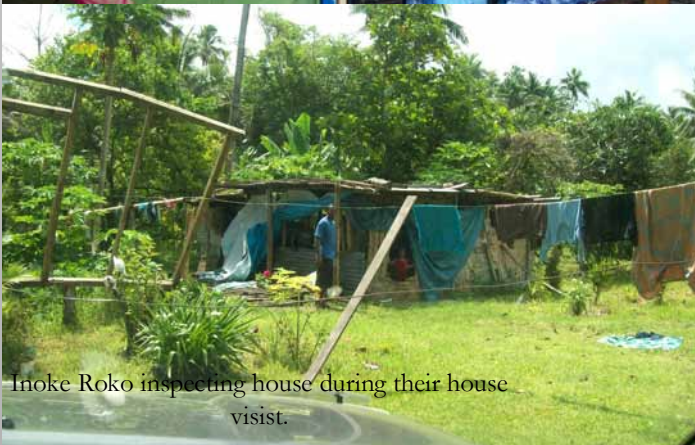


No matter what your time constraints, there is always a charity where you just want to 'get your feet wet,' a Volunteer stint would be ideal; spread the message of education, learn more about the difference you can make in the lives of the poorest of the poor in our community. If you have more time to devote, you can participate in fundraising activities or help our team of volunteers visit families in your area. Contact our office for more details and find the program that will best suit your interests and availability. Jump right in and get the satisfaction of making a difference.

Heart to Heart: Volunteer's Home visit



Volunteers busy sorting out file for the selection



Inoke Roko inspecting house during their house visit.



“When you give...”



Roshni lived with her parents, a younger sister and a brother lived on a farm in Vanua Levu. Their parents worked as farm labourers, often moving with the children from one place to another in search of work. Their father died a few years ago. Soon after, the family was evicted from the farmland. Mother and children moved to Suva with the little possession they had, in search of shelter and support of the extended family. But no one seemed to care.

The youngest son was taken in by an orphanage whilst Roshni and her sister moved from one place to another and eventually falling victim to the street culture. For a while, the two girls and their mother lived off the streets of Suva. The children were eventually abandoned by their mother

and left to survive on their own. Roshni, being the older of the two, took charge of her younger sister, protecting her and moving around town in search of a secure home. The children were eventually found by an elderly woman (Malti) who took the children under her care.

“When I first brought the two girls home, they would shiver at the sight of men. All those months of living off the streets of Suva had taken its toll. I enrolled the two girls at school but Roshni could not cope with the constant taunting from her peers. She dropped out of school. My family has been very supportive of the two girls but I only work as a housemaid when work is available. I do not know how we will look after these girls when they grow older. We were told to leave the girls at an orphanage but I cannot see them living in such a place. They call me Mum”, said Malti.

It is through the work of our volunteers that we found Malti and the two children. After several home visits and weeks of counselling, our area volunteers – Mrs Kamilo and Mrs Manueli managed to convince Roshni to return to school this year.

It is pleasing to observe the progress Roshni has made over the past few months at her new school. Although she is older than other kids in her class, she is coping well and made many new friends. We are constantly in touch with the teachers at the school, following her progress and looking into her needs.

Many thanks to our area volunteers for a job well done. To our donors, local and abroad:

...“You make the difference”...

“The habit of giving only enhances the desire to give.” -- Walt Whitman

Early Christmas gift for the less fortunate



The British High Commissioner with his family and staffs shared the Christmas spirit with poorest of the poor children as they presented them with Christmas gifts at FENC Fiji premises. The children were singing in high tune and excited. For many it was their first Christmas gifts. These were some of the children from the poorest of the poor families sponsored by FENC Fiji this year.

“We are thankful that the British High Commission is always thinking of the less fortunate children.” said Mr Ali (FENC Fiji, National Coordinator)

The National Coordinator for FENC Fiji, applauded the British High Commissioner Mr Mac McLachlan for giving his time in the midst of all his busy schedule to offer Christmas gifts to these less fortunate children.

The evening was hosted by FENC Fiji at their head office in Suva, Senate House at the parliament complex.





Going the extra mile...

While many young people have multiple interests and varied talents running around searching for employment and pursuing further studies to gain better paid job, there are some who do the opposite to gain experience that is needed in the field by volunteering for various organizations.

At FENC Fiji, I have the opportunity to mingle with these energetic young people who volunteer their time, abilities and money to help the poorest of the poor children in Fiji receive the education they deserve. Their work involves interviewing family that seek assistance from the Foundation, conducting home visits of each individual, documenting their family background. These cases are then reviewed and filed for the selection panel to decide on and recommended for assistance. It is no easy job to conduct all these processes and I'm talking about the time and effort made to see that it is done properly.

"The best thing about volunteering for FENC is that, I'm able to meet families that are very poor and this really helps me to consider them. Sometimes, we waste food, money and other things carelessly without knowing that there are families who are struggling to put food on the table." said Inoke Roko (Volunteer, Suva).

For these young people, volunteering has been a learning curve for them and whatever they learn from here will help surely help them find jobs elsewhere.

"I have travelled to some places that I haven't been before in my life. Volunteering has really opened my eyes to see the world with a different perspective and try to make a difference in my community." said Mere.

There are experiences that cannot be described in words, experiences that might make one overwhelmed with tears. There are untold stories that might be shared with little ones at home or their future family. But, we can go through these experiences if we volunteer our time for the greater good.