



FROM THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S DESK

ROD HILTON



Solomon Islands
Australia
Partnership

Australian volunteers supporting locally led development in Solomon Islands



Bridging Intern Graduation, February 2024. Australian volunteer, Maddie Ezard, (centre) undertook an assignment as Intern Training Program and Policy Mentor, supporting the National Referral Hospital to deliver the Bridging Diploma for medical interns



Australia's Deputy High Commissioner Andrew Schloeffel handing certificate to Bridging Intern graduate, Andison Jeriel Soau'una. Also on stage are Dr George Malefoasi, Chief Executive Officer, National Referral Hospital, and, Titus Nasi, Head of Pediatrics and Chair of Medical Training Committee, National Referral Hospital.



Australian volunteer Johnny Mulherin teaching the Youth Athletics team about muscles strains through a game of tug of war at SINIS, Honiara, Solomon Islands. (Photo : supplied by SINIS)

As Australia's High Commissioner to Solomon Islands, I have the privilege to meet a wide range of Australians who contribute in different ways to the development of this beautiful country. This includes the Australian women and men who contribute their professional skills and experience to organisations in Solomon Islands through the Australian Volunteers Program.

The Australian Volunteers Program is an Australian Government initiative, which matches skilled Australians to volunteer with partner organisations in the Pacific, Asia and Africa, to support those organisations to achieve their development objectives. International volunteering is a powerful way to build people-to-people connections between countries- and especially between Australia and Solomon Islands.

I've met many volunteers in my time here and am inspired by their can-do attitudes, humility and genuine connections to communities. There's Som-Ling who's helping with health planning. Claire who was out working with Western Solomons Surfing Association on sports development. Jeremy is working with the Institute of Solomon Islands Accountants and SINU to set up a new accounting qualification and Jeffery who was right there with the athletes for the 2023 Pacific Games. They are no nonsense and ready to help, much like our Solomon Islands partner organisations.

The volunteers always tell me how much they have learned and what a privilege it has been to come to Solomon Islands and share what they know. They make lifelong friends, and leave changed people.

A long and proud history of Australian volunteers supporting Solomon Islands

Australian volunteers first came to Solomon Islands in the mid 1960s, and since that time over 800 Australians have volunteered their professional expertise and time to organisations throughout the country, working side by side with Solomon Islander colleagues. In the last seven years, 147 Australian volunteers have supported 53 partner organisations in Solomon Islands through 189 volunteer assignments.

The Australian Volunteers Program partners with a wide range of organisations to support national development priorities. And these placements are not just in the capital city – we have had volunteers in Malaita and Western Province- the volunteers really get to know Solomon Islands' way of life. The volunteers have worked in key sectors such as health and medical services, law

and justice, tourism development, public sector governance, education, community services and sports development.

Australian Volunteers in action

One of our current volunteers is Som-Ling Leung, who is undertaking an assignment with the Guadalcanal Provincial Government's Health Division. As a Health Management Support Officer, Som-Ling is supporting the Provincial Government to implement its Strategic Health Plan, aimed at improving access

their accreditation as physios.

Forging connections between First Nations Australians and Solomon Islanders

I am also excited to see connections between First Nations Australians and Solomon Islanders through the Australian Volunteers Program. In 2023, four Indigenous Australian women working in conservation connected with

environmental conservation and management. We recently had our inaugural First Nations Ambassador visit Honiara, and I was able to tell him about this exchange of knowledge and experiences. We should do more connecting our First Nations people.



SINIS, August 2022 – then-Prime Minister Manesseh Sogavare, Hon. Minister of International Development and the Pacific, Pat Conroy, and Australian volunteers (left to right) John Tascone, Johnny Mulherin and Josiah McCarthy (Photo: Supplied by AVI)

to health services for the people of Guadalcanal. Som-Ling has told me that "I am also learning so much, including about the challenges of healthcare delivery in the Pacific, such as limited telecommunications, weather related logistic issues and financial constraints. I am so impressed by the dedication and resilience of the workforce."

The positive impact of this program was well demonstrated in the lead up to the 2023 Pacific Games. Between 2021 and 2023, 12 Australian volunteers supported athletes, coaches, physios and sports administrators through assignments with the Solomon Islands National Institute of Sports and the National Sports Council. For example, one of our volunteers, Johnny Mulherin, supported the capacity development of Solomon Islander physiotherapists. SINIS reported that Johnny helped to bring SINIS' physios up to a higher standard, introducing them to new skills and techniques, and facilitating



Australian volunteer Johnny Mulherin with Jeffery Pitua, Rehabilitation Coach at SINIS, Honiara, Solomon Islands. Photo: Supplied by SINIS

communities in Western Province which are working with WWF Solomon Islands on environmental protection projects. The group of First Nations Australian volunteers spent time in Pusuju, Nusatuva and Sagheraghi, learning and sharing knowledge and experiences about



Indigenous Australian volunteers Mary Blyth (L) and Cindy-Lou Togo (second from R), sharing knowledge with rangers and community members from Pusuju, as part of the Indigenous Conservation Knowledge Exchange 2023. (Photo: Alice Tamang/Australian Volunteers Program)

Accompanying the group was Minnie Fafe from WWF Solomon Islands, who said the experience really helped to encourage local women to see the important role that they can play in protecting their resources and environment.... It was eye-opening to learn about the different ways that resource owners can work with stakeholders to look after their resources." We are looking forward to welcoming more Indigenous Australian volunteers to Solomon Islands later this year.



Australian Volunteer, Maddie Ezard

Building strong connections between Australia and Solomon Islands

It is constantly inspiring to hear of the strong connections that are built between Australians and Solomon Islanders through the volunteering experience. Through these connections, organisations in Solomon Islands are supported to achieve their development objectives, and Australians and Solomon Islanders gain greater awareness of each others' cultures and countries.

Lukim iu neks taem!