

## 2018 The Year in Pictures





It's been yet another year of achievement for Leadership Fiji (LF).

For the record.... 29 leaders graduated from this year's program bringing the LF Alumni total to 412.

Special thanks to our Executive Officer, Gabriella Wong-Krishna who stepped in at short notice mid-year to keep things running and our amazing Executive Director (Volunteer) Sharyne Fong who along with our dynamic board drove the program forward this year.

I was particularly inspired by the efforts of LF2017 who took on the challenge of funding and building a house at the Koroipta settlement just outside of Lautoka. Just one of their projects in their "fellowship" year. Peter Drysdale and the Koroipta community have provided inspiration to Leadership Fiji participants for many years and it was wonderful to see LF2017 give back by building a Leadership Fiji house!

This year, for the first time we hosted an Evening with Sponsors and our LF Board where we got to share our plans with existing and potential sponsors, and also had the opportunity to meet with some of the newly appointed executives and diplomats.

In recent years Leadership Fiji has worked with Fiji Water in submitting nominees from our Alumni for selection to attend the Aspen Institute's Executive Seminar in the United States of America. This year Cathy Wong LF2008 was selected by Fiji Water to attend the Aspen Executive Seminar, increasing to 6 the number of Alumni who have been through the Aspen Institute. This program has provided Fijian leaders with a wonderful opportunity to network with leaders from across the world and LF has benefited considerably as a result.

This year Fiji Water came on board as a sponsor for Leadership Fiji with \$45,000. This amazing donation has allowed us to fast track a number of plans that I will outline a little later. We also welcomed two new sponsors this year, Exchange and Finance and Munro Leys.

As I highlight on a regular basis, our underlying philosophy at Leadership Fiji is that leadership is about action. It also recognizes that "anyone can lead at any time". This year we took on two projects linked to our goal of empowering leaders across the community.

Last year 2015 Australian of the Year, Rosie Batty a family violence survivor inspired us when she visited Fiji and shared her courageous story. The Leadership Fiji Alumni were privileged to be able to spend a weekend with her learning about this tragic issue that is having a huge impact on our community.

After the weekend with Rosie Batty the Alumni were challenged to take action. A group led by Viliame Waqalaivi LF2017 and Ilaitia Tuinamoala LF2009 decided to set up a program aimed at male office workers. Working in partnership with the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre they have prepared a training program aimed at getting in-house advocates for ending family violence. Plans are to launch the program early in 2019.

That's not all! In recent years we have been approached by a number of high schools to assist with training school prefects. In preparation for the 2019 school year we have been working with Veronika Naiwaqa LF2015 and her Up-Skill Yourself initiative to prepare a program and train our Alumni to facilitate the workshops and training on communication and leadership. We expect to be able to use this same program to also provide short course community leadership programs.

**NOW FOR THE BIG NEWS!**

One of the first challenges we set LF participants is to LEAP out of their comfort zones.

So we have decided as an organization that it is time to challenge ourselves with a move to our first permanent office at 6 Denison Rd in Suva. This is a first step to the ultimate goal of establishing a permanent Leadership Institute. Our new Home will comprise of an office and meeting area that will double as a library and resource centre for the year's participants and our Alumni.

That's not all! We have decided that the time has come to appoint a full time CEO in addition to a Training and Operations Officer. A search is on and we hope to make an appointment early in 2019.

All this will require boosting our finances which is why we are very grateful for the funding from Fiji Water. Needless to say the first job for our new CEO will be to come up with a plan to generate the funds needed to maintain growth and sustain us for the future.

Exciting and challenging times for Leadership Fiji.

**BRING ON 2019!**



Fiji Water's Director Stakeholder Relations, Geoff Smith handing over their sponsorship to LF Board Chair, William Parkinson



Bluescope's new GM, Justin Tierney with LF Board Chair at our Evening with Sponsors



Guests at our Evening with Sponsors

# Session Reports

The following are activity reports, in summary, of the sessions, site visitations and group retreats that have taken place. Traditionally, working groups are assigned to these reports, and the five Teams of Tuitui, Tabua, Tagimoucia, Tilapia and Tauratale shared in the responsibilities of tracking and evaluating these sessions.

## Education

The eighth session of the Leadership Fiji 2018 Program was on Education. Nine speakers were carefully chosen to talk on their challenges, initiatives and opportunities faced by their respective organisations.

Our first speaker was Ms Alison Burchell, Permanent Secretary for Education, Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts whose presentation summed up her opening statement, “develop skills for the future, not skills for now”. This highlighted a range of issues and challenges as well as the need for strategic planning, partnerships, and coordination by the Ministry to complement the work that needs to be done, and is already in progress. Another statement Ms Burchell made was, “everyone needs something out of Education, but we need to put back into Education.”

Our second speaker, Mr Billy Fitoo, Programme Coordinator/Lecturer, USP. Mr Fitoo’s presentation was grounded in the importance of the all-round development of a child who will grow into an “ideal adult”. This was best explained in Mr Fitoo’s own vernacular (Solomon Islands) with the word *fa’amanata’anga* which translated to “shaping the mind” and teaching knowledge, values and skills for children to prepare them for adult life, such as how to be respectful, honest, peaceful, loving, humble, and adaptable, to name a few. Mr Fitoo highlighted the need for more “hands-on, minds-on and hearts-on learning experiences” from family, community, church, schools, sports fields, gardens and the sea side. It’s not all about classroom learning and academic achievement, the overall development of the child needs to be factored into our education systems.

Dr. Brother Jim Madavana, Director, Montfort Boys Town was our third speaker. He shared Montfort Boys Town moto “discipline, dedication and determination to become champions of our trade”. The school teaches their students vocational trades such as fitting and machining, cabinet making, building and joinery, electrical and motor vehicle mechanics. The school’s vision is to “enable economically poor and disadvantaged youth to realign their self-esteem and to find means of meaningful employment and their place in society as nation builders”, while building character from strong Christian foundations. As a Catholic institution, this school receives minimal funding and has difficulty raising funds for themselves. At present, from observation on our site visit to the school, it was apparent that school management struggle to provide healthy meals to their students and cannot revive agriculture projects since their land has been over farmed and drained of nutrients. The school did have impressive facilities, workshops and sports programs.

Mr Nemani Drova, Director of Catholic Education, Archdiocese of Suva, highlighted the importance of a spiritual foundation for our children to become model citizens. The Catholic Church values education for development of our children and sees faith and education as part and parcel of a child’s educational journey but must operate alongside the Christian values that the Catholic Church stands for. Mr Drova highlighted the importance of religious instruction as part of school curriculum. A challenge faced is the reducing number of Catholic teachers, as well as Catholic Priests, Brothers and Sisters; and decreasing popularity of faith-based schools when given the choice to attend Government and Private schools.

Mrs Analesi Tuicaumia, Director, Child Benefit Fiji is an early childhood education expert who owns two early childhood schools in Suva and is Director of the not-for-profit “Child Benefit Fiji”. Analesi highlighted that the first 1000 days of a child’s development are crucial for embedding social, psychological, educational, emotional and physical development and skills that the children will carry with them for the rest of their lives, forming the basis and habits of how they learn as growing children and who they become as adults. Child Benefit’s focus is on early childhood education, early childhood health, and psychosocial support. They also train their teachers to deliver quality early childhood education syllabus. Their target groups are children and mothers in rural communities and informal settlements. Analesi believes that the only way to get people out of the cycle of living in poverty-stricken communities and settlements is to invest in their children’s development and education.

Mr Peni Taoui, Acting Director, National Training & Productivity Centre (NTPC) provided an overview of the Fiji National University (FNU) and the NTPC as the vocational training arm of the University. FNU and NTPC’s commitment is to continuously up-skill Fiji’s workforce and promote quality and productivity of labour. NTPC has four training divisions - Business and IT, Executive Management and Hospitality Services, Technical Training, and TVET & non-formal education – and constantly upgrades their programs to meet industry needs. NTPC has implemented several schemes to maintain training quality, namely, the Levy and Grant Scheme, Apprenticeship Scheme and the Trade Testing Awards Scheme. NTPC engages in partnerships with other universities and training institutions from Australia, New Zealand and Asia as a commitment to quality education and to develop certified qualifications and short specialised courses suited to Fiji’s industry.

Mr Jonathan Todd, Country Manager, Fiji, Australia-Pacific Technical College (APTC) was our final speaker for the day, who represented another TVET institution, the APTC, an Australian Government initiative under the Australian Aid Program which has been operating in Fiji and the Pacific since 2007. APTC has graduated 12,887 students across the Pacific since it began operations. APTC promotes education for women and students with disabilities; development in small island states; skills that respond to industry demand, and graduates who are work-ready.



## Sugar and Mining

The Sugar and Mining session took us to Lautoka, Tavua and Vatukoula.

We had another good line-up of speakers that gave participants an in-depth view into one of Fiji's top economic sectors, however we felt that the tune sung was the same - more unresolved issues with the grass-root level (farmers) having to ponder on their future. Many businesses have vested interests in the success of this sector, is there possibility of hand holding initiatives with the State for the betterment of it?

We were also fortunate to visit Koroipita Model Town and were proud to see the home that our LF2017 colleagues built as part of their LF Fellows project earlier in June.

The great work of the Sugar Research Institute of Fiji, Vatukoula Gold Mines and Koroipita that is so easily overshadowed does not do justice to the amazing work they do to make huge impacts to the lives of those deserving. Creating communities and having to fight for funding to keep the initiatives going. Our visit to a sugar cane farmer's farm gave us an appreciation of the challenges farmers face.

Then further into the LF program we go, the deeper we delve into the real state of affairs across the country. For more than a century, the sugar industry has been perceived as the backbone of the Fijian economy, given its contributions to gross domestic product (GDP) and employment generation. However, because of the non-renewal of land leases and the gradual withdrawal of preferential prices by the European Union, the industry is struggling. Some other factors contributing to the decline in the Sugar Industry are high cost of labour, lack of interest from people to do cane farming and climatic conditions such as flooding in low lying areas.

We also visited the South Pacific Distilleries in Lautoka; where our colleague Sandhea works, to get an appreciation of rum making using molasses sourced from the sugar mill. We learnt that high quality products are important for managing competitive advantage and the Rum Co of Fiji team has worked to achieve more than 100 medals in worldwide competitions. Finally, innovation, creativity and teamwork is key to growth and success in the distilling industry.

On the other hand, The Vatukoula Gold Mine, from which the Company takes its name, is the core focus for the Company. Vatukoula Gold Mines is currently pursuing a strategy of refurbishment and development. These two industries create a lot of employment in the nearby towns and businesses at the moment and there is still hope that it will remain to support the community. A group of us were lucky to go into one of the mine shafts, some 500 meters underground, to experience and understand first-hand the work that miners do.



## Health

The objective of this session was to examine the health care system in Fiji, its challenges and future plans, examine the major health issues that we currently face in the country and look into the operations of the only psychiatric hospital in Fiji, its challenges and future plans.

Dr Isimeli Tukana, National Advisor NCD at the Ministry of Health and Medical Services highlighted that NCD's is the leading cause of death in Fiji and how responsive our health care system is towards it. To combat the issue of NCD, the stakeholders have decided that mothers hold the key to make a difference. Empowering mothers to make good lifestyle decisions for their children can eliminate and minimize NCD for the upcoming generation.

Mrs Keshvi Sukul, Managing Director of Health Plus provided an overview of the operations of her clinic and discussed the benefits of privatizing the health care system. Privatization of health care will greatly benefit the patient and consumers in terms of receiving faster medical services, faster processes from consultation, diagnostics to treatment, proactive approach to health, liberty to choose and discuss treatment options and specialization where it is available. Privatization of health care also removes the burden from Public Sector and reduces the risk of malpractice and negligence.

In the four-member panel discussion that followed hosted Mr Asaeli Naika, Nutritionist at the National Food and Nutrition Centre; Dr Rajesh Sharma, Team Leader of Diabetes Fiji; Dr Theresa Yee Chief, Director of Private Medical Clinic and Mr Inoke Bainimarama LF2003, Board Member of Fiji Cancer Society. Mr Naika highlighted several important factors regarding our national nutrition intake. Fiji is mainly dependent on imports to provide the recommended dietary requirements per person each year and elaborated on the need to include fruits and vegetables in our daily diet and exercise regularly to avoid obesity, diabetes and other related NCD's. Dr Sharma, discussed what diabetes is in order to understand the problem. Dr Yee Chief administers integrated medicine (Convention and Alternative) in her clinic to combat NCD. In the past the model of fear to disseminate the ideology of diabetes worked on patients. However, in recent times patients are responding to positive factors to address preventative diabetes. Mr Bainimarama LF2003 provided an insight on the framework and contribution of the Fiji Cancer Society to Fiji. Amongst other things, the Fiji Cancer Society provide Patient and Client Care, information and advocate on cancer and have membership drives to rope in volunteers for the work that they do. FCS provides financial and moral support to cancer patients, their families and survivors and in any way possible supplements public health services to cancer patients.

Dr Kiran Gaikwad, Medical Superintended at St Giles Hospital shared that one must understand the source of stress in order to learn how to manage it. To fully comprehend the importance of managing stress Dr Gikwad briefly touched on the causes of mental illness identifying stress as one of the major contributing factors. 15% of Fiji's population have mental illness and 93% of them are not psychosis. To manage stress, we must learn to let go and accept that we cannot control the outcome of everything. Simple practices to manage stress are to get enough rest, manage your time well, eat healthy, exercise and maintain your sense of humor.

Our session ended with a tour of St Giles Hospital facilities. We were provided an overview of the types of case admissions which are related to stress, substance abuse, suicide, inadequate family and social support.



## Tourism

The objectives of the Tourism Session were to provide participants with an overview of the tourism industry and initiatives in the industry as well as stakeholder's perspectives and contributions and to examine the future markets for tourism in Fiji.

This session provided participants a balanced view of how Fiji's leading industry is looking from the perspective of small and large operators, accommodation service providers and also activity service providers.

Managing taxes and the environment seem to be overarching issues for most stakeholders in the industry and it will be interesting to see the downstream impact of these on the industry, and if (and how) the actions of some operators to preserve the environment creates buy in from other businesses in the industry.

Our first panel discussion were Tourism Fiji and Pacific Destinations providing an overview of the tourism industry. Ms. Finiasi, Events Manager at Tourism Fiji explained at macro-level

the impact of the Tourism Industry in comparison to other sectors of the economy. She elaborated on the new marketing theme of "Fiji - where happiness finds you" and also shared the projected future growth for the industry, in terms of investment and employment creation. Mr. James Sowane, Managing Director Fiji for Pacific Destinations stressed the importance of "Safety as a key priority for Pacific Destinations – for both passengers and drivers." Mr. Sowane shared his life story after leaving fulltime employment and starting his own business, and the challenges that came with it.

The second panelists provided an overview of tourism in Fiji from their organizations perspective, and examined the challenges and lessons learnt. Mr. Brian Kirsch, Vice President, Fiji Hotel & Tourism Association provided an overview of the Tourism Industry with similar stats to Tourism Fiji where the Asian markets were highlighted as emerging tourist markets for Fiji. Mr. Tui Kabu of the Fiji Backpackers Association, shared that this sector of the tourism industry is growing, and budget tourists are coming into the country with expectations similar to mainstream tourists. Major challenges for the Association is that many of its members are small to medium sized and the taxes pose a major concern. In addition, the pool of resources available to the SME's in the market is low.

The third set of panelists were Free Bird Institute and Raffe Group of Hotels sharing their views as tourism operators. Free Bird Institute's Director and Chief Operations Officer, Mrs Mereseini Baleilevuka shared their journey, achievements and challenges as an education tourism operator. The institute is also investing in staff capacity building through Japanese language learning. Overall, the institution is expected to grow over the coming years having recently listed as a public company. Mr. Akshay Singh, Director Sales, Marketing & Strategic Development of Raffe Hotels and Resorts provided an overview of the change in ownership and how the owners intend to refurbish and grow their capacity in rooms and customer service to become the best in their category of hotels. He also shared the impact of plastics on the environment and what they, as a hotel group, are doing about it. They have banned use of plastics at their Resorts and hopefully customers see this and identify with their own views of environmental conservation. An inspiring message for all LF2018 participants!

We visited Fiji Airways headquarters and hangar in the afternoon where their executives provided an overview and introduced the networks (reach) of Fiji Airways, together with its code sharing partners. They emphasized on safety of their airline and the regular training programs which keeps them abreast with other international carriers and competitors. The visit to the hangar was also an enthralling experience for all, especially on board the A330, and taking turns having our pictures taken in the cockpit. We had an experience of what it feels like to work for an airline, in the office and on the ground. For a small developing country, this was impressive.

Following dinner, we spent our evening performing a 30-minute drama of the novel Billy Budd by Herman Melville, and ended with probing discussions if there could have been an alternative ending; which made us think of what we would do when pressed to choose between procedures and what is ethically and morally the right thing. The drama was a fun experience for LF2018 and was classed by the LF Executives as well managed and demonstrated.

Day two of our Tourism Session took us on site visits to Wyndham Resorts, Denarau Marina, Cacao Fiji's Chocolate Factory and the Sigatoka Sand Dunes where we got a first-hand understanding of these operators and their contribution to tourism in Fiji.

Mr Clyde King shared that "People and Processes" are what we need to master, and if we do that, we can create and sustain a world class hotel.

Ms Cynthia Rach was an inspiration to us being a female working in a male dominated industry as General Manager of the Denarau Marina. She provided an overview of the port operations which was followed by a tour of the marina. Their challenges were significant during natural disasters (in terms of moving yachts to safe areas) and also the ability of local regulatory institutions to understand the intricate details and mechanics of the yachting business. It was encouraging to learn that the yachting business is a growing market for Fiji.

Mr. Arif Khan LF2017 and Founder of Cacao Fiji, a boutique chocolate manufacturer and exporter. Mr. Khan shared his story of returning from abroad and found that the cocoa quality in Fiji is world class, following feedback from participation in international competitions, and started to work with communities on sourcing cocoa. Cocoa was a commodity traded by Fijians in the past but changing lifestyles to go back to production has been a challenge for the company. Cacao Fiji buys wet cocoa and implements central processing to manage quality. LF2018 participants were impressed with the small but significant operations of the factory.

Mr. Savenaca Delai, Senior Ranger at Sigatoka Sand Dunes took us on a tour of the Sand Dunes and shared prior to our hike session the changes they have noticed over time, some of these were attributed to global warming. It was surprising to note the reef was so close to the shore and participants were advised not to swim or go close to the water edge due to strong currents. Their challenges also included uncertain land area demarcation amongst others. The National Park was looking at educating the neighboring landowners and visitors (rugby teams) on efforts to save this amazing resource. During the stops it was also intriguing to know of the land spaces that were home to western and southern trees and this was very unique.

We take this opportunity to thank Jason Tutani LF2012, National Park Manager for allowing LF2018 this visit to the Sand Dunes.



## Fiji and the World

The session objectives were to provide an overview of current links and relationships Fiji has with the rest of the world and to understand key policies and agreements in place for Fiji.

Mr Kristian Miles from Mangroves for Fiji was our first speaker. He provided insight to the LF2018 team through his presentation on the need to preserve our mangroves in order to save the breeding ground of many sea species and the importance it has in acting as shields during times of natural disasters and sea level rise. We were introduced to the different types of mangroves and how mangroves are now reducing day by day and the urgent need for us to preserve mangrove plants. The presentation linked well with LF 2018s community project, mangrove planting on 29th September 2018.

Our second speaker was H.E The New Zealand High Commissioner to Fiji, Mr. Jonathan Curr whose topic provided us an overview of international relationships. His Excellency emphasized the very strong relationship New Zealand has with Fiji. He also provided insight on the current programs and activities and future initiatives. He also shared with us his life journey and the challenges and success moments that he went through while in his role as a diplomat. The participants were especially impressed with and inspired by His Excellency's diplomatic and communication skills.

Our Leaders Lunch speaker was Mr Atu Siwatibau LF2004 who shared his life and career experiences with us. His advice was to simply identify one's purpose in life and once that purpose is clear, prioritise the things in your life in an order so you can focus on your goals and yet having the time for your family and your God. His philosophy was that there is no balance, just priorities. God, Family, Work, in that order.

Mr. Bakhodir Burkhanov Country Director & Head of Regional Policy & Programs of the UNDP Pacific Office in Fiji was next where he provided us an overview of the role the UN plays in the world. The UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were presented, especially in relation to human rights, climate change and trade. Mr. Bakhodir discussed the challenges his office has in examining the policies and the lessons learnt over his career while working for the UN, and also his personal achievements, challenges and leadership principles.

We concluded the day with discussions on the various community projects we were planning for the rest of the year.



## Look North

The trip to Vanua Levu for our "Look North" session was an enlightening four-day trip with two days spent in Savusavu and two days in Labasa.

We departed Suva early morning to travel to Natovi Jetty to catch the boat to Nabouwalu. Our first site visit was to Dama District Primary School where we met up with Laisa Bale LF2003 who had assisted with our North program. We identified Dama Primary School to receive the books and school supplies collected from our book drive and fundraising. We were humbled by the experience and overwhelmed by their hospitality. The children sang two songs for us and our colleague, Talei Tuitoga engaged the children with fun introductions from each of us and gave an inspiring talk. We were treated to a wonderful lunch by the mothers' club.

The second visit was to a cocoa farm in Dreketi, owned by Arif Khan LF2017. Here we were exposed to small-scale alternative agricultural business. Edwin, the Farm Manager, took us on a tour of the farm and showed us how cocoa is processed and prepared for sale. We had earlier visited Mr Khan's Cacao chocolate factory as part of our Tourism Session and this visit to the cocoa farm in Dreketi enabled us to piece the whole process of chocolate making together. Some of the challenges he faces is weather (recently there had been little to no rain), pests and disease, and securing markets for their product, which is handled by the owners.

We travelled on to Savusavu and stayed at the beautiful Daku Resort.

We started early the next day with a briefing over breakfast by the Savusavu Tourism Association Chairman who was also the owner of Daku Resort. They shared the challenges for tourism operators in the North, with the big setback being accessibility and marketing. Transport to Vanua Levu is expensive and cumbersome. Marketing Tourism in the North requires an out-of-the-box approach in niche markets such as adventure tourism, wellness tourism, cultural experiences and targeting not the typical sand, sea and sun tourists.

Following breakfast, we boarded the bus for our first site visit for the day, to Shane Bower's workshop. Shane is a talented artist who works in metals such as copper, steel, aluminum. He is known for his magnificent metal gates and metal sculptures. Shane briefly shared with us his journey to finding metals as his preferred medium, his creative eye, and success that reaches across the world with buyers in Europe and the USA. Some keys to his success have been well chosen collaborations with other artists, and recently Hot Glass Fiji on a joint exhibition and collaboration on artistic pieces, good marketing and being passionate about his craft.

We moved on to J Hunter Pearls. This site gave us an appreciation of the hard work that goes into becoming a successful world-renowned business. From humble beginnings, to extensive research and development, to commitment to the environment and the local communities, with personal sacrifice and dedication, a focus on quality and uniqueness, and a passion for your product, you end up with a world-famous brand and a ranking for Fiji among the World's best pearl producers.

Our visit went on to Kuladrusi, the Simpson's Estate to hear from Vesi Simpson. A typical story to most Fijians and anyone who has ancestral links to Vanua Levu, old Fiji families such as the Simpsons have a long history and ancestry that traces back to early settlers and sailors from Europe. Vesi Simpson shared with us his Simpson family history – a tale of men and women, land and country and a wonderful legacy to leave behind for future generations. On the family land in Kuladrusi, Vesi has developed a cottage industry in handmade herbal body charcoal soaps and oils from recipes passed down from Mothers, Aunts and Great Aunts and turned into a viable product and business in Kula Palms.

The next visit to Vunidogoloa Village, the first in Fiji to undergo Climate Change resettlement. This was a touching visit for us, having visited the new village site of Vunidogoloa, then tracking 30 minutes to the old village site to witness first-hand the effects of climate change. The people of this village were relocated due to climate change effects on their original sea-side village site. We were also caught in a mixture of emotions just as the Turaga ni Koro of Vunidogoloa as he retold the story of their relocation, gratitude to the Fiji Government for relocating and rebuilding their village on a new land site inland a fair way from the coast, far from rising sea levels. The new village is close to roads, transport and essential services and the acceptance of their situation that is out of their control and in the hands of mother nature; but a sadness and longing for their old way of life and their connection to the ocean still exists.

We took a long bus ride back to Daku Resort to get ready for dinner on Nawii Island which was hosted by Nawii Island owners. Nawii Island is less than a 2-minute boat ride from their Jetty beside the Copra Shed. We were warmly welcomed by Violet Williams and their staff. Nawii Island owner, Mr Mike had a comprehensive PowerPoint presentation of developments on the island, and shared their past, present and future plans, including their environmental conservation plans. Some of the challenges he mentioned was transportation, lack of power supply, water and the weather. This session ended with a delicious dinner, the boat ride back to the Jetty and our bus ride back to Daku Resort to tuck in for a good night's rest.

We were up early the next morning to have breakfast and board the bus for our trip to Seaqaqa Agricultural Station. Ms Kalo briefed us on the role of the Seaqaqa Agricultural Research Station, which was established for research on pastures and annual crops such as rice and pulses. Since 1960s, the research station has concentrated its research on citrus, pineapples, and cashew nuts. Ms Kalo also briefed us on the different soil types and some of the challenges they face. We were taken for a tour into their pineapple and citrus farm where we handpicked and munched on some oranges, starfruit and kumquat.

We then headed to Labasa to the Office of the Commissioner Northern where Mr Aminiasi Niumataiwalu met us. We were eager to hear from the Commissioner Northern, unfortunately he was not available. Mr Aminiasi stepped up to provide us an overview of the role of the Commissioner's Office and how major administration duties are carried out. He also shared with us the challenges, opportunities and future developments that will take place. The Damodar Complex is one of the major developments taking place just across the road from the Office of Commissioner Northern. He also mentioned development of FNU which will enable people to easily pursue their tertiary education and to some extent control the drift of university students from Labasa to Suva.

We had lunch at the Commissioner Northern's Office then set off to Labasa Farm Fresh, an SME exporter. The owner, Mr Madavan Reddy provided as an overview of his business which started in 2011 exporting local vegetables like jackfruit, chillies and beans. Mr Reddy exports approximately 10-15 tonnes of local vegetables per year depending on the demand and the target market is Melbourne and Adelaide. We were shown the small operational warehouse they have. Here the jackfruits are cut, washed, boiled, and then packed ready for export. Their warehouse also has a refrigerated container where they store all their final products for export.

Our visit to the Labasa Fire Station where Mr Jainendra Lal, the duty officer in-charge for that shift enlightened us on the operations of the fire station. He also shared with us some of their success stories and the many challenges they have. In their team, they have one lady firefighter as well. The firefighters executed a fire drill for us. The session ended with some refreshments provided by NFA. This visit made us really appreciate our nation's firefighters for the work they do and the risks they take to keep our communities safe.

The final site visit for the day was of the Labasa Sugar Mill where Mr Michael Faktaufon provided us an overview of the operations of the mill, how it helps the community by providing employment and the many challenges they have. We had an opportunity to take a tour of the entire mill and view for ourselves the operations and different phases in sugar production. The atmosphere inside the mill was hot, humid and loud. It was very interesting to see how the processes were controlled and monitored by employees, using the most sophisticated machines and software. The workforce is a diverse collection of skilled and experienced people.

After freshening up at the Grand Eastern we walked across to Salvation Army community hall where we had dinner and then shared reflections on the poems *Where the Minds Are Without Fear* by Rabindranath Tagore and *They Want Us to be Afraid* by Kamand Kojouri.

Day four saw us take a walking tour of the Labasa Market and Town. We spoke to the market vendors and shop owners to better understand their lifestyle and the many challenges they face. It was interesting to note the new migrants; we met Indians who had settled in Fiji as late as the 1950s and as recent as 1980s, and Chinese who had come to Fiji between 3 and 10 years ago. This visit to Labasa really opened our eyes to how busy this seemingly little town is, how diverse its people are and how fast development is happening.

We returned to Viti Levu by flight where the Suva based participants left earlier whilst the West based participants departed later that afternoon.

In conclusion, the four-day trip to the North has broadened our knowledge of its people, industry, challenges and potential. The common theme across businessmen and businesswomen and the town-folk was accessibility – or the lack of – to essential services (health, water, education, transport) and a lack of sustainable support to this area. We also learnt about how much of the business and industry in Vanua Levu contributes to Fiji's economy and the potential for more. Speaking with the different stakeholders it was apparent that there are many opportunities, but little ability to turn these into a reality in the face of common challenges – access, time and money.





## Participants Choice

Our Participants Choice Session had four esteemed leaders in our community, Mr Dave Aidney, Managing Director of Williams Gosling; Mr Howard Politini, General Manager HR of BSP; Mr Daryl Tarte, Writer, Chairman of Konitiki Board and Former Board Chair of Leadership Fiji and Madam Cathy Wong LF2008, Owner Suva Physio Centre.

Mr. Aidney shared the history of Williams & Gosling (W&G), elaborating that the company was incorporated in 1936. In 1949 the Aidney family purchased Williams & Gosling Ltd. The family had already made their mark providing accounting and management for over a decade. The company was poised to become the top logistics company in Fiji. W&G's comprehensive services include heavy and project transportation, audio-visual industry support, household and office removal, storage and distribution, records management, international and local courier services, container depots, as well as freight forwarding and customs clearance. W&G has diversified and grown and introduced new technologies and innovations and techniques, but the success over the years also reflects their total commitment to the client. This has been achieved by their highly trained, dedicated team.

Mr. Politini as an inspirational speaker shared about "Authentic Leadership". Authentic leaders are positive people with truthful self-concepts who promote openness. By building trust and generating enthusiastic support from their subordinates, authentic leaders are able to improve individual and team performance. We have to find a purpose in life and do what we do best. As a leader, we should know our squad, their strengths and weaknesses. Everyone is unique. Authentic leadership is a type of management style in which people act in a real, genuine and sincere way that is true to who they are as individuals. Proponents of authentic leadership say this type of leader is best positioned to inspire trust, loyalty and strong performances from employees.

Mr. Tarte particularized to the LF Group some of the key facts that good leaders should do: to make a change, do something about the issue, build Fiji's international credibility, worker participation is a good concept, be positive, if you want to succeed be willing to take risks, do things outside the box, support free media.

Madam Wong highlighted that as leaders, we should have a clear vision. As a leader, you must envision the future, passionately believe that you can make a difference, and inspire people to achieve more than they may ever have dreamed possible. Empowerment alone is not enough. You must train and coach your people to enhance their learning ability and performance. Coaching is the key to unlocking the potential of your people, your organization, and yourself. It increases your effectiveness as a leader. Making mistakes is essential to innovation and organizational growth, as long as systems are developed to learn from failures and to avoid making the same mistake twice. The more people fail, the more they succeed. They learn from taking action, from mistakes, from feedback, from getting going. Treat failures as learning opportunities. Develop a tolerance for mistakes and give your people freedom to fail, learn from failures, and start again more intelligently.

In summary, leaders help themselves and others to do the right things. They set direction, build an inspiring vision, and create something new. Leadership is about mapping out where you need to go to "win" as a team or an organization; and it is dynamic, exciting, and inspiring. Authentic leaders are positive people with truthful self-concepts who promote openness. By building trust and generating enthusiastic support from their subordinates, authentic leaders are able to improve individual and team performance. We have to find a purpose in life and do what we do best. As a leader, you must envision the future, passionately believe that you can make a difference, and inspire people to achieve more than they may ever have dreamed possible. Empowerment alone is not enough. You must train and coach your people to enhance their learning ability and performance. Making mistakes is essential to innovation and organizational growth, as long as systems are developed to learn from failures and to avoid making the same mistake twice. The more people fail, the more they succeed. Treat failures as learning opportunities. Develop a tolerance for mistakes and give your people freedom to fail, learn from failures, and start again more intelligently.



## Closing Retreat

Our Closing Retreat started off with buddies sharing their "I plan to ..." commitments on the Malolo Cat 40-minute boat ride to Plantation Island.

At the island, we were traditionally welcomed by the management and staff of Plantation Island Resort and the sessions started off with a *talanoa* session with our Resident Leader, Vera Chute.

Following Ms Chute's presentation, we proceeded with participant reflections where we were allowed 4 minutes to share our journey, personal experiences and views of LF2018.

LF Executives challenged us to be adaptive leaders and Executive Director, Sharyne Fong also shared some insight on her action plan for leadership training after Leadership Fiji.

We concluded the retreat with our buddies discussing and deciding on our "Leadership in Action" pledge with each other and it was our responsibility to hold our buddies accountable in achieving our action plans in 2019 and beyond.

We learnt a little bit more about our fellow participants, their experiences, their plans and we also got to appreciate each other and reminisce about the past eight months of our LF2018 journey. We also spent whatever spare time we got to discuss our LF2018 fellowship project and pointers for our Vision presentation.



## 2018 Vision & 2017 Fellows Presentations

This session in our Leadership Fiji (LF) program calendar is looked forward to by our Leadership Fiji Board, sponsors and employers. It is where the current year group shares their vision and community projects and the previous year group presents their Fellowship project.

Held at the refurbished Fiji Times training room in Suva, LF's Executive Director, Sharyne Fong welcomed sponsors, guests, the panel and LF 2017 and LF 2018 group. Our panel for the day was LF's Board Chair, William Parkinson, LF Sponsor, Hank Arts General Manager Fiji Times, and Thelma Savua LF2003.

The order of presentations was highlighted, where LF2017 would present on their Fellows project and LF2018 share their vision and community projects. The Chair shared with the wider audience the rationale as to why the previous year always presents before the graduating class - so that the graduating class can pen down ideas for their upcoming project(s).

The session commenced with LF2017's Ritesh Ratiram presenting on behalf of his year group on their major community project undertaken as part of their Fellows program. He shared details of their build a home in Koro-i-Pita project as well as other community projects completed throughout the year. Ritesh talked through the challenges faced and how the LF 2017 group fundraised for their project. LF 2017 had 90% participation (30 out of 33 participants) in their project. The panel commended LF 2017 on their completed projects and identifying that larger fundraising activities were not going to work from the onset.

Yvette Samson and Seymour Singh presented on behalf of LF2018. Yvette spoke in detail about the 6 projects completed by LF 2018 during the year including monies donated and fundraised in 2018. Seymour spoke about LF2018's project for their Fellowship Project in 2019, which is the refurbishment of the library for Dama District School which is situated in Bua, Vanua Levu. Seymour elaborated further on the context, the project schedule, anticipated challenges and how LF2018 will work together to complete the project. The panel commended LF2018 on their presentation and wished them luck with the project.

LF 2018 were very grateful to have listened to the presentation by LF2017 on how they successfully completed their projects, and particularly: 1) Keeping everyone accountable and personal commitment to raising their contribution of funds; 2) Having clearly defined rules around how to hold it together next year - keeping structure similar to the LF program such as accountability buddies, regular meetings, sub-committees, and 3) Social events that will keep the team engaged.



## 2018 Graduation Dinner

Our graduation dinner was held at the Holiday Inn in Suva and was attended by family, friends, colleagues, employers, sponsors, participants, LF Alumni and the LF Board.

Master and Mistress of Ceremony Viliame Waqalavi and Naomi Tagilala LF2017 welcomed our Chief Guest, New Zealand High Commissioner to Fiji, H.E. Mr Jonathan Curr and Mrs Curr and all the invited guests.

Mr Parkinson as Board Chair delivered the welcoming address, announcing Leadership Fiji's plans to step out of its comfort zone, setting up a Leadership Institute, and introduced our Chief Guest, H.E. Mr Jonathan Curr.

H.E Mr Jonathan Curr, during his address reminded us all to be better versions of ourselves, he stressed "Leadership is not only for the workforce it's whenever you're called to be a leader."

Following the dinner, our certificates were presented and photos were taken. Our LF2018 elected board representative, Yvette Samson delivered her vote of thanks and left us with three quotes that really stuck by her on her LF2018 journey....

"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader."

"As long as you are standing give a hand to those who have fallen."

Proverbs 3: 27 - "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due when it is in your power to act"

The evening ended with guests mingling and enjoying each other's company. What a special night to remember as we celebrated our journey and all the learnings we gained from Leadership Fiji.

**Editors Note: Congratulations LF2018...to new beginnings!**



**Words and thoughts captured from some LF2018 participants during their year:**

So, I ask that my Leadership Fiji class of 2018 continues to hold on to their WHY and their PURPOSE and their PASSION that's going to drive us in 2019 and that we really stick together as a team and make this dream a reality in Dama, Bua, Vanua Levu in 2019.

- Yvette Samsom

I plan to tap into my humanitarian journey! I know it's something I am passionate about and I plan to continue thorough planning and on to execution - asking myself constantly what legacy do I want to leave behind? While remembering that to leave a legacy I first need to be healthy and look after myself.

LIVE and revel in NEW BEGINNINGS by being COURAGEOUS.

To spread my wings and fly, a new journey/beginning awaits me. I'm excited about graduating and about next year's project seeing it to fruition. Putting all that I have learned so far into practice.

Vinaka LF!

## LF2017 Fellowship Year Reflection

By Viliame Waqalaivi, LF2017 Year Rep

Before parting company after the handover of the LF2017 house at Koroipita, the group unanimously agreed that it was going to embark on a few other projects one of which was the donation of a cooler and vacuum cleaner for the Fatima Girls' Hostel.

In this regard, a project team ably led by Fareesha Shah did an assessment of the hostel and after discussions with the authorities that managed the hostel, it was decided that a cooler and vacuum cleaner was what the girls at the hostel needed.

Because projects were being discussed concurrently, LF2017's lone Police Woman in Sigatoka, Avikali, had also commenced talks with the Management of Ratu Ilaisa Memorial School, in Sigatoka, for the construction of a mini, outdoor play centre for children. The project is into its second phase now after the groundbreaking ceremony that was attended by members of the school management, LF2017 representative and construction team. The project is expected to be completed in early 2019 before it is formally handed over to the management of Ratu Ilaisa Memorial School.

Last but certainly not least, LF2017 had also offered to sponsor a representative of Koroipita for the 2019 Leadership Fiji program.

LF2017 wishes to acknowledge Leadership Fiji for providing it with a platform to realize its plans, the Project Leaders and Project Teams, Treasurer, Ms. Rachel Eliesa, Project Finance Manager, Fareesha Shah, LF2017 Executives for being in the forefront of this year's projects and for all the things that you do for humanity.



LF2017 doing final touches into the night on their LF Home at Koroipita



Sufi Dean, LF Director jointly cuts the ribbon for the donated cooler with Fatima Girls Hostel Principal



LF2017's lone Police Woman, Avikali in orange



## A Personal Commitment

By Raziya Saheem LF2017

The Fatima Girls Hostel has 47 girls, one Alima, Matron and Principal.

They have a prayer hall which is utilized for prayers teaching and learning Arabic, Quran readings, and any functions held by the hostel.

During my visit in the fasting months I noticed their 20 year old carpet needed to be replaced. After completing our project and donation of vacuum cleaner and cooler to the Hostel as part of our Leadership Fiji 2017 Fellowship I got inspired and wanted to continue helping this hostel due to it being an Islamic Institute, and that my daughter was also boarding in the school.

I undertook this personal project of replacing the carpet with a purpose to gain deeds for my late husband who we lost mid-way through my LF2017 journey, and with the hope that the girls in the Hostel would be motivated and become involved in charity work when they graduate and start earning.

I began a fundraising drive by seeking the assistance of all my relatives living abroad and used my personal savings to complete the cost of purchasing and installing the carpet.

To conclude I found so much inner happiness and peace in doing this project on my own, especially with doing good deeds for my late husband who worked so hard in life until his eventual passing away while working for Mineral Resources Department, and for myself hereafter as well.

After completing two sets of project for the hostel and seeing the smiles on the faces of the staff and students gave me great fulfilment, a feeling that is difficult to express in words.

I sincerely thank my Leadership Fiji family, especially Fareesha Shah who drove the donation program amongst our LF2017, and my cousins from Canada. May Allah S.W.T shower his blessings to all of us involved in this honorable charity program and may he continue to bless each one of us and the families involved.

Wasalam



Some LF2017 pictured here with executives of Fatima Girls Hostel and LF Director, Sufi Dean. Raziya Saheem standing 2<sup>nd</sup> from right.

## Celebrating Success

In every issue of the Leadership Fiji (LF) Newsletter, we celebrate significant achievements of the Leadership Fiji Program, the works of the LF Alumni and notable accomplishments of venerated LF Fellows in Fiji and abroad.

Do you have great news to share with us? Please email [information@leadershipfiji.org](mailto:information@leadershipfiji.org)



We are always proud of our Leadership Fiji Alumni achievements, and acknowledge the perseverance and diligence of the above pictured Alumni, after being appointed into positions of influence and given special awards and mention locally, regionally and globally. Our hearty Congratulations to:

- 🌐 Radhika Murti LF2007, on her appointment as the Director of Global Ecosystem Management Program for IUCN, making her one of the youngest Directors in the network.
- 🌐 Niraj Bhartu LF2007, Company Secretary and Director Finance Vision Investment Limited who scooped the Listed Company Achiever of the year Award at the South Pacific Stock Exchange Annual Awards.
- 🌐 Waisale Iowane LF2014, Chief Financial Officer and Director of Free Bird Institute Limited for scooping the Enterprising Achiever of the Year Award at the South Pacific Stock Exchange's Annual Awards.

## LFA Awarded AICD International Scholarship

Having learnt of the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) a few years ago, I made it a goal of mine to do this course.

After seeing the fee structure, I pushed this goal further down the track whilst never taking my eyes off it.

Then, in early 2018, I saw a Facebook post by Sharyne Fong, Executive Director of Leadership Fiji (LF) on the Leadership Fiji Alumni page. The post had details of AICD offering an International Scholarship in the regions where AICD were conducting their training and Fiji was eligible for a spot.

I sent in my application and I was impressed by their approach – you had to answer 5 questions in less than 200 words. That was it.

My reason for applying for this scholarship was to understand and implement good governance in my organisation.

I am the Managing Director of a start-up private aquaculture venture. Growa Fish (Fiji) Ltd (GFL) specialises in freshwater aquaculture of prawns and fish. We're working towards adopting unconventional tactics by using a larger pond size compared to current practices in Fiji. We're also setting ourselves to be a fully renewable energy farm by using hydroelectricity and use low-tech high efficiency methods for pond aeration and water reticulation.

We run our own hatchery to ensure seed supply and grow fresh produce to make the most of the pond area to supplement farm income.

Being a start-up, the farm continues to be a huge capital investment and any surplus funds goes towards the upkeep and development of the farm hence the reason for me to apply for the scholarship.

This scholarship has given me the right footing to understand and implement in GFL and Weightlifting Fiji, proper governance, financial management and crisis and risk management skills.

My key takeaways were that the board chair makes or breaks the board and to hold the management to account.

I am grateful to AICD for offering me this scholarship and to LF for the many doors it keeps opening for me.

**Editor's Note:** Ritesh Ratiram LF2017 was one of four awarded AICD's International Scholarship and was asked to contribute an article for this Newsletter.

*The following is AICD's International Programs Executive, Anna McCea, interview of Ritesh, who was one of four recipients of the International Scholarship, to learn about his experience and how the course has made a difference to his role and views on governance.*

**AICD:** Why did you apply for the scholarship?

**RR:** Being the most inexperienced board member on a high performing board [Growa Fish (Fiji)], I wanted to broaden my director knowledge and improve my ability to make significant contributions in the boardroom. I'm also running my own startup business with plans to expand, so I wanted the right training in thinking/performing like a company director. I'm very grateful to be granted the scholarship.

**AICD:** What was your biggest takeaway from the training?

**RR:** A few things: I learnt that the responsibility of the board is to hold management to account; that the chair makes or breaks the board; and the importance of in-camera sessions before a board meeting. But the biggest takeaway for me has been clarity of the organisation's mission and strategy to marshal internal and external resources in delivering value over the long-term.

**AICD:** How valuable were the connections you made? How did you find the networking experience?

**RR:** I enjoyed the diversity of organisations, skill levels and perspectives of the participants. I made some good connections, and it was interesting to learn of the challenges that existed in other organisations and what we could take from them to implement into our own organisations.

**AICD:** What's next on your governance journey?

**RR:** I'd like to graduate from the ICDC in the near future. In the meantime, I'd like to contribute to good sports governance in Fiji.



Pictured here is Ritesh (left) with AICD Executive and Raymond John from PNGHRI, also one of four scholarship awardees

## LF Alumni Share Their Aspen Institute Experiences



Cathy takes a selfie whilst in transit at LA Airport, continuing with the Seminar reading and enjoying a red too.

Cathy Wong LF2008 was the recipient of Fiji Water's scholarship to attend the Aspen Institute's Executive Seminar on Leadership, Values & Good Society at their Wye River, Maryland Campus in October this year.

Covered here are excerpts from Cathy's report on her Seminar experience.

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We had a cohort of 20 participants (10 women and 10 men). 15 were from the United States and 5 were International participants (England/Germany, Spain, Mexico, Fiji, Japan). The group was from diverse backgrounds of government and private sector. Majority were in education. Our 2 facilitators were from the United States and Ghana.

The Seminar itself was a great learning curve for me personally. The application of the Seminar was a foreign concept to me where it was sitting whole day discussing readings and articles.

The discussions around the readings were the most valuable and this is where most of my learning took place. These sessions created a lot of healthy debate and dialogue and discussions. It made us look within ourselves as individuals. It took us on a journey to define and discuss what we as humans, value and what constitutes a good or a bad society.

This was the heart of the Seminar.

My travel home was spent doing more reading and putting together a vision of how to bring this concept to Fiji through Leadership Fiji, especially with I being a Fellow of the 2008 program.

I thank Fiji Water for selecting me to attend this Seminar. It was a valuable experience and was good to share thoughts, experiences and dialogue with colleagues from around the globe on various forms and challenges of Leadership. I have grown in my knowledge and experience as a leader and this can only help me grow as a leader in Fiji.

**Editors Note:** Cathy now joins LF Alumni's Rajesh Patel LF2002, Glenis Yee LF2006, Atu Siwatibau LF2004, Sharyne Fong LF2005 and Ritesh Singh LF2002 as Fellows of the Fiji Water Foundation.

Sharyne Fong LF2005 shared her experience of her recent trip to Aspen Colorado to attend the Resnick Aspen Action Forum on Fearless Leadership.

.....  
Following my experience at the Aspen Institute's Executive Seminar on Leadership, Values & Good Society at their Wye River, Maryland campus in October 2016, I made a pact with myself that I would attend the Aspen Action Forum someday. We were required to write a letter to ourselves on what we would commit to doing following that Seminar, and attending the Resnick Aspen Action Forum was one of the promises I made for myself.

This goal came to reality nearly two years later when I met my friend Kara Barnett, Executive Director of the American Ballet Theatre (ABT) in Hong Kong on my way back from a work training course in France. Kara and I had stayed in touch following the Aspen Executive Seminar, and it so happened that our travel dates aligned in March where ABT was performing in Hong Kong the day after my arrival from France. Kara and I got talking about our Aspen experience and shared how we were both at a point of wanting another boost of leadership inspiration. We discussed the Aspen Action Forum and it was then when I informed Kara that I would be in the United States in July that we realised that the Resnick Aspen Action Forum dates was scheduled around the same time.

For me, this was another revelation of the universe aligning, and confirmed my belief that if I put my mind to heart I will get what I want.

As they say the rest is history, as Kara introduced me to the Aspen Institute executives, and I received an invitation to be a part of the week-long Resnick Aspen Action Forum. I jumped at the opportunity and was determined to make this an investment in my personal development; and that I must make that trip to Aspen, Colorado. I was fortunate that my employer, BSP was supportive of my personal development initiative and helped subsidise the cost of my ground transfer and accommodation in Aspen.

The Resnick Aspen Action Forum with the theme of Fearless Leadership was just the boost I needed. With over 350 leaders in attendance, it was such a wonderful experience connecting with like-minded Aspen Fellows who came from other parts of the United States, South America, Central America, China, Africa and India, and were at some point in their lives seeking to make a real difference in their communities and our world. I also got to meet two friends who attended the Aspen Executive Seminar with me in October 2016.

The Action Forum as it is aptly named required us to develop an Action Pledge on what we desired to do, we had readings and in Socratic Method in groups of 15 we had dialogue and discussions, and shared our experiences, thoughts and commitments with each other. I found these discussions and sharing awe-inspiring, and with mixed emotions I realised that I was not alone in my quest in wanting to make a difference.

I was awestruck by the sincerity of the leaders I met who were wanting to reach out and so willing to help; for many it was a way of paying it forward. Their passion and commitment was of sincere genuineness. We were all in one, searching for a new beginning, questioning that courage to follow our heart and passion to become fearless leaders, to take that bold step to make a difference.

As the Forum came to an end and we bade farewell to each other, and boarded our shuttle to take the 3 hour ride from Aspen to Denver International Airport early that Sunday morning, I couldn't stop myself from reflecting in between teary eyes and mixed emotions on my leadership journey, my Why and my passion to help create a good society!

I was full of enthusiasm and couldn't wait to return home with all those learnings and to share and inspire LF2018 through our circle discussions during our overnight trips.



Pictures L-R: Kara and I in Hong Kong.  
I met Teddy from Kenya who was from Barack Obama's father's village. His pledge was to create 100 Mandelas.  
The serenity of the Aspen Institute campus gave us solace to reflect.  
I was delighted to meet my friends Dan and Ron from the Wye River Aspen Executive Seminar.

## LF Alumni Training of Trainers

Eighteen of our Leadership Fiji Alumni from year groups ranging from 2003 to 2018 went through two sessions of Training of Trainers (TOT) training on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> December to equip them with knowledge and the confidence to deliver communications and leadership training for high school prefects in 2019.

In opening the training session, William Parkinson, LF Board Chair shared with our Alumni present that Leadership Fiji had been receiving requests from some high schools to run leadership training for their senior students and this was an opportunity to pool our LF Alumni skills and talent to pay it forward for Fiji's future leaders.

The TOT sessions were facilitated by fellow Alumni, Veronika Naiwaqa LF2015, a Toastmaster and passionate about youth development and Sharyne Fong LF2005, our Executive Director.

The first Saturday offered attendees an overview and tips of being effective trainers, and the second Saturday saw them bringing together their learnings and delivering a mock training to a panel, fellow Alumni colleagues and a group of high school students.





## Reconnecting with Your Year Group?

Are you reconnecting with your year group or engaged in making a difference in our communities? Share your stories and pictures with us so we can share it forward with our fellow Alumni.

We learnt that LF2002, our inaugural Leadership Fiji program participants, have been meeting regularly. Some of them continue to serve on the Board of Samabula Old People's Home since 2002.

Here is a picture some of LF2002 at their recent gathering.



L-R: Arshad Daud, Rajesh Patel, Salote Uluinaceva, Ritesh Singh, Marica Hallacy, Mohammed Maqbool, Meli Nacuva and Ivan Fong

Spotted earlier this year was a group from LF2018 grabbing coffee while discussing their community project.



L-R: Tirath Sharma, Viresh Prasad, Seruwaia Mario, Kalolaini Ranadi and Yvette Samson

## My Kokoda Adventure

By Mele Marafono LF2010

I pointed to the mountains and said "I had been there!"

Such was the feeling of accomplishment after 9-days in the bush, completing 96-km of one of the most famous trails in our region; tired, weary but equally elated and accomplished.

After 5 long months of training, a group of 15 BSP staff and 4 friends/spouses finally set off on this epic journey. There was 96-km to be conquered, over 7 walking days with an accompanying party of around 30 guides and porters from a local PNG trekking company called KTDLA (Kokoda Trekking Dev Livelihood Association) and a shared load of around 800kg+ luggage and food.

We flew to Popondetta in the Oro Province, took a 3-hour ride in a truck to Kokoda Station to start off the adventure in pouring rain.

In the 2 weeks leading up to Kokoda, I was apprehensive; partly because I felt that I had not trained enough and that the trek was going to be ruthless. I convinced myself that if I think of this as one epic adventure, then my mind would compensate toughness with fun. That 'mind' training eased me into the journey and carried me through.

Kokoda has a unique way of teaching you about yourself – your aptitude, resilience, your inner self, on how to 'keep it all together', how you react and how you self-lead in the most difficult conditions.

If I'm honest I found the trek demanding. Parts of the trek were brutal, muddy, slippery, rough, and even leech-infested in addition to trekking in the rain for the first 3 days. The river crossings stretched your patience - imagine crossing 11 times on an afternoon leg, then waking up the next morning to cross the same snaking river another 9 times. Navigating through landslides, fallen trees, crossing overflowing creek with roaring sounds – that I would slip off the slippery make-shift bridges into the gushing water and be smashed by the rocks was stressful. Without fail, my day started with a never ending climb upwards and ended with an equally steep descent. I almost gave up and asked for a helicopter ride back into civilisation on Day 4 where we started at 6:30am and arrived in the dark at 6:30pm.

Oh there were easy going moments; those moments were special – just me and my thoughts cooperating; thinking deeply about the war and those who fought for what they believed, enjoying the scenery, the cooler air, hearing bullfrogs, birds and being one with nature.

The trek is filled with war history. Places like Isurava where the war memorial was so surreal, to think that so many men lost their lives here. Looking down into the Kokoda valley, so peaceful with a ray of sunshine behind, peace and serenity, chirping birds, this place gives you goose bumps.

Another heartfelt moment was witnessing the trenches dug by the Japs at Maguli Range where they ambushed the combined Allied forces. A few steps downhill lays the memorial that marked the demise of a brave woman soldier straight in the firing line from the trenches. Standing beside the memorial, I could almost hear her agony and suffering as she fell to the ground. I hoped she would have declared that her life was not in vain – that she was faithful to the calling until the end. Maybe the deep thoughts were provoked by the weariness of being on the trek for 7 days.

My porter, Jack became my 'son' on the trek, he was there to pull me up, hold my hand, balance my back pack, help me pack my 'yaya' early in the morning ready for take-off. He dried my boots and was my shadow throughout. He is now part of my life. Our conversation on the trek was always 'Jack, please promise you are going back to school next year; you're too young to be a full time porter'.

I thought about my own two sons and how much more privileged they are with opportunities. Life for young Koiari men centered on trekking to earn for their families. That was the other side of this famous trek; the hardships the villagers along the trek face to access communication networks, better health care and higher education opportunities. Fathers and sons travel for days to get supplies from nearby townships. Mothers with their children travel 2-3 days to get health care and access supplies for what we generally take for granted.

Choosing a local trekking company was an important team decision. A major objective for the team was having a deeper

purpose rather than personal conquest alone. We chose to trek with KTDLA and thus support its community initiatives of;

1. Improving campsite facilities for trekkers and porters
2. Setting up "Wilderness Kitchens" – providing organic food for trekkers
3. Providing market access to villages for garden crops, vegetables and handcrafted wares

The group fundraised and contributed K10,000 to kick-start the camp facilities upgrade which we hope will become a sustainable income generating means for villages along the trek.

Kauata, my husband and I also walked for a cause; a cause to establish a support network and possible learning opportunities for children living with Autism in Port Moresby. We were deeply touched by the show of support raising K10,946 towards the cause, some of which came from fellow Leadership Fiji Alumni. A big 'Vinaka Vakalevu' to those who contributed.

When I reached that arch at the end, Steven Francis (an inaugural Leadership PNG participant) was there to welcome us Fiji style. Kauata, Claire and I (all from Fiji) were welcomed with beads and hats and hugs, there was no stopping those tears of relief and joy.

In retrospect, despite the seemingly insurmountable challenges, Kokoda was amazing, rewarding and absolutely worth all the training and effort. The friendship made on this trail lasts a lifetime, etched in every footstep taken on this 96-km journey.

Kokoda not only instills in you a sense of achievement but it creates yearning and hunger for more. It drives you to go further, that you've proven yourself and that nothing can stand in your way. Not only in physical strength but it gives you that boldness, the inner courage and bravery that you can do anything that would have never come from staying in 'safe harbours'.

Trekking Kokoda is truly an adventure of a lifetime and I encourage all my fellow Alumni to take the challenge if presented with the opportunity. It is indeed life changing. The greatest mountaineer of all times, the famous Edmund Hillary said, "It is not the mountains we conquer but ourselves".



Kauata & I at the start of the walk. A very rainy start!



Isurava War Memorial. Kokoda Valley at the background.



Landslides and falling trees to tackle



Many rivers to cross



Villages nestled in mist. Common but beautiful sight in the morning leg of the trek.



Day 3 – arriving into camp at 6:30pm after 10 hours of walk. The hardest day ever!



Couldn't have done it without this young man, Jack Devex.



Welcomed at Manari by beautiful singing voices of tender young ones.



The end, we have conquered!



"I would do it all over again for this special trio - Theo, Tokilala and Paka Jnr who suffer from severe Autism."  
- Mele Marafono LF2010

# Thank You and Happy Holidays!

We take this opportunity to thank you all very, very much for the support you have given us this year.

Happy Holidays!



## Sponsorship Acknowledgement



The Fiji Times



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