

# Knickers meet need of Suva's camp kids

**IN** an interview with ABC News during his visit to Australia in February, National Director of Fiji's Peoples Community Network Semiti Qalowasa said up to 35 per cent of Fijians live in squatter camps. In the greater Suva area alone, an estimated 16.4 per cent of the capital city's population live in these informal settlements.

During his visit to Fiji in August last year, Rotary International president Ian Riseley, accompanied by District 9920 governor Malini Raghwan and Zone 7B public image coordinator Liz Courtney, visited a squatter camp preschool in Suva. The preschool was established by Annelise, a Montessori teacher living in Suva, who saw a huge need for the young children in the area living in poverty.

Ian, Malini and Liz visited a group from the island of Kiribati who had moved to Suva in the hope of finding jobs and an education for their children. They lived on the side of a hill and made their homes from branches, old pieces of tin and any packing cases they could find.

"The path was muddy and wet, with open drains and hanging wires and pipes for water and electricity," Liz said.

The squatter camp preschools, however, offer a brighter future for the camp children. The Rotary clubs of Suva donated four mobile teaching kits, equipped with learning and play materials, while teachers from the Montessori school volunteer their time to teach the children through play. Each day, a taxi is sent to deliver the kits and a teacher to each of the squatters

camps. Often, it is the first time any of these children have played with real toys and their delight is obvious.

"Once we reached the bottom of the hill, there was a platform with a thatched roof and we were greeted with friendly smiles, the laughter of children and colourful cloth walls," Liz said. "There were five mothers and approximately 15 small children, all engrossed in playing with games, toys, paints and books. The teacher was reading them a story and then the singing started. Annelise explained that they learn in their native language to keep their culture alive and also in English to equip them for the future."

Rotary in Suva continues to fund the project, because it believes all children have the right to education.

When Liz asked Annelise what Rotary in New Zealand could do to help, she was surprised by her response.

"She asked if we could collect and send children's underwear! The preschool teachers wanted to encourage good hygiene and sanitation among the children, but underwear is expensive in Fiji and these families couldn't afford to buy it."

A simple request and so easily done.

When she returned home, Liz asked all Rotary clubs in New Zealand districts to assist, by donating boys and girls underwear in sizes 2-4.

The result was a true testament to the Rotary spirit; underpants came flooding in – over 3000 pairs, plus many cash donations from Rotary clubs, Rotarians and the public.

"Knicker Liz", as she is now affectionately known, said they received so many pairs that they are now being used for other projects. Governor Malini intends to provide support to Koro Island, which was badly affected by Cyclone Winston and then Cyclone Gita, and the Rotary Club of Auckland Harbourside has also donated Rotary Dictionaries for Year 5 children in Koro Island.

**President elect David Wylie, of the Rotary Club of Howick, NZ, and PDG Liz Courtney, Zone 7B Rotary public image coordinator.**





SIZE 2-4

5 PACK

GIRLS BRIEFS

Ocoo 6 PACK BRIEFS

INSTRUCTIONS

SIZE 2-4

5

RIO \$8-10

5 PACK COTTON \$5

SIZE 6-8

5 PACK COTTON \$5



SIZE 2-4 \$5

BOYS' BRIEFS 5PK COTTON

H&H

RIO \$0.99

CARE INSTR