



PUBLIC HEALTH NURSES IN RAROTONGA TAKE A NEW BUS TO WORK

An innovative solution to a long-standing problem came to fruition in June 2018, when New Zealand Rotarians presented a fully-equipped converted bus to the Cook Islands Ministry of Health to serve as a mobile health unit for the island of Rarotonga.

KNOWN as Te Kaveinga Ora, and with the strapline “Healthy Children, Healthy Island”, the bus is vividly decorated with photographs of local children and carries the names of the donor Rotary clubs and sponsors.

The mobile health unit will be used for child and maternal health care, checks of pregnant women, school children and the elderly, plus other health services, such as immunisation

initiatives, disease awareness programs and blood bank collections. As the bus is fitted with medical equipment and Wi-Fi, the unit can also function as a command centre during emergencies.

The project began when the Rotary Club of Rarotonga learned that many community-owned health clinics around the island had fallen into disrepair. They were no longer fit for public health nurses to use for regular

checks of babies and their mothers.

With the support of the Child Welfare Association and the Ministry of Health, the club put out a call to Rotary counterparts in New Zealand to help bring the clinics up to standard. The Rotary Club of Belfast, near Christchurch, immediately sent a team to paint and do repairs, while the Rotary Club of Rarotonga used its own funds for other upgrades. Rotarian



The Rarotonga Mobile Health Clinic leadership team, from the Rotary Club of Masterton South: Dr Rob Irwin, District 9940 governor Mitch Brown, Tranzit's Paul Snelgrove and project manager David Baker cut the ribbon to officially open the medical bus. (Photo: Jade Cvetkov/Wairarapa Times-Age)



The local children who make a star appearance on the bus pose in front of their portraits.

and New Zealand High Commissioner Nick Hurley and Rotarian partner Christine Hurley played a pivotal role in the Rotary Club of Rarotonga at the inception of the project.

Meanwhile, serendipity was at work within the Rotary Club of Masterton South, NZ. Having learned of the project, club members Paul Snelgrove (managing director of the bus company Tranzit Ltd, based in Masterton) and former surgeon Dr Rob Irwin, came up with the suggestion that a converted

Tranzit bus could be turned into a mobile clinic. This would enable nurses to work with community-based patients in a hygienic and well-resourced environment and avoid the need for further work on individual clinic buildings. The Rarotonga club obtained enthusiastic confirmation from Cook Islands health officials that such a solution would be both practical and sustainable. The proposed bus could be serviced locally, was an appropriate size for local roads and

could be driven by nurses themselves.

From that point, the Rotary Club of Masterton South went into overdrive. The bus was purchased, and extensive exchanges took place with Rarotonga to ensure every component met Cook Islands requirements for specifications and medical equipment – with special input from Medspares Pacific, Tait Communications and Cook's Buses of Rarotonga, and particular support from Stuart Twaddle, of the Rotary Club of Inglewood, NZ. Club president Mark Boyd led the Rarotonga team.

Project manager David Baker, of the Rotary Club of Masterton South, kept the complex developments on track, while also leading the fundraising efforts. The mobile health unit's direct costs, excluding many donated hours of work and materials given free or at cost, reached \$171,000. This was met by contributions from 18 New Zealand Rotary clubs, four districts and a global grant from The Rotary Foundation. The bus was transported from Auckland to Rarotonga courtesy of the Matson shipping line. On June 18, it was bedecked with traditional greenery and formally handed over to the Cook Islands Minister of Health in the presence of visiting and local Rotarians to begin its new life. •