

From Christchurch to Nuku'alofa **with love**

The Vaiola Hospital in the capital of Tonga needed an ambulance. Via Rotary New Zealand World Community Service (RNZWCS), the Rotary Club of Christchurch Sunrise responded to the call.

CLUB member Roger Turner had links with St. Johns Ambulance, and so a retired ambulance was pulled out of an auction and donated to the cause. Checks were made that a Mercedes-Benz van could be serviced in Tonga. Ex-Rotarian John Luxton at Avon City Ford serviced the vehicle for shipping, with Peter Land from Signwise providing the Tongan signage. Rotarian Alan Foote from Pacific Direct Line arranged the shipping from Auckland. All of these services were provided free of charge or at highly discounted rates.

A special opportunity arose to involve the local Tongan community by having the ambulance blessed before the trip. This, along with social media, increased the profile of the project.

One of the issues was the cost of transporting the ambulance from Christchurch to Auckland.

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The Rotary network again provided the solution. Club president Brad Meek and David Watson volunteered to drive the ambulance to Auckland. Z Energy provided free fuel for both ambulance and drivers. The Rotary Club of Blenheim South put the team up for the first night, and Blue Bridge Ferries provided free transport for the crossing of Cook Strait. The Rotary Club of Taupo hosted the team on the second night, and the ambulance was delivered to Shuttle Express Freight, which placed the vehicle on the ship to Tonga. The Rotary Club of Nuku'alofa took delivery and officially handed over a reconditioned, equipped ambulance to the Vaiola Hospital on September 12, presenting the keys to Dr Siale 'Akau'lofa, CEO, Ministry of Health. •

