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May 2017



Dear Supporter

“Let us show love in our acts.”
Mary MacKillop, 1890

Our beautiful island nation of Papua New Guinea is the largest in the Pacific and a home that I share with over 7 million people. Despite significant economic growth, the majority of citizens struggle daily with a lack of access to basic education and health and other basic services, especially in our remote areas and most disadvantaged communities.

I am Valentine Masa and I work in the remote township of Vanimo, Papua New Guinea. This is a community where many Sisters of St Joseph served with the local villagers from the 1960's for many years and are fondly remember by so many.

I work with the wonderful children and families in many of the remote villages around Vanimo in early education and disability inclusion, through Callan Services, a partner of Mary MacKillop International.

I come from a family of eight children and was born in a small village within the Buka district on the neighbouring island of Bougainville. I am one of five brothers with three sisters and I am the sixth born.

When I was growing up my father was a teacher and my mother was a housewife. My grandparents raised me as my mother had twins after me and was very busy... sometimes many people in my area don't even know that I am part of my parents' family.

I was very fortunate to have an education along with my elder sisters and brothers. I completed my college studies as a primary school teacher with my diploma in primary teaching. I have recently acquired my bachelors' degree in special education.



Education is still one of the biggest challenges in Papua New Guinea. The average level of formal education for adults is, unfortunately, less than four years, whilst the national school enrolment rate is 63%... this is the lowest in the Asia-Pacific region.

I have a passion for teaching which I developed in my years as a primary school teacher. I applied for a teaching position with Callan Buka Special Education Resource Centre in 2006 as I knew I wanted to work with children who had a hearing impairment and other special needs.

The children I work with are intelligent and deserve to have the support, love and care that all people have... so that they can live a normal happy life.

Children in Papua New Guinea, especially those with disability face additional challenges in accessing education.

Nearly one million people in the country face challenges with their disability, and yet only 2% are receiving any form of reliable service.

There is much stigma and cultural beliefs around disability in Papua New Guinea which, unfortunately, leads to the unnecessary exclusion of people.

I give my personal commitment to my work and see a great need of promoting Papua New Guinea's policy on inclusive education... as negative attitudes need proper dialogue and supportive volunteers and staff who carry out the programs in a sensitive matter.

We also need the help of our friends like you... your gift will allow many more volunteers to be trained in the next six months, to raise awareness of disability issues, thank you.

Our biggest challenges are the lack of awareness and rights of the children with disability and also child protection issues.

I have seen people's lives changed in the ten years I have been in Vanimo. People now are talking about the rights of children with disability and the changes they can see in their children.

Over 80% of the population of Papua New Guinea lives in rural areas, which creates great challenges for our work as we are aware of the lack of services available to the poorest in the country.

Children in rural areas we support are much less likely to complete their education than are children in urban areas.

I am currently visiting villages at the outreaches like Osima, Imbio and Osol where we conduct eye and ear screening, engage people in disability awareness issues and collect data from our clients to help ourselves and also the government make disability policy decisions.



We are happy that our work helps provide information for our disability policy in the whole of Papua New Guinea. *Before our work, people with disability were being ignored and sometimes unnecessarily kept out of sight and locked away.*

I have noticed some of the family members now in the villages, wanting to work alongside the volunteers, to help support their own community. This is very rewarding to see.

I am fortunate to work with primary schools and the teachers, who are now building an understanding to support children with disability to be integrated into mainstream schools.

I like to discuss issues with my staff, as we have many challenges during the week. In the remote villages there are many problems because of the lack of transport options. Also, it is difficult to access medication for eye and ear patients, and there are always challenges with referring people on to professional services.

Especially important is raising awareness with the locals on the importance of school-based education, especially for the youngest children.

We have developed a Resource Centre in Vanimo which is a stimulating environment for very young children to prepare them for mainstream education. The Centre is the first of its kind in our community and will help parents understand the importance of a school education.

The parents too, get involved, sometimes up to 30 parents stand outside our early childhood class and watch. Often, if a volunteer is running late, a parent will fill-in and take the class... the whole community is engaged and that makes me very happy.

I like to share a bit of happiness through my work... that is the most rewarding thing for me. The many smiles I give and the many smiles I get is what I also would like to see on the faces of families and special people.

Often, it gets very emotional, when you see a child who has received further assistance. I share tears of joy by myself in my office, when doing my work.

The volunteers on the program are so committed to their work... I see the eagerness they have towards what they are asked to do.

One volunteer, Willie, helps the children in the early childhood education program once per week and also is most passionate about serving in his own village with the children who are hearing impaired.

As a person with a hearing impairment, Willie knows well the challenges the children face each day.

I have asked Willie to share his story with you, our Australian supporters, and he has written down his story, which I have attached to this letter... I hope you will find it as inspiring as I did.

My hope is that we serve many more people and build greater awareness in our remote communities.

For the next six months, with your help, we can train an additional 12 volunteers to help change the lives of more than 200 people and their families, affecting thousands of people in this remote region.

For Papua New Guinea, I hope for a future with inclusive educational institutions, greater employment opportunities and a more inclusive environment for all people with disability.

I would like to thank you personally for sharing with us and helping to support so many children. The smiles I see from the youngest in our community are because of our mutual friendship and care for those most often forgotten, thank you.

We hope, at this time of the year, you are able to support us again as you are able, so that we can continue our work with the most vulnerable in our country and expand this life-giving work.

We thank you from our hearts.

Yours in friendship,



Valentine Nakin Masa
Project Co-ordinator
Callan Vaimo Special Education Resource Centre

PS. Please send your kind support before the end of June... this will assist us in planning our projects for the next six months. Thank you.

PPS. Don't forget to read Willie's story; that is attached, please share with others also.



"Gutpla pasin blong yupla I ken kamapin gutpla pasin long wok bilong disability"

"Your hearty passion can create positive passion in the work of disability here."