

MOTA ISLAND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM—Vanuatu – a people of smiles!

The Vanuatu You Don't See at a Resort

Harsh, rugged, bare...harsh weather conditions, rugged landscape and bare shelves. But in the midst of this, generosity – giving of their meagre food to honour their guests; smiling, welcoming, happy. How is it that people with so little can appear so happy? They are content. That doesn't mean they don't want better for their children, but perhaps it is that they know in their hearts that the most important things in life are having someone to love and be loved by, somewhere to live and food to eat. It is out of this knowledge that the desire for a school, safe drinking water, and a few small businesses has come. The parents of Mota Island love their kids. They want to see them succeed in life. They want to see their faces light up with the joy of learning something new, to enjoy the feel of a full tummy, to sleep safely at night. I wouldn't say they want "the best" for their kids. There are no flat screen TVs here, no remote control cars, no birthday parties with presents piled high, and there probably never will be. The parents of Mota Island simply want good for their children. Good education, good water, good food, good sources of income. They want to give them a good chance to reach their potential and follow their dreams.



Travel in the Tropics

Earlier this year, LAI Board Member Ian Callaghan was one of a team to travel to Northern Vanuatu to visit our project site on Mota Island.

This is his story:

"Knowing about the remote location of our current project on Mota Island, I carefully packed the maximum flight baggage allowance to include supplies such as a torch, mini first aid kit, toilet paper and some extra rations such as peanuts and chocolate, water bottles and wet weather gear.

We flew from Townsville to Brisbane, Brisbane to Espiritu Santo, then on again in an unpressurised turboprop Islander aircraft due north to Sola Island...this flight is available only twice a week. Just before our steep approach and sharp base turn to the grass landing strip we could see Mota Island, only some kilometres off shore – wow a real volcanic island shaped like a sombrero hat."



"...Mota Island...wow a real volcanic island shaped like a sombrero hat."

Contact Life Aid International

- > Phone:
0409 059 714
- > Post:
PO Box 5030 Townsville
QLD 4810
- > Email:
aid@lifeaidinternational.org.au
- > Web:
www.lifeaidinternational.org.au
- > Contacts:
Scott Douglas or
Ian and Gina Callaghan

Inside this issue:

The Vanuatu You Don't See at a Resort	1
Travel in the Tropics	1-2
	2-3
	3

Travel in the Tropics Cont...

“Landing on the grass strip beside the ocean the pilot kept the aircraft engine running as our baggage was tossed out onto the grass ramp area as we were welcomed by our contact from Sola. Then followed a short walk of 50 metres before our baggage had to be shouldered and jeans rolled up to cross the Sola Rive – 20 metres wide along the coast. On the other side waited our transport, an old 4 x 4 tray back so the baggage and bumped along on the back for the 10 minute trip to the village huts where we were to stay before our journey across to the island of Mota.



The plan was to be based on Sola Island and make the journey across to Mota by motorised canoe. I noticed on landing back at the airstrip that the windsock was blowing straight out - meaning a wind of 15 knots – which equals rough seas whipped up – dangerous for any small boat. ‘Well,’ I said, ‘No problems. We have 8 days here. We’ll just wait until the wind abates.’ Well the wind only increased that night (to about 25 knots) and the morning saw an increase to 30 knots with driving rain.

“We spent the next few days at the Sola village learning about our Mota project, the 1.1 km walk that the villagers have to endure just to get fresh water, the great need their children have for a school. Days 2, 3 and 4 the winds never abated under 20 knots and the thatched roof on our small village hut had to be reinforced with new palm fronds. Food to the island was very scarce as the small coastal trader ship was delayed by weather on its only 3 monthly scheduled visit – no fresh milk deliveries here! The winds moderated and we planned for a 6am boat trip on day 5 across the reef to Mota. 6am came but no boat! The coxswain was ‘walk about’ and couldn’t be found! This probably proved a blessing as by mid morning the strong winds arose again and we would have been stranded on Mota!! Thus day 7 and 8 the winds and the seas continued to roar. We departed Sola Island after the long journey from Townsville with Mota in sight, but not able to visit!!! This my friends provides the reader with just how difficult the task is of simply reaching Mota Island. For our next project stage on Mota we are considering the purchase of a boat to enable safe and reliable sea transport of supplies, people and medical evacuations to the Sola clinic.”

What if it Was You?!

Imagine if this story was about you, your town, that you lived in circumstances such as these. I recall a time in Townsville during the summer monsoon rains when we had so much rain the roads were flooded. Trains didn’t come. Trucks couldn’t get through. People living in the Northern Beaches just had to stay home – they couldn’t drive to work through the flooded roads. Did we run out of food? Nope. The shelves at the local supermarket got a little bare. First the fresh milk disappeared, then the long-life containers and milk powder too. They had to organise a special convoy of trucks up to Cairns, up the back roads, carefully making sure there were roads free of flooding that could handle the weight of the heavily-laden trucks. What was being supplied? Bread and milk mostly. Cairns is dependent on road and rail freight for a lot of its food supplies. But no one went hungry. It was annoying. It was disruptive. There were a few put-out people who couldn’t have milk with their morning coffee. But for the vast majority of us, once the rain stopped and the water dissipated, life continued on as normal. We went to the supermarket the following week, and bought our usual trolley full of groceries, probably grumbling to ourselves about the exorbitant price of food these days.

Now imagine if the trucks didn’t come. What if they couldn’t? What if it was a whole month, or even two before a train got through with food supplies? Can you imagine the worry, as your cupboards gradually got more and more empty? Would you start rationing, eating a little less at each meal, thinking about ways to make it stretch further? For us, this would almost unheard of. We live in a prosperous nation, and while there are people who are genuinely struggling to survive each week, most of us can only imagine what that must feel like.

For the people of Mota, and the islands that surround it, worry about food is a daily thought process. They rely heavily on boats bringing rice and other staple foods to their island. The soils, while fertile, are very rocky, steep and surrounded by rainforest. Not your ideal growing conditions. Add to that the potential for storms and cyclones that destroy practically everything in their paths and the people of Mota have learnt to be resilient. There are sometimes weeks at a stretch when the seas are too rough for boats – this means not only no deliveries of staple foods, but also no fishing trips to supplement their vegetable and fruit diet, and no possibility of getting to a doctor in an emergency...if you can afford the trip to start with. This is what life is like for the people of Mota, every day, every month, every year.



Ian Callaghan shaving ‘a la natural’ down at the beach during the trip to Vanuatu

Dinner at the Museum

August 11th saw Life Aid Intl host a Fundraising Dinner at the Museum of Tropical Queensland.

Our grateful thanks go to all those involved in the Fundraising Dinner – Ben Patterson and Brad Stokes standing as auctioneers for the night, the delicious catering by The Brewery, sound and lighting support, the list goes on. Thank you all!!!!!!

We appreciate the generosity of those who gave, and also those who lent support by their presence. Special thanks to Councillor Marr representing the new Townsville City Council as well as various business and community leaders.

A total of \$3,750 was raised! Well done everyone!!!



Above—auctioneering of sports memorabilia



Right—Kevin Trimmer accepting the raffle prize (apparently it will be perfect for his grand daughter!).

A Little Girl's Story



Gina Callaghan gazes out to Mota Island and contemplates the difference LAI can make for the people who live there.

During the Fundraising Dinner, LAI Board Member Gina Callaghan shared with us a beautiful story about a little girl. This little girl grew up not knowing luxury; her family really struggled to put food on the table. They lived in a rural area where the only work available was farming poor soil to eek out an existence. There were no other options. Life was hard, and the future for their little girl looked bleak. Education, career, quality medical care—these were things barely even dreamed of.

Then one day an opportunity was given for this family to immigrate to Australia. They took that opportunity; it meant that their little girl could go to school, have enough food to grow well, and have so many more opportunities to reach her dreams. It meant leaving everything they knew behind, but they knew it would be worth it if it meant they had hope when they currently had so little.

Gina was that little girl! She shared how forever grateful she is for the opportunity given to her family. The memory has remained in her heart ever since, and she now has a great passion to champion those who are in the place she started, people without hope, struggling to survive. They simply need someone to give them an opportunity to change their lives. That's what Life Aid is about, offering opportunity for positive change!

To donate to Life Aid International, either use our online forms at www.lifeaidinternational.org.au or call one of the numbers on the front of this newsletter. We'd love to hear from you!