

## ***Study Tour with the Blind and Low Vision Education Network, New Zealand:***

Building capacity for implementation of the model of education for children with visual impairment in Papua New Guinea

**Papua New Guinea presents the highest level of blindness and low vision in the Pacific and one of the highest levels worldwide. However until now, there has been no systemic approach to assist with early detection of visual impairment in this country of remote communities. There has been very little hope for children with visual impairment that face high risks for survival, often living in social isolation and missing out on an education. In fact, over 130,000 children with moderate to severe disability are estimated to be missing out on school in Papua New Guinea. For this reason, the work of cbm is not only providing medical attention to children with visual impairment, but also access to quality education by supporting teams from Resource Centres to work closely with schools in Papua New Guinea.**



*Sharon Duncan from BLENNZ demonstrates an informal vision assessment at a pikinini clinic in PNG during the training visit in August 2017 coordinated by **cbm** New Zealand.*

In November 2018, ten staff from Inclusive Education Resource Centres in Papua New Guinea under the Callan Network travelled to New Zealand to up-skill in techniques and use of specialised equipment and resources to increase the quality of education for children with visual impairment. The six days of intensive training was hosted by the Blind and Low Vision Education Network New Zealand (BLENNZ), the key provider of education services in New Zealand for children and young people who are blind, deafblind or have low vision. Over the last three years, BLENNZ has supported **cbm**'s programme which is funded in partnership with the New Zealand Aid Programme, visiting Papua New Guinea twice for training and providing technical advice in the design of a model of education for children with visual impairment. The model has now been developed by a local team and submitted to the Government of Papua New Guinea for endorsement.



***cbm** New Zealand International Programme Manager Linabel Hadlee greets a delegate from an Inclusive Education Resource Centre in Papua New Guinea during the Study Tour welcome at BLENNZ.*

The Study Tour included sessions with a variety of specialist teachers and allied health professionals at the BLENNZ campus in Auckland. Developing skills for early intervention with visually impaired pre-schoolers, how to teach mathematical strategies and spatial concepts to visually impaired students and how to assess vision using informal and standardised Functional Vision Assessments were covered.



*The BLENNZ music therapist demonstrates how music can be used as a therapeutic tool when working with children with visual impairment as young as babies for early intervention.*

To further the dialogue for increased connection between health and education services in Papua New Guinea, Dr John Pokana representing the National Department of Education in Papua New Guinea, and **cbm** Ophthalmologist Dr Geoffrey Wabulembo also participated in the Study Tour. Important round table discussions facilitated by **cbm** with the delegates, the New Zealand Aid Programme and the New Zealand Ministry of Education in Wellington took place to share the progression of inclusive education through this government funded programme.



*Above: Dr Pokana from the Department of Education in PNG, gifts Sally Jackson from the New Zealand Ministry of Education with a bilum – a traditional woven string bag hand made in PNG.*

*Below: Delegates from the Study Tour along with **cbm** New Zealand and the New Zealand Aid programme at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, NZ.*



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On the final day, the delegates created a series of video tutorials capturing key learnings and specific use of newly acquired equipment from the Study Tour. The video will be used with colleagues when they return to their respective Inclusive Education Resource Centres in Papua New Guinea to replicate the training. Likewise Dr Wabulembo will transfer the skills to doctors in Papua New Guinea who are training as Ophthalmologists, reinforcing the importance of working with staff from Resource Centres.

This exchange between Papua New Guinea and New Zealand specialist service providers and policy makers has been a unique opportunity to share very similar challenges in very different contexts. These opportunities are proving to be highly valuable for both countries, creating collaboration across the Pacific Ocean to improve the future of children who are blind or have low vision.



*Study Tour delegates shoot a video capturing 'the parachute song' learnt during sessions about early intervention – the song is used to teach concepts of up and down in a fun setting utilising movement, visual and tactile stimulation.*

*Study Tour participants presented BLENNZ with a carving to demonstrate their gratitude for such a memorable and effective Study Tour.*



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The delegates and **cbm** New Zealand extend heartfelt gratitude to the staff and Board of BLENNZ, and the New Zealand Aid Programme, who made this Study Tour possible and a huge success. All of us at **cbm**, staff, volunteers, Board, donors and partners, look forward to increased inclusion of the visually impaired community in Papua New Guinea for years to come.



*Dr Murray Sheard, CEO from **cbm** New Zealand presents BLENNZ Principal Karen Stobbs with a plaque, recognising the technical support provided by BLENNZ for the model of education for children with visual impairment in PNG and continued support through the Study Tour in New Zealand.*



***cbm** staff take a rare opportunity for a photo together at the BLENNZ welcome event. Left to right: **cbm** New Zealand International Programmes Manager Linabel Hadlee, PNG Ophthalmologist Dr Geoffrey Wabulembo, PNG Country Coordinator Diana Ureta, **cbm** New Zealand CEO Dr Murray Sheard and **cbm** New Zealand Programmes Officer Karen Jack.*