

# HOPE

*worldwide*

## AUSTRALIA

FEBRUARY 2025 NEWSLETTER

### *HOPE Volunteer Corps to Papua New Guinea... Adventure and Challenge*



#### ***Natalya Cheng – Global Service Intern***

In December I had the privilege of leading the HVC team to Moroma in Papua New Guinea. Our group consisted of around 25 volunteers, including people from Australia, Singapore, USA, Europe and Papua New Guinea. We had the opportunity to serve in the Highlands, Simbu Province, supporting a rural health centre with building works, medical visits, and a sports-based community engagement program.

We fixed up the Moroma Health Centre, a rural clinic set up in 2016 by HOPE *worldwide* PNG. It caters for about 8,000 people including delivering babies. We conducted health checks at the clinic and homes. In addition, we organised a sports tournament (volleyball, soccer, basketball and touch rugby) involving over 400 children and sang Christmas carols to children in the paediatric ward at the provincial hospital.

The trip was an unforgettable experience, and despite the challenge of remoteness and sickness everyone returned home encouraged, inspired, and with a new perspective. Personally, leading the HVC taught me valuable lessons in patience, perseverance and humility. I'm incredibly grateful to God for the opportunity to lead the trip alongside my co-leader, Peter Awolumate from the USA.



Despite facing challenges, we were able to resolve issues, adapt to the conditions as they arose and complete the project work. More importantly we built strong connections with the community of Moroma- who were so full of joy and love. PNG has also taught me to stress less, to go with the flow more and trust in God's hand. I'm deeply thankful to HOPE worldwide PNG and Australia for putting this program together and for taking such good care of us during our stay.



**Mark Timlin- HOPE director**

I spent the Christmas period in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea with a group of volunteers that included university students, a counsellor, a banker, a mental health nurse, 2 of my teen children and my niece! After the team was reunited with 19 suitcases of lost luggage, we were able to provide donated medical supplies (thanks to HOPE worldwide Australia, Headspace and EACH).

Personally, it was challenging to see that rural communities have limited health services and no mental health services. People requiring mental health support are often deemed as just 'crazy'. The nearest in-patient mental health facility is in the capital city which is a 2-hour drive to the airport followed by a 1-hour flight. And most cannot afford to make this trip. I was able to engage with some families who had mental health issues related to domestic violence. I was shocked by the absence of services and the general 'taboo' and 'shame' experienced by victims. One interaction that moved me was of a young woman in the village who was told

by her community that she was 'mad' and was started on strong antipsychotic medication after the family arranged a trip to a mental health ward in the capital city. She was in fact a victim of sexual violence whilst being treated for TB at a district hospital and showing symptoms of PTSD. The HVC team had mental health skills and started sessions of trauma focussed therapy. This woman made a significant improvement in her mental health and ongoing feedback about her progress from the family has been very positive. They are very grateful for the treatment given, which is not currently available in PNG.



The donated medical supplies and training resources we brought were used at the clinic for patients and to train and equip rural nurses, community health workers and community leaders to provide mental health 'first aid' to their communities. Quina, the HOPE worldwide PNG highlands program manager has a vision to set up mental health services alongside the other clinic services in all rural health facilities across PNG.

**A big thanks to the volunteers who participated in this HVC and for the donations that are now being used in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea!**



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**A \$5 donation provides free healthcare for a vulnerable child in Papua New Guinea.**