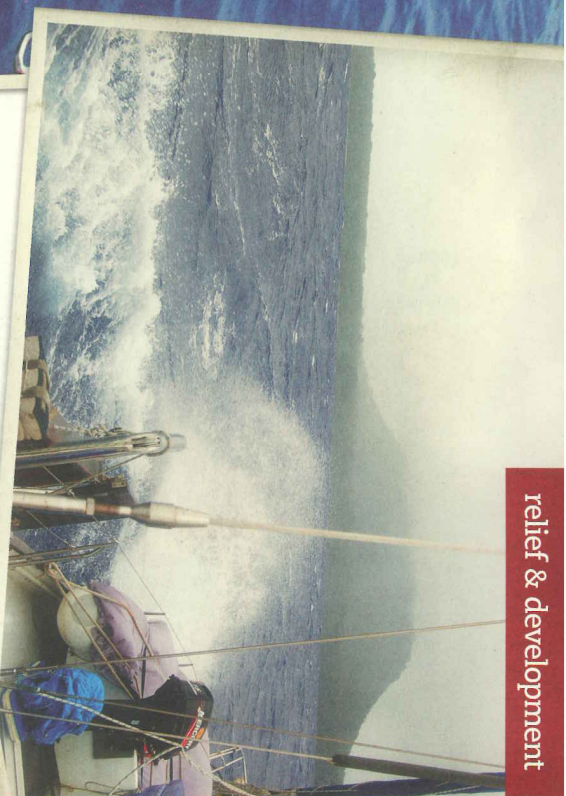




Island hopping medical care brings sight to Vanuatu

Some of Vanuatu's most remote islands welcomed the "medical milk run" conducted by a team of Australian medical professionals. Battling high seas and up to 30+ knot winds, the volunteers island hopped by boat to some of the most isolated places known as the 'forgotten islands' to run ten eye and medical health clinics.



relief & development

▲ Medical team member, Jo Lewis with new friends at Mare Lave

On this mid year boating visit, the group of Australian surgeons and other medical professionals performed simple eye surgery, screens for diabetes and high blood pressure as well as treating general medical needs such as pre and post natal care, dental and tuberculosis treatment. The clinics were held on several remote islands, providing care in areas where the local health department is unable to offer adequate support. In fact, people living on one island had never before seen a yacht anchor in their bay.

In the last five months alone, the project has assisted 4,200 patients – that's 2% of the population. The Australian team is doing itself out of a job by training local staff at the Vila Eye Care Clinic who have since cared for an additional 200 patients in post operative care and clinics.

A young girl from Pentecost Island in Vanuatu received life-changing heart surgery in Australia, thanks to the UnitingWorld medical team. Leticia suffers from rheumatic heart disease which the team diagnosed two years ago at one of the eye care clinics. Team members organised funding for the surgery and travel to Australia for treatment and in late August this year, Leticia and her Aunt were flown to Brisbane for treatment. Leticia is now enjoying a healthy and active lifestyle. The team's work in providing care and empowering locals is transforming the lives

of remote villagers once burdened by eye health issues. However, much more work is needed to reverse the dire situation in which the remote populations of Vanuatu are trapped. UnitingWorld will continue partnering with the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu to respond to the eyesight problems in their community, building the capacity of local staff to make a tangible difference.

FAST FACTS 2009:

- Vanuatu has over 80 islands, spread 800km south to north
- five teams
- 19 islands
- 4,221 patients seen
- 50 locations
- 2,500 pairs of glasses dispensed
- 170 eye operations

Donations to the Vanuatu project and also to eye care in Fiji can be made at www.unitingworld.org.au