

# INSIDE INTERPLAST

CHANGING FUTURES TODAY.



## SRI LANKAN SURGEONS STEPPING UP

### YEARS OF INTERPLAST INVESTMENT HAS HELPED TO TRAIN A GROWING NUMBER OF LOCAL PLASTIC SURGEONS.

For Dr Chris Coombs, travelling to Sri Lanka earlier this year on his first Interplast volunteer program had a particularly personal connection.

In 2003, when Sri Lanka's plastic surgery program was in its infancy, Dr Coombs helped to train Dr Thushan Beneragama, who was on a year's placement at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne.

Dr Beneragama has been asking Dr Coombs to visit to Sri Lanka ever since. This year the opportunity finally arose, but Dr Coombs was not expecting the impact to be quite so profound.

"Being the head of a department in a major teaching hospital, I train lots of people," he said. "And to actually see them down the track, and see how much they've achieved, and what a leader they've become within their own country was just fabulous.

"I didn't really realise the impact that I had on Thushan, and to see that and hear that was incredibly humbling."

Dr Bruce Johnstone, who joined Dr Coombs on the Interplast team, said that the skills of Sri Lankan plastic surgeons such as Dr Beneragama and the impact they are having was a direct result of the support and investment from Interplast over the past 15 years.

"They've got a good training program and the number of plastic surgeons is increasing exponentially from what was originally one or two per 20 million to now 13 per 20 million - and a lot of very impressive people in training. In another few years' time they'll have 20 and then 30, so they'll be able to [fully] service their own population.

"Australia has played a huge role in building up their capacity, and it's mainly been under the auspices of Interplast," he said.

With such skilled surgeons already working in Sri Lanka, the emphasis of this latest trip was on working alongside the local surgeons to further develop their skills,

rather than performing as many operations as possible.

Dr Johnstone said it was "a dream trip for an Interplast volunteer".

"They are our peers, they are our equals; we've got a few things to show them, they've got a few things they can teach us. We were sharing ideas and concepts and taking each other to a higher level," he said.

This involved the Sri Lankan surgeons choosing a smaller number of more complex cases for the visiting surgeons to perform and that they could learn from.

"We worked pretty hard for the three operating days, but they served up the cases that were specific to Chris and my individual skill sets and what they wanted us to do," said Dr Johnstone. "We said right from the beginning 'do you guys want to do the operating and we'll help you?', and they said 'no, we want you to operate so we can watch you do it the way you do it'."

The most striking of these operations was a ground-breaking case that Dr Coombs worked on with his former trainee, Dr Beneragama.

# TREKKERS CONQUER KOKODA TRACK TO SUPPORT INTERPLAST

**DIVERSE GROUP OF PEOPLE FORGE FRIENDSHIPS AND PUSH THEMSELVES TO THE LIMIT ON AN EPIC ADVENTURE.**

In June this year, our amazing ambassador Turia Pitt led a team of 26 people on a nine-day trek over the Kokoda Track to raise funds for Interplast.

Representing Interplast was Laura Nicholson, Executive Assistant to our CEO, Prue Ingram.

Laura said she jumped at the chance to join Turia on the trek. "I've always wanted to do Kokoda since I was in high school," she said. "My school did a trip, but I was too young."

Each team member was expected to raise a minimum of \$5000 for Interplast, along with covering their own costs, for the opportunity to push themselves to the limit on an epic adventure. But as a team they far exceeded expectations, raising more than \$335,000.

Laura said the experience of walking 96km over nine days was far more challenging than she expected, but the team unity that developed helped everyone to get through. One particular moment stands out for her.

"One day we had to climb up three peaks and go down four steep inclines over about 11 hours. The third peak would have to be the hardest thing I've ever walked up in my life," Laura said. "It was just vertical, and everyone was exhausted. But as each person made it to the top, the whole group would clap and cheer. It was just so nice. You didn't know these people a few days beforehand, and everyone was just so excited that you'd made it.

"One person was really struggling that day. The trek leaders said that usually we'd wait for everyone, but we could just move on to the next camp otherwise we'd be waiting a long time for the final person. Everyone



*Laura Nicholson marks the achievement of completing the Kokoda Track with her porter, Ben.*

refused to move, insisting that we wait for the last person, celebrate their achievement as a team, and move on together. That really struck me – the feeling that we're all in this together."

Laura said that sharing the trek with Turia was a special part of the experience. "She's really thoughtful, always keeping tabs on people, on where they were, how they were going. If she felt that someone was struggling she would just drop back and spend some time with them. She's really aware of other people.

"She's really fun, really good at bringing people together and she's great at putting things in perspective for you."

And what lessons did Laura learn from Turia? "Don't say you can't do something. Anything is possible, you just have to put your mind to it, genuinely want to do it, and you can do it."

The team was welcomed back to Port Moresby with a celebration dinner. During the night they heard speeches from a PNG surgeon supported by Interplast, along with a patient, Laurie, who has been given an opportunity to pursue his passion for Australian Rules football and hopes to become an accountant thanks to surgery by Interplast volunteers (you can read his story on the Interplast website).

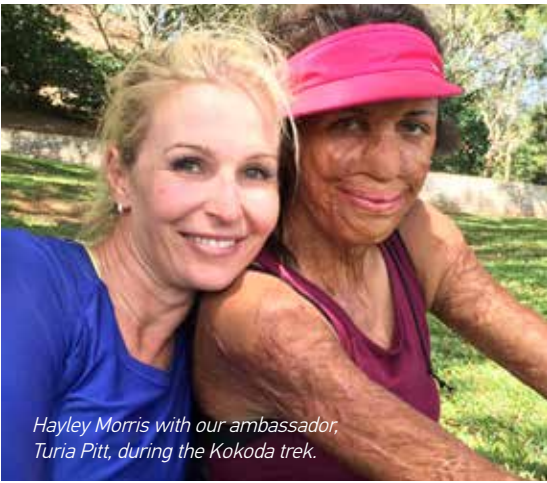
"It's just made me love Interplast even more," said Laura. "You always hear the stories coming through from our volunteers, and they're great, but being able to hear them in person from a surgeon and a patient really cemented that." Laura said that she would highly recommend taking on an adventure trek for Interplast, and that it was a great opportunity to get outside of your comfort zone while connecting with amazing people.

And, she says cheekily, "you look really good at work when you say 'I need annual leave so I can go do this interesting trek, fundraise for charity and meet a cool human'."

**TURIA'S NEXT FUNDRAISING TREK FOR INTERPLAST WILL BE TO THE MT EVEREST BASE CAMP IN NEPAL FROM 10-28 MAY, 2017. FIND OUT MORE AND SIGN UP NOW ON OUR WEBSITE: INTERPLAST.ORG.AU**

**THE KOKODA TREK WAS RUN BY INSPIRED ADVENTURES, AND SUPPORTED BY MOUNTAIN DESIGNS AND EAT FIT FOOD.**

[interplast.org.au](http://interplast.org.au)



Hayley Morris with our ambassador, Turia Pitt, during the Kokoda trek.

# REFLECTIONS ON KOKODA

**HAYLEY MORRIS, INTERPLAST BOARD MEMBER AND HEAD OF CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS FOR GOLDMAN SACHS, JOINED THE TEAM FOR THE KOKODA TREK. WE ASKED HER ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE.**

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“There was a 3-year-old who had a non-healed fracture of his lower leg. His bones weren’t connected, so he couldn’t walk,” said Dr Coombs. “Thushan and I took a bone out of his other leg, with all the blood vessels, and put it into the injured leg to reconstruct his lower leg bones. It was the youngest child that’s ever had a fibula transfer in Sri Lanka.

“That child was one of the happiest kids I have ever seen, despite having a six or seven-hour operation. He was comfortable, always smiling in the ward. To see the gratefulness and relief from the parents and on the kids’ faces is really part of the reason that I do this job.” Dr Coombs said that without the surgery, the child would have been on crutches for the rest of his life, with the risk of needing an amputation, but now he should be starting to walk within four months and shouldn’t require ongoing surgery.

“We have been very lucky in our country to have an exceptional healthcare system, and for us to go and help in countries, to be part of trying to develop that in those countries is very rewarding,” says Dr Coombs. “The ability that we have to change lives and build capacity should never be underestimated.”

*This program was funded by the Australian Government’s aid budget through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).*

## Why did you go on the trek?

The trek was a terrific opportunity to fulfil a number of goals – firstly to raise money to support the incredible, ongoing work of Interplast in the Asia Pacific region. Secondly, it was an amazing physical challenge and gave me something to train towards and thirdly, it was a terrific chance to bond with a group of fun colleagues out of the business environment and to meet some new and inspiring people.

## What challenges did you face?

I think every trekker had tough days and good days. It was more physically demanding than I expected. No amount of training could prepare you for the mud, the humidity and the history. I had anticipated having a lot of time to think about life and goals but in actual fact, I spent the nine days solely concentrating on where I was putting my feet.

## Were there any key moments?

I think our first very steep climb up through the Kokoda Gap was physically the big wake-up call for me in terms of what we had committed to. From an historical perspective, the time we spent at Brigade Hill listening to the stories of bravery from the fierce battles was very humbling and brought to life the incredible sacrifice all those young soldiers made in horrific conditions.

## What was it like walking with Turia?

Unpredictable is the word. That woman has a sense of humour that is completely random which made her hilarious company on the trail. You never know what she is going to say or do next ... so my advice is to keep an eye on her.

## What did you learn from her?

Our outlook is the only thing that limits us. Turia doesn’t see limits.

## What did you learn about yourself?

Your mind is a very powerful tool when harnessed positively. When you think the tank is empty – you can always find reserves. I also learned that I should probably exercise more and that I won’t be eating two-minute noodles again in this lifetime.

## What was your experience of the group?

Friends can be found anywhere – even in the jungles of PNG. I became closer to the friends I travelled into the jungle with and met a lovely group of new people along the way.

## How did the trek contribute to your understanding of Interplast’s work?

To trek through these remote villages and witness the physical and geographic challenges of the local people in accessing healthcare really reinforced how critical the services provided by Interplast are for these communities. Without the work of Interplast, thousands of people would live their lives in pain and unnecessary discomfort.

## What support did Goldman Sachs and its employees provide?

We were overwhelmed with the financial generosity of our colleagues. Our fundraising target was achieved twice over by the time we left for the trek. It was very humbling. People were really interested to hear about what we were doing and found it incredibly amusing that this group of middle-aged bankers was actually seeing this through.

## What would you say to people thinking about doing an adventure trek for Interplast?

Do it – without question. Not only do you achieve an incredible personal physical goal but you will most certainly meet some amazing people. Most importantly, know that you are truly making a difference to the quality of people’s lives in the region by supporting Interplast.



# A FUTURE TRANSFORMED

*Dr Zac Moaveni, left, with Rockson and his mother before the second round of surgery in June this year. Below: Rockson before surgery in 2015.*

## ROCKSON, A YOUNG BOY FROM A REMOTE PART OF SOLOMON ISLANDS, IS LOOKING FORWARD TO A FUTURE AS BRIGHT AS HIS PERSONALITY THANKS TO RECONSTRUCTIVE FACIAL SURGERY BY INTERPLAST VOLUNTEERS.

Rockson first came to our attention in May 2015 when volunteer surgeon Dr Zac Moaveni repaired a severe cleft lip and built him a nose.

"Most children don't have such a wide gap in their lip," said Dr Moaveni. "It was one of the worst I've seen in some ways. I had to do the lip repair unconventionally, plus a rib graft to rebuild a nose for him, which is not something you'd normally do for a cleft."

Despite the magnitude of his cleft lip and palate, and the rigors of surgery, Rockson's energy and positivity impacted on everyone. "Rockson will stay in my mind as one of most remarkable young patients I've met on an Interplast trip," said Dr Moaveni. "He's got one of those personalities that lights up a room. He wore the most ready smile that wins you over instantly."

"The rib graft is quite painful. After surgery we went to the ward and he was sitting in bed smiling (as best as he could!) and his mum had tears streaming down her face. By the time we left he was running around the ward and playing."

But that operation was only stage one. Dr Moaveni planned to repair Rockson's severe cleft palate on a return trip to Solomon Islands in June this year, but as the visit progressed he became increasingly

concerned that Rockson, now almost six years old, wouldn't make it on time.

"He wasn't there on the first day, so I was asking if the local doctor had heard from him," said Dr Moaveni. "The local clinic had assured the doctor that Rockson was going to come, but he didn't show up."

"Rockson finally made it on the Monday, day four or five. I was just walking past the entrance to the theatre and suddenly saw him. I was just over the moon to see him, because you never know if the message is going to get through."

The delay in Rockson's arrival is an example of the transport challenges people face throughout the country. Rockson's family lives on the island of Choiseul in the far north-west of Solomon Islands, near Bougainville. In 2015, Rockson and his mother travelled by boat for up to three days, but this time teamwork made things slightly easier. The Choiseul Provincial Health service organised his travel and paid for his flights to Honiara, and the National Referral Hospital in Honiara paid for his flights home.

Dr Moaveni was very pleased with Rockson's progress since the first surgery. "Everything seems to have healed exceptionally well, both the lip and the nose, and he seemed in really good spirits," he said.

Repairing Rockson's cleft palate took a number of hours, but once again, Rockson recovered quickly and the future is looking good. Once fully healed, eating and speaking will become even easier for him. "The amazing thing is that even though the mouth is sore, the speech is immediately different, and much more intelligible. His



mum commented on that the next morning."

Dr Moaveni said that Rockson now has the best chance of living a normal life as a fully accepted part of his community. "There is still a small hole in the very front of the palate. In a couple of years he will need a smallish procedure to fix that, but it's not absolutely essential."

Dr Moaveni said that helping Rockson has been very significant for him, and his passion for Interplast's work.

"That's the sort of case that makes you do what you do," he said. "It's why Interplast exists, really. Everyone, from people who donate, to logistics people down to the teams who do the surgery, it's the whole endgame of everything that we do - people like him."

The Solomon Islands June surgical program was made possible thanks to generous funding from Rotary District 9830 in Tasmania.

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OR VISIT INTERPLAST.ORG.AU**

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in the Asia Pacific region

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**FUNDS RAISED THROUGH THE INTERPLAST REGULAR GIVING INITIATIVE WILL BE USED TO SUPPORT OUR WORK ACROSS THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION.**

# REPAIRING BODIES, REBUILDING LIVES AND CHANGING FUTURES!

**THE DEDICATED AND HIGHLY SKILLED MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS WHO DONATE THEIR EXPERTISE TO INTERPLAST TRULY MAKE A DIFFERENCE ACROSS THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION.**

**BY GIVING OF THEIR TIME AND TALENT, THEY ARE CHANGING FUTURES, HOWEVER SKILLS AND CARE ALONE ISN'T ENOUGH.**



**Interplast**<sup>TM</sup>

## **WE NEED YOU TO BE PART OF THE WIDER INTERPLAST TEAM!**

Making a financial donation to Interplast every month is one of the most powerful ways to support our work. By becoming a regular donor, you will be equipping us with the ability to continue providing life-changing assistance within the Asia Pacific region.

By giving on a regular basis you provide Interplast with the ability to prepare for lasting change. In turn, this allows us to have a greater positive impact in the communities we work.

## **HOW DOES REGULAR GIVING WORK?**

You determine the amount of your monthly donation and advise us using the attached form. We will charge your pledge to your credit card each month (usually the 15th of the month). At the end of the financial year, Interplast will send you an annual giving statement which can be used for tax purposes.

Additionally, as a valued donor to Interplast, we will keep you informed of our progress by sending regular updates detailing how we are supporting the people of the Asia Pacific region.

## **BENEFITS TO YOU**

Regular giving is convenient. Each month the amount you nominate is deducted from your credit card, however you have full control over your giving. You can increase your donation amount or make changes at any time.

Most importantly, you will know that each month you are making a significant contribution to the work of Interplast. Together, we will repair bodies, rebuild lives and change futures!

## **FURTHER INFORMATION**

If you wish to discuss regular giving opportunities with us, please contact the Fundraising & Communications Manager (03) 9249 1231 or [contactus@interplast.org.au](mailto:contactus@interplast.org.au)

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