



**Interplast**

Repairing bodies & rebuilding lives  
in the Asia Pacific region

# inside INTERPLAST

REPAIRING BODIES. REBUILDING LIVES.

SPRING NEWSLETTER 2012



WE'VE HAD A MINI MAKEOVER! WE'LL BE SPLASHING OUR MODIFIED LOGO AND NEW LOOK AROUND THE PLACE, SO KEEP A LOOK OUT FOR IT!

## SAMOAN STORIES

INTERPLAST STAFF MEMBER, JESS HOWELL, REPORTS ON HER EXPERIENCE AS AN OBSERVER



Interplast volunteer, Dr Damian Marucci, with one of his cleft lip repair patients.

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#### HAVE YOU HEARD?

WE HAVE A NEW WEBSITE! IT'S FABULOUSLY FRESH AND WE'RE SUPER EXCITED ABOUT IT. AND, OH SO PROUD! THANKS ONCE AGAIN TO FIRST CLICK CONSULTING FOR FUNDING THE PROJECT. SO, GO ON, JUMP ONLINE AND CHECK IT OUT.

[WWW.INTERPLAST.ORG.AU](http://WWW.INTERPLAST.ORG.AU)

In August, I had the privilege of joining Interplast's program activity to Apia, Samoa, for three days, along with surgeons Ben Norris and Damian Marucci, anaesthetist Alan Goodey and nurses Simone Kairouz and Elke Lushington. As Interplast's Program Activities Coordinator for the Pacific, Papua New Guinea and Burma, a considerable portion of my time is spent behind the scenes, organising these activities.

Flying into Apia pre-dawn, Samoa's two main islands of Savai'i and Upolu can be seen from the night sky, lights dotting the populated areas. Stepping from the plane onto the tarmac, the team was hit with a wall of tropical humidity, despite the early hour. The air is thick, warm, and mixed with fire

**"THE GREAT IMPACT THAT OUR TEAMS HAVE ON THE LIVES OF INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES IN THE COUNTRIES WHICH WE WORK, NOT ONLY MADE ME FEEL ALL THE MORE LUCKY FOR THE PRIVILEGED LIFE I LEAD, BUT HONOURED TO KNOW THAT THE WORK WE DO HAS SUCH A POSITIVE IMPACT ON SO MANY LIVES."**

smoke, salty sea air and a bit of jet fuel. Our bus flies along Apia's beach road, I suspect considerably faster than the 30km speed limit. We are going from one end of the city to the other, dawn has crept in and the sun is rising over the ocean. Dogs and chickens scurry out of our path and early risers wave from porches on the road side.

The day of our arrival is Father's Day, celebrated as a national holiday in Samoa, so the hospital is quiet.

Despite that, we busy ourselves unpacking, setting up, and seeing a number of patients who are on the wards, ahead of clinic day on day two. Most of the team has been visiting Samoa with Interplast for some years, and so our arrival at the hospital is a reunion of sorts - the Head of Surgery, Dr Aleki, and the surgical registrars, greet the team like family who have been away. We have an early night, as most of us have been up for over 30

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# VOLUNTEER YOUR THOUGHTS...

**BETH MCNEISH**  
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

"I was initially asked to go to Bangladesh in 2008, a year after a hand therapy program was initiated, where I met Mohan, the hand therapist. Mohan and I have been able to communicate via email since then when he has queries about specific patients or treatment protocols. Over the years, I've gathered lots of donated equipment, new and used, to help set up Mohan's treatment area. What are seen as scraps here in Australia

are items of great value to them...Teams have travelled twice per year and the Interplast nursing volunteers have worked with Mohan (and local nurses) to teach postoperative and ward wound care. I was asked to return this September with another team to see how they were going and for further education. I was very impressed with the progress over the past four years! We were able to see many patients each day and I worked one-on-one with Mohan as well as with a group of general physiotherapists and allied health assistants. The outcomes are very impressive for patients with severe injuries such as multiple digit amputations requiring replantation. Patients are hearing about the service they have to offer and receiving acute treatment earlier. Mohan stated that what he gained most from our visits was "confidence." The knowledge he has gained as well as the reassurance that what he is doing is correct and well accepted, is incredible. I feel very honoured to be a part of this wonderful organisation. The trips have been a real highlight of my working career as an occupational and hand therapist. We all need a trip like this to bring us back to reality and realise how much we have and how fortunate we are! The work is incredibly fulfilling - hard work but so worthwhile. The teams always get along very well sharing in the common interest in doing the best work we can in teaching them to become more competent, independent and self-sufficient and as some say, doing ourselves out of a job. If I didn't have to earn a living, I'd be doing much more of this type of work! We have so much and take it for granted. We have so much to share and teach to those less fortunate."



**HEAD TO THE TRANSFORMING LIVES SECTION OF OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE ABOUT OUR ALLIED HEALTH FOCUS.**

# STAFF PROFILE

**SANTISOUK PHONGSAVAN**

SENIOR PROGRAM ACTIVITIES COORDINATOR

> **WHAT'S YOUR STORY?**

I was born in Vientiane, Laos, moved to Australia when I was six-years-old and grew up in Albury. I have worked for many years in various capacities within the international development field, and until recently, worked for a large international non-government organisation based in Melbourne. For most of my professional career, I have worked with small grassroots organisations around the Asia Pacific region and on programs/projects that worked directly with vulnerable and marginalised individuals, groups and communities.

> **WHAT INTERESTED YOU IN BECOMING INVOLVED WITH INTERPLAST?**

I was interested in working with a smaller organisation again that has a clear identity as to the work that it does. I also felt that I can bring my experiences to Interplast, and together with the team, can help it grow. I believe that everyone involved with Interplast ultimately has the same goal and vision of wanting to see positive changes in the countries we work in.

> **WHAT'S YOUR HIGHLIGHT SO FAR?**

The highlight so far has been working with colleagues who work hard, but do so with a smile and a laugh. And, meeting the volunteers and hearing of the great work they have been doing or want to be doing.

> **WHAT'S A FACT MOST PEOPLE WOULDN'T KNOW ABOUT YOU?**

I don't really like AFL (anymore) and I am a Melbourne Heart supporter.

> **BEST WAY TO SPEND A WEEKEND?**

Doing nothing at all!



INTERPLAST'S NEWEST STAFF MEMBER, SANTI!

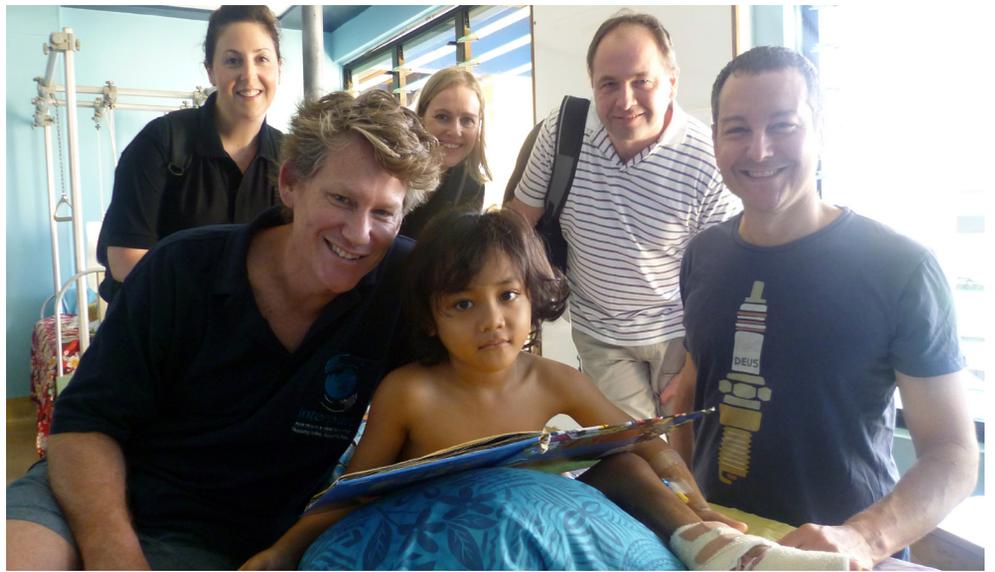
# SAMOAN STORIES

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hours and we have busy days ahead.

During the 10 day visit, 83 patients were consulted with 53 procedures done. Cases ranged from motor vehicle accident trauma, cleft lip and palate, extra toes, skin grafts, releasing of cross-leg flaps, removal of benign tumours and lipomas and other growths, revision amputations and burn scar contracture releases. Our patients ranged from three-weeks-old through to mid-70s. While I had the privilege of hearing the stories and seeing the clinical journey of many of our patients during my three days, there was one who had a particular impact on me – little Andrew.

Andrew is five-years-old and a few months ago, while playing outside his house, he injured his leg. No one is quite sure how he did it; his mother told me he changed his story a couple of times from falling over to having a rock fall on him. She suspects, she told me, with a twinkle in her eye,



Five-year-old Andrew with Team Apia. L to R (back row): Simone Kairouz (nurse), Elke Lushington (nurse), Alan Goodey (anaesthetist). Front row: Ben Norris (surgeon), Andrew (patient) and Damian Marucci (surgeon).

that he was getting up to mischief at the time. Andrew was seen by a local doctor but his wound became septic. He had exposed bone in his left leg and quickly went downhill, becoming a very sick little boy. Luckily for Andrew, there was a visiting plastics team from Hawaii, around the same time, and they performed a first stage cross-leg flap procedure. When we saw Andrew, it was almost three weeks since the first stage operation and time for the second

stage – division of the flap and skin graft. The procedure was done on our first operating day, and within hours, Andrew was racing around the ward in a wheelchair, his mischievous spirit clearly back, enjoying the freedom of having his two legs separated. Andrew has quite a period of rehabilitation ahead of him, but with his wonderfully supportive family and courage and determination (so admirable for one so young), he can expect a full recovery. On my final day visiting Andrew and his mum in the paediatric ward, his mother spoke to me about how grateful she was for the outcome and how worried the family had been about what Andrew's life would have been like had he not had access to the procedures provided by the Hawaiian team and Interplast.

Being an observer and support person on an Interplast program activity was a great opportunity and allowed me to get an excellent understanding of what happens on the ground. Being witness to stories like that of little Andrew, showing the great impact that our teams have on the lives of individuals, families and communities in the countries which we work, not only made me feel all the more lucky for the privileged life I lead, but honoured to know that the work we do has such a positive impact on so many lives.

BY JESS HOWELL

## MILES FOR SMILES

45 DAYS, 6500 MILES (10,460 KILOMETRES), SIX COUNTRIES

In February 2013, avid Interplast supporter, Peter Jones, will embark on an epic motorbike ride through South-East Asia and Australia to raise funds and awareness for Interplast. What a journey! He'll be spreading our word, shouting our name and sharing the Interplast secret. Keen to get on board and assist? Head to [www.milesforsmiles.org.au](http://www.milesforsmiles.org.au) to donate, sponsor, supply, support or join in on the ride. No matter what your involvement, it promises to be an adventure!

FOR REGULAR UPDATES  
ON THE MILES FOR SMILES  
JOURNEY, HEAD TO THE NEWS  
SECTION OF OUR WEBSITE.

# HAROLD MCCOMB TRIBUTE

INTERPLAST CELEBRATES THE LIFE OF A MUCH-LOVED AND RESPECTED VOLUNTEER AND BOARD MEMBER

The President, Board of Directors and the wider Interplast community extends our sincere condolences to the family of Harold McComb on his passing. An integral part of the development of Interplast in its surgical and training activities, particularly in Laos, Harold was a valued volunteer plastic surgeon for many years and member of the Board of Directors from 1993 to 2001.

He will be sadly missed by his many friends and colleagues. One such individual, volunteer anaesthetist Dr Chris Lowry, penned the following note in response to news of his passing:

"I first met Harold on an Interplast trip to Bougainville in about 1987. A colleague, John Vandervord, who wanted to learn more about Harold's cleft surgery techniques, had invited me as the team anaesthetist. I soon observed that Harold was a passionate teacher as well as an excellent surgeon. I subsequently joined Harold and his scrub nurse, Leonie McNamara, on Interplast programs almost every year up until 2003. Earlier trips were to Bougainville, Honiara, Vanuatu, Bali, Manado, Mauritius and Hanoi. Harold learned to scuba dive in his 60s and during these trips we managed some diving on nights and weekends. On Santo Island, to fit in with the locals' siesta and sterilizer time, we even had a dive on the wreck of the President Coolidge liner/troop carrier between morning and afternoon lists! The last five or so trips were to Laos (landlocked – no diving!) where Harold

was instrumental in training local surgeons in plastic, but especially cleft surgery... Despite often significant language barriers, Harold always tried to impart his knowledge and experience. He would be proud to know that one of his pupils, Dr Keutmy, is now doing about 100 clefts a year in Vientiane and provinces around Laos. The project he started in Laos is still going strong in 2012. We worked hard on these trips, but we also had a lot of fun together. Harold had a great sense of humour and loved telling a few jokes over gin and tonics after a hard day in the operating theatre. In a way it was fitting that an Interplast team was in Laos when we heard of his death. We raised a gin and tonic to him.

I will miss him."



HAROLD IN VANUATU (1989)



HAROLD OPERATING IN BOUGAINVILLE, PAPUA NEW GUINEA (1987)

FOR MORE PHOTOS OF HAROLD VOLUNTEERING, HEAD TO OUR WEBSITE.

# RUNNING'S GOOD, CLIMBING'S BETTER!

EUREKA CLIMB 2012

It's that time again! The Eureka Climb is back! Scheduled for Sunday November 18, 2012, this unique fundraising event allows participants to walk, run or climb their way to the top of one of the world's tallest residential buildings to raise money for two charity partners. And you guessed it, we're one of them!

So, go on, get involved. Raise money for Interplast and Whitelion and know that with every one of the 1642 steps, and with each of the 88 floors, your efforts are contributing towards making an incredible difference.

Registrations are now open, so if you're keen to challenge yourself physically and raise money for charity, get entering. Or, sponsor someone else! It's well worth it.

REGISTER NOW OR SPONSOR ANOTHER FUNDRAISER AT [EUREKACLIMB.COM.AU!](http://EUREKACLIMB.COM.AU)

## SAY HELLO!

GIVE US A CALL: 03 9249 1231

SHOOT US AN EMAIL: [CONTACTUS@INTERPLAST.ORG.AU](mailto:CONTACTUS@INTERPLAST.ORG.AU)

DROP BY: 250 - 290 SPRING STREET EAST MELBOURNE, VIC 3002

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WEBSITE: [WWW.INTERPLAST.ORG.AU](http://WWW.INTERPLAST.ORG.AU)

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The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons established Interplast with Rotarians and the Fellows remain active supporters.



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