

'Church of generosity' funds kindergarten at Mele Maat

By Len Garae

AUSTRALIANS KAREN COLLIER

Cogtevs and her husband Ed Cogtevs do not belong to any mainstream church in Vanuatu but she says they belong to the "church of generosity".

A housemaid called Rose from the village brought Mrs Cogtevs to visit Mele Maat after Cyclone Pam last March, and a conversation with villager John Enoch resulted in the first kindergarten in the country, to be built after the cyclone to open at the other side of the village bridge in perfect weather yesterday.

Mr Enoch and his wife Emily Enoch who is a kindergarten teacher, believe the way forward for their village is through education. It explains their initiative to open a kindy in the village which started with five children many years ago.

The kindergarten gradually grew until the cyclone came and tore it down. Enoch did not give up but started digging and shifting through the rubble when help came knocking at his door.

Mr Enoch met the writer

of the article three months ago and confided, "This is a miracle, I met a total stranger and she and her husband agreed to purchase new materials to build a new kindergarten. Their friends are also helping. This is just unbelievable. I will let you know when it is time."

Mrs Cogtevs says she and her husband would not have done it on their own. Her friend Stephanie introduced her to Robin and the four of them put their heads together and said, "We can do this".

Karen Cogtevs' friends are from both Australia and New Zealand.

"This is our first project outside Australia and it took Cyclone Pam to make it happen," she says with a smile.

When the cyclone hit, Mrs Cogtevs and her husband were in Melbourne and she admits, "We were scared because all forms of communication were cut and we could not connect with our friends so my husband Ed came straight away and I followed seven days later with a chainsaw, tarpaulins, medicines and what we could come with because we knew



Karen hands over key to caretakers John Enoch and his wife Emily Enoch

that ni-Vanuatu people needed help."

Standing inside the Aim Yee Kindergarten building she says, "It feels wonderful to be able to give back to a culture, a country that has given up so

much, you have a wonderful country here and the people are beautiful and to give back and provide a school for the pikininis is a blessing".

The first kindergarten to be built after Cyclone Pam was

jointly opened by a group of expatriate volunteers and the ECCE Programme and Curriculum Coordinator, Serah Vurobaravu.

Mrs Cogtevs then handed over the key to the caretakers

and pioneers of education at Mele Maat, John Enoch and his wife. Emily Enoch has dedicated her life to introducing education at kindy to the children of Mele Maat for the last 29 years.