

SHaRM

Much more than a group of friends having coffee. By Tony Wilson



A dedicated group of volunteers including Air Vanuatu's Captain Stuart Friend has helped rebuild schools damaged in Cyclone Pam.

PEOPLE have been seeing the name SHaRM bob up frequently around Vanuatu for almost three years now.

The name comes from the first initials of four women – Steph, Helen, Robin and Marg – and while it sounds like a cute little coffee club or similar, this could not be further from the truth.

These four energetic and enterprising women are the core of a team that has come together since April 2015 as the SHaRM Foundation, in an incredible performance to create a major re-building program centred around Vanuatu schools badly

damaged by the ferocity of Cyclone Pam in March 2015.

The women, Steph Neilson, Helen Collier-Kogtevs, Robin Culph and Marg Manhire (who retired in 2015), were later joined by Debra Friend and her Air Vanuatu pilot husband Stuart.

They decided they would do more than just fund-raise after Pam. Their ideas evolved into the SHaRM Foundation, a registered charity with the motto, 'Building a brighter future for the children of Vanuatu'.

And the outstanding results would do a major construction company proud. So far they have repaired and re-roofed 44 school classrooms, a

laboratory, a dormitory, three school offices, three halls including one with a cathedral style roof and repaired a headmaster's residence.

And their marvellous work is still continuing.

As we walked around one of their numerous success stories, Suango Mele Primary School, Steph recalled how it had fared after Pam.

"The roofs were gone from most classroom blocks, in some cases completely torn off, and the roof of the headmaster's house had been peeled back, trees were down everywhere, it was just a shambles," she said.

"You can imagine the damage inside these buildings, with books, equipment and even desks just ruined."

In fact, SHaRM has done such a great rebuild that this school re-opened in January 2018 with a new name after being elevated to a Junior Secondary School – 'Millenium Imere Junior Secondary School'.

"One of our biggest and most important benefactors has been BlueScope Lysaght in Vanuatu and they have sent us 50 tons of long run roofing from all their branches and suppliers around the Pacific to assist with our Cyclone Pam rebuilding in

schools," said Steph.

"Without their extremely generous help we couldn't have achieved much at all; they have been vital to our plans all the way."

The Mele school rebuild is a classic example of how this team went about their work.

"At Suango we repaired and re-roofed the headmaster's house, which was completely done by the SHaRM Foundation," said Steph.

She said a four-classroom block – which had the roofing completely torn off – was big repair job.

"It was a combined team effort of SHaRM Foundation, Cyrille Mainguy, Mele Association, Ratua Foundation and New Zealand builders Andy Ross plus Volunteer Vanuatu," she said.

"The SHaRM Foundation and Volunteer Vanuatu also repaired another single classroom and a storeroom. We also refurbished the four-stall toilet block and shower room and we fully tiled it and put in new fixtures.

"Then we tackled a new library and media centre and this was a project undertaken by Cyrille Mainguy, SHaRM Foundation and Ratua Foundation and funded by Lodge of Discovery Vanuatu."

She said a large range of school books was donated by schools and citizens in North Otago, New Zealand, and 12 new computers and a printer were donated by Beyond Disaster Relief NZ via the Pacific Fund in NZ.

"Then four new classrooms were completed via Cyrille Mainguy with funding from France and all roofing donated by BlueScope Lysaght," she said.

"And all the furniture came from NZ in two containers via the SHaRM Foundation.

"There were lots of minor donors along the way as well – private donors and others that assisted to make up shortfalls in funding to finish the projects.

"There was also a load of sports equipment donated and it was too

much for the Mele school, so it was shared around 10 schools in the area."

Steph said this was typical of efforts at many of the schools they repaired.

"There were lots of people giving items and their time and expertise for no return or recognition, just a case of wanting to give and help," she said.

"The SHaRM Foundation has also brought in a 40ft container of new school uniforms and these were sent to schools from the Banks Islands in the north to Aneityum in the south," she said.

"In total 145 schools and kindergartens were given various uniforms, school items, books, stationery and other items which were delivered."

SHaRM has assisted the following educational facilities: Montmartre Secondary School; Teuoma Greenhill School; Sainte Jeanne D'arc Primary School; Suango Mele Primary School; Vila North School; Vila East School; Manua Centre Primary

School, Vila East School; Anabrou School; Ohlen Kindergarten; Ecole Maternelle de Sacre Coeur; Erakor School; AUJ Port Vila; part of the Port Vila Cathedral; Ecole Maternelle du Sacre Coeur – Anabrou Annex; Isangle School in Tanna; Lycee LAB; Ecole Maternelle Malasitabou Freshwota, and College de Lenaula in Tanna.

Steph said SHaRM is currently working on Takara Primary School, building two classroom blocks with funding from SHaRM Foundation and Rotary Wellington Point in Queensland, Australia.

"We also are re-roofing the old building and funding again is from Rotary and SHaRM," she said.

"We would welcome another donor on board to assist with this difficult re-roofing, or volunteer tradesmen."

The SHaRM projects are a classic example of people power – ordinary people with an extraordinary will to help others in need. ➔

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