

SurfAid; Committed to 'a Hand Up not a Handout'



By Fiona Sullivan

When I met Harry and Viv Hill, they were in their sunny house overlooking the sea at Mount Maunganui and we talked about the charity they have been passionately involved with for the last fifteen years. Viv served homemade sourdough hot cross buns and plum jam with espresso coffee, yum!

"I love it! It was just some guys surfing. When they went on shore they realised the people were poor and they were so much more affluent. I think Doctor Dave saw all of the little graves there, they're all babies - lots of tiny graves. So that triggered the first thought. This is wrong, you're losing so many children. He thought ninety percent of this was malaria related. They were all struggling with malaria, and it hits the young babies especially. So, I presume they would have attacked the mosquitoes, but the best way really is nets, then eventually you can clean up the hosts. Like everyone in an ideal world, if you remove the mosquitoes everyone will stop getting malaria. It won't be a problem afterwards. You've got to keep helping without being the sort of person who rocks up and tells them this is what they should do. You need to keep them engaged and feel what they need to do for their own health and benefit. That's what it is, the hands up not hand out, it's full community development."

Kiwi David Jenkins was surfing in the Mentawai islands off the western coast of Sumatra. Working in Singapore, he was staying on a nice boat but when he went ashore he found real poverty. Beautiful waves a hundred metres from where people on the other side of the palms were dying of malaria. So, he found the chief and said, "I'll bring my medical kit to the village. Would you like me to have a look at your people?" He came back a couple of hours later and all the village people had lined up to see him. People were brought in wheelbarrows to see the doctor and David thought, 'I think we've got a problem'.

He headed home to a new challenge and called up two of his closest friends; Dr Steve Hathaway (a world-renowned public health specialist), and lawyer Phil Dreifuss. They went diving for crayfish and enticed the local surfing crew to a barbecue. This is where they sprung the news that a quorum of 25 people was needed to sign up, to pay \$25 each to register a legal NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation) in New Zealand. On 26 January 2000 SurfAid was born, full of shared hopes and dreams and crazy, overly ambitious plans," explains Dr. Dave Jenkins, SurfAid Founder.

At first, malaria was the major focus, the simple fix was getting mosquito nets out to the villagers. The nets were impregnated with an insecticide for added effectiveness. Major logistics were involved in getting to remote villages, but after some time they realised that the nets were a status symbol for people. They would still be in the plastic bag, up on the shelf for show. So the Kiwis thought, "we need to create an educational program." They got the people to act it out, involving them rather than standing there talking at them. They created little plays, pantomimes with the villagers acting the parts. There were bits about how you don't smoke in your net and that they're safe for deep sleep. There was a pregnant, woman a guy with a basketball in his belly, sitting under a net to stay safe, and others as mosquitos flying around trying to get in - it was fun, hilarious.

SurfAid has programs all around the world. The one in Mexico is administrated by the Americans. "It's all about health, sanitation and clean water. We put wells down and run pipelines and systems. Sometimes people have to walk miles to get water so we're trying to bring the water in wherever we can. There are also latrines, toilets and those systems as well, so people aren't defecating in the open. We're trying to encourage a better sort of behaviour not only in Mexico but also around Indonesia."

"We soon realised that we need a holistic approach to community development. We have to teach people about nutrition, mother and child health, breastfeeding and just basic things like that. Then we move on to a nutritional gardens, parental care, postnatal care."

They work with local communities to support the delivery of a health service system known as Posyandu, run by dedicated volunteers called Kaders who they support through mentoring and coaching to ensure an excellent level of health services to the community, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. "The Kaders teach other women, it's all about finding those women in the community who are early adopters and working with them, training them. The women will adopt something in a village, usually before the men because they're looking after children and their children's

interests. Most of our staff are women and our country director is a woman. Mainly local Indonesian women run our programs there."

Fundraising is a focus of the Australian office and, to some extent, New Zealand. "We do surfing events to raise money and sometimes we might bring a celebrity into town and create a lunch or dinner. It's not unusual to pick up/fundraise a couple of hundred thousand dollars from the surfing community. Some of our events in Australia are huge. We have no permanent staff, it's all voluntary here apart from our board and they're not paid so we rely on people to donate."

SurfAid has eighteen ambassadors including three surfing star Kiwis: Paige Hareb, Saffi Vette and Ricardo Christie who promote the NGO at international events. In the early days they raised money by selling T-shirts saying things like 'malaria sucks' and 'saving lives every day' and then it evolved. "The New Zealand government channel some of our overseas aid money through SurfAid and have been doing that for years now as they like what we're doing. SurfAid have to apply which is not an easy task, we're very accountable. We've got to meet benchmarks. That's what's expected of us, so they don't just throw us money. We've got to meet their expectations and they audit us and check as well, so everything is done effectively. Some of the results, as you'll see on the website, show we've made a big difference." Visit the SurfAid website: www.surfaid.org for more information.

Surfers are the main target audience and, as the biggest populations of surfers are in the United States and Australia, they set up boards there as well. There's fundraising direct to high-end donors as there are some very affluent people who surf. Surfing used to be a bit underground but now it's mainstream and professional and a lot of surfers are getting really engaged with the program. "Now we're in villages all around Indonesia and we've moved into the Solomon's a few years ago, with the cervical screening program run by women. Women there are dying from cervical cancer at eleven times the rate of Australian women."

SurfAid is part of the World Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (WANGO) and won the humanitarian award for 2007 because, they said, SurfAid reflected all those values of surfing; the adaptability, courage and you're not really taking - you're giving.



Fiona Sullivan

