

Selective Study of 12 Early Childhood Education Centres in Fiji



Vuli Taumada Shishak Project



Save the Children
Fiji



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CENTRAL

SUVA

- **JITTU SETTLEMENT** - ECE Teacher Laisiana Baleira

NASINU

- **CAUBATI** - ECE Committee President Awadh Sharma
- **LOKIA** - ECE Women's Group member Sesarina Dakuiboca and Secretary Timaima Cuvatoka, teachers Temara Raloga Dausiga, and Elesi Lotu Baravilala
- **WAINIBUKU** - ECE Committee Member Makarina Wati and teachers Laite Raturala and Kelera Kasaivia Muloilagi

WESTERN

- **KOROBEBE** ECE, Jo Kanacagi, and teacher Siteri Saukuru
- **NAKAVIKA** ECE Committee, teacher Manani Korolana and the Turaga-ni-Koro Isaia Usa
- **TAIPERIA NADI** ECE Committee and Isikeli Banuve
- **VUNATO** CEC Committee, Kelera Verevou and teacher Limiva Butani

NORTHERN

- **JORITANI** ECE Committee and Chairperson Pr. Kolinio Tuiwaini and teachers Milika Fulora and Laisa Musuqawa
- **KOROVULI** ECE Committee, teachers Ana Selita and Saiyasi Maitoga and the Committee President, Maciu Navitilevu
- **NAKAMA** ECE Committee, teachers, and parent Emele Sogoituba
- **NATUA** ECE Committee and Chairperson Vetaia Vuinakelo and teachers Reijeli Vuinakelo and Neli Masiyalewa

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**We deliver
immediate and
lasting change
in the lives of
children in Fiji.**



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FOREWORD

The experiences of children in their early years shape their thinking, capacity to learn and socialise, and their response to daily challenges and stresses. It sets the foundation for lifelong learning, behaviour and health habits. This Vuli Taumada Shishak Educational Toolkit is a complimentary resource that is designed to empower teachers, parents, communities and children to raise the standards of safety, health, nutrition, healthy discipline and childhood education for young children living in underserved communities.

This toolkit is made up of an overarching teacher's guideline, *Safe and Healthy Start, Grow Smart* that is supported by manuals and innovative educational resources that compliments the national curriculum for Early Childhood Education the *Na Noda Mataniciva (NNM)*, but addresses indicators and outcomes that are indispensable for the holistic development in young children. These manuals and guideline are the result of a culmination of activities in the Vuli Taumada Shishak (VTS) project, which focuses on enhancing the quality of early childhood education programs in community-managed centres.

The guidelines and manual outline early childhood development and its implications for teachers, parents, communities and children whilst outlining success stories and challenges that many communities are able to achieve success from in regards to Early Childhood Education. This toolkit takes a rights-based approach to supporting young children's educational outcome no matter their living situation or community whilst drawing on the Fiji Islands National Curriculum Frameworks and Global Perspectives of the Child.

Save the Children Fiji would like to acknowledge the contribution and participation of all stakeholders, including the Ministries of Education and Health and communities that have been integral in making this toolkit a reality. These resources encapsulate the basic building blocks that are essential for holistic learning, growth and development of young children with a dedicated focus to understanding and applying our own rich and diverse culture and environment within this.

So, it is with great pleasure that Save the Children Fiji present ***the Early Childhood Educational Toolkit*** for a quality and holistic approach to children's education.

Raijeli Nicole

Chief Executive Officer, Save the Children Fiji

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VISION

Our Vision is a world in which every child attains the right to survival, protection, development and participation.

MISSION

Our Mission is to stimulate breakthroughs in the way the world values children and to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives.

GOAL

Our Goal is to achieve these by strengthening key partnerships so all children, especially those from marginalised and disadvantaged communities, benefit from greater public commitment and better use of society's resources.

VALUES

Accountability ● Ambition ● Collaboration
● Creativity ● Integrity



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HOW TO USE THIS MANUAL

This manual was designed as part of a Save the Children Fiji Educational Toolkit for communities, teachers, children and parents at kindergarten level. It can be used on its own or in conjunction with the broader toolkit designed as part of the Vuli Taumada Shishak Project.

The Toolkit consists of the below manuals and materials and can be accessed online or directly through Save the Children Fiji.

1. ***Safe and Healthy Start, Grow Smart Guideline*** – this guideline is designed to be a supporting document to the curriculum for early childhood education in Fiji. It gives support by helping teachers create indicators of success markers for children along with relevant tips from community teachers across the country.
2. ***Teachers Manual*** – a supportive manual for teachers or aspiring teachers in community settings with step-by-step instructions how what needs to be done to become a registered teacher in Fiji along with tips on best practice teaching methods from Fiji.
3. ***Operation Guideline*** – support manual for Community Education Committees that are interested in understanding best practice examples of how to manage a community kindergarten or establish a new one.
4. ***Community Manual*** - best practice examples and an understanding of the challenges and success that communities face when they make kindergarten education a priority. This tool can be used for learning and understanding the best way to approach community kindergartens.
5. ***Positive Discipline Manual*** – detailed, easy to understand explanation of why positive discipline methods are beneficial both in the classroom and at home with tools to implement this in communities.
6. ***Supporting materials*** – games, stickers, information posters for communities, teachers, parents and children to engage with the best practice learnings and important messages from the Vuli Taumada Shishak project.

Where to access these manuals

If you only have one or some of the manuals you can access all of the materials on Save the Children Fiji's website.

Visit www.savethechildren.org.fj and find them under EDUCATION RESOURCES.

For more information email info@savethechildren.org.fj or call 3313178.

Vuli Taumada Shishak Project

Community Profiles



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INTRODUCTION

The Community Manual was developed as part of a resource toolkit put together by the Vuli Taumada Shishak (VTS) Project. It is a collection of stories and lessons learnt from 12 of the 52 communities in which Save the Children Fiji work, and is intended to encourage and support other communities who wish to set up their own Early Childhood Education (ECE) centres.

These stories tell of struggle and perseverance, success and disappointment, hard work and joy, commitment and dedication, and above all, a realisation about the incredible importance of investing in Early Childhood Education. We share these stories to show anything is possible when people are committed and working together to achieve a common goal.

It takes more than one person to make an Early Childhood Education centre a reality. Typically resources are available within a community to start an ECE centre, all that's needed is some time and energy.

Save the Children Fiji (SCF) hopes that the lessons learnt in the case studies will empower and encourage existing Community Education Committees (CEC) in their roles as managers of their ECE centres and also communities supporting Early Childhood Education.



WHO IS THIS MANUAL FOR?

This manual is written for the management team of community kindergartens or the Community Education Committee (CEC). It is intended to provide directions and guidelines for managements to provide quality operations and education in disadvantaged or informal communities. This manual outlines the roles and responsibilities of the management committee and describes their core functions.

Objective of the manual

This manual is designed to provide a snapshot of the challenges, success stories and triumphs that communities across the country have had since committing to providing a community kindergarten in their settlement or village.

A snapshot of 12 communities focuses provides tips on how to:

1. Engage outside support for your kindergarten
2. Parent persistence pays off
3. How to build income for your kindergarten and community
4. How parents can change the health of their children
5. Going coconuts for health and their benefit
6. How to make resources without spending any money
7. Increasing commitment of teachers or parents or getting outside help

JITTU ESTATE

Jittu Estate squatter settlement sits on a hilly slope between Grantham Rd and the main Kings Highway in Suva, Fiji's Central Division. Jittu Estate consists of over 700 houses with a population of approximately 3,500 people.

Engaging Outside Assistance

Key area: Involving supportive organisations

Community leaders in Jittu Estate started to realise many of the young children in their community were missing out on preschool education and sought a solution. The community approached Save the Children Fiji to seek guidance on how to ensure its young children were being educated before beginning primary school. A few years later a preschool centre was built in the heart of the community.



Jittu Estate kindergarten began in 2005 after Veiquwawa Methodist Church approached Save the Children Fiji on behalf of the community to establish a preschool. At the time there were several young children in the community who weren't attending preschool. Church elders, Semiti and Taniela, began an initiative to help bring education directly into the community so it was easier for these young children to attend preschool.

Classes began in the old church until renovations in 2010. The materials from the old church were used to build another hall and the kindy then shifted there. Three years later in 2013, a big mango tree fell and demolished the hall. Fortunately it happened on the weekend! Classes then shifted to a small extension of the church which held only a few students. When the number increased, classes moved inside the church.

Discussions between the community and various organisations began. By August 2014, the building was well on its way to being completed.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was developed and signed between the Methodist Church in Jittu, Peoples Community Network and Save the Children Fiji regarding the construction and completion of the building. The Peoples Community Network (PCN) supplied materials for the flooring and extra funding for the proper completion of the building. The Access to Quality Education Program (AQEP) supplied the walls and tiles for the flooring. Save the Children provided materials for the roof.

This gave Jittu the opportunity to provide quality sustainable early childhood education for preschoolers, a safe place for the primary and secondary students to do homework and a space for youths and the wider community.

In 2015, 33 children from Jittu now learn in this beautiful kindergarten hall.

Lessons about engaging with organisations

- Religious organisations are usually good points of connection
- Approach organisations working in similar communities
- Get to know and make use of all your possible connections eg parents who may have connections to such organisations
- Be clear and honest about the work that needs to be done
- Make the most of what you have and are given
- Approach more than one organisation
- It is sometimes easier to ask more than one organisation to help complete one project

Teacher Laiseana Baleira said, “there is so much to be thankful for. We are so lucky to have had the three organisations involved. If only one had been here to help, the preschool building may never have been finished.”

CAUBATI

The Caubati Squatter Settlement community has a population of more than 1000 people with 503 homes across 10 acres of state land and is in a slight valley surrounded by Caubati Rd. The average monthly income is \$400 and Caubati doesn't have a consistent reliable food source.

A Concerned Dad's Persistence

Key area: Persistence is key

The project to build a kindergarten for the low socio-economic community of Caubati began in 2009 after a survey of the area revealed parent's overwhelming desire for their young children to be educated.

Despite his reservations, Mr Awadh Sharma, a resident of the community for almost 30 years and Advisory Councillor for the area, worked closely with Save the Children to start operations.



The community faced many challenges: they had no teachers; a lack of funds; no experience in starting a school; and no land where the kindy could be built. Mr Sharma approached his religious organisation for assistance. The organisation advised him to work with whatever he could, as they could not assist at that time.

With the assistance of two Caubati Mandali board members, they financed two community members who volunteered to teach. They struggled to keep teachers at the kindergarten due to the low pay level.

So Mr Sharma began fundraising activities. After all his efforts, he came up against another obstacle – his religious organisation requested to use the funds. Mr Sharma entered negotiations and managed to convince the organisation to confirm a budget for the kindergarten.

Now in 2015, Mr Sharma is the President of his religious organisation and the kindy is flourishing, enrolling kids from as far away as Kinoya. The Kindergarten Committee is even paying the fees for some children whose parents are struggling financially.

He has advice for those wanting to establish kindergartens in their communities:

1. **Be organised;** establishing and running a kindy is a huge responsibility.
2. **Seek the community's approval and support;** they are ones that will ensure the sustainability of the school.
3. **Seek assistance from supportive organisations,** such as Save the Children.

Lessons

- It takes the persistence of just one person to begin the process of starting a kindy
- While starting and operating a kindy is a big responsibility, it can be done
- Community support and willingness is a big plus to ensuring sustainability
- Use an established organisation to set up a sustainable kindy



When asked what continues to drive him despite so many struggles, Mr Sharma replied, “It just feels great to see the smiles on kids’ faces during graduation.”

LOKIA

Lokia kindergarten was established in 2010. It was the result of a decision made by the village and was put into action by the local Women's Group.

Women's Support Makes the Difference

Key area: Persistence is key

Sesarina Dakuiboca, a resident since 1985, remembers how the different religious groups and especially the women came together to help with the initial setup. "The women worked out what the village needed," Mrs Dakuiboca said. "The kindy continues to run well because the whole community really supports its operation, especially the women."



Fundraising activities include curry nights, tea baskets, selling roti parcels, and soli. The funds raised help to pay the teachers and also to assist families who are struggling to pay for their children's kindy fees. Despite having only one main source of income (selling 'moci'), the community continues to persevere. The Women's Group is currently divided into three groups, who take turns to provide special treats like fruit and juice for the children and teachers at their own cost.

Teachers Elesi and Temara agree the community support is probably the major reason the kindy continues to operate well. They have taught at the kindergarten since the very beginning.

"We continue to stay on, despite the circumstances, because we belong here and our husbands who are from Lokia really support us. We are part of a great Women's Group and we count these kids as our own."

"We would like to encourage teachers out there to be patient, accept the differences in children, and listen to the committee and community."

Both the Women's Group and teachers dream of a separate stand-alone kindergarten. The village has allocated a piece of land and is working towards realising that dream.

Lessons

- The support of community groups (like the Women's Group in Lokia) is key to ensuring the sustainability of kindergarten operations
- Fundraising activities are part of assisting with the financial commitments required for the kindy
- A great support system is usually a prerequisite to ensuring teacher retention



"We were fortunate that SCF assisted us to establish the kindergarten and up-skill for its operation," said Timaima Cuvatoka, secretary of the Women's Group.

WAINIBUKU

The Wainibuku HART settlement community consists of 22 blocks, comprising 88 flats, of which 77 are occupied by one family each. 265 people live in this community, 8 of whom have disabilities.

Parental Support and Persistence is key

Key area: Parental Support and Persistence

Makarina Wati moved into the Wainibuku HART Community in late 2012. She is one of 67 disadvantaged women (who may be widowed, married, single mums, divorced, separated) that make up the majority of this isolated community. She has three children, aged 20, 18, and 7.

In 2014, Makarina took up the position of Secretary of the kindergarten committee. By that time, the kindergarten was in its eighth year of operation and was facing some serious problems. The majority of problems all stemmed from a lack of parental support. Children were bringing unhealthy food to school, school fees were not being paid, and some children were not attending school at all.

When Makarina realised school fees were not being paid and saw the lack of care for students, she took action. And according to teachers Laite Raturala and Kelera Muloilagi, 2014 was different



Steps:

1. She approached each parent in their own home to talk to them about the issues.
2. If that approach did not work, she approached the 'marama ni koro' of the HART 'villages'. For neighbouring settlements, Kelera arranged for a committee member to do the same for each child.

The positive shift in parental support has seen major changes in the food quality, attendance, and children's performances in both the kindergarten and primary schools.

The parents, despite their very low level of income, even provided the curtains for the kindy at its new site.

Lessons

- Payment of school fees can be a big obstacle for parents
- Dedication and following a personal approach assists greatly in the collection of fees
- Parental involvement and dedication in kindy activities directly benefits kids' performance in primary school
- Showing appreciation of teachers' work in the kindy helps teachers feel their work is valued



"Last year was our best year of operation. All school fees were paid and there was a major shift in the support from parents. Because of that, 2015 is off to a great start."

KOROBEBE

Korobebe is part of the Sabeto district in the Ba province, on a slope opposite the Sleeping Giant mountain range, about 12 kms from the Sabeto junction on Queens Rd. The village was relocated in 1977 from 'Nadele' after Hurricane Bebe and the resulting flood, which destroyed most of the village. In memory, Sir Robert Foster named the village Korobebe. There are 71 families, in 49 houses with a population of 365 people.

Not being a member of the community is no reason to be passive

Key area: Care for kids and community and strive for the best

Dedication to building relationships within communities and getting to know families in the village is one of the biggest reasons why the kindergarten in the remote community of Korobebe has been so successful.



Jo Kanacagi is the manager of the local committee that helps run the kindergarten which began in 2013. He says the attitude towards education in the area has changed since young children have had a school to attend.

Mr Kanacagi spent more than 20 years running the local Sabeto Christian Camp. After retiring he became focussed on helping the community improve access to education for young children. Even though Jo is not from Korobebe, he has treated it like his home. Jo hails from Vanua Levu and is married to an Indo-fijian lady.

He says he succeeded because of the strong relationships he built with people in the community by attending meetings, helping organise workshops and learning sessions and by just spending time with them.

"When I started this, I became friendly with many people in the community. By doing this I heard many people's ideas and it helped me understand who could help. This result is not mine. It is for them. I will continue to help them and to do good things," he said.

Mr Kanacagi worked with the Korobebe community and local businesses, government, Save the Children Fiji and a local mining company to raise money to build a new education-learning centre. The new centre will have a library, computer room, kindergarten and accommodation facilities to ensure income can be generated to help maintain the building and access to education for children into the future.

"I enjoy having strong relationships with people. If I am honest, they are honest,"
Mr Kanacagi said.

Lessons

- Not being a traditional member of a community does not mean you cannot help
- An attitude of always wanting to help and learn is key to carrying on despite the obstacles

How to engage the community

- Start talking to the community about what they want
- Be friendly with people and understand their ideas
- Identify people in the community that can help
- Attend village meetings and understand what is happening
- Help bring people to the area that will teach the community new things

"People from the community tell they have seen a big change since the kindergarten. And I have seen it too."

NAKAVIKA



Nakavika settlement is on a hill beside the sea, 22 kms from Lautoka towards Ba, and 2 kms from the Kings Highway. Nakavika settlement consists of 27 houses with a population of 251 people.

Being grateful to a 'FRIEND'

Key area: Accepting assistance and being grateful for help

Nakavika community is on a rugged, mostly rocky coastal cliff between Lautoka and Ba. The members of the community are mostly from other parts of Fiji, like Vanua Levu and the Yasawa islands. Most have settled in Nakavika to support their children's education.

The main sources of income are fish and beche-de-mer. They fish in boats which were given to them by Indian and sometimes Chinese owners. Middle-men come into the community to buy the goods they are selling.

The kindergarten class is organised in the turaga-ni-koro's home. Noting the need for a separate stand-alone kindy, the committee, through the turaga-ni-koro, approached the Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprise and Development (FRIEND) for assistance. The local NGO responded admirably by donating materials for the new classroom, which is almost complete.

SCF is currently working with the committee to include a toilet block, which should fully furnish the kindy for recognition with the Ministry of Education.

The committee, teachers, community, stakeholders and especially the children are all eagerly looking forward to the celebration of the new classroom when it is complete.

Lessons

- Connecting with supportive organisations working in your area can open up opportunities for assistance
- Partial assistance is possible, and should be kindly accepted, provided they contribute to the final completion of project

The committee, teachers, community, stakeholders and especially the children are all eagerly looking forward to the celebration of the new classroom when it is complete.

TAIPERIA NADI

Taiperia Nadi is located right beside the sea between Lautoka and Nadi, 10 kms from Nadi town. The turn off is by the airport, 1.7 kms towards the coast. Taiperia Nadi consists of 21 houses, 33 families and the population is 190 people.

Community Education Committee Initiative

Key area: Taking the initiative

Taiperia Nadi is a small community which is pretty well organised, with easy access to services in Nadi and near to most amenities. The land fit for cultivation is large enough for subsistence and semi-commercial farming. Most community members have access to staple root crops at home.

Currently, the kindergarten class is run in a community member's home. The kindergarten committee decided it was not fair to keep the member's home occupied and began a fundraising drive to build a separate kindergarten.

Community members were asked to give cash donations. With the amount collected, the committee immediately began construction, which included the frame of the building. SCF is now working with the committee to continue the momentum to fully complete the new building for the children.

Starting construction was a bold step for the committee to take, knowing they did not have enough funds to complete the building. But, it is a great lesson of faith, in that, by starting the building, it would continue to push the community towards providing a permanent and separate space for their children.

Taiperia Nadi community clearly sets a very clear example for other communities, by making use of what was available, and taking the first step.



Lessons

- Don't wait for assistance, begin with what you have
- Supporting organisations appreciate a "do what you can" attitude, rather than those always asking for assistance and doing nothing.



Vunato community clearly sets a very clear example for other communities, by making use of what was available, and taking the first step.

VUNATO

The Vunato settlement is on flat land along the Kings Rd, only a minute drive from the centre of Lautoka City in the semi urban zone. The nearest villages towards Ba are Vitogo (2 kms), Naviyago (4.2 kms) and Matawalu (6.4 kms). The settlement consists of 74 houses, with a total population of 192 people.

Community Leader Drives Change in her Community

Key area: Personal drive can bring about change

Kelera Verevou started campaigning for change in Vunato when she returned to her community after a fire destroyed the clothing factory she managed.

After finishing school when she was 12 years old, Kelera started sewing clothes and working in the factory. She worked her way up into a management role and retired in Vunato after the fire devastated the business in 2008. This is when she noticed children in the village running around during the day because there was no education available to them. Soon after Kelera started a community movement that led to the construction of a local kindergarten.

"I always saw children roaming around in the village and I felt someone should make sure they all had the opportunity to go to school. That is what drove the people of the community to come together," Kelera said. At this point the support of the local women's group started to gain momentum. The group made food and goods and sold them to raise money for the construction of the kindergarten. Save the Children Fiji also came on board to support their efforts.

"We split into four groups and set a target to raise \$200 each. We made goodies and the people in the village bought them. It only took one day to raise the money! And soon after we built the little kindergarten centre," Kelera said.



Kelera says this is one of the community's greatest achievements. *"This kindergarten is our biggest success because it has helped the community understand the importance of education for our children."*

"I am happy because now all the children go to school and some of them have progressed to primary and secondary school. I don't want all our children to just stay in the village when they grow up, I want more for them. It is better they go to school, find something they enjoy and see where it takes them," she said.

The kindergarten has also created more opportunities for the Vunato community. Local teachers have been trained to work with children, which has provided opportunities for young people who may not have been able to find employment. Limiva Butani is currently the local kindergarten teacher. She is only 21 years old and has come to work at the centre and help teach the children, after being requested by Kelera.

"I have taught the children alphabets and numbers, and about all the different shapes. They know the colours too. Some children just love to draw. I love teaching them, and I can see they love and enjoy coming to school," she said.

This story illustrates a community's ability to change and realise the need to educate their children. It also shows that people like Kelera and Limiva can instigate and drive important changes that have long-term benefits.

Lessons

- Becoming aware of children's needs often sparks whole projects
- After identifying a need, act on it and do something about it
- Often it takes just one caring person to start a whole movement

"I am happy because now all the children go to school and some of them have progressed to primary and secondary school. I don't want all our children to just stay in the village when they grow up, I want more for them."

JORITANI

Joritani is 65.3 kms from Labasa Town and is located on a slope near the Dogotuki-Cakaudrove Road, near the Dogotuki River. It comes under the district of Dogotuki in the province of Macuata. The Joritani community is made up of four villages and six settlements, with a total of 79 houses. The total population of this community is 830 people.

Communication leads to excellence

Key area: Parental engagement, school communication with CEC, support from the committee and excellence for the students

Joritani community is more than an hour on a dirt road to the top of a peak where there is a beautiful river shrouded by wild bamboo.

This rural community is home to a local kindergarten that educates children from neighbouring areas to prepare them for primary school.

The kindergarten is an example of excellence. Every Friday, the Joritani Women's Group make healthy meals for the children's lunch which parents buy for \$1. This money is invested back into the children's education by buying books and stationery and paying the volunteer teacher a small sum each week.

Flora Milika has been teaching at the school for three years and says the money raised by the Women's Group directly improves the education provided to children.

"With the money from the Friday lunches, I can sometime attend workshops, or buy teaching supplies. It makes a huge difference to know there is always money there if we need it, and that we don't have to go looking for it," said Mrs Milika.

She says the support from parents and the community allows her to help her students excel and succeed in further education.



"In the first week of the new school year, the Head Teacher from the local primary school called to tell me he was very impressed with the performance of the children from Joritani Kindergarten. He showed their workbooks to all the teachers, from class 1, all the way up to class 8," Mrs Milika said.

"In 2012, a girl I previously taught in kindergarten was attending a nearby primary school. At the end of first term her father called to explain that when she was asked to spell flower/flour in class, she asked "Teacher, there are two types, which one do you want me to spell?". The parents were so proud."

"I am very proud to be a teacher here, and I continue to work with parents to help change the way the community views education for young children," she said.

Building and maintaining the kindergarten would not be possible without the support of the community. While the money raised usually doesn't cover the entire cost, it ensures the teacher's salary will be paid and that students can attend the centre on a daily basis. In Joritani, the committee will always make sure there are fundraising events to help fund the kindergarten's needs.

What is the best way for teachers to communicate with parents and community?

In Joritani, the teacher and the committee meet every month to open up discussion and provide a space to raise any concerns.

The teacher in Joritani also:

- Writes notes everyday in the students books about what they have done at school
- Notes any fundraising events the committee and community are organising
- Asks for help from the community to make arts and crafts
- Sells jams and chutneys donated by the parents to help fund the purchase of stationery supplies
- Attends workshops
- Organises with the local zone nurses to come and visit the community for health checks
- Visits parents if they need support or if their child needs support
- Follows up with parents with phone calls about their children's progress

Lessons

- Becoming aware of children's needs often sparks whole projects
- After identifying a need, act on it and do something about it
- Often it takes just one caring person to start a whole movement

KOROVULI



Korovuli is located on flat land, 3.5 kms from Seaqaqa town and 200 metres from the main road towards the mountains. They have access to the sea and a nearby lake. Korovuli is in the Seaqaqa district, in the province of Macuata. The Korovuli community consists of 25 families living in 19 houses and has a population of 213 people.

Working Together

Key area: ensuring ECE is well supported in terms of resources and working toward a centre of excellence status

Korovuli community has worked together for more than two years to help build a new kindergarten centre with toilet and washroom facilities.

This community is nestled at the base of lush green mountains more than 25 kms from the nearest town of Labasa, on Fiji's second largest island, Vanua Levu. The charming kindergarten sits next to the community hall, against a beautiful mountainous backdrop.

Maciu Navitilevu is the manager of the committee that helps run the kindergarten. He says the biggest challenges are raising money and finding manpower to build and maintain the centre.

This was communicated to the entire community, and they began to work together to fundraise for the necessary facilities.

"We have been fundraising for the teacher's welfare and we have been helping by cleaning the compound, building the toilet and planting flowers for the children to play around,"
Mr Navitilevu said.

"We are creating the bright students of the future, who will go all the way up to university and, once they have a job, come back to help the community,"

How did they fundraise?

The committee went to village meetings and spoke to parents regularly about creating solis and bazaars.

"We invited the community to a small soli and we had a small tea party for them. Recently we also held a bazaar, selling suits, masi, clothing, food and souvenirs made by parents and women's groups. The bazaar raised more than \$500 in a day and this money paid for the building of the washroom for the kids, including taps and pipes," Mr Navitilevu said.

How did they communicate about the fundraising events?

- They used community meetings to explain the event
- Parents were brought in for meetings to help them create things to sell
- Reminders and notes were sent home with the children from the kindergarten

As Mr Navitilevu explains, the work is focussed on the future of their community and the long-lasting benefits education will bring.

"We are creating the bright students of the future, who will go all the way up to university and, once they have a job, come back to help the community," he said.

Lessons

- Communities are willing to participate, especially to help their youngest children
- Committee members and teachers who take the time to clearly explain to the community the long-term benefits of supporting the kindy-age children will reap the rewards
- The work of the committee is essential to the sustainability of the kindergarten
- Committee members need to be driven by the long-term benefits of their work
- Fundraising to help support community kindergartens can be necessary to support the wages for teachers and to buy necessary resources for the children's learning

These stories tell of
struggle and perseverance,
success and disappointment,
hard work and joy,
commitment and dedication,
and above all, a realisation
about the incredible
importance of investing in
early childhood education.

NAKAMA

Nakama is located on flat land near the Nakama River, 8.3 kms from Labasa Town, along Korotari Road. Nakama village consists of 58 families living in 48 houses and has a population of 237 people.

Community bans tang for bu

Key area: Health, Community Participation and Benefits to community

Children in Nakama Community are healthier as a result of the fruit program set up by local women's groups. Mereani Tecala has been teaching at the community kindergarten in Nakama for more than three years and says this is a result of the centre becoming a hub of information about health.



"Before this initiative, many children had sores and were often unwell. They would eat canned food and noodles for lunch. Now that we have introduced the idea of 'healthy living', children are much happier and healthier and parents have planted fruit and vegetable gardens," Mereani said.

How did this change happen?

It began with the community prioritising children's health and committing to change.

The teacher then set up weekly meetings with the Women's Group and established a roster for parents to supply fruit for the children's snacks at kindy each week.

Emele Sogoituba has two children attending kindergarten and says the community has now banned Tang and sugary drinks in favour of bu and water. She explained her cooking methods have changed, as she now understands how a healthy diet can contribute to children's future success.

"I used to give them chips and ready-made food from the supermarket. After we had a discussion with the health centre, I changed from canned to boiled food. Before I would fry everything!" Emele said.

How to organise a fruit roster

1. Each week the teacher informs the parents when they come to the centre whose turn it is to supply the fruit
2. The Women's Group meets every day after they drop the children off to school to talk about the snacks and what they should plant in their gardens
3. When parents can't attend meetings, a note is sent home by the teacher or delivered by the Women's Group to their homes
4. The Women's Group explain what is planned each week to make sure everyone knows what to do and how to help

Emele says the community has become closer because they are communicating more often. *"The women's group has been good because we are slowly getting to know each other and so working more together more. It is a true community."*

Lessons

- Good life lessons introduced to benefit children's health and welfare, can also change parent's attitudes and influence their lifestyle choices
- The sooner positive messages are introduced, the better. Start correcting damaging habits now. Excellent communication and discussion between the community members and teachers greatly assists in providing good support for children

"Before this initiative, many children had sores and were often unwell."

NATUA

Natua is spread out over five settlements, including the Seaqaqa township and suburb. The community comes under the district of Seaqaqa in the province of Macuata. The total population is over 6,000 people.

Gaining support for the community kindergarten

Key area: Stakeholder engagement is of benefit to the entire community

Mount Sinai (Natua) Village ran a kindergarten in its community for more than 20 years but in 2003 the centre was closed because it was decided the building was no longer safe for children.

For more than 6 years children in the area were unable to access kindergarten schooling, until in 2009 a group of community members came together to start the centre again.



Community-based teacher Rajeli Vuinakelo helped bring together the key stakeholders needed to create a new centre. They set up initially in a local church building before working to create a new centre where the community could also meet and discuss their children's schooling.

Steps take to engage help

- The community started by approaching the local church for a space to begin the kindergarten again.
- The community then formally asked the Department of Social Welfare to help by holding training workshops with parents about the need for education for children. The support for the centre and number of children slowly grew during 2010 and 2011.
- The Management Committee then invited the District Officer to attend the graduations and explained the success children were having in the kindergarten.

- The District Officer then worked with the community to support them to build a new centre by donating money to buy the resources needed.
- The community worked together to build a completely new centre to ensure the students had their own stand-alone building.
- Fundraising events such as solis and bazaars were organised to help raise the money to complete the building and the verandah for the centre.

Communicating with the community

To ensure the community and people involved in the centre understood the process, the kindergarten committee and teacher sent letters home with the students and posted information on a board at the school.

The partnerships with local government, Ministries, the District Officer, local community and teachers created cohesion for the project. This was done with the support and guidance of Save the Children Fiji through their regular visits and training.

Raijeli Vuinakelo says these stakeholders are very important in preparing the area for long-term education and helping the community more generally.

"I started talking to people about what we needed and inviting them to come to our centre. I invited a traffic officer to help the children understand crossing the road and then invited the health people here to check the children and talk to parents. The new centre means they can come here and participate in workshops about children and education," Raijeli said.

The challenges of running the centre

Regular communication to the parents and home visits helped support the teacher in creating the new centre.

"The parents were very supportive. They provided us with tyres and manpower but we still need more parents to take part in the ongoing development of the school. They can donate things but manpower to always keep the place at the required standard is continually needed," Raijeli said.

Lessons

- Identifying the key stakeholders who can assist is key to ensuring the success of a kindy
- There is a great need for people that can bring key stakeholders together, for any venture
- Regular, clear and open communication is essential in ventures involving many people
- The community, through one or more members, must take the lead in beginning and continuing the work needed to keep the kindy and any related activities sustainable