

**VANUATU CIVIL SOCIETY
DISABILITY NETWORK (VCSDN)**

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VANUATU CIVIL SOCIETY DISABILITY NETWORK



Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network (VCSDN) aims to break down barriers to inclusion in society. The network's purpose is to provide a forum for civil society organizations working towards disability inclusion to share ideas and strategies, to learn together, to support each other to reduce duplication in our collective work. This network has had considerable success in influencing decision makers to listen and respond to the priorities of people with a disability when developing and implementing policies, plans and legislation. The VCSDN has provided input into international human rights conventions and processes including *Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)* 2016 through support to and engagement of one of the members of the VCSDN who is currently the Pacific Disability Forum co-chair, Nellie Caleb. Nellie represented the disability sector at the 68th meeting of the CEDAW and the concluding observations on the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Vanuatu include a section on disability which references many of the points raised by Nellie with the support of the VCSDN. During the World Humanitarian Summit 2016, Nellie presented her story and gave input into the first ever *Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action* launched by multi-stakeholder groups at the summit. VCSDN has provided lots of input into various national level policy consultation processes including reviewing the *Priorities and Action Agenda for the new Vanuatu National Sustainable Development Plan*. The plan articulates that it will work towards many of the goals that the network identified like: inclusive education; accessible transport, buildings and public spaces, infrastructure and services; and access to employment and livelihood opportunities for people with disabilities. Both *Ministry of Education (MoE)* and *Ministry of Health (MoH)* have contacted the network at different times to gain insight into the accessibility requirements for e.g. village aid posts and classrooms and school pathways. As one VCSDN member, Tony Naliupis, says: "one organisation alone cannot go to the government and advocate or ask to input into national policies, but through the network our collective voice has allowed the government to pay attention to the rights of people with disabilities".

Vanuatu Society for People with Disability (VSPD) is a nationwide Non-Government Organisation committed to assisting people with disabilities to participate as fully as possible in community life in Vanuatu. VSPD's mission is 'meeting the needs of people with disabilities in Vanuatu'. VSPD started in 1986 as part of Vanuatu Red Cross, and was a small group of parents and friends of people with disabilities and has grown into a strong organisation providing services for and facilitating advocacy on the rights of people with disability. VSPD services include community based rehabilitation, identification and assessment of people with disabilities, provision of technical assistance to clients, provision of equipment such as wheelchairs and crutches, training of caregivers and parents, and support for people with a disability within schools and the workplace. VSPD also provides advocacy through community and awareness programs relating to disability and the promotion of rights of people with disability

Sanma Frangipani Association (SFA) is an association made up of parents, caregivers and people with disabilities. It is a non-profit secular organisation established by Tony and Doriane Naliupis in 2003 who are passionate and keen to work towards socio-economic change in the SANMA Province. Through their own personal experience having children with disabilities, they recognized the need for education to be provided to their children and other families who had children with disabilities. Over the years the range of services provided has grown and today SFA is a NGO that acts on behalf of people with disabilities and disadvantaged people across the Sanma Province to encourage full inclusion, equal rights and active participation of people with disabilities in the community. SFA's mission is to empower people with disabilities to live, to learn, to assume meaningful roles in their community and to achieve maximum independence and an optimal quality of life

Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association (DPA) is the national *Disabled Persons Organization* (DPO) of Vanuatu. DPA was established in 1999 with the mandate to advocate for the rights of and promote abilities of persons with disabilities in Vanuatu. DPA has contributed significantly to advancing the rights of people with disabilities through the development of its affiliate members and through developing a positive and proactive working relationship with the Government of Vanuatu. As a result, disability is on the local, national and regional agendas. At the local level, DPA works with volunteers from all provinces to set up local member organizations, comprising of people with disabilities who work to raise awareness and advocate for disability inclusion at the community level. DPA works nationally with the Government of Vanuatu towards the signing and ratification of many policies and legislation, and Vanuatu was the first Pacific country to ratify the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD) on 23rd April 2008. DPA has contributed to and influenced many national and regional inclusive policies including the National Disability Policy and Plan of Action, the Inclusive Education Policy, and the Pacific Regional Strategy on Disability.

The Vanuatu Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Sector Strengthening Program is an Australian Government funded Program which aims to support economic development through targeted skill development services. The Program encourages a more responsive and better quality training system that is able to meet the skill demands of the productive sectors in provincial communities. The Program works to strengthen national and provincial structures within the TVET sector and builds the capacity of local training providers to deliver courses focused on employment and income-generation outcomes within a nationally recognised framework. The TVET program works in partnership with disability advocacy associations to ensure people with disabilities access skill development services and are supported in income-generation activities.

Rainbow Theatre is a group of actors with disabilities who tour Vanuatu performing plays, facilitating workshops, and conducting radio dramas about the abilities and rights of people with a disability. This theatre group was formed with initial support from *Wan Smolbag* (WSB) and *Vanuatu Society for People with a Disability* (VSPD), and they received training from the Adelaide-based No Strings Attached Theatre of Disability. In April 2011, Rainbow Theatre, in partnership with WSB and VSPD, did their first performances for primary schools in Port Vila where teachers say it changed their students' perception of disability. Rainbow theatre's post performance discussions demonstrate how drama is an effective mechanism to initiate discussion around human rights issues that are often challenging to talk about. Plays and performances bring the focus back to the real-life experiences of people, in a way that is accessible to varying education levels and ages. Rainbow Theatre actors believe their messages are delivered more effectively through their performances as actions speak louder than words.





ALEX HAM

A YOUNG MAN STANDS TALL AGAINST DISCRIMINATION

Meet Alex Ham, 19, a young man with a small stature, dwarfism, but with a bigger than life personality which has been showcased around Vanuatu through his acting with the Rainbow Disability Theatre. Alex is also an active member of the Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network (VCSDN).

Although Alex is outgoing now, it is in stark contrast to his early school years. He attended Vila North Secondary School until class six, however his dream of furthering his studies came to an end when he became a victim of constant bullying and harassment.

“Other students would crumple my books and papers, throw my pencils away and hide the rest of my belongings. This happened a lot and it really hurt that my fellow classmates would do this to me. This affected my work and I felt I couldn’t continue my schooling anymore, so I told my parents that I wanted to quit school.”

After he ended his studies in 2010, he spent most of his time at home but he never gave up hope of finding opportunities beyond his current situation. He found just that when in 2014, Wan Smolbag (WSB) and Rainbow Disability Theatre members attended Alex’s church.

“I was very happy when they asked me to join them because they promote the rights of people with disability through advocacy. This was something different for me and I was more than excited that I could be part of their work. I was waiting for such an opportunity and it came to me!”

Alex joined the Rainbow Disability Theatre in 2014, there he learned about the rights of people living with disabilities and also learned various acting skills. The following year, 2015, he became a member of VCSDN when the Rainbow Theatre joined the network. Through his acting, Alex has had the chance to visit schools around Efate as well as on other islands in Vanuatu, which is another thing he really enjoys.

“When we go to schools and do plays, students always approach me afterwards and ask lots of questions like how old am I and what my height is. They would laugh

when I tell them my age and they would touch me, hug me and take photos with me. I feel really good when I see that they genuinely like my company and they are asking me these questions because they are curious not because they want to make fun of me.”

In spite of his success outside of his village, Alex still faces struggles and discrimination in his village and even when commuting. “Many drivers won’t stop for me because they don’t want to be bothered with helping me on the bus.”

Alex finds comfort when attending network meetings, “When I see my friends in wheelchairs or those who are blind, I empathize with them, so I always offer to help however I can. **In the network meetings, everyone is equal, whether you have a disability or not, we all go there with one goal and that is to fight for the rights of people with disabilities.**”

Alex’s knowledge on advocating for the rights of people with disabilities has grown significantly and he feels empowered knowing that there are people who are working, including himself, to promote the rights of people with disability. “**I feel that now I can advocate for my rights and can say to people, even those students who have bullied me in school, that we are all equal and they are no better than me. We may have different needs but we all have the same rights.**”

HELEN POPAUL

A YOUNG WOMAN WEAVES HER WAY INTO INCOME GENERATING BUSINESS



Helen Popaul, 22, is a young member of the Sanma Frangipani Association (SFA) which is an organisation based in Santo that supports people with disability. Helen lives with her mother and two brothers in Turtle Bay area on Santo Island. She was born with her legs deformed which results in Helen using her hands to walk.

Helen didn't attend school because of the conditions of the roads and the fear that people would ridicule her. "The road to the school is covered with rocks and

gravel, which I am sure would have made it unbearable for me to travel to and from there. Once there, I don't know how people would have treated me, if they would have accepted me."

Helen spends most of her time in the garden where she grows vegetables and root crops on a piece of land a few metres from the family house. Whenever her mother goes to sell her harvests in Luganville town, she takes Helen's harvests as well to sell at the main market. "I make my garden near

the house because it is easy for me to get to, but my brother, Simon, makes his way further up the mountains. I do everything at home, I do our washing, cooking and also clean around the house. The only thing I can't do is collect water from the tap or well."

In 2007, Helen's brother Simon experienced similar leg deformity challenges. He became sick and was taken to the hospital in Luganville. While in the hospital, Simon met Dorian Naliupis, the founder and coordinator of SFA. Dorian helped Simon receive appropriate treatment at the hospital and then registered Simon with SFA. He later told Dorian about his sister, Helen, so Dorian went to Turtle Bay to visit Helen and asked her if she wanted to become an SFA member.

Helen joined SFA in 2009, and was then eligible to receive trainings about tailoring and micro-business management. SFA provided her with a wheelchair, a sewing machine and sewing equipment which she uses to sew skirts, pants, island dresses and pillow cases. She sells her products to family, relatives and other people in the village. "At first I didn't know how Frangipani would help me but when I went to their trainings, I was given mobility equipment

to help me move around more easily and also given tools and skills so I can make an income. I began to understand that SFA supports people with disability to become more independent, confident and empowered to speak out about their rights as a person with a disability."

Helen's relationship with SFA has strengthened over the years and she has flourished into a strong, articulate, confident person. She continues to receive trainings from SFA and has been involved in advocacy campaigns with the association. Through her experiences with SFA, she has been able to face her fears around meeting people and going out in public. This has contributed to a big positive change in Helen's life.

"I am a woman who has a disability but I am also an advocate, a business owner and a woman with dreams just as big as anyone else. I will never look at myself as a victim but as victorious. I have defeated the odds and will continue to enjoy and have a fulfilling life. I hope that other people with disabilities are empowered to do the same."

FRANKIE SALILIE

AN ACTOR LEARNS THE IMPORTANCE OF ROLLING WITH THE PUNCHES

Meet Frankie Salilie, 33, a vivacious member of the Rainbow Disability Theatre in Port Vila, who learned how to overcome obstacles at an early age. Frankie is from Penapo Village in South East Ambrym. Frankie was not born with a disability, but at the age of 12 he began to have pain in both his legs which resulted in amputating his legs.

“There were sharp pain in both my legs, they were in so much pain that I couldn’t go to school. I missed six months of class because I had to go to the hospital all the time. It got to a point where the doctor told me that if they did not amputate my legs quickly, the disease would spread to the rest of my body and I would die.”

Frankie was in class 4 when they amputated his legs. His life changed dramatically and he began to question the quality of his future. “It was like losing a part of my life, I couldn’t do things that I used to do before. My legs were taken from me when I was just a kid. It was so hard for me. I knew my life was going to be hard, and I knew from that day forward, I was different.”

Frankie didn’t want the amputation to ruin his life. One day, Frankie met Arthur from

the Nakato Society (now Vanuatu Society for People with Disability (VSPD)) and Arthur arranged for VSPD to allocate Frankie a wheelchair. During that time, Frankie learnt about the services and advocacy for people with disabilities, that VSPD was involved in.

Through VSPD, Frankie met with Wan Smolbag (WSB) staff and then spent over seven years with WSB. Frankie is one of the first members of Rainbow Disability Theatre when it was formed in 2010. **“When I am at home I feel left out and it feels like I am not part of society. At Rainbow Theatre, we come together as a group and learn about our rights and how we can improve our lives through learning and advocacy. I like the positive spirit we have when we are together.”**

Because of the encouragement he received, Frankie now goes everywhere in his wheelchair. He is well known around Port Vila because people see him every day along the road commuting to WSB and back to Fresh Wota where he lives. “Sometimes people swear at me and say negative things when they drive by me along the road. They would tell me to go home and that I shouldn’t come

out in public. But they don’t understand that I too am human and have the same exact rights like they do.”

The daily comments and negativity he faces hasn’t stopped him at all. In 2011 Frankie participated in the La Piste Bleu, an annual cross country event that takes place in Port Vila. With the help from a group of American volunteers from VSPD, a custom-made hand pedal wheel chair was made for him which he used to successfully complete in the race. **“I was probably the only person with disability who participated that year. I thought to myself that if others can do it, I can do it too.”**

In 2012 when Rainbow Theatre became a member of Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network (VCSDN), Frankie started attending the disability network meetings. He became inspired and decided to work with youth in his community so that they too learn more

about the rights of people with disabilities. He organises youth gatherings and events that allow them to raise funds that are used to help the families of young people with disabilities. In addition, He provides leadership skills training to members of his youth group as well as teach them about how to best interact with people with disabilities.

“People with disabilities have the same rights as everyone else in our communities. Most people with disabilities have limited access to education because national inclusion policy is often not developed or implemented. Our rights need increased representation in the national development agenda. VCSDN aims to help people with disabilities gain access to education, government services, and to let people with disabilities know about their rights. We need to remove the different barriers that people with disability continue to face in society.”





CHARLIZE TEVANU

EMBARKING ON NEW TERRITORY AND TAKING IT ONE STEP AT A TIME

Charlize Tevanu, 23 years old, is an optimistic young woman from Vau Island, Malekula. She was born with a leg deformity which makes it difficult for her to walk and stand up. She uses crutches to support her walking but doesn't see that as a barrier when it comes to chasing her dreams.

At school, Charlize was teased a lot by other students but despite these challenges, Charlize enjoyed going to school. Her dreams of furthering her education came to an end when she became pregnant in 2009. **"School was a challenge for me because of the teasing and the complications with my leg made it difficult to travel but I liked school because I loved learning.** However,

when I was in year 9, a boy lied to me and took advantage of me, I became pregnant, and so I had to stop school."

In December 2013, Sanma Frangapani Association (SFA), an organisation committed to supporting people with disabilities, organized a celebration for people with disabilities in Lakatoro, Malekula. Charlize attended this celebration and met Dorian Naliupis, founder of SFA. "When I met Dorian for the first time, I saw that she really enjoyed working with people with disabilities. She asked about my family and who I was. It was nice to meet someone who was interested in me and my family. It was different to the usual teasing I received."

Dorian and Charlize kept in contact until 2014 when Dorian returned to Malekula with a team that conducted inclusive sports workshops for people with disabilities. Dorian explained more about SFA to Charlize, and encouraged her to become a member of the association. "It felt good to have people around me who were genuinely interested in and committed to supporting me, so I was motivated to travel to Santo and find opportunities there."

In Santo, Charlize visited the SFA office where she received trainings and workshops on micro-business management, and learned more about the rights of people with disabilities. She also travelled around Sanma with SFA, volunteering and advocating about the rights of people with disabilities. "SFA was like a new school to me because through SFA I had the chance to attend trainings with the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Youth at Work programs, and learn about micro-businesses, life skills and other things that helped my life." SFA also provided Charlize with a pair of crutches. Seeing how supportive SFA was, Charlize decided to stay in Luganville and continue her passion of advocating for the rights of people with disability.

In 2016, Charlize met her fiancé Stanley, another member of SFA. "When I met Stanley, I already had my child and I thought by telling him this, it would deter him from talking to me. But he said he wanted to be with us. I admired him because even though he also had a disability, he had so much confidence"

That same year, a partner association of SFA, Youth at Work, provided Charlize with 20 layers (chickens who produce eggs), wire mesh and chicken feeds. With the micro-business trainings she received from TVET, Charlize decided to set up a poultry farm in her village of Vau in Malekula. In addition to her farm, she established a kava bar. "The layers are great because they make daily income. They are being looked after by my brother, he sells the eggs and earns money to support my family on the island."

Charlize doesn't let obstacles get in her way and is very excited to participate in the Van 2017 South Pacific mini-games in December. She will participate as a shot put competitor. "I have never been to Port Vila, so I am very excited to partake in the mini games. Frangipani empowered me to become a confident person. With the trainings I've received and experience I have from my life, I plan to increase the number of chickens on my farm. This way I can be self-employed enabling me to support my family."



PETER DICK

A BUSINESSMAN'S DIFFICULT TIMES HELPS HIM TAP INTO AN UNDISCOVERED TALENT



Meet Peter Dick, a businessman and talented athlete from Banks Island. His disability may be the first thing you notice but his talent goes beyond anything that is easily seen. Peter, who is 1 of 7 children, was born with his left arm undeveloped but that hasn't stopped him from winning numerous awards for his intricate artistic designs.

While growing up and going to school, Peter faced a lot of discrimination from other students as well as his own family. "I had a rough childhood. Sometimes my legs and

arms were tied together and I was forced to sleep outside without food. I felt that my siblings were loved more than me. The only person who really cared for me was my mother."

The person who cared for Peter the most, his mother, died when he was in class 6 and Peter was devastated. He knew that there was little hope for him to go to school, and that his life would become much more difficult. "I couldn't imagine living without my mother, under the care of just my father. He would have made my life hard so I decided

to run away. I went to live with my other relatives on Mere Lava and Barabara. I lived there for five years before returning to my family."

Peter found it very difficult when he returned, particularly since his father showed little time, commitment or love towards him at all. So Peter left his family once again and travelled to Santo in 2006. Peter's plan was to start a new life in Santo. In 2007 he went to the Disability Promotion & Advocacy Association (DPA) and registered as a member. He also registered with Sanma Frangipani Association (SFA), another local NGO supporting people with disabilities.

Between 2012 and 2016, Peter had two jobs: producing and exporting kava, and working for a shipping company. "When I was working for those companies I was able to earn a bit of income to support myself but the work was hard for me because I can only use one hand, I decided to stop working for them and start my own way of earning money."

When Peter was younger, he always enjoyed drawing, creating and painting designs, so he knew that he had an artistic flair. He decided to put his talent to good use and earn an income. He joined a group of young boys from his community who formed a tourist attraction site (cultural village) and he began selling his art products to tourists. "When I started, I used x-ray papers to cut my designs and then I painted them onto lava-lavas to sell to tourists, and I also made wood carvings. When I saw that my products were selling well, I decided to increase the production."

In 2016, Peter attended a training conducted by the Technical & Vocational, Education & Training (TVET) program, in collaboration with SFA. The training focused on enhancing

Peter's design and carving skills and as a result, the quality of his products improved, and he learnt how to increase the quantity of his production. Peter now designs and sells wood carvings, shirts and lava-lavas to tourists and business houses in Luganville. His talent speaks for itself and he won the Best Handicraft Ambassador award for two consecutive years in 2015 and 2016.

"My products are always sold out, people like to buy them. They are very good because I put effort in creating quality products for my customers. People would ask me how I do it and I would tell them that whatever they can do with two hands, I can also do with just my right hand."

In addition to designing, Peter also has a deep love for sports, he will be a participant in the Van2017 South Pacific mini-games and will be competing in the 100 metre relay and javelin.

Peter believes that he owes much of his success to DPA, SFA and TVET for providing him the trainings he needed to fulfil his dream of starting his own business. "I came to Santo with nothing, not even a proper education. They encouraged and offered me trainings to improve and believe in myself, and now I am in a different stage in life, earning a great income, and I am proud of my designs and work. If it wasn't for DPA, SFA and TVET, I would have returned to the island family home."

Peter's business continues to grow and he is a well-known artist and role model in Luganville. He plans to purchase a piece of land for his family in 2018 and aims to become a leader in Luganville whilst continuing to produce quality handicraft products for tourists.



DANIA BENJAMIN

A YOUNG LADY CREATES AN INCOME ONE BEAD AT A TIME

Dania Benjamin is 17 years old and has faced challenges since birth, but her smile and sense of humour demonstrate a story of triumph. Dania, who is the second of three children, was born with both of her legs paralysed, and because of this disability she never had the chance to attend school. Although she didn't attend school her world opened up when she was 5 years old, through Sanma Frangipani Association (SFA), an organisation in Santo committed to providing services for and advocacy about the rights of people with a disability.

As Dania grew up, SFA involved her in trainings and campaigns that enabled her to learn about the rights of people with disabilities and why it is important to advocate for them. Her involvement with SFA allowed her to go beyond her front door and engage with people all around Luganville. **"I did not go to school but to me Sanma Frangipani is like school because with them I made new friends and learned about my rights as a person with a disability. I also had the opportunity to see things and meet people that I never thought I would."**

Growing up, Dania developed an interest in making hand-woven bracelets and anklets using beads. SFA supported Dania's passion and helped her create an income generating business by providing her with additional strings and beads. "I really like making bracelets and anklets, especially now that I am able to make an income from it. I have been able to sell more to my community with the support of SFA. SFA helped to purchase some extra materials, and they also told lots of people about my business, which was great."

Dania has a friend that lives in her community, Jevalin, who is 7 years old and attends class one at the local primary school. Jevalin spends every day with Dania and they have a lot of fun together. "Jevalin comes over and plays with me every day. She helps give me things when I'm unable to reach them and she even helps me make some of the bracelets. I am so appreciative of her and it truly makes me happy to have her as a friend."

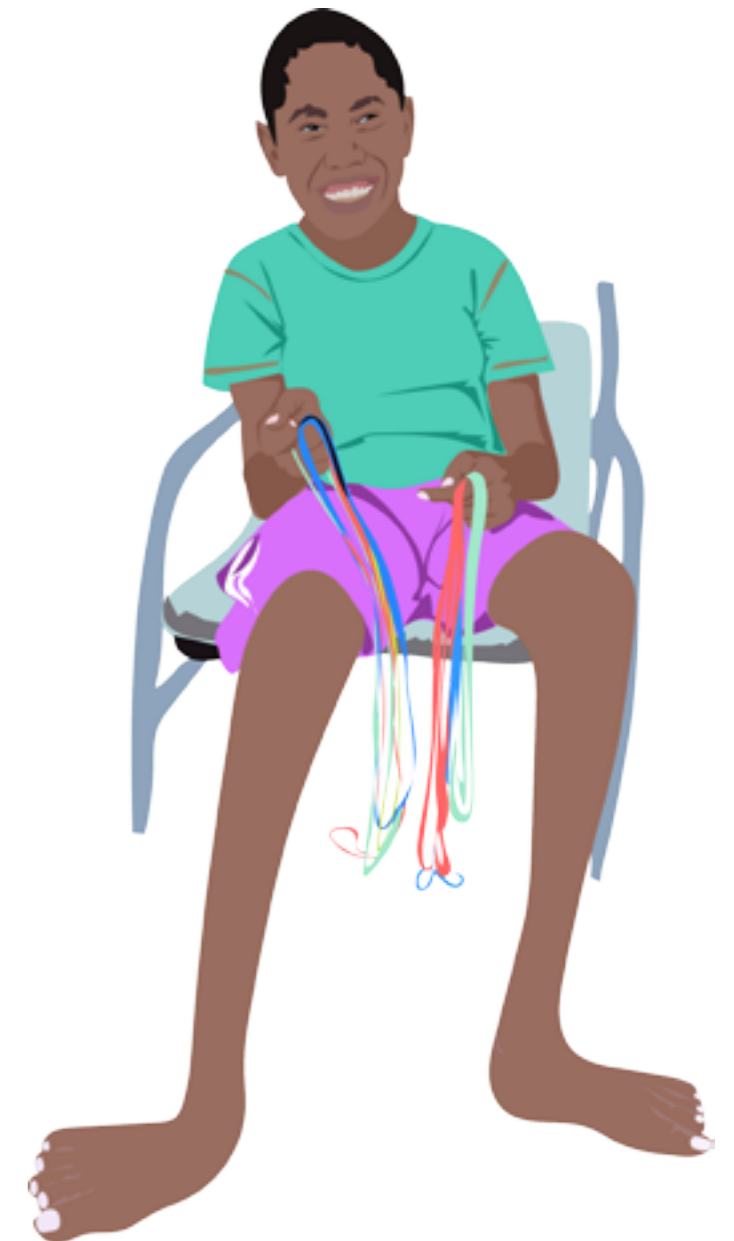
In 2010, a medical team from America, whose focus was people with disabilities, visited Luganville offering free medical services. The team met with SFA and donated disability equipment to the association such as wheelchairs and crutches. They also spent time with SFA members, assessed the types of disabilities they had, and then provided the members with appropriate disability equipment. Dania received a wheelchair.

Dania's story is like many in Vanuatu. Children with disabilities are often neglected and denied their basic rights to enjoy life, like access to education. Local organisations like SFA and the Disability Promotion & Advocacy Association (DPA) continuously work to support people with disabilities directly, and/ or to set

up local member disability organizations comprising of people with disabilities who raise awareness and advocate for disability inclusion at both the community and national level.

For Dania, becoming a member of SFA has given her the chance to engage with the public and experience life outside her home environment and the opportunity to learn even though she didn't attend school.

"I am not able to go to school but I make bracelets and people buy them, this way I earn money to buy things that I want. This little business I have, also makes me feel good about myself"



RHODA EMI

A TAILOR GOES BEYOND THE HEM AND CREATES A BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY



Meet Rhoda Emi, 63 years old, a proud mother, wife and tailor. She was born with both of her legs paralysed, which limits the use of the lower part of her body. Throughout Santo, Rhoda is a well-known and respected tailor with unlimited sewing talent. She is a role model to young people with disabilities showing them that women with disabilities can contribute to society, earn an income and enjoy life.

Rhoda was the first of five children, grew up in rural South Santo, and she had the responsibility of looking after her younger siblings. Despite her disability, she always tried her best to cook for them, wash their clothes and take care of them whenever their parents were not around. "I was very active when I was younger, I would climb coconut and orange trees using just my hands and knees, I also worked in the

garden. I was able to do whatever other people were doing. I had no limits." Rhoda began tailoring when she thought it would be fun to make some new clothes for her younger brothers and sisters, so she got pieces of cloth, drew outlines of shirts and skirts, cut them out with a razor and hand-sewed them. She continued sewing by hand until her mother discovered her growing interest and skills in sewing, so she showed Rhoda how to use her sewing machine.

"I started sewing to help my brothers and sisters have clothes to wear but when my mother gave me the sewing machine I started to sew more and more and developed new design ideas. I taught myself to sew and it became a hobby that I fell in love with." Rhoda's tailoring skills continued to improve and she started sewing a wide variety of clothes using local designs for different dresses, skirts and shirts. Rhoda's started to use neighbouring Pacific designs too, as well as sew graduation gowns.

As Rhoda grew older, she decided to adopt her first child and in 1997 she married her husband, Manley. "When we first met, I told him that I had adopted a child thinking that it would cause him to change his mind but he told me that he wanted to be with me and my child, so I agreed and we've been together ever since. We care for each other, and together we love and look after our children." Over the years, Rhoda and Manley adopted three more children, two daughters and one son.

In 2002, the family moved to Luganville town and they live in the Chapuis area. When living in Luganville, they met Dorian Naliupis, the co-founder of Sanma

Frangipani Association (SFA) which is an organisation that supports and advocates for the rights of people with disability. SFA supported Rhoda with her sewing business by providing her with sewing and micro-business trainings conducted by the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) program. SFA also provided Rhoda with a sewing machine and a hand pedal wheelchair, and helped to advertise her growing sewing business. The increased advertising, combined with the reputation of Rhoda's high quality sewing skills, resulted in a steady increase of customers.

Rhoda's sewing business has attracted many different customers around Luganville including business houses, schools, sports teams and church groups. "When people saw the kinds of clothes I was sewing they started coming to me directly and placing orders. Many lived on different islands and were still placing orders with me in Luganville. Sometimes when I receive many orders I would sew nearly a hundred clothes in one day!" Rhoda sets her prices from 500VT to 2000VT, and **Rhoda feels that she is contributing to the household income and this makes her feel strong and empowered. She and her husband combine their income to provide for their family.**

Rhoda is very appreciative of the relationship she has developed with both SFA and with the Disability Promotion & Advocacy Association (DPA). She hopes in the future to continue to grow her business beyond Vanuatu and include clients from all around the Pacific.



STANLEY MAHE

**A MAN OF GREAT DETERMINATION,
LEADS HIS OWN WAY**

Say hello to Stanley Mahe, a twenty-six year old leader from Ambae living in Luganville, who is known for his independence and determination. Stanley has had difficulty walking since birth and now uses a wheelchair to help with his mobility.

When Stanley was born he was left in the care of his grandmother. His grandmother looked after him well but she did not know exactly what his disability was. Without any access to physiotherapy or other rehabilitation services, she did not have the knowledge or skills to be able to help him strengthen his legs so that he could learn to walk.

Dorian Naliupis, founder of Sanma Frangapani Association (SFA), first met Stanley when he was 3 years old. SFA is an organisation based in Luganville that supports people with disabilities. Dorian

was walking past Stanley's grandmother's house when she saw young Stanley calling out to her from inside the yard. Dorian went inside the yard and met Stanley and his grandmother.

Dorian advised Stanley's grandmother that supporting Stanley to do some regular exercises, would encourage the development of his bones and muscles so that his legs would strengthen as he grew. With no rehabilitation equipment or mobility aides available locally, Dorian and Stanley's grandmother had to improvise. Dorian suggested that Stanley should lean against a banana stem beside the house for small periods of time each day, with support from his Grandmother. Stanley's grandmother did this, and continued the practise almost every day while Stanley was growing up. The technique strengthened his leg muscles until he was able to walk, with support.

Stanley's grandmother then had the confidence to enrol Stanley in kindergarten. Commuting to and from Santo East Junior Secondary School however was too difficult, so it only lasted four months. Although he no longer attended school, his grandmother continued to do the physiotherapy exercises with Stanley every day.

When Stanley was old enough he participated more and more in SFA activities, and now he is one of the main advocates for the association. "I like doing plays to show people about the rights of people with disabilities and I am not ashamed of going out in public because we too have the same rights to enjoy our freedom like other people."

In 2014, he was supported by SFA to travel to Port Vila and work with Wan Smol Bag (WSB) and the Rainbow Disability Theatre for one year. After spending a year in Port Vila, he returned to Luganville and is currently working with SFA to establish a theatre play group that will also promote disability awareness.

"Seeing how my friends at Rainbow Theatre were doing great advocacy work through plays, I wanted to start something similar in Luganville. Rainbow Theatre is a highly respected theatre group that has actors and actresses who have disabilities, and is a great example of how people with disabilities can have a strong voice and give important and personal awareness messages about their own experiences." In 2016, he received a micro-business management training that was conducted by the Vanuatu Skills Partnership program (TVET) in collaboration with SFA. Being the only son in the family, Stanley inherited a cattle production business that his family owned, and Stanley uses the knowledge he gained from the micro-business training to help his family manage the business.

He was also provided a wheelchair by SFA. "Stanley refuses to sit in the wheelchair and have someone else push him, instead he uses it as support for him to walk. Since receiving the wheelchair, Stanley walks everywhere, especially to town," says Dephanny Naliupis, SFA staff member.

In 2016, Stanley met Charlize, another young member of SFA, who later became his girlfriend and now his fiancé. SFA continues to support Stanley and Charlize and have been promoting them as role models for other people living with disabilities.

"Disability for me lies in how I think of myself, just because I have difficulty doesn't mean that I can't walk or go to town by myself and enjoy my life like any other person. When I want to go to the club, I go, there are limitations only if you see yourself as less. Being with SFA all these years has taught me that I myself, am my only real barrier. I would like to encourage other people who are living with disabilities to exercise their rights as well because the discriminations we face will not be defeated if we continue to stay hidden in our communities."



ARTHUR SIMRAI

FROM A VILLAGE IN MALEKULA TO VETERAN DISABILITY ADVOCATOR THROUGHOUT VANUATU



Arthur Simrai, 59, is an exceptional role model for people with disabilities as a fieldworker, actor, sportsman and election candidate.

Born in the village of Walarano in Malekula, as a child Arthur contracted paralytic polio, a highly contagious disease caused by a virus that attacks the nervous system which completely affects the movement of his legs. Arthur's parents initially refused to send him to the local school which was around 1 km away. Fortunately, a priest encouraged them to carry Arthur to school every day for two years until a wheelchair was donated from overseas.

"If I hadn't gone to school, I think I'd still be stuck inside the house. I believe that education is the key to independence for people with disabilities. We learn about life and it means we can get a job afterwards and can provide for our families, not depend on them. It's everyone's right to have access to education, including those with a disability" Arthur completed Year 10 at College de Santo but couldn't continue his education because the school wasn't wheelchair accessible. He worked at a post office and cooperative stores before attending Carrington

Polytechnic in New Zealand through a Kiwanis scholarship. "I went there to study English and also be trained to develop my leadership capacity as a person with disability. I learned a lot from my studies and when I returned I used the skills and knowledge I gained to form disability groups like DPA. I did that by going from community to community and advocating about the rights of people with disabilities."

Arthur then came to volunteer at the Nakato Society Blong Vanuatu, the previous name of Vanuatu Society for People with Disability (VSPD), in 1989. Arthur became one of Vanuatu's first disability fieldworkers after completing training in Community Based Rehabilitation in 1991. As VSPD staff, Arthur had the opportunity to represent the organisation at regional and international meetings in the Pacific and around the globe as well. He was also the first Ni-Vanuatu Paralympic athlete to have competed in Javelin, discus and shot put in the South Pacific mini games in 1982.

As a provincial fieldworker, Arthur travelled around Malampa province visiting people with disabilities. He provided rehabilitation services and equipment, educated parents and caregivers, and conducted disability awareness sessions. Arthur is also a co-founder and member of the Disability Promotion & Advocacy Association (DPA) and a member of the Rainbow Theatre group at Wan Smolbag (WSB) and the Vanuatu Paralympics Committee.

Last year, he was the first person with a disability to run as a candidate in Vanuatu, in the Port Vila Municipal elections with the Graon mo Jastis Pati (Land & Justice Party). **"I want to represent Ni-Vanuatu people with disabilities and fight for their rights. Politicians talk about disability rights but they don't really**

understand them, so I thought running as a candidate I could be on the frontline of current and developing policies that better serve people like myself."

In August 2016 Arthur was recruited to look after VSPD's Early Intervention and Community Based Rehabilitation services which is funded by the Australian Government Stretem Rod Blong Jastis program. Arthur has made more than 90 client consultations around Port Vila in communities such as Mele, Freswota, Blacksands, and Seaside.

"A career as a disability field worker means being employed in an environment where you have to provide care and support to people with an intellectual or physical disability living in our communities. The work is not always easy, but the rewards are worth it. The needs of the people we care for vary, so we must be flexible, adaptable and positive in everything we do."

"I want to tell everyone with a disability: don't let your disability win over you, you must win over your disability."





DUNSTAN RIHAI

TAKING THE LEAD AND CONQUERING HIS FEARS

Meet Dunstan, 59 years old and a man of great humour, determination and perseverance. His positive attitude in life has helped him overcome his challenges from contracting Poliomyelitis (Polio) when he was an infant. Polio is a highly contagious disease caused by the polio virus that attacks the nervous system and transmitted through oral contact with infected faeces.

Polio affected various parts of his body, primarily his legs which resulted in his left foot becoming deformed, and this forced him to use his hands and his strength to drag the rest of his body forward. "When I was younger, I went to the Nazareth School, now called the Lini Memorial College, which is located about two kilometres from my village. Every day I dragged myself on the dirt to school because at the time I didn't have a wheelchair or crutches to support

me. When it rained it was more difficult for me because my hands would slip on the mud. I often arrived at school covered in dirt and mud but I did not give up because I wanted to have an education that would give me the opportunity to travel and further my studies."

Dunstan's mother died when he was a baby, so his aunt and his grandparents raised him. When he was in class six his grandparents could no longer afford to pay for his school fees, so Dunstan was forced to stay home until he found another opportunity that would give him a chance to further his education. "Growing up I was always worried of how my future would turn out because of my disability. I wanted to find a way out of the situation. I was living in my village and I really wanted to broaden my knowledge so I joined the Melanesian Brotherhood for three years."

Dunstan then spent 12 years from 1986 to 1998 working as a receptionist at the Vanuatu Savings Bank (now National Bank of Vanuatu). "My job experiences really grew when I worked at the Bank. My fellow colleagues were supportive of me in my role and this empowered me a lot, and in 1998 I decided to further my education." Dunstan enrolled in International Correspondence School (ICS) to do a Business Information Technology and Management course (BITMan course). After completing that course he registered with Vanuatu Society for People with a Disability (VSPD) and he then received his first pair of crutches. Seeing how eager and committed Dunstan was to furthering his education, VSPD sponsored him to study accounting and business studies at the Vanuatu Institute of Technology (VIT). "I knew about VSPD for many years before I registered but I didn't want to visit them because I was ashamed of my disability. One day I just got the courage to go into their office, they were surprised to see me because they used to see me go past their office all the time but never go inside."

After completing his business studies, Dunstan was then employed by Air Vanuatu Catering in 2006. The company employed many members of VSPD and Dunstan enjoyed his time working there because he worked alongside other people with disabilities who shared similar life experiences and goals as himself.

"Although I have a disability, I don't see myself as having any limitation when it comes to obtaining a higher education or a job. I push myself and take advantage of every opportunity I get. I was quite fortunate that even though I only completed class 6, VSPD supported me as a member of the organisation to have a higher education."

Dunstan has always been a strong advocate for people living with disabilities since joining VSPD and the VCSDN, and one of the achievements he is proud of is the network's inputs into national development plans such as the Public Works Department's construction of buildings, schools and other infrastructure around Port Vila. This is a proud achievement for him because it is through this disability network that the government of Vanuatu is requesting input from people living with disabilities, into national development processes for Vanuatu.

With all the experiences he has gained, Dunstan also hopes to find another job where he can fully utilize his skills. "I have proven that people with disabilities can be employed too so there's no need to give up. Dunstan has a dream, has plans to go to Cambridge University in England to further his studies in English language and Information Technology, a career he has always been interested in."





FREDA WILLIE

WHEN DISCRIMINATION STRIKES, SHE PERSEVERES

Meet Freda Willie, 38, of Tongariki Island. She is an outgoing individual who is a staff member with Vanuatu Society for People with Disability (VSPD) and also a member of the Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network (VCSDN). Freda was born with disabilities, however it was not until when she was two years old that her parents realised that she had difficulties with her speech and walking, which resulted in speech impairment and both legs becoming paralysed.

Freda's membership with VSPD started shortly after she was born. The organisation registered her as a member during a survey conducted at the Vila Central Hospital. In 1985, when Freda was six years old, she went to the Hilton Special School for people with disabilities in Suva, Fiji. Freda spent

eight years in Fiji and attended kindergarten until Year 8 before returning to Vanuatu in 1992. "I really liked the Hilton Special School because it had disability accessible facilities and learning opportunities that we do not have here in Vanuatu. My studies in Fiji were going well but I returned to Vanuatu for family reasons."

After returning to Vanuatu, Freda wanted to continue school but her parents were worried that she would experience too much discrimination from other students, so she stayed at home. "I spent nine years at home and the more I stayed in the house, the less exposed I became to the public. This fed my insecurities and I started to wonder what people would think of me if they saw me in public. For nine years I did not go to town or even to the nearby shops."

VSPD paid visits to Freda at her home and provided opportunities for her to partake in the advocacy work that the organisation is doing, they also gave her a wheelchair. In 2011 VSPD enrolled Freda with Wan Smol Bag (WSB) theatre and Rainbow Disability Theatre, where she took acting classes and performed in plays. Freda was elected as the fundraising coordinator for Rainbow Disability Theatre, and it's through this theatre group that she met her partner, Sergio Moses, who is one of the founding members of Rainbow Disability Theatre. Freda performed in three different plays with Rainbow Disability Theatre, and one of the plays features her own story, and that of her partner, Sergio.

Freda and Sergio have a 5 year old son, Samu who was born without a disability. **"When I discovered that I was pregnant, I was very scared. I had a lot of negative criticism from my friends and family. Many of them believed I shouldn't keep the baby. It was a difficult time for me but I kept my faith, stayed strong, and I knew I had rights to be able to have a child just like my friends. Sergio and I had decided to keep the baby regardless if it had a disability or not. We feel blessed to have our son."**

Freda continued working with VSPD and through them, was introduced to the Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network (VCSDN) in January 2017. Freda is excited about the opportunities that the network is bringing to people with disabilities. "The network supports and strengthens the different messages from all the disability advocacy organisations by highlighting collective advocacy initiatives with and about people with disability. Awareness is so important so that all community members learn about the rights of people with

disability, and so we can put pressure on the government together."

Freda is passionate and articulate about the rights of people with disabilities and in July 2017, Freda was approached by Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to work with the TVET program as an Accessibility Disability Coach. Freda's role requires her to support TVET program efforts to better integrate and support people with disabilities not only in communities, but in the workplace too.

"Physical access is not only about wheelchair access, but about improving access for people with a wide range of impairments. Making premises accessible for people with disabilities makes it accessible for everyone, for people with mobility difficulties and for parents with pushchairs too. My role involves helping TVET identify disability inaccessibility issues and working with people with disabilities to find solutions to these issues". Freda remains active in both her role and association with TVET, VSPD and VCSDN. She hopes that through her advocacy efforts she will eliminate the stigma behind people who live with disabilities in Vanuatu.

"My dream is for future generations of people who are living with disabilities in Vanuatu to be able to have equal access to education like other children, and also be offered employment opportunities after school. VCSDN is taking the lead in promoting the rights of people with disabilities but there is still a long way yet to go. **Our government needs to work more closely with CSOs to prioritize disability inclusion and disability budget allocation in the national development plans of Vanuatu so that the needs and rights of people with disabilities are met."**



NELLIE CALEB

A TRAIL BLAZER LEADS THE WAY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Nellie Caleb, Director and National Coordinator of the Disability Promotion & Advocacy Association (DPA) and also member of the Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network (VCSDN), is one of the network's most dedicated advocates for people living with disabilities in Vanuatu. Her hard work is reflective in her achievements such as the Andy Lynch award that she received in 2015 from the Australian Government for her advocacy in the disability sector. Nellie has also represented Vanuatu in many regional and international conferences, ensuring that the Ni-Vanuatu perspective is heard and listened to during discussions and decisions about people with disabilities.

Nellie, who has a vision impairment, started working with DPA when she volunteered with the association in 2002. "It was challenging for me at first because I lacked the proper knowledge, skills, experience, and support needed to do advocacy. However, with the passion I had for giving a voice to people living with disabilities, I felt motivated to carry out the role and ensure that their rights and voices were being heard, recognised and valued in our communities."

When Oxfam in Vanuatu, through their Governance, Leadership, and Accountability (GLA) program, started the VCSDN network in 2013, DPA registered as member organisation. "Networking with other partners committed to supporting people with disabilities, is an effective way for civil society organisations to collaborate and work together towards achieving common goals and objectives. As an advocate for the past few years I did feel that I had very little power to effectively carry out my role and make change. I feel there is greater momentum to make change happen now that we have the network in place.

Collective voice and action is so much louder and stronger."

During the Tropical Cyclone Pam response in 2015, Nellie raised the real-life experiences of DPA's members, for example people with disabilities missing out on food distributions as they couldn't get to the distribution points, and evacuation centres not having accessible facilities.

"The Pacific Disability Forum came to Port Vila straight after the cyclone, but they left soon after and then nobody was in Port

Vila to support the rights of people with disabilities during the disaster response planning. I was fortunate to get funding from Oxfam to advocate in the cluster meetings to include us in their response activities. I raised the rights of people with disabilities and disseminated our key disability inclusion messages in cluster meetings. I also got people's email addresses and sent them relevant documents to help the clusters address the needs and rights of people with disabilities."

VCSDN meetings during the TC Pam response and recovery phases created a safe space for civil society to share information, interpret national processes and to strategize together to address the challenges for people with disabilities. The network provided input on the accessibility of infrastructure recovery projects in e.g. the tourism, education, health and public works sectors.

When Oxfam co-organised the national Women in Emergency Response and Recovery Forum with CARE International and UN Women, members of the VCSDN were confident and vocal in sharing their experiences. They provided recommendations for improving future disaster preparedness, response and recovery to meet the needs of women and people with disability.

"At the Forum, women with disability could talk out on issues they faced. I was able to encourage a friend to share her story: when cyclone Pam hit, she went and sheltered at her sister's home but she couldn't get her wheelchair in the house. Her house wasn't accessible and she had to stay without her wheelchair. We need stories like this to come out. I have many others."

Ongoing challenges in disability inclusive disaster assessment and planning processes prompted VCSDN members to develop a joint project to pilot a standardised 'good practice' disaster assessment tool. Results from the project will be used to guide and train Vanuatu humanitarian agencies to be more inclusive during humanitarian preparedness and response.

While many challenges remain for people with disabilities, there is no doubt that the collective efforts of VCSDN members and people with disability themselves, are having a positive impact by ensuring that the voices of people with disability are consistently loud and heard in national level planning and decision-making. As Nellie said at the first VCSDN meeting after the TC Pam, **"We can give services but without advocacy we will never change things for the long term in a sustainable way"**.





JAMES PACKETTE

MEET A YOUNG MAN WHO TURNED CLOSED DOORS TO OPPORTUNITIES

Say hello to James Packette, a fashionable young man who can be seen rolling throughout Luganville, Santo. The self-proclaimed 'most respected man in Santo', can be seen on a daily basis in town chatting and joking with his friends.

Although James is rarely without a smile, he has overcome a lot of trauma during his 17 years. James, who was born with both of his lower limbs paralysed due to a spinal disease, was left to be raised by

his grandparents when he was 10 years old, because his parents separated. He may not be able to use his legs, but he has an incredible aptitude for numbers. He is one of the key money lenders in BP Bond, Luganville in Santo.

James started kindergarten in 2009 at the Santo East Primary School in Luganville. Three years later when in 2nd grade in 2012, he refused to go back to school. "Going to school was difficult for me because

I got teased a lot. The other thing was transportation, it was hard catching a taxi to and from school every day, especially when my grandparents were not with me."

Growing up, James spent most of his time at home hanging around with other boys in his neighbourhood. "I only followed my friends inside the neighbourhood street and not further because I was ashamed of my disability and also because I did not have a wheelchair." The mobility difficulties that James experienced without a wheelchair, are starkly evident from the many permanent scars, blemishes and lumps he has all over his lower limbs as a result of him crawling through dirt and gravel.

In 2005 James took part in a church event where he participated in a show and was noticed by Dorian Naliupis, the Coordinator of the Sanma Frangipani Association (SFA), which is an organisation dedicated to supporting people with disabilities. Dorian visited James at his grandparents' house at BP Bond. "I was surprised when mama Dorian visited me because I didn't know how she knew where I lived or who I was. She came and talked to me about what she was doing for people with disabilities and asked me to join Sanma Frangipani Association." James registered with SFA and started attending workshops and participating in their advocacy work.

In 2009, a medical team from the United States visited Santo and donated equipment specifically for people with disabilities, to the hospital, clinics, and SFA. SFA gave two of the hand pedal wheelchairs to James. James reflects on how empowered he felt to visit other places, once he had these wheelchairs. "The wheelchairs were the only reason why I started going further from my house and seeing other places that I haven't

seen before in my 17 years living in Santo. I even go by myself to town when I get bored of staying at home. These wheelchairs changed my life. The advocacy we carry out through SFA allows me to realise that I too have the same rights as all other people."

In 2016, James' sister, Sophia, died due to a heart disease. James was heartbroken but was again determined to overcome his pain and grief.

Recently, a micro-business workshop was conducted by the Vanuatu Technical Vocational Education & Training (TVET) Strengthening Program, in collaboration with SFA. The workshop gave James business knowledge and skills, and he decided to start a money lending micro-business. "I started with a loan maximum of VT1, 000 but now I'm lending a maximum of VT11, 000. I feel really proud as I have 100+ customers. For every VT 1,000 loan, I charge VT100 in interest. I hope to increase the amount of money that I'm lending and maybe even start other businesses."

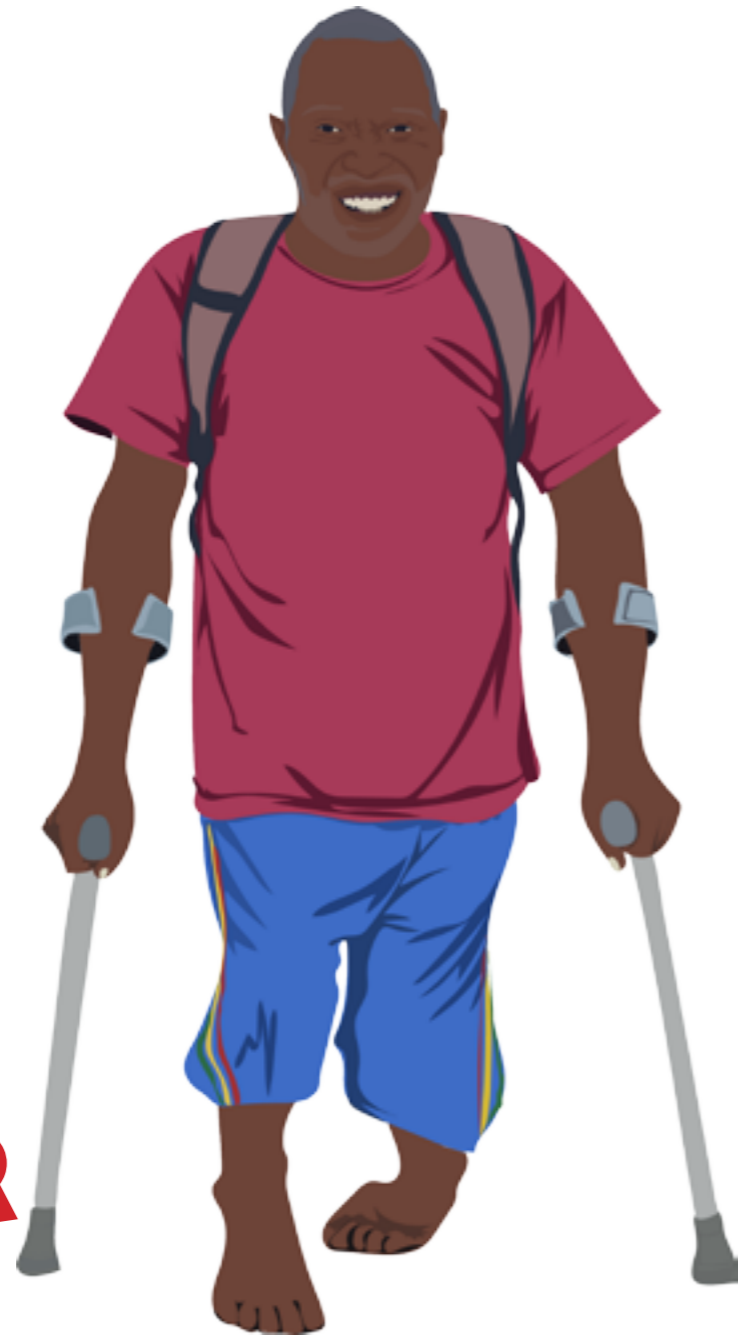
One of James' characteristics is that he always tries to stay positive. **"Yes I have had challenges in my life and I sometimes struggle to overcome them, but I am young and have my life in front of me. How will I live my life to the fullest if I don't choose to be happy? I like making friends and having fun. Laughter makes me happy, it makes me forget my worries. We can't buy laughter and it is the best medicine for me. I try to be an example for other people with disabilities that it's important to be positive and be practical in your life."**

WINSOR TOM

LOCAL VILLAGER TURNS INTO WELL-KNOWN ADVOCATOR AND TRAINING EXPERT

Forty three year old Winsor Tom from Malekula Island is a father of eight children, and lives in Erakor village, Port Vila. Winsor was born premature which resulted in the deformity of his legs.

When he was 6 years old, Winsor's parents enrolled him at the local primary school and everyday his parents would carry him on their backs to and from school. Winsor also used



a walking stick to support him. Winsor's education came to an abrupt end due to the intensity of the discrimination against him by other students. "Kids would play all sorts of tricks on me, push me down on the ground, bully me and call me all types of demeaning names. It got to a point where I felt like I just couldn't take it, so I told my parents that I didn't want to go to school anymore."

Although Winsor didn't finish formal school, he worked in the garden and built a house for himself with the help of his father.

In 1992, Arthur Simrai, a member of Vanuatu Society for People with Disability (VSPD), met Winsor when he visited his village of Malekula as part of an assessment that VSPD was conducting. "Arthur came to my village and did an awareness on the rights of people with disabilities. It was very interesting and informative for me as a person living with a disability. Arthur then asked me to follow him to Port Vila and register with VSPD."

Winsor travelled to Port Vila shortly after and registered as a member of VSPD as well as with Disability Promotion & Advocacy Association (DPA) which is based on Santo. He worked alongside Arthur at VSPD providing rehabilitation services and equipment for people with disabilities, educating parents and caregivers, and facilitating disability awareness sessions around Port Vila and on other islands of Vanuatu.

"At VSPD I learned a lot of important things about disability. Advocates and advocacy is important in helping people be aware of their rights and to have these rights supported by others. VSPD empowers people with disabilities to be aware of and to act on their rights and also advocate for them."

Seeing how dedicated he was as an advocate for disability inclusion, DPA selected Winsor to be a member of their committee board.

VSPD provided Winsor with a pair of crutches and a wheelchair through their community-based rehabilitation program. In addition, after he attended a micro-business management training sponsored by VSPD, they gifted him with VT100, 000 to help him start a small shop. His shop was not that successful, so Winsor refocused his energies on his awareness activities and on his disability inclusion advocacy work which he loves and is good at.

"Even though throughout Vanuatu there have been some changes that have taken place regarding the recognition and treatment of people with disabilities, there are still old practices of tradition and past belief that influence practices that affect people living with disabilities today. VSPD works to break these barriers and provide a voice for people with disabilities, identifying their needs and advocating change and public awareness."



MADLEN NATVUNEI

YOUNG DEDICATED LEADER FOCUSES ON HER PASSION TO EMPOWER WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES



Madlen Natvunei, 27, a member of the Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network (VCSDN) who works with the Vanuatu Society for People with Disability (VSPD) believes that having VCSDN composed of a consortium of different disability organisations is the key to achieving change in the lives of people living with disabilities in Vanuatu.

Madlen is from Erromango Island and lives with her partner, Taussi, in Rentapau area in Efate. She has two daughters who are in primary school. In 2000, a tumour developed in Madlen's spinal cord which affected her back down to her legs. Although the tumour later disappeared in 2001, it left a permanent spinal complication that meant Madlen could not bend her legs all the way and has resulted in her now walking with her legs completely straight.

"I'm not expecting that people should treat me differently because I have a disability. I don't want to be a victim, I am trying to be as independent and as active as I can. I don't want people to feel sorry for me, I want them to understand or at least take the time out to educate themselves, but many don't even try to understand."

Madlen saw the opportunity to educate people when she began her career with VSPD in 2011 as a secretary, and when the position of the Early Intervention Field Worker opened in 2015, she applied and was recruited successfully for the position.

"My role involves working in communities and identifying children who have disabilities and helping them have access to special classes we offer at VSPD, referring them to the hospital, creating educational programs and support groups for parents. I was very shy at first when I started working as a field worker but attending the network meetings has really built my confidence. We are given a chance to chair monthly meetings and through these opportunities as well as other capacity building trainings, I have become more confident to fulfil my role at VSPD."

In 2016 Madlen was also supported by VSPD to travel to Oregon in the United States to participate in a program that allowed people living with disabilities around the globe to experience what it's like to live in a disability accessible environment. There she also received trainings on women's leadership. **"My trip to the US gave me insight into accessibility options that we can support our Government in Vanuatu to develop here. I also felt more confident as a young woman when I returned to Vanuatu because of the practical leadership trainings I received. Now I have no problem speaking out in public and standing up for our rights."**

Madlen strongly believes the disability network plays a very important role regarding 'participation' for women, young people and people with disabilities. The majority of people attending the network

meetings are women, so this correlation reflects the safe space that the network meetings provide for women's participation and leadership. Madlen says that another valuable thing about the network is the fact it is made up of various civil society organizations that share the same interest which is to improve the lives of people with disabilities in Vanuatu. **"Our collective voice and actions are stronger than if we keep trying to make change by ourselves"**.

For VSPD, gender equality has also become a priority, as has employing people with a disability. "The trainings that the VSPD staff have received from the network has enabled people with disabilities, women and girls in communities to participate more in decision making processes. VSPD management can observe that their staff with disabilities are becoming more confident in expressing their ideas."

Evidence demonstrates that the disability network is contributing important influential input into policy development and decisions etc. and as a result decision makers have come to value the purpose of the network. Government and other decision makers are engaging more effectively with people with disabilities, through network invitations. "Some of the national policies and processes that VCSDN members have contributed to include the National Disability Plan of Action 2016, the TVET Disability Inclusive Policy Consultation, the Port Vila Urban Development Project Consultation, the Youth Authority Act Consultation, and the Standardisation of Building Health Facilities for the Ministry of Health. As a young woman advocate for VSPD and VCSDN, I am very proud to be part of this network that is helping to make a change in the lives of people living with disabilities in Vanuatu."



SERGIO MOSES

A VISIONALLY-IMPAIRED MAN SEES BEYOND HIS DISABILITY AND CHANGES VIEWS ON DISCRIMINATION

Sergio Moses, 23, of Tevali Village on Paama Island, has a vision impairment but that doesn't prevent him from seeing all the opportunities that lie beyond his challenges. He has been a very influential person in the disability sector in Vanuatu, including being one of the founding members of Rainbow Disability Theatre in Port Vila, which has toured throughout Vanuatu disseminating community based awareness about the rights of people with disability.

Sergio's right eye is completely blind and his left eye can only see up to 5 metres. At a very early age, Sergio received a lot of discrimination. "I was a very shy kid because I was ashamed of how other kids would tease me and call me names. I spent most of my days inside the house, whenever visitors come over I would run into the house and hide."

In 1998, Sergio was discovered by Vanuatu Society for People with Disability (VSPD) during a survey that the association conducted in the Anamburou area, Port Vila. Within a few months, VSPD enrolled Sergio at the Fresh Wota Primary School and Sergio was really excited to go to school, but he continued to receive discrimination from both students and teachers. "Other students would grab my books from me and step on them, they would slap me, spit on me and rub dirt on my head. One day

they poured dirty kitchen water on me. I was alone and didn't have friends. I often wondered whether I deserved to live or not. I cried all the time after school and so one day I decided never to attend school again."

Although he didn't return to formal school, he continued to visit the VSPD office and attend their workshops. He learned about the rights of people with disabilities and got involved in advocacy campaigns and also acting. "VSPD changed me! I became a totally different person when I started attending the workshops and getting involved in their campaigns. **My shyness slowly crept away and I was becoming aware of my rights. I became empowered to show others that people living with disabilities have equal rights the same as anyone.**"

Over the years Sergio made friends with Willie Sablan, another member of the Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network (VCSDN). Willie introduced Sergio to Wan Smol Bag (WSB) and shortly afterwards the two of them developed the idea of starting a theatre just for people with disabilities. With the help of WSB and VSPD, Rainbow Disability Theatre was established in 2010 and since then has become a well-known acting group throughout Vanuatu, whose plays advocate for the rights of people with disability.

Through the disability network Sergio met his partner, Freda Willie. Sergio and Freda have a son, Samu, who is now 5 years old. "Our son was born without any form of disability". Sergio and Freda reflect on how blessed they feel to have the opportunity to have a family, something that people with disability are often discriminated against for having.

Through the advocacy work that he does around Port Vila, Sergio encountered some of the classmates who used to bully him. "Some of my classmates who used to bully me would come up to me and ask for forgiveness as they regret what they did to me. They even pay for my son's school fees as a means to apologize for what they did to me. I am glad that they've realised their mistakes and are willing to change their attitudes towards people who are living with disabilities."

In 2016, the Anamburou Catholic Mission School also compensated Sergio for their discrimination towards him. When Sergio was at school, teachers wouldn't take additional time to assist him with his school work and told him that he would be

better suited to a school that specialised in educating people with disabilities. They now recognize how discriminatory their comments and attitude was, so as an apology they constructed a two bedroom house for Sergio, his partner and son. "I am so thankful for everything that people are doing for me. **People are starting to realise that those who are living with disabilities have equal rights the same as others. They have decided to change their views and attitudes and that is what we are trying to advocate for.**"

Sergio is one of the most vocal members of VSPD and the Rainbow Disability Theatre, as he continues to advocate for the rights of people with disabilities through campaigns, motivational speeches and acting. His hope is for people in Vanuatu to realise the rights of people living with disabilities and treat them equally.



OLIVER ANTAS

FATHER WITH DISABILITY OVERCOMES ODDS AND TRANSFORMS HIS FAMILY'S LIFE



One of the few two-story houses in Sarakata, Luganville was built by Oliver Antas, a 51 year old man with one leg. Oliver has never let anything stop him from achieving his goals.

Born on Malo Island, Oliver is a father of three and a member of the Sanma Frangipani Association (SFA) on Santo, an organisation committed to assisting people with disabilities to participate as fully as possible in community life in Vanuatu. Oliver was a carpenter for many years but in 2006 he was diagnosed with diabetes and 4 years later his right leg was amputated.

"It was really hard and strange for me because I could not walk like I used to. My wife thought I would not be able to take care of her and our family but I wanted to prove to her that despite the amputation, I could still do the things I used to do and take care of my family."

Oliver 'walked his talk' and in 2012 he began to build the extension of their home. He uses crutches to move around, these were given to him by the hospital. Oliver completed most of the construction by himself and his children helped during weekends. Oliver's determination and persistence, together with his construction skills, resulted in

Oliver transforming their one-story home into a two-story home in just two weeks!

Oliver was excited that he could still be a builder, even though he had only one leg. After completing the house, Oliver constructed two fish ponds in his backyard. "I was listening to the radio and heard the announcer talking about fish ponds that the Fisheries Department was helping people set up. I knew how to do construction, so I decided to make my own." Oliver constructed two fish ponds in June 2016 which included irrigation systems, he then bought 110 tilapia fish from the Fisheries Department and farmed them in the ponds. The fish are mostly for the family's consumption.

Oliver's relationship with SFA started in 2010 when Dorian Naliupis visited him at the hospital during the time his leg was amputated. "After the amputation I was ashamed of going out in public. SFA members really encouraged and supported me to overcome my fears and start to come out of the house. They encouraged me to feel strong: you can't just sit there and feel sorry for yourself, you know! It's you who will decide how your life will be after situations like this happen."

In 2014 SFA provided Oliver with a hand pedal wheelchair which helped him move around more effectively. "Now that I don't do construction on a daily basis, my daily routine includes preparing breakfast and lunch for our children and doing some work around the house. Sometimes I use my wheelchair and sometimes I stick with my crutches. I've also started backyard gardening. I like working, it keeps my energy

going and helps me stay fit and healthy." Oliver is a great advocate for people with disabilities. His story inspires others who have a disability so SFA asked him to be an advocate, an ambassador for disability inclusion throughout Sanma Province. He is passionate about spreading awareness about the rights of people with disabilities, and he is also a role model for people living with disabilities.

"With or without disabilities, life goes on. People should never forget that. I went through a rough time in my life when my leg was amputated but I had to be strong for myself and my family. People are starting to look at my ability rather than my disability, and this is an important change."





RACHEL CHARLIE

A CARETAKER FOLLOWS IN HER MOTHER'S FOOTSTEPS

Rachel Charlie, 42, is an inspiration as she has dedicated her life to caring for people with disabilities. She is a devoted mother, caregiver, advocator and actor, known throughout the disability sector as Auntie Rachel.

Rachel's mother was a nurse, and Rachel and her siblings were taught at an early age to live a life of love and compassion. Her parents encouraged them to care for people who are in need. "In 1988 when I was in class six, my younger sister was burnt while cooking. I took care of her every day and this affirmed my passion for taking care of others."

In 1995 Rachel met her husband Marcel, and they have seven children, one with heart complications (cardiovascular disease). "Our son Pierre is 9 years old and he suffers from heart problems which has affected his growth and brain development, and as a result he has learning difficulties and a hearing impairment. I take care of him and make sure he does not get stressed because it can make his heart problems worse."

In 2013 Helen Tomaki, Rachel's neighbour and member of Rainbow Disability Theatre at Wan Smolbag (WSB), asked Rachel if she could be a caregiver for Freda Willie. Rachel agreed and through Freda, was introduced

to Rainbow Disability Theatre, the Vanuatu Society for People with Disability (VSPD) and the Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network (VCSDN). "After I became involved with Rainbow Theatre and VSPD my experience grew immensely and I learned so many things about different disabilities, and I even acted in some plays. I learnt so much about how to correctly care for people with disabilities, in terms of their health, hygiene, personal care and physiotherapy needs. I now know how to more appropriately care for those who are living with disabilities, including my own son."

VSPD provided Rachel with various trainings which included a micro-business training at the Chamber of Commerce. The organisation also enrolled her son Pierre at the Early Intervention classes at VSPD and they recently helped Rachel enrol Pierre in Pikinini Play Time (child care) in Port Vila. "The vast majority of people with a disability are cared for at home by family and friends. **I like to share what I learn with other carers so they can look at people with disabilities more effectively, and encourage children with disability to go to school and participate in community life.**"

Rachel is passionate about the everyday awareness and advocacy that she can do to

help others understand the rights of people with disability. "I try to explain to people we meet how important it is to treat people with disabilities with respect, just the same as how we treat other people. One day when I was taking Freda to her classes at Chamber of Commerce, the bus driver who drove us was very rude and discriminatory towards us. He told us that Freda's wheelchair was blocking space for other passengers and when he dropped us off he charged us 500 vatu each but the adult bus fare is only 150 vatu per person. There are many times when we get inside a bus, passengers would seem angry and some would even get off to catch another bus. Small discussions with these people about equal rights will hopefully slowly change the mindset of community members." These experiences make Rachel even more passionate about taking care of people who live with disabilities.

She feels so strongly about the access challenges to health services for people with disabilities that she has raised her concerns to the Department of Health regarding access to emergency services for people living with disabilities in rural areas. More generally, Rachel believes that there is a huge need for continued awareness raising and advocacy about disability inclusion. **"Perception about people with disabilities needs to change, through increased awareness at the community level and by putting pressure on the government. Only then will there be change and more support for people living with disabilities in Vanuatu."** And this is why Rachel believes the VCSDN is such an important group of people, and an important mechanism in the country.



WILLIE SABLAN

ADVOCATOR TURNS DISABILITY INTO OPPORTUNITY TO ACHIEVE GREATER CHANGE



Forty-four year old Willie Sablan is a charismatic and perseverant individual who has a contagious laugh to match his smile. The father of one child is from Ifira Island. He had an accident that left him visually impaired but not defeated. In 1994, while Willie was collecting firewood with his relatives, a piece of wood was accidentally thrown at him and landed just above his right eye. Three years later he started to experience difficulties with his vision.

“It was unusual that the blindness happened 3 years after the accident took place. I went to the hospital and the doctor told me that the accident may have weakened my optic nerve. I became completely blind later that year.”

After losing his sight, Willie stayed home and mainly depended on his wife to take care of him. However, things became very hard when

his wife decided to leave him soon after he lost his sight. “My wife couldn’t handle the fact that I was blind and could not do much to support our family, so she left me. It was difficult, I was a blind man with a child to raise. But I didn’t give up.” Willie thought that there must be something out there in the community he could do that would draw on his passion for working with people, his team work abilities, and his sense of adventure.

He seized the opportunity to utilise such skills when in 2006 Andy Lynch, a woman working for Vanuatu Society of People with Disability (VSPD), met Willie in town one day and she asked him to join VSPD. Andy explained what the organisation stood for and Willie immediately became interested. Willie was elected as VSPD’s Chairman the same day he was introduced to VSPD!

“Andy took me to the office the day she met me. To be honest I was scared at first, but the things she was telling me about VSPD and the needs of people living with disabilities motivated me to join the organisation. It was on that day that I was first introduced to the disability advocacy arena.”

Willie, now the Chairman of VSPD, also became Chairman of the Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association (DPA), and Rainbow Disability Theatre. He is Vice Chairman of Port Vila Sports Federation and Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition. Willie is also a member of the Shefa Disability Committee and the National Disability Committee, and of course a member of the Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network (VCSDN).

“I use my disability to advocate and promote the rights of people living with disabilities. Through having all these different positions in the various organisations that I work with, I have gained so much knowledge and experiences in advocating for the rights of people with disabilities. People would tell me to stop working for these organisations because it is voluntary but I tell them that this is my heart, I like the work I am doing. I’m working with my friends and we are advocating for us all.”

Due to his blindness, walking and commuting from place to place is a constant challenge for him. He is often seen walking with Arthur Simrai, another VSPD staff member who uses a wheelchair.

“Arthur and I walk together a lot because he is my eyes and I am his legs. When we go places together, I push his wheelchair and he would direct our path. This act alone in itself is advocacy when we are out in the public.”

Though the VCSDN has achieved quite a few successes since forming in 2015, Willie believes there is much to be done as most people in Vanuatu still don’t know about the rights of people living with disabilities.

“This is my place. When I became blind, I had doubts of what I was going to do with the rest of my life, but thanks to VSPD and my friends in the VCSDN I am here and I’m helping to promote the rights of people living with disabilities and I really enjoy doing it. **All member organisations of the VCSDN must stick together and continue our advocacy work because without us there will be little hope for a better future for people living with disabilities in Vanuatu.**”



SIMON POPAUL

YOUNG LEADER WITH DISABILITY TAKES LEAD AND BUILDS SOLID FOUNDATION FOR HIS FAMILY



Say hello to a young carpenter and gardener who defies all odds and simply builds a wall over any barrier. Simon Popaul, 23, is from Turtle Bay. Simon was born with his legs deformed, and as a result, he primarily uses his hands to help him walk. Simon has a sister, Helen Popaul, who has the same leg deformities and walking challenges.

In 2007 Simon met Dorian Naliupis when he went to the hospital in Luganville to recover from being sick. Dorian helped Simon receive adequate treatment and care at the hospital. She then registered Simon as a member of the Sanma Frangipani Association (SFA) which is an organisation committed to supporting people with disabilities in terms of both advocacy and service support.

Simon really liked school when he was a child. He went to the local Topap Junior Secondary School, and finished school at year 8 level, in 2010. Simon's education came to an end in 2010 when a land dispute caused his school to shut down. **"I liked school because I learned things, math was my favourite subject. But going to school was also difficult for**

me. When I was younger and started going to school the stones on the road would cut me, I didn't like it but after sometime I got used to it. When it rains I had a hard time climbing up the hill and every time when I reached school I had to change my clothes."

After his school closed, Simon decided not to further his education, so he took up gardening and farming instead. He grows local root crops and vegetables which the family eat as part of their subsistence household consumption. There is also enough to sell at the local market, so the family get a little bit of income too. Commuting to the garden every day is a challenge for Simon as it is quite far from the village, so to help decrease his traveling he has built a small hut at his garden location. He sometimes sleeps there so he doesn't have to travel to the village each day after toiling in the garden.

When Simon's father died in 2010, Simon helped his elder brother take care of the family. He and his brother produce copra which they sell to buyers in Luganville town. Though it is hard work, it is the best way that they can earn enough income to support the family. Simon has also started building his own house using bricks and corrugated iron sheets, using the savings from selling his cash crops.

Simon joined SFA in 2007, and during his time as an SFA member, the organisation paid for Simon's school fees, provided him

with micro-business trainings, a wheelchair and also 10 bags of cement to help him build his house. Simon is grateful for SFA's support and assistance, although he admits that he prefers walking with his hands, rather than use a wheelchair or crutches, because it is a form of exercise for him.

With SFA's help, Simon will be participating in the Van2017 South Pacific mini-games which will be held in Port Vila in December. He will be competing in shot put, and is very excited to be involved in this sporting event. "I have never been to Port Vila so I am very excited to take part in the mini-games. Frangipani organisation is like family to me, and Dorian cares for us like her own children. Through SFA support, I am a stronger person with more confidence to articulate my thoughts and opinions to others."





ROBERT WARREN

EMERGING ENTREPRENEUR SEEKS OPPORTUNITY FOR BETTER FUTURE

Thirty-three year old Robert Warren is from Banks Island and lives in Pepsi Area, Luganville. Robert was born with epilepsy, a condition that causes him to have seizures multiple times a day. Although he is a shy person, his talent speaks volumes.

When he was just one month old, the condition caused severe muscle cramps in his right foot and leg, which resulted in a paralysis-like immobility of the affected muscles, and Robert's right leg became paralysed. "The seizures would happen every 5 to 6 minutes every day and every time they happen I would pass out for an hour or so. It was very hard for me. I could not play like other kids and enjoy life like I wanted to. My parents were always worried about me thinking that I would die."

Robert went to Kamewa Primary School until class 6. Robert then finished school in 1999 because it was challenging keeping up in class. "Because of the effect of the seizures on my brain, I could not think at the normal speed like I used to. I realised that I became slower mentally and I could not keep up in class, so I decided to stop going to school."

After leaving school, Robert spent most of his time at home. He could not find a job in Luganville so he decided to start his own income generating design business where he stencils designs on x-ray paper and then paints in the designs onto lava-lavas and t-shirts. He quickly became known for his wonderful artistic talent.

Over the years, Robert's epilepsy condition decreased and as long as he is mindful of his dietary intake, he doesn't suffer from seizures anymore. "I can eat anything except for chicken. I realised that whenever I eat it, my epilepsy would flair up and bring about the seizures, so I completely stopped eating it."

In 2012, Robert was elected as the Sports Inclusive Volunteer of his community and the neighbouring community of Sarakata, one of the largest residential areas in Luganville. Robert's role was to promote and support the inclusion of people living with disability in Pepsi and Sarakata in local sports events held in Luganville. He really enjoyed this role as it gave him purpose and Robert realised he loved sharing his

experiences about living with a disability, and being a role model for others.

Through this volunteer role, the Disability Promotion & Advocacy Association (DPA) got to know Robert, and he registered with the association in 2013. DPA supported him by involving him in awareness workshops and campaigns on the rights of people with disability. Shortly after joining DPA, Robert discovered the Sanma Frangipani Association (SFA) and registered with this association as well.

With support from SFA and DPA, Robert's knowledge and skills on how to advocate for people with disabilities increased significantly. "People with disability are sometimes treated like they are not humans. People would call me stiff leg or handicap and it hurt a lot. Being with SFA really empowered me to see myself as equal to other people and also stand up for myself when I am discriminated against."

SFA and the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) program supported his career aspirations by providing him with trainings on micro-business management as well as formal design training to further strengthen his artistic talents. They also provided him with equipment for his drawings and designs. Robert used the business management and design skills he learned to improve his products and his business.

Robert met Peter Dick, another SFA member who is also an artist. Peter mentors Robert and gives him support and advice about

running his art and design micro-business.

"Just because someone has an impairment, doesn't mean that they are different and cannot do what others can. People with disabilities are strong because it's harder for us to make a living but the difficulty doesn't stop us, it makes us push harder. We are the example of what happens when you are determined and have support from organizations like from SFA, TVET and DPA. Yes, we struggle and yes it's hard but we don't see it as a barrier, we see it as a chance to get creative."



KALSAL KALO

ONE MAN'S LEG AMPUTATION LEADS TO OPPORTUNITIES FOR A COMMUNITY



Kalsal Kalo, 57 years old, is the Vice Chair of the Disability People's Organisation (DPO) at Elaw Elang area in Erakor. He never thought he would be living with a disability.

In 2016, Kalsal's right leg was amputated after contracting a bone infection. His life

changed enormously. "I used to be active before my leg was amputated. I was a carpenter, a chef, a security guard and I was in the Vanuatu Mobile Force in 1980. After the amputation, I just sat in my wheelchair and use my crutches. I didn't think I could do much."

When Kalsal was ordained as the Chief's representative of his community in 2014, he knew very little about the needs and rights of people living with disabilities. He witnessed some of their struggles when Category 5 Tropical Cyclone Pam struck Efate Island in 2015. Kalsal evacuated community members including people with disabilities to a church building in the village.

"We moved the people with disability to our church during TC Pam and I thought that we had done a good job of getting them to safety, but now that I have a disability myself I realise that all we did was get them to safety but the accessibility of the church house was far from what they needed."

Members of the Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network (VCSDN) discovered Kalsal during a visit to Erakor village in 2017. The

network was aiming to establish an Erakor based Disabled People's Organisation (DPO). The fact that Kalsal had a disability and was a community leader meant that he was a great candidate for the position of Vice Chairman of the DPO committee.

"When they came to visit me, I didn't really know what the disability network was about. Network members asked me to join them. I hesitated at first but once I joined and saw how strong they were as a network and how they were advocating for the rights of people with disabilities, this really got me interested."

Now living with a disability himself, Kalsal has first-hand insight into the rights and needs of people living with disabilities. He saw how expressive and encouraging members of the VCSDN were, and that really increased his confidence. After his first meeting with the network, Kalsal went back to his community and tried to organise a meeting with the Chief's council to discuss ways of how to improve the living conditions of people with disabilities in their community but it was challenging getting everyone together.

"It made me reflect on how my attitude was before my leg was amputated, because this was how I used to treat people with disabilities. I didn't take them seriously or really listen to them, and now it is happening to me! I took matters into my own hands and started creating small projects to help people with disabilities in the community."

Kalsal started a small shop in September 2016 to provide him with a small consistent income. After his first meeting with VCSDN members in 2017, he was motivated to also start a poultry business. "The idea

came to me after seeing the Stories of Change booklet produced by Farm Support Association (FSA) and Oxfam, about farmers creating their own poultry businesses, so I decided to create my own. I also wanted to show people who are living with disabilities that they too are also capable of doing things on their own, so they should not be looked down on. **It's important that people don't just look at our disabilities but look at our abilities."**

Kalsal also started a nursery of dwarf coconuts, coconut trees that don't exceed 7 feet so that he can easily reach them. His aim is to distribute coconuts to people with disabilities throughout his community, so they too can enjoy planting and drinking their own coconuts.

"There are about 90+ people living with disabilities in the entire Erakor community but so far I have only met twenty. People with disabilities are not treated well here in Vanuatu. Sometimes, family members are ashamed of them so they do not let them outside. They are hidden inside their houses and this causes them to become more ashamed. There are some families who love their children with disabilities and who advocate for the rights of children with disabilities. This demonstrates to others how to treat children with disabilities with respect."

Kalsal believes that the VCSDN network is doing great work in promoting the rights of people with disabilities in Vanuatu. "I am in a unique position where I know what it's like to be a person without a disability as well as someone living with a disability! With this experience, I will try my best to open the minds of people in my community to realise the needs and rights of people with disabilities so that we can all provide better living conditions for people with disabilities in our community."



DEPHANNY NALIUPIS

SFA CO-FOUNDER CREATES ACCESSIBLE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Dephanny Naliupis, 22 years old, is a young pioneer who has an infectious smile and strong determination. She fights for the rights of people with disabilities on a daily basis through the Santo based organization that she co-founded, Sanma Frangipani Association (SFA), which supports and advocates for the rights of people with disability.

Dephanny advocates for others and also for herself as she was born premature which caused her to be born with cerebral palsy, a condition which minimises her control over her body movement, muscle coordination and tone, reflex, posture and balance.

When she was in school, Dephanny encountered difficulties writing because her hands couldn't firmly grip the average size pencil or pen. "I faced a lot of challenges when I was in school and I had a hard time keeping up with the other kids in class, so my school mates told me that I may as well stay at home. Every day I would go home crying because I just couldn't keep up in class, no matter how hard I tried. I really loved learning so I felt very sad and told my mum that I didn't want to go to school anymore. Mum knew I loved school so she wouldn't let me give up. She bought be a

big pencil for me to take to school and it helped a lot. I could grip it well so I could write faster. I carried that big pencil with me everywhere I went, including to school."

Dephanny spent her primary schooling years at the Santo East Primary school before passing her year 8 exams and furthering her secondary studies at the Aore Adventist Secondary School. Dephanny experienced teasing and discrimination every school she went to. "Because I could not keep up with what the teacher wrote on the board, I would ask my classmates if I could borrow their books to copy notes but they refused and would tell me that I should quit school because I wouldn't pass the exams anyway.

Although their constant negative comments made me upset, it made me even more determined to show them that I was capable of finishing school just like them."

During her Year 12 final exams in 2012, Dephanny broke down in tears while taking the exam because she was not allowed to complete the exam paper, as time ran out. "I had the answers in my head but the problem was that I couldn't write fast enough. They wouldn't allow more time for me to finish. At that moment I just gave up and cried."

Although Dephanny's formal education ended in 2012, she hasn't stopped educating herself and spends most of her free time reading and helping her parents, Dorian and Tony Naliupis, run the family founded organisation, Sanma Frangipani Association which started in 2003.

Dephanny decided on the name because of her love for the frangipani flower and how the flower represents equality. "The flower's white and yellow colours remind me of light and love, and how we are all equal no matter what differences we have."

In 2013, the Vanuatu Football Federation (VFF) met Dephanny and offered her the roles of Development Officer and Social Inclusion Ambassador under the Just Play program, a project aimed at promoting soccer development for all children, inclusive of those with disabilities. As part of her job, Dephanny disseminated

information and provided advice about how to include children and youth with disabilities into soccer teams and tournaments.

Dephanny feels grateful for all the opportunities she has had with regards to advocating for the rights and inclusion of people with disability. **"I want people to focus more on what we have and not what we lack. I hope that through organizations like SFA and DPA, we can promote that type of thinking. Even if it seems like a small change, it can make a big difference."**

Dephanny is following the footsteps of her mother, with the hope that SFA will continue to grow so that it can reach as many other children and people living with disabilities not only in Sanma province but the rest of Vanuatu as well.





ELLIE ENOCK

A PARALYMPIC ATHLETE MAKES LOCAL HEADLINES

Meet Ellie Enock, 28 years old, a young woman from Atchin Island, Malekula whose life took a tragic turn when she had a car accident, but sustaining her significant injury also created an array of potential opportunities. Ellie is a sports enthusiast

and enjoys the arts so she is a proud member of the Rainbow Disability Theatre, a theatre whose members are people with disabilities. Ellie wasn't born with a disability. When she was 20 years old, Ellie was in a car accident while driving with a

friend. "My foot became detached from my leg and my leg was crushed during the accident, so it had to be amputated. I was unconscious until I woke up at the hospital."

"I used to work as an Administrative Officer and a Hair & Makeup artist at the Rina's Island Spa but I stopped working there after the accident. I had to learn how to use crutches to move around, and many of the buildings are not accessible for people with a disability. There are only a few ramps, most buildings have only stairs."

In 2013, Ellie's friend, Francis, a member of Wan Smol Bag (WSB) and the Rainbow Disability Theatre asked her if she was interested in joining Rainbow Disability Theatre. "I was painfully shy, I didn't know what people would think of me. I used to be really active and outgoing but lost a lot of confidence after my leg was amputated. The thought of being in front of people scared me. However, I agreed to visit the theatre and see for myself what they do, and if it was something I was interested in, I would join."

With Rainbow Disability Theatre, Ellie had the chance to learn about the rights of people living with disabilities and was also given acting lessons. Acting help to develop Ellie's confidence and enabled her to come out of her shell and overcome her fears about being in public as an amputee. She became a member and has been with Rainbow Theatre since 2013. Ellie travels with the team around Vanuatu acting and advocating for the rights of people with disabilities.


"I used to look down on people with disabilities as if they had less rights than me, that they weren't important. But now that I have a disability I have

insight into how that discrimination feels. I have now been taught about the rights of people living with disabilities, and I realised how wrong and discriminative my views were, so I want to help change the negative perceptions other people have about us."

Ellie decided to start her own private hair salon business. "My partner works and earns most of our income and I get paid working with Rainbow Theatre but I realised that I can put my skills to good use by running a private hair salon business at home. This way I can earn additional income to support my family."

Rainbow Theatre also encouraged Ellie to join the Port Vila Rowing Club. She competes in the coxless four category and is one of two rowing club members who have a disability. Ellie was featured in the local paper, the Daily Post, where they spoke of her bravery and spirit to conquer the challenges she faced after her amputation. She is also receiving shot put training and will be competing at the Van2017 South Pacific Mini Games.

"Rainbow Theatre helped increase my knowledge in disability issues and has also taught me things about climate change, domestic violence, and life skills. **After my accident I thought that that life was over for me, but Rainbow Theatre (WSB) allowed me to realise that even with a disability, I can still bring positive changes in my life and in other people's lives."**

 Oxfam in Vanuatu November 2017

This collection of 'Stories of Change' was compiled by Oxfam and the Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network (VCSDN). These twenty-four stories give a voice to people living with disabilities who embraced the opportunity to emphasize how working with VCSDN empowered them and changed their lives. All interviewees have voluntarily shared their story.

Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network (VCSDN) is a national Non-Government network committed to facilitating collaboration and joint action between its members so they can advocate effectively to decision makers and contribute to greater positive change for people with disabilities in Vanuatu.

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For further information about the Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network (VCSDN), you can contact Oxfam on +678 25786 or visit the Vanuatu Society for People with Disability (VSPD) at <http://vanuatusocietyfordisabledpeople.org/>

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