

**SUMMER/FALL 2019
NEWSLETTER**



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends of Tonga Community,

I am pleased to share with you our Summer 2019 newsletter. Our goal for this newsletter is to share with you the progress we have made over the last six months and to raise awareness of our upcoming projects and events.

In the last six months, the board has focused on expanding our reach, our current programming, and increasing our fundraising capabilities. To date, we currently have over 300 participants in our Pen Pal program and are also getting ready to launch our 2020 scholarship project to add to our 11 currently funded students. Likewise, we are partnering with other stakeholders and are making progress on our Kindergarten rebuilding project. We are very excited to announce that we will be partnering with Schools for Children of the World on this project. Also, we are pleased to announce our new Online Library for Tongan teachers— please see page 4 for more information.

Our continued success is contingent upon the generosity of our community. We hope we can continue to rely on you to fund our programming. Since we are an official 501c3, all donations are tax deductible. We currently are raising money for our 2020 scholarship program and our Kindergarten building project. Please consider donating and sharing our projects with your network and on your social media platforms.

Please check out our projects at <https://www.friendsoftonga.org/campaigns>

We look forward to continuing to expand and cultivate the rich FOT community. We would love to hear from you and potential ideas on how we can grow and maximize our impact in the Kingdom of Tonga.

‘Ofa atu,

Michael Hassett
Friends of Tonga President

INSIDE THE NEWSLETTER

MEMBER MONTHLY SPOTLIGHTS..... 2-8

PROJECT AND EVENT UPDATES....9-12

FRIENDS NEWS... 13-14

CULTURE CORNER...15

DONATIONS AND MEMBERSHIP16

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SCHOLARSHIP FEATURE

In 2019, with the generous support of friends, family, and passionate supporters of Tonga, Friends of Tonga officially launched its secondary school scholarship program. Last January, we used \$1,200 USD to pay the Form 1 school fees (equivalent to US 6th grade) of 11 promising in-need boys and girls, on the main island of Tongatapu. Throughout the year, we have engaged the scholarship recipients and their families to gauge the effect of the scholarships and see how the students are performing in their schools and communities.

Board member Harrison Siegel is leading the scholarship committee and implementing our 2020 scholarship strategy. In 2020, Friends of Tonga plans to expand the scholarship program to the islands of Vava'u and 'Eua, while continuing to fund last year's scholarship recipients who met certain academic and community standards. With a fundraising goal of \$2,000, \$1,415 has been raised to date. We expect our 2020 application to go live in December of 2019.

Friends of Tonga sincerely and deeply thanks all of our generous donors who have made and continue to make the scholarship program possible. The cost to fund one student, for one academic year, is \$100 USD. With your help, we are thrilled to be able to support the education of Tongan children.



KINDERGARTEN REBUILDING PROJECT



The UNICEF tent students are currently learning in.

Friends of Tonga is working to build a Kindergarten in Ta'anga, 'Eua!

The Kindergarten in Ta'anga, 'Eua is one of the only locations on the island where parents can send their children for kindergarten. On February 3, 2018 Cyclone Gita, a category 5 cyclone (category 4 hurricane) hit the Kingdom of Tonga and destroyed much of its infrastructure, including the building that Ta'anga was using for kindergarten classes. Although the community is working to rebuild a hall for the community, the kindergarten is currently using a donated UNICEF tent. The cyclone also destroyed all of the school supplies that the teacher's and community had purchased for the class.

With your donation, Friends of Tonga will be able to create a specialized kindergarten building. The teachers' goal is to create a kindergarten where their students feel comfortable and safe. The new kindergarten building will fit all current students- with room to grow- and will be handicap accessible, earthquake and cyclone resistant, have running water, natural ventilation and a new playground.

With a building specified for these students to learn in, students will be provided with the foundation they need to succeed in primary school and beyond.

Won't you support these students' education? Please help us in building a space for the Ta'anga Kindergarten to thrive!



What the Ta'anga Future Kindergarten could look like. Photo from our partner, Schools for Children of the World.

NEW PROJECT: FRIENDS OF TONGA

RESOURCE LIBRARY



Friends of Tonga is always working to create new and innovative ways to help support education in the Kingdom of Tonga.

One challenge facing Tonga is that educational resources, especially books, are limited. This is due to many factors: it is inordinately expensive to send them, the climate is inhospitable (limited climate control and very humid), and dissemination to the right people who would use and care for books is difficult. This contributes to a major gap in education delivery. Although English is the second language in Tonga, English language books are limited, and often students do not hear stories read by fluent English speakers.

To meet this need, Friends of Tonga is working to create a resource bank of videos in which English speakers record themselves reading stories. With these videos, Tongan teachers can have at their fingertips a variety of read alouds to provide to their students. It is our goal that these videos will promote a stronger love of reading in Tonga and improve students' English reading and comprehension skills.

So far, we have permission from more than 20 authors, including Patricia Polacco, Steve Metzger, Janet Stevens and more, for their books to be recorded and shared on the website, with some authors even sending in their own videos of themselves reading the stories!

Friends of Tonga will be working hard on this project in the upcoming months.

You can see the start to our resource library here: <https://www.friendsoftonga.org/cpages/videolibrary/5d026718893aaa17efe1b966>

If you are interested in being a part of this project, we could use help by contacting authors, recording read alouds, and creating accompanying resources.

Please contact us as friendsoftonga2018@gmail.com.

EVENTS

This past May, FoT was hosted by Tampico Grill, in Laurel, MD. Tampico Grill is a family owned restaurant whose mission is to serve quality Tex-Mex food from scratch. It is owned and managed by two brothers: Eduardo and Hector Cabrera.

At the beginning of our fundraising event, the Cabrera brothers placed a bucket on the checkout counter and generously offered to donate 30% of all receipts deposited in the bucket! With the generous support of the Laurel community, we raised \$400, which is enough to sponsor 4 scholarships for the 2020 school year!

Thank you Tampico Grill for hosting us!

If you ever find yourself in the Laurel area, be sure to check out Tampico Grill!

<https://www.tampicogrill.com/>

On Saturday, May 18 Friends of Tonga threw it's first Spring BBQ/ potluck event in DC! Members from the RPCVs Tonga and Fiji community were in attendance as well as Pacific Islanders interested in getting involved in FOT. During the event FOT was able to share more about its upcoming and ongoing work over the last year and connect with those in the DMV community. Check out Facebook for pictures of the event.



UPCOMING EVENTS

November 2nd: Come join Friends of Tonga on Saturday, November 2nd from 3-5pm at your favorite RPCV owned Exiles Bar in D.C., as we get together for our third event of the year!! FOT will be raffling off some Tongan swag as we raise money for our 2020 Secondary School Scholarships. Help us in our final push in sending students to school this year. For more information about the event check out FOT's Facebook and Instagram page. We look forward to seeing you there!!

Exiles Bar (upstairs room). 1610 U St NW Washington, DC 20009
Interested in joining FOT's events planning committee? Want to host a FOT event in your area? Have suggestions for our next event? Email friendsoftonga2018@gmail.com for more information.

Meet the 2019 Friends of Tonga Member Monthly Spotlights



March 2019: Tina Martin Peace Corps Volunteer 1970-71

Tina is a returned Peace Corps Volunteer (RPCV) from Group 5. She served from 1970-1971, in Ha'ateiho, Tongatapu where she taught at 'Atele Si'i and at the Fasi and 'Atele Teacher's Retraining Center.

After Tonga, she used her Peace Corps adjustment allowance and traveled to Spain. She ended up staying on and teaching in Madrid for over a year. Following her stint in Spain, Tina taught at a girls' lycee in Medea, Algeria for two years, before returning to San Francisco. She earned her MA in linguistics, got married, and had a baby (who will be 40 this month!).

In 2008, Tina was able to return to Tonga, where she was hosted by her friend 'Ana Taufe'ulungaki and got to see many of her friends from her time in Tonga- including her friend Kili who was only a child when Tina lived in Tonga.

In 2014 Tina retired from teaching ESL at City College of San Francisco for 32 years, but before her retirement she taught and trained teachers on 4 continents--Europe, Africa, Oceania, and North America. (She could say 5 if she counted a methodology seminar she was part of in Japan).

Her time in Tonga and subsequent travels had a profound influence on her life and she has written extensively about her experience. She wrote a description of her home that was used in a PC reading of journals in the Capitol Rotunda in 1988 and was later used for Peace Corps Recruitment.

Currently, Tina is working hard on a memoir she calls "Everything I Should Have Learned I Could Have Learned in Tonga." Other things she has written are in anthologies ("An Algerian Wedding," "Crash Course in Spanish: Being Robbed in Chile," and "God, President Kennedy, and Me") and two Tonga-related pieces, "Under the Tongan Sun" and "Eco-Bore Takes the Good Old Days Back to Tonga."

When asked to participate in this spotlight, she was asked to share her favorite memories from Tonga and what advice she would have for future volunteers. To "adequately" respond, she combed through her diaries (all 28 of them!) she kept while a volunteer.

Tina's favorite memory of her time in Tonga may be her experience with Kili. She says volunteers were told they wouldn't have a social life, but Tina had a very active one. She dated a lot of men (she remembers fondly) and she took the Tongan children along on some of her dates. Kili was one of these children. She loved the children and had a lot of affection and respect for the teachers she taught with.

Her advice to current volunteers is a piece of advice that the 1971 PC Tonga Staff gave her group: "Be sure to get off to a slow start" and "Be people-oriented rather than job-oriented or project-oriented."

She also thinks it's wise to remember what they were taught in cross-cultural training: "It's a valid expression of human existence." However people choose to live their lives--spend their time and money, get married or not get married, have children or not have children, etc.--is "a valid expression of human existence." We don't have all the answers, but we can have respect for the varying answers people come up with to live their lives..

She highly encourages volunteers to keep a diary and advises them to put dates--month, day, and year--on every page because she too often sees "Tuesday" in the 28 diaries she kept--just the day of the week. But in this computerized age, she assumes that photos and diary entries are dated electronically.

Lastly, she would encourage PCVs to be grateful that they were assigned to Tonga even if they asked (as she did) for any French or Spanish-speaking country. She didn't know enough to ask for Tonga, but the experience was unique and she is extremely grateful for it.

Tina has currently committed to donating \$32, monthly, to Friends of Tonga- this was her living allowance when she lived in Tonga. Her ongoing donation is in honor of her friends Kili Solini Hu'akau and 'Ana Taufe'ulungaki, along with her closest Peace Corps friend who passed away in 2010, Andrea Ptolemy.

April 2019: Otolata Fainga'a: Teacher, Community Developer, Friend of Tonga



Lata was born and raised in Ha'apai, before moving to the main island of Tongatapu to train at the Teachers' Training College. She knew being a teacher was her calling when she went back to Ha'apai, after high school, and the principal and teachers invited her to come help out at the local school. She was hooked immediately and has been teaching for the past 27 years. She currently works at the Government Primary School, in Fahefa.

Lata has been a counterpart for 4 different Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs): 1 in Ha'apai and 3 at her current school. She believes that it is extremely beneficial to work with PCVs. For example, it has helped her to appreciate the differences between groups of people; however, she notes that the differences are often skin deep and that we are all the same on the inside. She enjoys her time with the volunteers and likes to practice her English and learn about life in America. She jokes that in exchange the volunteers get to eat her food and use her washing machine! She followed up, more seriously, by saying that she welcomes volunteers into her family and after 2 years of working alongside them, they become a part of her family (she calls them her palangi (foreign) children).

Lata is a leader in the Fahefa community. She is a co-founder of Ma'u He 'Ofa, a group comprised of women from around her village who focus on community development and environmental issues. Most recently, the group came together to build a playground made mostly out of old tires. Their innovation and gumption has received national attention when they won a government-led competition to clean up after Cyclone Gita. The prize included a sum of money. Rather than spend it all, they decided to open a savings account and deposit their winnings to fund future projects. She is extremely pleased with this group as it "helps her community thrive."

Lata is the first Tongan teacher to partner with Friends of Tonga's Pen Pal Program. She has led this project in multiple grade levels and has already noticed an improvement in her students' English ability. She has also conveyed her students' excitement and engagement around the program and hopes to expand it to the entire school.

We asked her if she had to describe to someone what Tonga's best attributes are and what are the biggest challenges facing Tonga, what would she say?

She responded by saying that Tonga is gorgeous and has wonderful beaches! She recommends that everyone go to the beaches of Ha'apai. The best quality about the Tongan people, according to Lata, is their friendship and easygoing lifestyle. She notes, "Tongans are welcoming and friendly to everyone and will invite you in to eat the last of their food."

She believes the biggest challenges facing Tonga is lack of job opportunities for youth, money for families, and lack of funds for education and development. She thinks people need to have better education, jobs, housing and ways of earning a living.

She hopes that as Friends of Tonga expands, students can attain higher levels of education and come back to Tonga with these skills to create jobs for people here. She also thinks Friends of Tonga creates a connection between Tongans and the rest of the world. She would like to see Friends of Tonga collect food, clothes, and materials for houses to send back to the Islands to increase the quality of life in Tonga.

May 2019: Virginie Dourlet: Teacher, Artist, Film Festival Organizer and International Spokesperson

Virginie hails from Paris, France. She discovered her calling thanks to her year as an Erasmus exchange student in Copenhagen, Denmark, where she pursued her Master's degree in Scandinavian studies: she would live overseas and teach French to earn her money. Afterwards, she lived and worked in the Netherlands, Mexico, the Czech Republic, Canada, and Australia before coming to Tonga. She has lived in Tonga, now, for over six years.

So why and how did she end up in Tonga? In Australia she worked for two years as an International Volunteer in Administration (no joke –that's a thing) at the French Embassy in Canberra, as the attaché for language education cooperation –working with all the schools, universities and French language centres in Australia and networked with the French territories and representatives in the Pacific region as well.

She then saw the advertisement for a position as International Solidarity Volunteer (a different programme) to “relaunch the Alliance française in Tonga and cooperate with the local administration, education sector and cultural scene.” She knew there was no Alliance française (French cultural centre) Embassy, or consulate, in Tonga and that was very much a challenge to her taste, and that she was qualified for. Three days later, she was interviewed and pretty much the following day she was doing the paperwork to fly to Tonga!

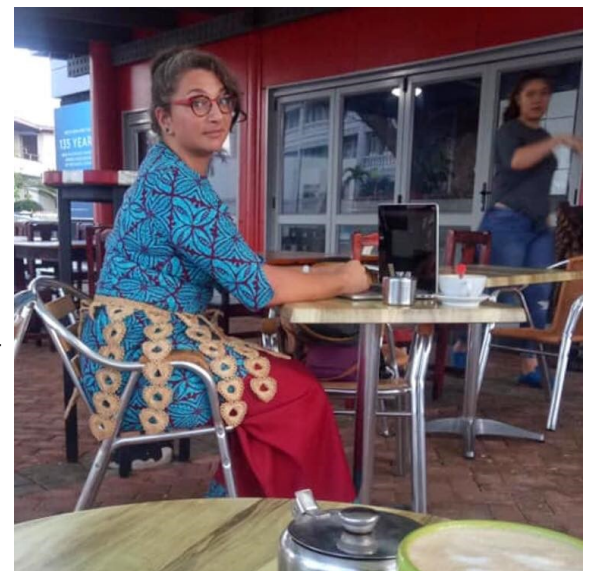
She arrived in Tonga in January 2013. Her first year was extremely busy, since she was relaunching the Alliance Française project by herself; however, during her second year, she was able to develop a team to help with her work. This allowed her to have more free time which led her to discover traditional Tongan art and hang out with local contemporary artists. Hanging out with local contemporary artists and cultural promoters who are very involved in their community became her main activity –and still is to this day. Similarly, she spends her free time with artists and a bunch of youth, some of which have dropped out of school, or who find it hard to fit in society.

At the end of her volunteer assignment, she was absolutely not ready to leave. The director of the Ministry of Education and Training offered her to work for the Curriculum Development Unit to write the syllabus for the French language subject in secondary schools. There she spent over 2 years in that position doing all she could to deliver high quality education products in the midst of extreme reforms in the education sector.

After 2.5 years, she had had enough of the office life when serendipity struck: the French teacher who had been recruited by the Government of New Caledonia to work at Tonga High School was bailing out on them at the last minute. Virginie jokes that after nearly two years of teaching she “still hasn't murdered any students, which is good, and has only cried profusely once: at last year's graduation ceremony, when a student she's known since she was in Form 3 (first year of elective subjects – which French, Japanese and Chinese are) won the King's Prize for best language student as she graduated from high school (Form 7), and less profusely too many times to count, each time anything makes her too proud to have taught something right to a kid, be that in French or life-stuff.”

Though teaching isn't her main passion, she has found other projects that have really engaged and motivated her throughout her tenure in Tonga. Most of the time, that's at Seleka. Tongan visual artist, Tēvita Lātū, founded an art circle in 2008 to teach the youth of his village how to draw and paint. It has become a massive, free range kind of art group and youth initiative, working as much in painting, dancing, music etc. as in community work and consultancy at a local and national level, where everyone is welcome and will find a non-judgmental, inclusive group of people to hang out with, do stuff with, and if necessary, find counselling and even a halfway home. Virginie helps where she can: with the counselling when sought out (being a pālāngi (foreigner) can help attract certain confessions) and with the administration of the art.

She has been appointed “international spokesperson” and “international project manager” for the group, and has been loving organizing or helping organize participation to workshops, residencies and exhibitions in New Zealand, Tahiti, the Cook Islands, New Caledonia and Fiji for the artists, and particularly Tēvita Lātū. Her original philosophy was “the less he does in admin, the more time he has for the youth” but she's eventually become his manager because “he's an amazing artist who deserves to show his work to the world but he's absolutely hopeless with communication. Literally. He's allergic to computers and doesn't



own a phone”. She still hasn’t managed to send him over to France, but that’s only because the project he wants to run there requires partners in Paris that are yet to be found –but it will be a great residency when it happens! She also dreams of sending the other Selekā members involved in fine arts and hip hop dance all the way, but it’s not like France is right around the corner or something..

And because that is not enough, she is also a founding member of the Nuku’alofa Film Festival, and secretary of the board. 2019 will mark its 5th year (ready to enter Class 1!) and the team is more than ever excited to encourage local storytelling through the film media by bringing to Tonga short movies from all over the South Pacific and beyond. The film festival has one rule: our local Tongan audience must be able to relate to the story and its humans –may they be characters in a fiction or people in a documentary. Most movies shown at the NFF are made by Pasifika filmmakers, professional or apprentice. Young Tongans are picking up whatever equipment they can, and shooting. It is not many, but it is a start –and a promising one at that. The NFF also supports important Tongan and Pacific stories told in long format being shown in Tonga, and have namely proudly premiered *Leitis in Waiting* last year, and will premiere *For My Father’s Kingdom* this year, both amazing documentaries. There will be more, because the Pacific Islanders have the talent –or know to work with talented and culturally minded outsiders- to tell their stories in striking ways, and the people of Tonga deserve to see these stories told on a big screen, in spite of the only cinema having burnt down in the 2006 riots.

She thinks Tonga is a wonderful and crazy place, and she has heard she fits in so well because she is wonderful and crazy herself.

Virginie’s social media posts and blog have been featured on numerous news outlets, especially after Cyclone Gita when she provided real-time updates on what was happening on the ground. To follow her:

Her twitter is @VDakaSini

Main Instagram is @virsine

Blog is www.wordpress.com/homingaway

Also, if you are interested in more information on the Film Festival and Selekā:

Film festival is www.facebook.com/nffTonga

NFF Twitter is @NFFTonga

Selekā is www.facebook.com/selekasiasi

Selekā Twitter is @selekaTonga

*Note: FoT had to edit Virginie’s biography for space. Her entire biography can be found on her blog.

Are you interested in joining a committee? Friends of Tonga has four committees looking for volunteers: Scholarship, Education, Event Planning and Community Outreach.

If interested, please contact us at friendsoftonga2018@gmail.com

June 2019: Tu'amelie Mahe: Teacher, Ministry of Education Officer, Friends of Tonga Board Member

Tu'amelie Mahe is originally from the island of Vava'u, in the Kingdom of Tonga. He enjoys teaching, traveling, and watching movies. He started his primary education at Hunga Government Primary School from 1985 to 1991. He then continued on to Vava'u High School, in Neiafu, where he attended secondary school for five years before finishing up at Tonga College 'Atele, in Nuku'alofa. Tu'amelie entered the Tonga Institute of Education in 1997 and trained for three years to become a primary teacher.

Tu'a has taught all over the Kingdom: He served as a Primary school teacher from 2000 -2014; a Senior Assistant Teacher Diplomate, in Niuafu'ou Island, at GPS 'Alele'uta, for 3 years; and then became the principal of GPS Tongamama'o for another three years. He was also a teacher at GPS Popua in Tongatapu but attached at the main office for 2 years at the Filing system Units. He was then transferred to 'Eua where he worked at GPS Ta'anga and became the principal of the school for several years.

With the help of Peace Corps Volunteer Chiara Collette, Tu'a started studying for his Bachelors of Education in 2013 before traveling to Fiji on a New Zealand Aid scholarship for further studies at the University of the South Pacific. Tu'amelie graduated with a Bachelor's in Education in 2016.

After studying, Tu'a became an Education Officer for school grants and asset management at the Ministry of Education and Training in Tonga, a position that he continues to serve. Although Tu'a has now been transferred to the office and works as an Education Officer, being a teacher in the classroom is what he is most proud of professionally

Tu'a is also a member of the board for Friends of Tonga. Tu'a works from Tonga as the Program Manager for Friends of Tonga by overseeing the Scholarship program, which entails outreach, transferring funds, and ensuring students are meeting their benchmarks. He also promotes FoT to communities and schools, collects information on how FoT can best serve the people of Tonga, and provides guidance on how FoT can maximize its impact. Tu'a has been instrumental in getting FoT up and running!

Tu'amelie's is fiercely proud of Tonga and touts the fact that Tonga is the only Kingdom in the Pacific and that they were never colonized by any foreign country.

Despite his unconditional love for his country, he has no illusions on the challenges facing Tonga and its people. He believes that a major challenge that Tonga currently is the impact of climate change, which has increased the frequency and intensity of major weather events like tropical cyclones and heavy rain. Substance abuse has also become a major concern, along with increasing rates of school dropout and unemployment.

Tu'amelie says to overcome these challenges Tonga needs helping partners like Friends of Tonga to fund projects to help Tonga withstand the impacts of climate change. These projects can include making drains to drain water from low-lying areas, during the heavy rain season. In addition, he believes the government needs to invite more foreign companies to come and invest in Tonga, so that they will employ the people of Tonga. He also believes pushing the students to continue with their studies to the University level is another way it may help to overcome the current and future challenges facing Tonga.

Tu'amelie shared that he thinks it will be very helpful if Friends of Tonga continues their scholarship program to support students completing their studies, up through University. He believes Tonga does not have the natural resources to help their economy but their best resource is their people. Therefore, there is a need to support the peoples' education and Tu'a thinks Friends of Tonga is helping meet that need.



July 2019: Allie Kane: Teacher, Pen Pal Coordinator, Friends of Tonga Education Committee Member

Please meet our Monthly Spotlight for July: Allison Kane (better known as Allie)!

Allie is originally from Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania, but moved down to the Greater Baltimore area after graduating from Kutztown University. Allie is a passionate educator and has worked for Monarch Global Academy (MGA) for the last 6 years, first as a special educator before transitioning to kindergarten. Since MGA is an International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program (IB PYP) school, it has been an incredible partnership between our two organizations. Specifically, PYP schools have a focus on developing “the whole learner” and experiential and community oriented projects. PYP schools also promote students learning about local and global issues and looking for ways to take action. Allie has spearheaded the partnership between Friends of Tonga (FoT) and MGA and has incorporated many FoT projects into her curriculum.

Allie initially became involved with FoT through her personal relationships with board member Chiara Collette (they taught together). When Allie learned about FoT’s Pen Pal program, she was excited about the opportunity to teach her students about a culture few know about. In their unit on transportation, Allie approached FoT to create a PowerPoint to share how transportation in Tonga and the United States differ. As students saw the many ways students got to school in Tonga, they were struck that a majority of students walked to school, and even more surprising- without shoes! Her students felt compelled to take action to help their Tongan Pen Pals, and the idea for a Friends of Tonga fundraiser was developed. Partnering with a local restaurant, Tampico Grill, students and their families came to have dinner, learn a little more about Friends of Tonga, and for every meal purchased, Tampico Grill generously donated 35% towards Friends of Tonga projects. By the end of the night, \$600 was raised! Moreover, this student-led excitement spilled over into other classrooms and MGA now has 5 classes participating in the Pen Pal program.

Allie says that she has loved collaborating with Friends of Tonga. She believes it has helped to broaden the viewpoint of her students in the classroom. Her students enjoy learning about Tonga and their pen pal partners. She looks forward to continuing and maybe even having students take additional actions in the upcoming school year. In the last year, Allie has become further involved with FoT, including becoming a part of the Education Committee and helping develop resources for Tongan teachers. As an early childhood educator, Allie says she is really excited about the idea of Tongan students gaining access to the new Friends of Tonga Kindergarten. She would also love to see the Pen Pal program grow so more students can receive the same benefits she has seen in her own students. As a passionate educator, Allie sees the crucial value of education and loves being able to participate in Friends of Tonga’s different projects.

Partners like Allie are one of the main reasons FoT is able to meet its mission and we are happy to have her as our monthly spotlight to recognize her indefatigable passion and dedication.



August 2019: 'Elenoa Kauvaka: Peace Corps Tonga Training Manager and Friend of Tonga

Please meet our Monthly Spotlight for August: 'Elenoa Kauvaka! 'Elenoa, also known as Noa, is originally from Makave, Vava'u. Noa currently works for Peace Corps Tonga as the Training Manager for Peace Corps Volunteers. Noa has held multiple positions at Peace Corps since starting in 1990; She has been the Language and Cultural Facilitator for incoming Peace Corps Volunteers, the Tech Trainer, and a Language Coordinator. She also attended the Teachers Training College with fellow Friends of Tonga board member, Tu'amelie Mahe!

What are you most proud of professionally?

Working for Peace Corps has changed me both personally and professionally, and I wouldn't have changed as much if I was still a teacher.

What are you most proud of personally?

I am most proud of my children - My daughter is in her final year of high school and my son has just started.

What is your favorite part of Tonga?

The peace.

What do you think the biggest challenge facing Tonga is?

Change, some for the better and some for worse.

How can Tonga prepare for that challenge?

For most Tongans, but not for all, it is important to rely on God's promises to help overcome any challenge.

What would you like to see Friends of Tonga accomplish?

I think it's great to see what FOT is working on. I would like to hear success stories of people who have been to Tonga, sharing their experience, and if there are negative experiences, what can be done to turn those around. When you become a member of FOT, you know you're providing financial support, but it is important to also get an understanding of the family support which is so important in Tongan culture.



September 2019: Jeff Guenther (Current Tonga Peace Corps Volunteer)

Jeff Guenther arrived in Tonga as a Peace Corps Trainee one month ago, and is currently in a 9-week technical, cultural, and intensive language training before he starts his service. Upon completion of training, Jeff will swear-in as a Peace Corps Volunteer! We interviewed Jeff to learn about his first impressions of Tonga:

Where are you from?

I am from the San Francisco Bay area, specifically Marin County.

What made you interested in joining the Peace Corps?

I had been considering joining the Peace Corps since early adolescence after hearing the stories my dad's friend told me about his service in Mali and Jamaica. I have always been interested in cross-cultural friendship and understanding, so Peace Corps has been the most obvious way to build those bridges in my mind. I also wanted to give of myself and my time to others, which makes Peace Corps service the perfect fit.

Did you know anything about Tonga before you heard you were going?

I knew that Tonga was a country in the South Pacific, but not much more than that! Every day here so far has been a rich learning experience.

What are you looking forward to learning about the most?

I am looking forward to learning the language the most, I love foreign languages and I find it to be a fascinating window into the cultural mindset of its native speakers.

Since arriving in Tonga what has surprised you thus far?

I have been surprised with just how much the "Friendly Islands" live up to their name. Tongans are among the most generous and welcoming people I have ever had the pleasure of meeting.

What item did you bring with you that has the most sentimental value to you?

I brought a framed photograph of my family at my middle school graduation, so probably that!

What do you want your future self (27 months from now) to remember about this moment?

I would like to remember all of the calm afternoons spent drinking coffee with my host father and the overwhelming kindness that I have been shown on a daily basis.



NEWS FROM OUR FRIENDS

Kevin Russell (PCV 2014-16) is attending Georgetown University where he is pursuing a Masters of Science in Foreign Service, where he is concentrating on international development with a focus on social and economic development.

Reimen Hii (FOT Board Member and AusAid Volunteer in Tonga 2013-2015) Reimen Hii was recently awarded the Law Council of Australia's 2019 Australian Young Lawyer Award for his outstanding contribution to the legal profession through pro bono work, access to justice and diversity advocacy.

The Law Council of Australia is the peak national representative body of the Australian legal profession (representing 65,000 Australian lawyers through their bar associations, law societies and law firms) and works for the improvement of the law and administration of justice. The award recognises excellent in young lawyers and young lawyer organisations; it is awarded to nominees who have made continuous and outstanding contribution to the profession and community.



Since joining FoT in March this year, Reimen has worked tirelessly with board members and stakeholders in Australia, NZ and Tonga, to promote educational and developmental opportunities in Tonga, raise awareness about issues affecting Tongan society and connect those with an interest in the welfare of the Kingdom.

Brian Favorite (PCV 2005-2006) has produced a documentary about his time and experience in Tonga titled: *The Queendom of Tonga*. The Queendom of Tonga profiles a select group of leitis (trans women) through the experience of a privileged American white male living within their island nation as a Peace Corps volunteer. Meet Mergina, Joey, Hapakoki, Maile, Baby, 'Aisea, Marika, 'Epi Pola, Susi and Saskia: courageous, out-spoken, and poignant provocateurs. Brian, the only apparently out gay man to volunteer in the Peace Corps Tonga program (2004-2006) for as long as the staff could remember, is told to hide his sexuality. He soon must grapple with feeling as though he does not completely fit into his small village as an elementary school teacher. He soon discovers friendship and guidance with a group of trans women, referred to as fakaleitis or leitis ("like a lady") who are looked upon with fascination and disdain by their fellow Tongans. During Brian's 27 months of volunteer service in the Kingdom of Tonga, the leitis show Brian how to live courageously, honestly and with integrity in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Featured events: The coronation of King George Tupou V, the Miss Galaxy pageant (talent contest for leitis), civil unrest and rioting in the Kingdom as democracy advocates demand increased representation from the monarchy, Peace Corps experience, and Tongan island life. The Queendom of Tonga asks: Who gives you the right to be who you truly are?

To watch his documentary, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xl1FDhyDWMU&t=107s>

Tina Martin (PCV 1970-71) attended the Climate March on Friday September 20th, with the organization Mother's Out Front. She says "We aren't youth, but we care about the future of the planet and want it to be here for future generations." Tina is working on a project recording *South Pacific* as a Peace Corps Musical. If you know the words to South Pacific, live in the bay area, and can sing a-cappella- please contact us.

Paul Jurmo and Olga Hernandez (DPT 2012-2017) have been busy since returning from five years in Tonga in late 2017. Olga has been doing temporary assignments (2-3 months each on average) as PCMO in five African countries, accompanied by Paul on most of them.

Paul has been doing research and writing on basic education for development in the US and developing countries (visit the "Writing" sections of www.pauljurmo.info to see some of the resulting documents). These resources include a case study of the Tonga English Literacy Project written for Unesco. Another article about the good work done on the Peace Corps Project by PCVs, staff, and partners will be published in the next issue of the Worldview magazine of the National Peace Corps Association).

They have also been enjoying spending time with their two-year-old granddaughter, who now lives in Geneva with her parents. Recently, Olga, Paul, and their son Eric moved from Baltimore to Washington, DC which will be their home base for professional and family activities for the foreseeable future. They look forward to seeing PC/Tonga friends who live in or visit the area. Feel free to get in touch.

Michael Hassett (FOT Board Member PCV 2012-2014): Michael Hassett successfully defended his dissertation and earned his Ph.D. in Public Policy, in August, from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC). His research focused on how the perception of training and development opportunities, within the Federal workforce, influenced both work engagement and turnover intention. Congratulations to the newly minted Dr. Hassett!



Lee Hartle (FOT's board member and compliance specialist), is a CPA and works at a local public accounting firm, Aronson LLC. Aronson LLC is a top 100 accounting firm in the country and recently promoted our board member to Senior Manager in the company's assurance practice. He is recognized as a leader at the firm in the technology and life sciences industry, and, in his new role, he is responsible for managing some of the firm's most complex engagements in his industry expertise, assist in strategic direction and planning, and his role in business development will continue to expand. He manages a staff of 8 direct reports in completing engagements of various complexity. Congratulations to Lee on this achievement!

Tu'amelie Mahe and wife, Laise Mahe (FOT Board Member) welcomed their first child into the world in July! Congratulations Tu'a and Laise!



Friends of Tonga is looking for a new Communications Coordinator!

To continue to increase our online presence and name recognition, we are looking to expand the FoT Board by adding a Communications Coordinator!

The role entails managing our Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram accounts, along with assisting in posting content to the Friends of Tonga website: www.friendsoftonga.org.

We are looking for someone who has a connection to Tonga, will serve for at least 1 year, and can dedicate at least an hour a week.

If interested, please message us via Facebook or email directly at friendsoftonga2018@gmail.com

BOARD MEMBER KATIE TONGIA'S TRIP TO TONGA

Board members Tu'amelie Mahe and Katie Tongia met last month in Nuku'alofa to discuss the progress and future vision for the Friends of Tonga student scholarship program. With experience as a local teacher, as well as within the Ministry of Education in Tonga, Tu'a has insight which is immensely beneficial to the program. We continue to rely on our Tongan counterparts for guidance and support of the scholarship program as it develops into its second year!



CULTURE CORNER: PHOTOS FROM TONGA

Photo Credit: Katie Tongia



Fun Fact: The word "tapu" is the only Tongan word to have entered the English language, though you probably say "taboo."

FRIENDS OF TONGA

Friends of Tonga is a charitable organization that supports educational and developmental opportunities in the Kingdom of Tonga; raises awareness about issues affecting Tongan society; and connects all people who have a vested interest in the welfare of the Kingdom.

DONATE TO FRIENDS OF TONGA

Friends of Tonga is currently seeking donations for two ongoing projects. These projects include funding for continued support of our Scholarship Recipients and upcoming recipients, and the support of the Kindergarten Building Project.

If you are interested in promoting better education in the Kingdom of Tonga, please consider donating— no donation is too small! One member of Friends of Tonga has committed to donating \$32 a month, which was the living allowance from when she was a Peace Corps Volunteer in the 1970s!

To donate, visit our website at :

<https://friends-of-tonga-npca.silkstart.com/campaigns>

Or send a check payable to Friends of Tonga to: (Please make sure to include a contact number or email address for us to confirm receipt)

Katie Tongia
708 Q Street NW Apt. B
Washington, DC 20001

BECOME A MEMBER OF FRIENDS OF TONGA

To become a member of Friends of Tonga, please visit:

<https://friends-of-tonga-npca.silkstart.com/cpages/join>

Contact friendsoftonga2018@gmail.com and see the Letter From Our President (Pg. 1) for more information.

Did you know? Friends of Tonga is an officially designated a 501c3 organization by the IRS. This means, all of your donations are tax deductible!

We are an affiliate of the [National Peace Corps Association \(NPCA\)](#).

NPCA is the nonprofit alumni network at the center of a vibrant community of over 220,000 people who share the Peace Corps experience. NPCA champions lifelong commitment to Peace Corps ideals by connecting, engaging and promoting its members and affiliate groups as they continue to make a difference in communities in the U.S. and abroad. NPCA is also dedicated to advocating for, contributing to, and supporting the

