

— September 2026 Issue —

Sun, Service, and Stories

A newsletter made from your Friends of Tonga



TALES FROM TONGA AND BEYOND

**Peace Corps
Partnership Program**
- Page 2, 4-5

FoT in the News -
Page 7

Financial Reports -
Page 12



Welcome From the FoT Co-Presidents

Dear Friends of Tonga Community,

As we move through the heart of the year, we're excited to share some of the milestones, partnerships, and organizational updates that continue to strengthen Friends of Tonga and the communities we serve.

One of the biggest developments for our organization is the beginning of a new chapter in our leadership. As Friends of Tonga has grown and our work has expanded across the Kingdom, we've recognized the importance of shared leadership to support our volunteers and ensure our programs continue to thrive. We're thrilled to officially welcome Daniella DeLaRue as Co-President. Daniella brings tremendous dedication, experience, and passion to our mission, and we're excited to lead the organization together.

We've also expanded our program leadership through a new co-program manager model. Kyle Aloof has joined Chiara Collette and Lose Lavakei'aho in coordinating our work on the ground, helping ensure our projects remain organized, responsive, and community driven.

CONTINUE ON TO PAGE 2



This year has already been filled with meaningful accomplishments. Our scholarship program reviewed more than 130 applications and awarded 19 new scholarships, bringing our support to more than 50 students. We also celebrated the completion of our new cyclone-resilient kindergarten in Tu'anuku, along with the successful completion of the Vava'u kindergarten project, pending the final transfer of building materials.

Our mission has also reached new audiences through the support of outstanding community champions, including Super Bowl champion Haloti Ngata and Detroit Lions offensive tackle Giovanni Manu, whose engagement continues to shine a spotlight on Tonga and the importance of community-led development.

To better support local initiatives, we recently launched a standardized online funding application process. We're already supporting two new volunteer-led projects, making it easier than ever for communities to bring their ideas to life.

Meanwhile, Tau Laukonga, our offline bilingual literacy app developed by Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Andy Pavey, continues to gain momentum. Since its launch last year, the app has surpassed 3,000 downloads, helping children across Tonga access stories in both Tongan and English, even without an internet connection.

As we look ahead, we're already preparing for Giving Tuesday and other year-end fundraising efforts that will help sustain our programs in the year to come. If you'd like to support our work while representing the organization, be sure to check out our **[new summer merchandise collection](#)** on page 4.

None of this would be possible without the commitment of our volunteers, board members, donors, and our incredible partners throughout Tonga. Thank you for believing in community-led development and for walking alongside us as Friends of Tonga continues to grow.

With gratitude,

Michael Hassett & Daniella DeLaRue, Co-Presidents Friends of Tonga



Empowering Grassroots Impact Through the Peace Corps Partnership Program

The **[Peace Corps Partnership Program \(PCPP\)](#)** connects Peace Corps Volunteers, local communities, and donors to support community-led projects around the world. Since 1964, the program has helped thousands of communities turn local priorities into lasting impact.

Here in Tonga, our Small Grants Program continues to demonstrate what is possible when communities lead the way. We're proud to highlight three recent projects that improved education, strengthened climate resilience, and expanded environmental stewardship across the Kingdom. *CONTINUE ON TO PAGE 4*





FRIENDS OF TONGA NAMED FINALIST FOR THE 2026 .ORG IMPACT AWARDS

Never doubt what a small group of committed people can accomplish. We are incredibly excited to share that Friends of Tonga has been selected as a finalist for the **2026 .ORG Impact Awards** in the Environmental Stewardship category.

This recognition is a big moment for our small, volunteer-run organization. Public Interest Registry, the organization behind the .ORG domain, received a record 4,242 submissions from 145 countries this year. Friends of Tonga is one of only five finalists worldwide in the Environmental Stewardship category and one of just 35 organizations around the world recognized as finalists across all award categories.

When Friends of Tonga was founded after Cyclone Gita, we never imagined where this journey would take us. We simply believed that if we listened, showed up, and worked alongside communities in Tonga, we could make a difference.

That belief has guided everything we have done.

This recognition belongs to the volunteers who continue to give their time and expertise after long workdays, between family responsibilities, and alongside everything else life brings. It belongs to our partners in Tonga who have trusted us, worked with us, and helped guide our efforts. Most importantly, it belongs to the communities who have allowed us to walk alongside them.

From supporting climate resilience and environmental projects to expanding access to education, literacy, and disaster recovery efforts, every accomplishment has been made possible because people chose to show up and serve.

A small group of volunteers, working from their homes and giving what they can, has grown into a global community of people committed to supporting Tonga. The award is meaningful, but what matters most are the relationships that made this work possible: the trust of our partners in Tonga, the dedication of our volunteers, and the support of everyone who has believed in this mission.

To everyone who has supported Friends of Tonga in any way, thank you. Whether you volunteered, donated, shared our story, partnered with us, or simply encouraged us along the way, you are part of this journey.

The winner of the 2026 .ORG Impact Awards will be announced in October. No matter the outcome, we are proud of what this community has built together and excited about the work ahead as we continue supporting Tonga. Thank you for being part of the Friends of Tonga family.



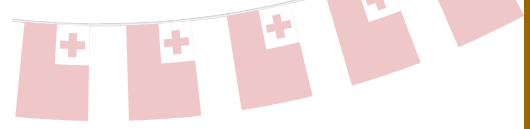
Peace Corps Tonga

Looking to make a global impact?
Explore current projects, hear volunteer stories, and learn how you can be part of this meaningful journey.

👉 [Discover more and get involved](#)



Building Safer Schools in Ha'apai



Completed late last year, the Safe and Healthy School Grounds Project in Faleloa, Ha'apai, was led by Peace Corps Volunteer Ashlynn A. with \$2,803.36 in Partnership Program funding.

The project addressed ongoing problems caused by stray animals entering the school grounds, damaging gardens, and creating safety concerns for students. Before construction began, the local PTA independently raised an additional 4,000 TOP (approximately \$1,700 USD) to expand the project.

Working together, volunteers from three neighboring villages completed the new perimeter fence in just three weeks. Today, the project directly benefits 70 students, 15 staff members and their families, and more than 130 parents, while ensuring the school has a long-term maintenance plan in place.



Shop Fresh Gear for a Great Cause

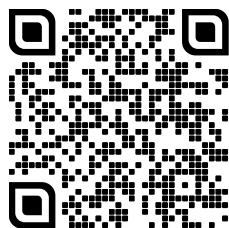
Looking for a new way to support Friends of Tonga?

Our 2026 Collection is now available through our official **Friends of Tonga Bonfire Store**, featuring premium T-shirts, tanks, V-necks, youth apparel, and baseball caps.

Every purchase directly supports Friends of Tonga's programs, volunteer initiatives, and community partnerships throughout the Kingdom.

Visit our Bonfire store, pick up your favorite design, and wear your support with pride.

👉 Purchase your FoT gear **HERE**, and be part of the change!



Strengthening Water Security on Olo'ua Island

Led by Peace Corps Volunteer Rachael Z., the Olo'ua Island Water Security Project addressed one of the community's most pressing challenges during a severe El Niño year.

After receiving unanimous community support, residents constructed concrete platforms, coordinated transportation from Neiafu Wharf, and installed four 10,000-liter rainwater tanks at key community facilities, including two churches and the local primary school.

The project added 40,000 liters of freshwater storage, providing a reliable backup water supply for approximately 15 households, two churches, and the island's school. Down-piping and mosquito screening were also installed to improve water quality and long-term sustainability.⁴



Inspiring the Next Generation of Ocean Stewards

Peace Corps Volunteers Alf F., Abigail S., and Ella J., working alongside Tonga's Ministry of Fisheries, created Color Our Community Fishes: Fishes of Tonga's Reefs, a bilingual conservation coloring book designed to introduce young people to Tonga's marine biodiversity.

Supported through \$1,877.73 in Partnership Program funding, the project produced 1,000 copies for national distribution. Following successful field testing at environmental camps across Tongatapu and Vava'u, the books were officially launched on World Ocean Day.

Each book introduces children to common reef fish using illustrations, Tongan and English text, and biological information that encourages environmental stewardship while celebrating Tonga's rich marine heritage.

These projects demonstrate what can be achieved when local leadership, Peace Corps Volunteers, and generous supporters work together. Every scholarship awarded, water tank installed, fence constructed, and educational resource distributed helps build stronger, more resilient communities throughout the Kingdom.

Thank you for helping make this work possible.



👉 Join the global community for free. **BECOME A MEMBER HERE**

Who can join Connect+?

- Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs)
- Peace Corps Volunteers currently in the field
- Future Volunteers preparing for service
- Peace Corps Staff (current and former) who made our service possible
- Host Country Nationals who made our service meaningful
- Family and Friends who supported us every step of the way

Call to Action

Want to submit an article, news, photos or share your Peace Corps Tonga experience, email your article(s) to info@friendsoftonga.org



Technology Corner

Tau Laukonga

The first reading apps built for the Kingdom of Tonga. Available in English and Tongan, Tau Laukonga (“Let’s Read”) is a force multiplier for efforts to improve literacy rates for both languages within the country and the Tongan diaspora abroad. Each app features 110+ fun, culturally-relevant books.

Ako Sipela

Ako Sipela is a game featuring 100+ levels that teaches players the letters of the Tongan alphabet, including uppercase and lowercase and the faka’ua and toloi diacritics, as well as how to spell 450+ of the most common words. You can play without internet, and up to 9 players can share the same device. Try it today!

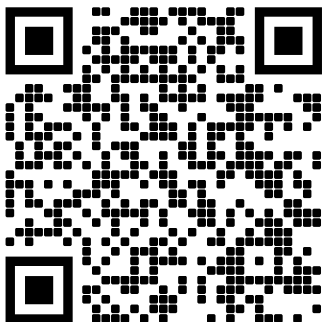
Na’a nau malimali
fiefia, he sio mai kiate
au mo hoku puletaha
fo’ou.

“Okú ke tui mai ‘a e
puletaha faka’ofa’ofa
taha kuó u sio aí!” ko e
lea ia ‘a ‘eku kuí.



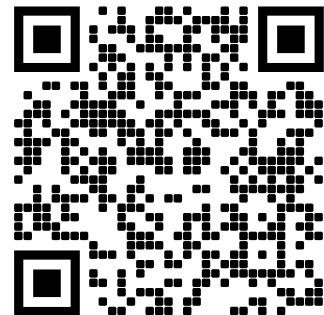
Download the Apps - Today

Tau Lakonga
Download [HERE](#)



The Tau Laukonga and Ako Sipela apps are available for **FREE**.

Ako Sipela
Download [HERE](#)





Education

Our new cyclone-resilient kindergarten in Tu'anuku was featured by the **Detroit Free Press**, **Peace Corps Connect**, **Kaniva Tonga**, and the **New Castle News**, highlighting support from Detroit Lions player Giovanni Manu and rugby legend Charles Piutau.



.ORG Impact Awards

Friends of Tonga was selected as one of 35 finalists worldwide for the 2026 .ORG Impact Awards, from 4,242 submissions representing 145 countries. Coverage of the recognition appeared in **Talanoa o Tonga**, **Matangi Tonga**, **Kaniva Tonga**, and the **New Castle News**, among others. Friends of Tonga was one of five finalists in the Environmental Stewardship category, recognizing our work with communities and local organizations across Tonga on climate resilience, water security, environmental stewardship, and education. *READ MORE ON PAGE 3*



CLICK ON THE LINKS ABOVE TO LEARN MORE

Friends of Tonga has received growing media attention over the past several months, helping introduce new audiences to the people and communities we work alongside.





Friends of Tonga in the News



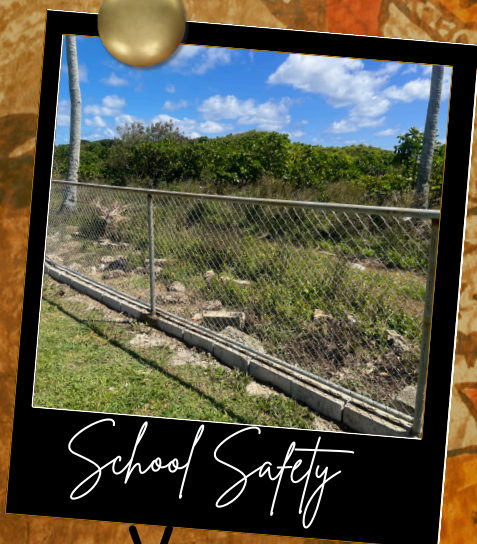
Founder Profile

Voyage Maryland published an in-depth profile exploring how Friends of Tonga grew from Peace Corps service into a 100% volunteer-led nonprofit.

Boston University School of Public Health featured Nik Karr in a Q&A about his work on climate resilience and public health across the Pacific. Nik served as Director of Programming and Training for Peace Corps Tonga and currently supports Friends of Tonga as a Special Advisor.



Nik Karr Profile



School Safety

Talanoa 'o Tonga also covered the completion of the new perimeter fence at Faleloa Government Primary School, highlighting another successful community-led project supported through our Small Grants Program.

We are grateful to each of these media organizations for helping share the stories of the communities and partners we work alongside.



CLICK ON THE LINKS ABOVE TO LEARN MORE



Community Update: Haloti Ngata Visits Tonga

This summer, Friends of Tonga had the privilege of partnering with Super Bowl champion and former Baltimore Ravens defensive tackle Haloti Ngata and his family during a community-led environmental and cultural exchange in Tonga.

Working alongside the Civil Society Forum of Tonga, Tonga National Youth Congress, and the Tonga Citizen Science Initiative, the Ngata family reconnected with their heritage while participating in projects focused on climate resilience and environmental conservation.

Together, volunteers:

- Planted 60 mangrove seedlings and propagated an additional 700 seedlings to strengthen vulnerable coastlines.
- Explored sustainable farming practices, including no-till agriculture, composting, and natural alternatives to chemical herbicides.
- Shared traditional knowledge through the preparation of an umu and other cultural activities.

The visit highlighted the power of community partnerships and the enduring connections between Tonga and the Tongan diaspora. We are grateful to Haloti and his family for their generosity, enthusiasm, and commitment to supporting grassroots initiatives across the Kingdom.

Looking Ahead... ➡➡➡

As we prepare for the remainder of the year, we're excited about what's ahead.

Upcoming priorities include:

- *Launching our Giving Tuesday campaign.*
- *Expanding our community-led Small Grants Program.*
- *Continuing scholarship support for Tongan students.*
- *Growing Tau Laukonga and other educational initiatives.*
- *Building new partnerships that strengthen communities across the Kingdom.*

Thank you for being part of the Friends of Tonga family. Together, we're helping build stronger, healthier, and more resilient communities throughout Tonga.

THIS BOY WILL DO GREAT THINGS



Susan Greisen Publishes Debut Children's Book

Congratulations to Susan Greisen, **Tonga 38**, on the publication of her debut children's book, ***This Boy Will Do Great Things!***

Susan served in the Peace Corps in Liberia from 1971–73 and in Tonga from 1973–74. During her time in Tonga, she worked as a nurse for the Infectious Disease Department in Nuku'alofa, supervising TB and Typhoid vaccination campaigns throughout the islands.

Her new book was inspired by meeting Dima in 2023.

In a small village in Botswana, Dima lives where elephants roam, hippos splash, and snakes lurk in tall trees. His name means "This boy will do great things," and deep in his heart, Dima believes it. With courage, curiosity, and love for the wild, Dima follows his dream and changes his village forever.

You can learn more about the book at susangreisen.com.

This Boy Will Do Great Things is available from **Village Books** or wherever books are sold.



Thank You, Elizabeth. Welcome, Kaylee!



This month, Friends of Tonga celebrates one volunteer's remarkable service while welcoming another into a key leadership role.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to Elizabeth Philips as she concludes her Peace Corps Tonga service and her time serving as the Peace Corps Volunteer Officer to the Friends of Tonga Board of Directors.

Over the past year, Elizabeth played a unique role within our organization. In addition to serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer, she served as an officer to our Board, strengthening the connection between Friends of Tonga, current Peace Corps Volunteers, and the communities we all serve. Her insight, dedication, and leadership helped ensure we remained responsive to volunteers in the field and better positioned to support community-led initiatives across Tonga.

Elizabeth, malo 'aupito for your service, your friendship, and your unwavering commitment to the people of Tonga. Congratulations on completing your Peace Corps journey. We are grateful for everything you've contributed, and you'll always have a place on the Friends of Tonga team.

As we thank Elizabeth for her outstanding service, we are pleased to welcome Kaylee Stiffler as our new Peace Corps Volunteer Officer. Kaylee will build upon the strong foundation Elizabeth helped establish, continuing to strengthen the partnership between Friends of Tonga and the dedicated Peace Corps Volunteers serving throughout the Kingdom.

Currently serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Tonga, Kaylee brings a passion for community partnership, service, and cultural exchange to the role. We are excited to welcome her to the Friends of Tonga team and look forward to the experience and perspective she will bring as we continue supporting community-led initiatives across Tonga.

Please join us in thanking Elizabeth for her outstanding service and welcoming Kaylee to the Friends of Tonga team.



Kaylee Stiffler
kayleenstiffler@gmail.com



Friends of Tonga Leadership Team

Friends of Tonga is powered by a dedicated group of educators, returned Peace Corps volunteers, and community leaders who are passionate about making a difference. Each board member brings unique experience and heart to our mission of supporting education and opportunity in Tonga.

👉 [Meet the current board members](#) and special advisors and learn more about the people driving our work forward!



SP/FS host Christopher Wurst

Worth a Listen: SoftPower/FulStories

SoftPower/FulStories explores stories of diplomacy, peace, international exchange, and cross-cultural understanding. One episode features a conversation connected to Tonga and the Peace Corps experience.

Listen to the episode [HERE!](#)



Friends of Tonga

FY 2026 Year-to-Date Financial Report

Year-to-Date: January 1 – July 10, 2026

Executive Summary

As of July 10, 2026, Friends of Tonga has received **\$18,681.40** in contributions year-to-date and disbursed **\$26,986.79** in program grants and operating expenses, resulting in a net decrease of **\$8,305.39**. Program spending has been dominated by overseas support: continued wire transfers to the Civil Society Forum of Tonga for kindergarten construction, along with MoneyGram transfers and a large Peace Corps program disbursement in March. Revenue was strongest in February and April, driven by BB Merchant online fundraising, mobile/check deposits, and a \$5,000 incoming wire gift from the Carner Family Trust. The current account balance is **\$135,305.66**.

Financial Summary

Beginning Balance (Jan 1, 2026)	\$143,611.05
Total Revenue (YTD)	\$18,681.40
Total Expenses (YTD)	(\$26,986.79)
Net Change (YTD)	(\$8,305.39)
Current Balance (Jul 10, 2026)	\$135,305.66

Table-1: FY 2026 YTD Financial Summary

Revenue

Year-to-date revenue has been led by check and mobile deposits and BB Merchant online fundraising, boosted by a \$5,000 incoming wire gift from the Carner Family Trust in March. A \$1,877.73 Peace Corps credit reflects the reversal of a duplicated card charge (see Expenses note). The breakdown of all revenue sources through July 10, 2026 is shown in Table-2.

Revenue Source	Amount
Cash / Check / Mobile Deposits	\$6,300.00
Incoming Wire Gift (Carner Family Trust)	\$5,000.00
BB Merchant / Online Fundraising	\$4,637.20
Peace Corps (card charge reversal)	\$1,877.73
UK Online Giving Foundation	\$429.60
Thrivent Grants	\$330.00
America Online Giving	\$68.55
OurChange Foundation	\$38.32
YTD Total Revenue	\$18,681.40

Table-2: FY 2026 YTD Revenue by Source

Expenses

The largest program outflows year-to-date are a \$7,421.33 Peace Corps disbursement in March, wire transfers totaling \$8,300.00 to the Civil Society Forum of Tonga for kindergarten construction (\$6,300 in January, \$2,000 in March), and MoneyGram transfers totaling \$5,485.98 in April. Operating and software costs remain minimal. See Table-3 for the full breakdown.

Expense	Amount
Peace Corps (program disbursements, net)	(\$12,466.79)
Civil Society Forum of Tonga (Wire Transfers)	(\$8,300.00)
MoneyGram Transfers	(\$5,485.98)
Bank Service Charges	(\$420.00)
Software – Microsoft 365	(\$137.79)
Software – Esri	(\$103.00)
Amazon Web Services	(\$57.78)
Software – Squarespace	(\$15.45)
YTD Total Expenses	(\$26,986.79)

Table-3: FY 2026 YTD Expenses by Category

Note: Two identical Peace Corps card charges of \$1,877.73 posted on April 23; one was reversed by a \$1,877.73 credit on April 27 (shown under Revenue), leaving a single net charge included above. The board may wish to confirm this with the bank.

Monthly Activity

Table-4 below provides a month-by-month view of activity through July 10, 2026. July reflects a partial month, as the report date falls early in the month.

Month	Revenue	Expenses	Net
January 2026	\$570.03	(\$6,443.24)	(\$5,873.21)
February 2026	\$4,174.20	(\$146.03)	\$4,028.17
March 2026	\$5,097.31	(\$9,564.59)	(\$4,467.28)
April 2026	\$6,955.93	(\$10,539.70)	(\$3,583.77)
May 2026	\$1,371.24	(\$158.26)	\$1,212.98
June 2026	\$364.49	(\$23.71)	\$340.78
July 2026	\$148.20	(\$111.26)	\$36.94
YTD Total	\$18,681.40	(\$26,986.79)	(\$8,305.39)

Table-4: FY 2026 YTD Monthly Activity Summary

The current account balance as of July 10, 2026 is \$135,305.66.

This report was prepared for internal review and donor transparency purposes. For questions regarding this report, please contact the Friends of Tonga board.



Transparency You Can Trust

At Friends of Tonga, we believe in openness and accountability. Our [Legal Documents & Reports](#) page provides access to our bylaws, financial reports, and annual impact summaries.



Take a look to see how your support is making a measurable difference—and how we're staying true to our mission every step of the way.

Stay Connected with Friends of Tonga

Have questions, ideas, or want to get more involved? Visit our [Contact & Resources](#) page to find ways to reach us, access helpful materials, and stay engaged with our mission.



Whether you're a supporter, educator, or community partner—we'd love to hear from you!

