

FIJI DEAF MINISTRY

FIJI DEAF MINISTRY, PO BOX 2495, WELLINGTON 6140, NEW ZEALAND

www.fjideaf.net

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Fiji.Deaf.Ministry@gmail.com



Mere with "her boys". The junior boys share a room underneath the main floor of the Main Hostel.

Marilyn and Jim welcome a new grandson: Benjamin James Cooney.

23-30 August a camp is scheduled for Deaf from throughout Fiji. This photo is from the Easter Camp



There are different ways to serve; but all these ways are from the same Lord...
each person is given something to do that shows who God is.

1 Cor 12:5-6

On my latest trip to Fiji, in April, I spoke with two key members of the ministry staff about their work and how they first started.

Ruth Harland for the Trust Board.

A Calling

Aunty Mere may look relaxed and inattentive but "her boys" have learned that she has eyes in the back of her head. "Where are you going?" she signs to a small boy quietly gliding past. "Have you washed your clothes?"

Mere Yavala came from Taveuni, in 2011, to bring her deaf nephew, five-year old Apenisa, to see what the school and hostels could do for him. Tema, the hostels' manager, saw there was something special in the way Mere interacted with the children and she offered her a job. By 2014 Mere had gone from hostel helper to hostel-mother to the junior boys (currently 9 boys: aged 5 to 11yrs).

Mere speaks with passion about her role. "God has called me," she says, "to care for the deaf children." She talks about her task to help the little boys, when they first arrive, to feel part of the family. There is much to learn. Some need to be toilet trained. Everyone has to learn to share everything. The older boys have to help the younger ones, and together they must wash their clothes, tidy their room, clean the toilet, and pick up rubbish. The daily roster runs very smoothly from a quick shower at 6am, through



into bed at 8pm.

Careful work and planning lies behind what appears to be a well-oiled machine. Aunty Mere has a

breakfast, school, homework, washing clothes/chores, games, dinner, devotions, and

reputation for softness and toughness. She uses a system of rewards and she notices when someone is struggling. "I am still learning", she says. Last year she had to teach the boys how to control the vocal sounds they made so as not to disturb the neighbours. These days the neighbours share spare fruit with the hostel and they appreciate the quiet and respectful boys whose room is three or four metres away, just through the fence.

"I am responsible to the parents of these children," says Mere. "I build a partnership with them. It is hard for many families, they are poor and far away, but they want to know their children are well cared for. I report to them and help them to communicate with their children. It is not easy but the encouragement and advice of the other staff is a big help."

Mere's favourite times? Parties, when we all celebrate together!



USA. A quiet American retirement, living close to their son, was planned. Shortly before they left, in response to a request from Jim Cooney, Nirmal spent three months

take it on. Here was somewhere she could serve.

Mrs Mudaliar says that among her top priorities is becoming trusted by the GSD teachers. She knows a lot about teaching but her knowledge of teaching the deaf, and working in sign-language, is growing. "In teaching the deaf," she reports, "you have to adapt to the fact that some of the Year 8 students are 18 or 19 years of age, and have different social issues than those of most 12-year-old Year 8 students. Learning the language of maths is also extra hard for the deaf, as is all communication. But we must prepare them well to succeed in a challenging world." Communicating well with parents and hostel parents is also very important to Nirmal. "Please pray for us," she asks, "we need God's wisdom and guidance."

Post Retirement

Mrs Mudaliar is like her desk: organised, business-like, and attractive. No one would guess that this new Head Teacher of the Gospel School for the Deaf, appointed after the death of Mrs Raiqueu, retired in 2009. After over 30 years teaching Nirmal Mudaliar left her role as Assistant Head Teacher at the Gospel Primary School (the hearing-school next door to the GSD) to travel, with her husband, to the

with the Year 8 deaf students, preparing them to sit the High School Entrance Exam. The experience went well, and the results were encouraging.

In 2013 the Mudaliars returned to Fiji a little restless. The USA was cold, and they felt there was more they could contribute. Nirmal did more work for Jim, and then further work elsewhere in special education. In 2015, when she was offered the Head Teacher's job, she decided to

FDM Update

- Until the end of August it is school holidays in Fiji, a time for boarders to reconnect with their families. Mere travels back with the Taveuni children, and when they are home she helps with family communication.
- Later in September the Cooneys will be back in Fiji.
- The Trust Board is currently deliberating on which hostel building plans to adopt. This is a tough one, there are no easy answers.

If you would like to make a contribution, please make cheques out to **Global Connections in Mission** (n.b. 7.4% to a maximum of \$200 is deducted by GCiM before sending to us). **Please do not send gifts direct to Fiji.** Alternatively, you can make an online deposit to bank account **06 – 0729 – 0336879 – 00** with the Reference set to **FIJI DEAF**. Either way, please **always** send the details below to GCiM at **PO Box 744 Palmerston North New Zealand**, or to **admin@gc3.org.nz** so we know who the gift is from and the intended purpose.

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