



CASE STUDY

First Aid and coconuts

By Sandra Silas + Elissa Webster

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

CARE International in Vanuatu has been working in Aniwa, south Vanuatu since 2013. Currently, CARE's WASH, Resilience and Gender programs are working with communities across the island. Jethro* is one person who has been impacted by these programs.

Meet Jethro

It wasn't the first time that Jethro* had climbed a coconut tree – but it could easily have been his last. Jethro is 10 years old and lives in Ikaokao on Aniwa Island. On an atoll like Aniwa, where the land stretches out flat from shore to shore, the top of a coconut tree is an excellent place for a look-out, for climbing races and of course, for finding coconuts – which makes it an excellent place to find a boy like Jethro.

Aniwa is home to about 400 people, living in three small villages. Because there's not much land for farming and few opportunities for trade, many of Aniwa's men work as labourers in the capital, Port Vila, or as farm workers in Australia or New Zealand, going away for months at a time and leaving the women to look after the crops, the children and the elderly. Most of the children go away too once they are 10 or 11, moving to nearby Tanna Island to stay with relatives and complete school because Aniwa's only school teaches only up until Year Six.

Because the population is small, services are limited – there are no banks and just one health clinic, manned by one nurse who also spends part of the year in Futuna, another island nearby. That means that traditional medicine and "kastom" is still the main kind of health care used in Aniwa, and that most people have little knowledge when it comes to medical care. A lack of health care and other services can be dangerous no matter where you live, but on Aniwa, where there are no hills to provide protection from cyclonic storms or stop tsunami waves from



Aniwa is a flat atoll in southern Vanuatu. © Patricia Cyrus/CARE

rolling in and outside help is on the other side of a rough sea, it can mean the difference between life and death.

That's why CARE International, with the help of the National Disaster Management Office, the Tafea province and its local representatives, chose Aniwa as one of the islands where it would offer help to prepare for disasters and climate change. CARE helps communities across Vanuatu's southernmost province to strengthen their local defences against natural disasters like drought, cyclones and tsunamis with practical training for community members on things like planting drought resistant crops, drying and preserving food, and preparing nutrient-rich meals, as well as support to form Community Disaster and Climate Change Committees to lead local efforts to prepare. CARE started work in Aniwa in 2013, and its work with the local community on planning for and responding to emergencies as well as its assistance to the Vanuatu Government in distributing post-disaster aid helped Aniwa achieve what seemed impossible – the island survived 2015's Tropical Cyclone Pam without any loss of life. Today, CARE is still one of the only international humanitarian organisations providing assistance to the three communities there.

In October 2016, CARE partnered with the Vanuatu Red Cross to provide another type of training in Aniwa to reduce the risks in disasters – Basic First Aid training. Ten people were selected to join in the training in Ikaokao, but lots of others came along to see what was going on. Jethro's mother was one of the onlookers watching as the trainers demonstrated a myriad of First Aid techniques, from bandaging wounds to performing Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) – and for Jethro, it was more than a little fortunate that she was there that day.

Just a week after all the excitement of the First Aid training, Jethro was out playing with the other children. The game had made them all thirsty, so one of his friends asked him to climb a tree and bring them a coconut to drink. Jethro is an expert coconut climber and was happy to oblige. But – it was hot, and he was a bit tired, and this particular coconut tree was about nine metres tall. Jethro lost his balance and fell. When the kids saw Jethro hit the ground, unconscious from the impact, they were sure he was dead. They screamed for help until his mother heard them. She came running, finding him crumpled on the ground and not breathing – just the sort of nightmare this mother of three boys, who looks after them alone while her husband works away, had always feared.

But Jethro's mother had just seen the First Aid trainers explain exactly what to do in an emergency like this. She started CPR – and she kept going. Finally, after almost half an hour, Jethro started breathing again.

"If it wasn't for CARE, my son would have died," says Jethro's mother. "We were so fortunate that we have an organisation like CARE working in our small island – they help us in many ways. Many people here have been part of CARE's training. The little bit of knowledge that I got from that First Aid training saved my son."

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CARE International in Vanuatu
Megan Chisholm, Country Director
T: +678 22951
M: +678 775 6714
megan.chisholm@careint.org

