



CASE STUDY

Now She Knows: Dolores Lishi

By Winy Marango + Elissa Webster

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

CARE International in Vanuatu has been working in Futuna, south Vanuatu since 2008. Currently, CARE's WASH, Resilience and Gender programs are working with communities across the island. Dolores Lishi is one of the people who have been impacted by these programs.

Meet Dolores

She might not have had the chance to finish school, but Dolores Lishi knows a lot of things. She knows all about planting and growing and harvesting, and plenty of other things about farming. She knows lots about fish, and the very best way to prepare a flying fish for dinner. She knows the challenges of raising children.

She also knows what it is like to be disowned and abandoned by her parents. She knows how it feels to have the people around her think she is helpless and hopeless. And now, she knows that she is neither helpless nor hopeless.

She knows first aid and how to help her family and her community in an emergency. She knows that people with a disability – people just like her – have much to contribute to their community. As a new representative on the provincial Disaster and Climate Change Committee, Dolores knows she is giving a voice to people with disabilities, and that she is helping to make her community stronger.

Dolores Lishi was born in Mission Bay, Futuna, with her right hand not completely formed. When her parents saw that their child had a disability, they refused to take her home.

Fortunately, Dolores was adopted by another family in the community. But though she grew up with a roof over her head and food on the table, she also grew up being mostly ignored by the people around her, because they considered her useless.



Dolores grew up being mostly ignored by the people in her community because of her disability. © Winy Marango/CARE

“When I was a young girl, I thought my disability is not good, so I am not good either,” she says.

Now 28, Dolores is a married mother of four – three boys and one girl. Dolores’s family makes a living from farming, and her husband also works as a fisherman, adding fish to the family’s meals and sometimes bringing home enough to sell at the market as well. Life has often been challenging, but Dolores’s family has always had to deal with their problems alone.

“People in the community did not notice us,” she shrugs.

That was one reason Dolores jumped at the opportunity to take part in the Life Skills training run by CARE’s Women and Girls Empowerment Project in Herald Bay in November 2014. Dolores learned so much from the training that she was eager to learn more. In the following months, she joined in the nutrition training, and she started to change her family’s meals to improve their diets. Then, she signed up for the Basic First Aid training offered as part of the Yumi Redi 3 Resilience Project when they visited Mission Bay in July 2016. And as she continued to learn, Dolores began to realise that she actually had a lot to offer – to her family, but also to her whole community. She started to understand that her disability didn’t need to be the end of her story.

Dolores had the chance to travel to the capital, Port Vila, to attend special training at the Disability Society. Back in Futuna, she took part in CARE’s Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation training. And bit by bit, Dolores started to change. With growing confidence, she began to speak up in her community, especially looking out for other people living with disabilities, both in her village and in other communities around Futuna.

Her family weren’t the only ones to notice the change in Dolores – the elders in her community did too, as she built their trust in her with her efforts. In September 2016, Dolores was chosen as the Assistant Secretary of the local Community Disaster and Climate Change Committee (CDCCC), especially appointed to give a voice to people with disabilities at the provincial level.

“It opens their eyes to those of us who are living with a disability,” says Dolores. “I realise that things are slowly changing. Since learning with CARE, I’ve been able to make a really valuable contribution to the people with disabilities in a few communities in Futuna.”

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Dolores’s adopted parents are amazed at what she has achieved, and proud of the community leader she has become. Her biological parents are too – because now that Dolores knows she has valuable contributions to make, she is choosing to help the parents who rejected her as well.

But for Dolores, her achievements so far are just the beginning. Next, she plans to set up a business to help others living with a disability to discover their value too. And after that? Dolores knows anything is possible.

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