**Five minutes with...Kate Evans, VSO Volunteer**

Papua New Guinea faces widespread rural poverty and poor educational opportunities for the 4.2 million children and young people. In particular, lack of resources has made the more isolated regions, like the island of East New Britain, cut off from the advancements in teaching enjoyed by the rest of the world.

VSO led an initiative called Language Support Programme (LSP), which has been improving language course materials for student teachers and college lecturers. Kate Evans, 29, is a teacher and VSO Volunteer based in Papua New Guinea.

Tell us what you do in PNG.

I am working as part of the education team in East New Britain, PNG. We have a small team of volunteers based at teacher training colleges trying to improve the education of student teachers in PNG.

Literacy is a building block, a starting point for everything. I was the kind of pupil that struggled to hold a pen, read and write. I had very persistent parents, both teachers, who made sure I could do better. I know if you get children confident and competent in literacy then it helps them access all other areas of the curriculum. If they can’t read or write they are at a huge disadvantage.

**What’s the LSP project about?**

Literacy rates are pretty dire here. Lecturers also did not have sufficient subject knowledge on language to teach the courses that they are employed to teach.

The LSP project aims to improve literacy rates for lecturers and student teachers so that they will improve literacy in the classrooms.

We ran conferences and workshops with all the language lecturers from different teacher training colleges, and trained them on a topic each week. For example, a workshop could be about ‘assessments’; how to asses reading, writing, speaking and listening, phonics and what can be done with the results.
After each week of training, the teachers decide which areas are the most important for a student teacher to learn. They then put it in the course book. It’s written up and ordered in a way that makes sense and distributed to all colleges in the country.

On top of that are multimedia resources. These are films of Papua New Guinean teachers teaching Papua New Guinean children examples of things from the course book. These videos are copied onto micro SD cards so that all students have all of these resources themselves.

How does teaching here compare to the UK?

It is very different. There’s a lot more chalk and talk, where the teachers just stands at the front and talks about a topic and children do one activity. Bright children will finish in three minutes and have nothing to do, the rest struggle. Lessons are also shorter so they move from one subject to another quickly.

There are not enough tables or chairs so children have to sit on the floor- not great for doing your best work. A lot of schools don’t have electricity so when it’s thundering, lightening and stormy, they can’t see or hear the teacher.

Many basic things are brand new here, like showing lecturers what a ‘word wall’ is - nearly every primary classroom in the UK has one to help children spell. But people are so keen for strategies to develop children and are excited to use ideas that volunteers bring.

Is it working?

It is definitely having a positive effect on the lecturers and the student teachers. They are so much more confident in what they are teaching. The lectures spend more time preparing more resources for their lectures because the course book is ready for them to use. The strategies taught by lecturers are being used by student teachers when they go into their weekly practicum. The teachers in those schools are amazed with the confidence that they have. Now, we are writing course books for other subjects, starting with maths.

How have you found living here?

Papua New Guinea is very easy to love. People are amazingly friendly and keen to have volunteers. There’s such a need to improve education so being a volunteer is rewarding. Seeing something I’ve helped with being applied in the classroom is very rewarding.

My social life is dramatically different. I also do miss getting to see children every day. I live on campus, I’m part of the lecturer community here and evenings are spent on the basketball course watching people play or storytelling under someone’s house. I go into town on the weekends and I can go swimming with other volunteers- snorkelling is amazing. I’ve got a chance to get to know the lecturers really well and build good friendships.
What were your concerns?

My biggest worry was that I didn’t actually have the skills because I was a class based teacher. But I realised that my experience actually gives you a whole wealth of skills that people here can really benefit from.

How do you feel about volunteering?

Working together and being able to hold the result of a project in the form of course book makes you feel like you’re part of achieving something very worthwhile, very purposeful that will have a long-lasting effect here. This experience will prove to be life-changing. I love going to different countries and this is a good way to stay in education, have a purposeful job and see a new place.

You feel like you’re part of something good. It’s also very nice to look out of window and see palm trees and blue skies!