

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

**Rotary**  
Districts  
of Oceania



**ROMAC**  
Rotary Oceania  
Medical Aid  
for Children



## ***Frequently Asked Questions about ROMAC***

- 1 Q. Does ROMAC receive Government funding?
  - A. No. ROMAC relies entirely on the generosity of our individual and corporate donors, the support of Rotary Clubs and District Governors – and the very prudent management of our funds.
- 2 Q. Does ROMAC have any paid employees?
  - A. No. ROMAC is “staffed” entirely by volunteers who use their own office facilities, drive their own cars and pay their own miscellaneous expenses.
- 3 Q. Why does ROMAC bring children to Australia and New Zealand instead of operating on them in their own countries?
  - A. Because the complex surgery, paediatric intensive care and rehabilitation required to remedy disfiguring birth defects or life-threatening cardiac problems, is simply not available in small nations in the South West Pacific, Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste.
- 4 Q. Once a child in need has been identified, how are they brought to Australia or New Zealand?
  - A. It is logically complex to bring a baby or an adolescent, from a remote village to a leading teaching hospital for treatment. Visas and passports need to be obtained, international airfares booked and pre-paid, availability of hospitals, costs and surgeons ascertained, internal transport organised, home hosting arranged... it is incredibly time consuming... and all offered pro bono by volunteers.
- 5 Q. Does ROMAC need more volunteers?
  - A. Yes. There are many ways of supporting ROMAC. You might offer your vocational skills, home-host one of our patients and their carer, or be a volunteer driver.
- 6 Q. How can I find out more about ROMAC?
  - A. Visit our website – [www.romac.org.au](http://www.romac.org.au) or [www.romac.org.nz](http://www.romac.org.nz) or check out our Facebook page for regular updates at <https://www.facebook.com/ROMACFRIENDS>. Subscribe to our E-Newsletter for monthly updates at [www.romac.org.au/media](http://www.romac.org.au/media).
- 7 Q. How can I donate?
  - A. That's easy. Thank you for asking. Donate securely on-line at [www.romac.org.au/donate](http://www.romac.org.au/donate). Give a little, care a lot.



*Cover image: Stancia and her mother Hilda. See [page 6](#) for Stancia's story.*

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## Ian D'Arcy Walsh

Chair

### Board Report

It has been a satisfying but challenging year as we dealt with significant change once again. While it has been fantastic to have a steady stream of patients again with the opening of borders after the COVID pandemic, the numbers have not been as high as hoped because of the pandemic's ongoing impact.

Australian and New Zealand hospitals have taken time to recover from COVID, impacting their ability to accept our patients. Fortunately, we have obtained a couple of new hospitals in regional areas.

The number of referrals we received from our Oceanian neighbours has also fallen since COVID. In 2023-24, we received only 37 referrals, which is well down on over 100 we received before 2020. We need to re-establish and strengthen our relationships with our in-country Rotary Club colleagues and with our network of doctors working in Oceanian countries.

Despite these limitations, we were able to treat 19 cases during the year. Ideally, we would like to be treating 30-40 patients per year.

While our focus is on treating children, we can only continue to do that if:

- We have enough people in our core team
- Our systems and processes are up to date and in use, so that we are compliant with all our legal and Rotary requirements, and
- We have the funds available to do what we want.

### Organisational Structure

Historically, Timor-Leste has been a good source of patients. We have treated 144 patients (20% of all our children) from there since 1996. Thanks to a group of enthusiastic Rotarians and friends in Darwin and Dili, all transited through Darwin, managed by our Northern Region in Queensland. However,

referrals and patients have dramatically dropped over the last 5 years.

To turn around this decline, we established a new ROMAC Region for the Northern Territory-Timor Leste area. Judith McKay, from the Rotary Club of Litchfield-Palmerston in Darwin, is the Chair of the new NT-TL Regional Committee. The other members from the Darwin area are Valerie Wilkey, Belinda Jennings, Rod (Crusty) Meyers, James Smith, and Ray Fauntleroy; and from Dili, we have Mario De Jesus, Judite Martins and Ruth Hitchins. We congratulate Judith and her new committee and wish them all well.

Our new region has brought our core team of volunteers to about 26 people. But unfortunately, during the year we farewelled 3 hard-working volunteers: HR Manager, Jim Prokhnovnik; Northern Region Chair, Adele Hughes and Operations Director, Judy Holland. Our sincere thanks to these 3 people for their time and effort. We also thank the people who have acted in their vacant roles, some in addition to carrying on other roles.

We are always seeking new people to join the core team to obtain our desired outcomes and meet our legal responsibilities. It is for mostly health and personal reasons that our volunteers end their voluntary relationship with us. ROMAC is a complex organisation so we need people with a variety of skills, a willingness to work within a team environment and a commitment to compliance.

Volunteering is not about us as individuals, it is about "service above self", utilising our skills and abilities to help children, in a respectful and considerate manner. While most of the tasks our volunteers are doing are demanding and time-consuming, the outcomes of our efforts are extremely rewarding and satisfying.

We particularly need people in:

- Patient care and hosting
- Medical, especially in the paediatric area
- Fundraising, club involvement and marketing
- Hospital, government and corporate sector liaison
- Communications, media and IT
- Treasurer and Secretary roles

## Compliance

We have strengthened ROMAC's compliance with RI's Code of Policy for Multidistrict Organisations (MDOs) like ROMAC.

For many years, ROMAC has had a District Governor (DG) and a District Governor Elect (DGE) representative to liaise between ROMAC and the District Governor groups. While they have, with all the other DGs of the day, been members of ROMAC with full voting rights at the Annual and other Special General meetings, they have not been members of the ROMAC Board of Directors.

In May, we added our DG Representative, Neta Kirby and our DGE Representative, Stephen O'Connell, to our Board as full voting non-executive members. In the Rotary year 2024-25, Stephen is the DG Representative on the Board and Ken Smith is our new DGE Representative.

We also completely updated our Constitution which has undergone very little change since 2001, and the draft is with stakeholders.

The new Constitution will be presented for acceptance in November 2024 at the ROMAC Annual General Meeting (AGM) during the Zone 8 Conference. Our By Laws, which were revised last year, are currently being revisited to align with the new Constitution.

Our annual Volunteers Workshop was in Adelaide in November 2023. We reviewed our completely revised and updated By Laws, our Strategic Plan and a new Child Protection Policy and Procedure and Volunteer Code of Conduct Policy. We also worked through our updated patient database system.



*Team members' discussion at the Adelaide Volunteers Workshop November 2023.*

## Donations

I have previously flagged that, due to COVID, natural disasters, hard economic times and falling Rotary membership numbers, Rotary Club donations to ROMAC had fallen by over 50% in the five years from July 2018 to June 2023.

I am pleased to report that, as a result of our Club and District liaisons and presentations, club donations have increased by just over 10% in the last year on the previous 12 months.

Many thanks to the many clubs that have either continued or recommenced donating to ROMAC. I also thank all the individual ROMAC supporters, Rotarians and Non-Rotarians, who have continued to give. Our achievements would not be possible without your on-going support.

## My Last Annual Report

This is my last report as the Chair of ROMAC as I am standing down from the role at the AGM in Queenstown in November.

It has been an honour to serve ROMAC in this capacity and I would like to thank those volunteers who have given me such great support, respect and cooperation over the last two and a half years. We have had to work through some quite difficult times so I greatly appreciate your support and backing.



*Ian D'Arcy Walsh with mother Seraphina and patient Stanric from the Solomon Islands.*



## Nigel Stewart

Medical Director

### Medical Report

This has been a steady year of growth after COVID. We set a target of treating 30 patients in the year but 17 patients and 19 cases were treated, due to hospital restrictions. We have not achieved our ambitious target, but a lot of good work has been done.

The majority of our patients have come from Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. The most direct pathway for identifying and securing treatment for children and young people is assessment by visiting New Zealand and Australian specialists and our South Pacific doctors.

We have explored a new partnership with Sai Preema Hospital in Suva and funding children to be treated by visiting international medical specialist teams, including those from Australia and New Zealand. Pasifika Medical Aid is also helping children. We refer our patients to Interplast for in-country surgery where possible.

We have seen good activity in Adelaide, Canberra, Regional Victoria, New Zealand, Queensland and New South Wales, which have all treated children this year. The bigger Australian East Coast hospitals are largely unavailable due to patient pressure and rebuilding relationships.

A new regional team in Darwin, Northern Territory, will provide exciting opportunities to re-establish relationships and assessments from Timor-Leste in the future. In Western Australia, the team has been ready for their first patient to come into Perth for some time and we are working hard to find a suitable case for this region.

My thanks to the many who have supported me in my role over the last year. I remain amazed by the positive outcomes and the resilience of children and families. I am immensely grateful to every volunteer who has contributed to improving the lives of children and young people in our region.

Name	Years	Treatment	Country
Ephraim	8	Eye	Solomon Is
Senri	13	Burns	Solomon Is
Apakuki	15	Heart	Fiji
Brenda	10	Heart	Vanuatu
Diana	5	Heart	Vanuatu
Fransisca	1	Heart	Vanuatu
Stancia	7	Anus	PNG
John	-1	Heart	Vanuatu
Stanric	1	Meningocele	Solomon Is
Malisha	-1	Heart	Vanuatu
Melenaita	1	Teratoma	Tonga
Carolyn	18	Ear Nose Throat	PNG
Krisselda	9	Urology	PNG
Habib	17	Orthopaedic	Vanuatu
Haggai	-1	Encephalocele	PNG
Elina	5	Orthopaedic	Vanuatu
Joy	19	Heart	Solomon Is



ACT Regional Chair Sandra Goldstraw presenting Cherie from Calvary Bruce Hospital with a ROMAC Certificate of Appreciation, accompanied by patient Habib.



**Stephen Noble**

Treasurer

### **Treasurer's Report**

I am pleased to submit my report as ROMAC Treasurer for the year ended **30 June 2024 FY23/24**. This is my third year as Treasurer, covering accounting, financial management and reporting. I am also the Company Secretary and Public Officer and cover regulatory compliance and governance.

### **Financial Results Overview**

Donations from Rotary Clubs in Australia totalled \$275,574 (\$259,451 FY22/23). The number of Clubs that donated was 161 (148 FY22/23). It is pleasing that we received more funds from more Clubs than last year.

ROMAC has continued to benefit from other donations and bequests, receiving \$204,443, which is slightly down on last year (\$216,034 FY22/23). We continue to enjoy yearly support from several charitable organisations and individuals, and have some new donors.

Income from investments (dividends and interest) was \$215,468 (\$159,060 FY22/23), mainly because of higher interest rates.

Medical expenses were \$229,981 (\$100,371 FY22/23). While these are higher than last year, they are still lower than our FY19/20 pre-COVID medical expenses of \$419,215 because the number of patients treated has dropped. Hospitals continue to have capacity constraints as a result of the impact of COVID.

Indirect costs (administration, promotion, IT development and donations) are \$151,396 (\$164,825 FY22/23).

The Board continued to ensure that the income from investments is sufficient to cover the indirect costs through close liaison with our Financial Advisor, Morgan Stanley.

Travel Insurance for all patients and carers is now facilitated through Insurance Broker, AON, providing better cover and certainty. We have specific cyber insurance cover following cyber attacks that occurred in the prior year.

There was no loss to ROMAC because of these attacks.

ROMAC continued its significant upgrade of the patient record system, eHR, to ensure that it is fully-compliant, up-to-date and able to meet more patient demand. We also integrated its reporting with the Xero accounting reporting system.

I want to acknowledge and thank the members of the ROMAC team, plus our IT service providers, for their involvement with the implementations which have significantly improved the management of ROMAC.

### **Compliance and Governance**

The Board has undertaken a review of the constitutions for both ROMAC companies. They are compliant with laws and regulations and Rotary International's MDO requirements but both need refreshing.

The ROMAC Board continued preparing for an increase in patient cases by reviewing our processes and procedures. We are ensuring that ROMAC maximises its beneficial impact across the countries that we serve.

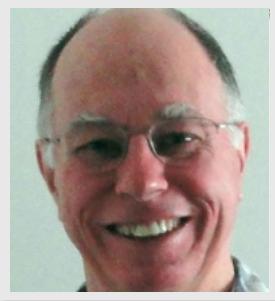
There have been added process requirements in some of those countries. Illnesses, such as tuberculosis, have increased, which means stringent medical testing prior to acceptance and a need to link this with passport and visa application processes, before the transfer of patients and carers. The recent collapse of Air Vanuatu added to these challenges.

I would like to thank and acknowledge all the Rotary Clubs, and the individual Rotarians and non-Rotarians, who have contributed to ROMAC during the last twelve months. The support of Rotary Clubs and Rotarians is critical to the ongoing success of ROMAC.

Stephen Noble

Treasurer

**ROMAC. Rotary Oceania Medical Aid for Children Ltd**  
**Rotary Oceania Medical Aid for Children Pty Ltd as trustee for ROMAC Gift Fund**



## Richard Woodburn

Operations Director

### ***Operations Report***

**A**fter several years of low patient activity and numbers as a result of COVID, we have been slowly rebuilding our operational capacity. During the year we received 37 referrals and provided crucial treatment for 17 children. We managed 19 cases in all, as 2 children returned for further procedures.

I stepped into the role of Operations Director during the year. Judy Holland was in the role for the preceding three years and I commend her for her untiring efforts over this period.

During the year, we rolled out an essential upgrade to our patient management system called eHR. This system enables all patient related matters to be managed “in the cloud”, with all the ROMAC volunteer team members having live access to the latest developments in each case.

The year has presented challenges. Firstly, many of our hospitals were slow to open their doors after the pandemic. They had long wait lists of Australian and New Zealand children, and overseas patients were at the bottom of the list, or not even considered.

Secondly, restrictions on travel meant that many medical practitioners, who normally conduct outreach clinics in the Islands, were unable to do so. This meant that we could not obtain sufficient diagnostic information on many of our referred cases to enable their proper consideration by potential clinicians in Australia and New Zealand.

Lastly, the natural turnover of ROMAC personnel meant that many of the team, particularly in the Regions, did not have the normal handovers that ensure continuity of knowledge of ROMAC procedures and policies. It was a steep learning curve for many, but they came through with flying colours.

I am indebted to all the Regional Chairs, who have the unenviable task of not only

negotiating with their local hospital administrators and clinicians to obtain treatment for our children, but then look after the patients and their carers. They were often required to organise, sometimes at very short notice, airport arrivals, carers, interpreters, accommodation, hosting and attendance at appointments, and never once did they let our patients down.

Thanks also to the Rotary District ROMAC Chairs and Committees who assisted with many of these tasks.

My sincere appreciation goes to the two Operations Managers – Jill Oliver in Australia and Sue Smith in New Zealand. Jill and Sue coordinated with the Regional Chairs and home country contacts to make sure that the logistics behind all our treatment ran smoothly. It is not an easy task to obtain the myriad of identification documents necessary for passports, then negotiate the hurdles of visa applications, especially dealing with families in remote communities.

It takes a great Operations team effort to enable a ROMAC child to receive their life saving and/or dignity restoring surgery from our highly skilled, and very dedicated, Australian and New Zealand surgeons and hospital teams – a big thank you to all the volunteers involved.



*Patient Stancia with her carer Hilda, surgeon Prof. Croaker and ACT Regional Chair Sandra Goldstraw at her bedside.*



## Sandra Goldstraw

Australian Capital Territory Chair

### *ACT Report*

**T**wenty-eight children have come to Canberra through ROMAC since 2008. I am proud to continue to be part of the team that has brought about amazing life changes for these children and families through our wonderful ROMAC program.

Although this year started slowly, it became one of the busiest in Canberra for many years, with three ROMAC families here at once.

It took 12 months to get two little Papua New Guinea (PNG) girls, Stancia and Krisselda, here. Thanks go to our Operations Manager, Jill, who organised passports, medicals, visas and transport for mothers and children.

Both girls were accepted under the MOU between the Canberra Health Services and ROMAC. They were in the care of Paediatric Surgeons Prof. Croaker and Prof. Hamid.

## Stancia



Delightful 7-year-old Stancia and her mother Hilda arrived in February 2024 from the highlands in Goroka, PNG. Major corrective surgery was required for her Ano-rectal fistula.

Her operation was performed in April, followed by 7 minor surgeries, until the final closure of her stoma in June. Stancia will return home to PNG at the end of July. This surgery has been life-changing for Stancia and her mother Hilda.

## Krisselda



Cheeky and happy 9-year-old Krissy and her mother Sonia arrived in Canberra from Port Moresby, PNG in March. Krissy has Caudal Duplication, which is a rare condition.

Doctors had to conduct significant but essential investigations before her 8-hour operation was booked in. Canberra Hospital is a teaching hospital and this condition, which is rarely seen in Australia, is of great interest to many paediatric surgeons.

Krissy will require many minor surgeries before her stoma is completely closed and she can go home around October 2024.

It is rewarding and exciting to see the transformation of these little girls, who should be able to live a normal life after their surgery. It is due to the generosity of Canberra Hospital, the skills of the surgeons and ROMAC volunteers all working together.

## Habib



Seventeen-year-old Habib and his father Bertrand arrived in Canberra in May from Tanna Island, Vanuatu. After falling heavily on a rock while playing soccer 2 years ago, Habib has not been able to walk far without enduring pain in his hip and he could not go to school.

The day after seeing a copy of the X-rays of Habib's hip, Prof. Miniter phoned me and agreed to operate pro bono on Habib for a Total Hip Replacement. Calvary Bruce Private Hospital also accepted care of Habib free of charge.

After a successful operation, Habib and Bertrand returned home to Vanuatu excited about his future.

It is encouraging that when you share with others the needs of our ROMAC children, there are those who will step up, like Professors Miniter, Croaker and Hamid, as well as Canberra Hospital and Bruce Calvary Private Hospital.

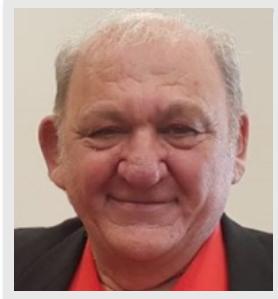
## Thanks



I would like to express my great appreciation and thanks to the support of Rotarians in District 9705. Especially those from the Rotary Club of Bungendore and Ginninderra, who cared for our ROMAC families.

It is thrilling that when a request to host our families is put out to D9705 there are always people like Leo, Gordana, Shirley or Colin and Anne who will assist.

I have had the privilege to talk about ROMAC and the children to a number of Clubs as well as at our District Changeover. I am very grateful for their financial support and pastoral care for ROMAC children in Canberra.



**Phil Cordery**

Western Region Chair

## Western Report

In the past year, activities in Perth, Western Australia, have focused on continuing to develop a relationship with Perth Children's Hospital (PCH). At the same time, the team has been exploring opportunities to use private hospitals for the treatment of ROMAC patients. Both avenues for treating children are at the point of requiring a potential patient to be presented for treatment to move through to reality.

I can report that the Memorandum of Understanding with PCH has progressed to the contract team, which is currently getting advice from the State Solicitors Office.

Recent focus by the Operations Team has been on identifying a patient who will be relatively straight forward to treat and create engagement and success that will lead to a sustained commitment for further patients to come to Perth. The allocation of a patient will also mean that we can approach private hospitals in Perth to assist.

The team in Perth continues to be enthusiastic for ROMAC, despite the length of time it is taking to build relationships across the health sector to get the green light to bring patients into Western Australia.

Unfortunately, donations have dropped off significantly as Rotary Clubs wait for a patient to arrive.

However, a meeting was held with the DG, DGE and DGN recently to keep them up-to-date with the situation. I value their ongoing support.



**Anita Robinson**

Eastern Region Chair

### **Eastern Report**

**O**ver the past 12 months, I have experienced tremendous growth and achievement while remaining aware of the ongoing learning required for this vital role within the ROMAC project. ROMAC's mission to provide life-changing, life-saving medical treatment to children from our neighbouring Pacific countries deeply resonates with me.

In the Eastern Region, encompassing Rotary Districts 9675, 9685, and 9660, we have actively advanced the ROMAC story. Through numerous visits and presentations to Rotary Clubs and other charitable organisations, we have significantly increased both financial support and awareness. Our collective efforts have demonstrated the impact of uniting to make a difference.

Eastern Region has provided support for two children this year. This progress highlights the impact of our collective dedication, and I am excited about the journey ahead.

#### **Melenaita**



Melenaita is a brave little girl who underwent surgery for a vascular teratoma in 2022. Melenaita returned to Sydney Children's Hospital in February and June 2024 for follow-up MRI scans and specialist consultations. Her recovery journey continues, with another visit scheduled.

ROMAC remains committed to ensuring that children like Melenaita receive necessary

ongoing medical care, even after returning to their home countries where such treatments may not be available. Under the care of her local doctor in Tonga and the dedicated medical team at Sydney Children's Hospital, Melenaita is thriving.

During her time in Sydney, Melenaita and her devoted mum, Michelle, stayed at Ronald McDonald House in Randwick, where they have built meaningful relationships with compassionate staff, fellow families, and Rotarians, reinforcing the strong community of care surrounding them.

#### **Haggai**



Haggai was born in Papua New Guinea with an encephalocele, a rare congenital condition where the neural tube does not close, causing a sac-like bulge with brain tissue and spinal fluid to protrude through the skull.

Haggai underwent successful surgery in June 2024 at Westmead Children's Hospital, under the care of Craniofacial Surgeon Professor Christopher Forrest, Neurosurgeon Dr Gemma Olsson, and Plastic Surgeon Dr Damian Marucci. Doctors and nurses were impressed by Haggai's adjustment during her hospital stay. Her mother, Malina, was amazed by the successful outcome of Haggai's specialised surgery.

Haggai celebrated her 1st birthday in the hospital. Rotarians from the Rotary Club of Parramatta and the nurses from the Commercial Travellers Ward helped make it memorable, including a wonderful Teddy Bear cake baked by Marilyn Cook.

Haggai and Malina were supported by compassionate staff at Ronald McDonald House at Westmead, had daily visits from Rotarians and enjoyed the company of other families. I am very grateful for the support they received from the Rotary Club of Parramatta, particularly Rotarian Maggie Thorn.

Before returning home to PNG, Malina and Haggai spent a few days sightseeing in Sydney with me, including visits to the Opera House, Sydney Harbour Bridge, and a ferry trip to Manly. In PNG, they will continue to be supported by their local doctor, Dr Ben Yappo, who reached out for medical support when Haggai was born.



### Thanks

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the dedicated medical teams at Westmead Children's Hospital and Sydney Children's Hospital Randwick for their unwavering care and support of our ROMAC children. Their expertise and compassion have transformed these young lives, providing hope and healing during their most challenging times.

A special thank you also goes to the Ronald McDonald Houses at Randwick and Westmead for exceptional hospitality. Their support is crucial for the continued well-being of our ROMAC children, who are receiving life-saving and life-changing medical treatment. The comfort and stability they offer are invaluable during these critical periods.

The ongoing financial support for ROMAC is essential. As the number of children requiring our assistance continues to grow, our ability to provide essential medical care depends on this generous support. Each contribution helps ensure that more children can access the treatment they desperately need.

I am profoundly grateful to the many Rotary Clubs and Rotarians in Districts 9675, 9685, and 9660 for their unwavering support. Their commitment has been instrumental in our efforts and achievements. Looking ahead, I am enthusiastic about collaborating with the ROMAC District Chairs to form a dedicated ROMAC Committee. Together, we will strive to enhance our support systems and continue making a significant difference in the lives of the children who depend on us.

### **Thanks to our major Sponsors this year:**



**A SPECIAL THANK YOU to all our wonderful MEDICAL SPECIALISTS AND ALLIED HEALTH PROFESSIONALS**  
whose generosity and skills are recognised and appreciated by all ROMAC volunteers, and most of all by our patients and their carers.



### **Peter Garnett**

New Zealand Region  
Chair

### **New Zealand Report**

**T**he New Zealand Region has been delighted to be able to support 6 children this year, 5 from Vanuatu and 1 from Fiji, who needed remedial cardiac treatment.

### **Apakuki**



Apakuki, who had his successful operation last year, completed his recovery and, with his mother Litea, flew home to Fiji on 23 July.

We received the following special message from his mother, Litea, after they had arrived home: "On behalf of Kuki, my family & I would like to express our most sincere gratitude to ROMAC and to the Rotary family as a whole for the gift of life to my son Apakuki."

Another lovely success story which reminds us of the impact ROMAC has on the lives and the future of our children and their families.

### **Brenda**



Brenda, a 10-year-old girl from Vanuatu, and her mother Naomi, arrived in NZ on 6 August. Brenda had her cardiac operation at Starship Hospital on 22 August.

The doctors were very pleased with Brenda's recovery and were considering an early return home. But, an infection picked up during a day outing, delayed it to 3 October.

The Starship Hospital experienced a period of sustained high occupancy in August, which significantly impacted on their surgical lists. This resulted in Starship deferring the planned arrivals for overseas patients, including our ROMAC children.

### **Francisca and Diana**



Francisca, a 1-year-old girl, and Diana, a 5-year-old girl, were both cardiac patients from Vanuatu. They were scheduled to arrive at the Starship Hospital in September and October respectively.

Francisca and her mother Fiana, together with Diana and her mother Christine, arrived together on 16 November. They both had Day Stay Surgery with great results and were able to fly back to Vanuatu on 15 December to be with their families for Christmas.

### **John**



John, a 10-month-old boy from Vanuatu, arrived with his mother Pascal on 7 February. He needed serious, open-heart cardiac surgery and extensive pre-operation testing to get a better understanding of his issues.

On 9 March, I was delighted to join Pascal and three other members of Rotary East Coast Bays, his host club, at Ronald McDonald House to celebrate John's 1st birthday. John had his surgery 14 March and was immediately breast feeding after he woke up. John recovered well, enabling him and Pascal to return home on 16 April.

## Malisha



Our last child for the year, 8-month-old Malisha, and her mother Leimas, arrived from Vanuatu on 14 February. Melisha's condition meant she was required to travel with a medical escort and they were accompanied by Vanuatu Paediatrician Dr Thyna.

On arrival Malisha was admitted to Starship Hospital where she remained until her successful cardiac surgery on 12 March.

After extra time in the Paediatric Intensive Care Unit, due to the extent of the surgery and the previous issues, she completed her recovery back at Ronald McDonald House.

Malisha and Leimas flew home to Vanuatu on 25 April. Leimas shared this lovely, heartfelt message. "Thank you to ROMAC and to the wonderful doctors (cardiologists) who gave us this miracle."

The ability to bring children from Vanuatu for treatment enabled us to utilise the remaining funds available from an existing Rotary Foundation's ROMAC Global Grant, initiated by the Rotary Club of Takapuna. This funding covered the cost of the operation, hospital care and Ronald McDonald House accommodation for Brenda, Francisca, Diana, John and Malisha. The ROMAC Global Grant funds have now been fully utilised.

Our NZ Medical Adviser, Dr John Stirling identified a number of other children in Vanuatu who needed cardiac intervention. Unfortunately the news of Air Vanuatu going into liquidation meant that Malisha was the last child we could get to New Zealand for treatment this year. With flight schedules from Vanuatu starting to resume, it appears promising for ROMAC activities again next year.

We continue to be very grateful for the significant support and collegiality from the dedicated medical teams at our supporting hospitals, and in our contributing countries, who go out of their way to assist and change the lives of the children ROMAC brings to New Zealand each year.

Our thanks also go to the dedicated staff at Ronald McDonald House for the welcoming and nurturing care they provide for our patients and their families during what is such a challenging time. They are an integral part of our support team and we acknowledge their huge contribution.

The pastoral care ROMAC is proud to provide for the children and their carers could not be achieved without the support provided by members of our Rotary Host Clubs.

This year we acknowledge and are incredibly grateful for the wonderful support provided by members of the Rotary Clubs of North Harbour, Takapuna, Downtown Auckland, Remuera, Newmarket and East Coast Bays.

The members of the New Zealand Regional Committee continue to work together to achieve the best outcomes for the children we treat and we all feel a sense of pride in being part of such a great Rotary team and project.



**Minh Nguyen**

Southern Region  
Chair

### ***Southern Report***

**F**rom March 2024, Southern Region started to become busy because of 2 new patients.

#### **Carolyn**



Carolyn Puluku, a 19-year-old PNG girl, had suffered breathing difficulties since childhood due to a tumour in her throat. The tumour was removed and a hole cut in her throat to allow breathing.

She came to Melbourne for the hole in her throat to be inspected and closed. We hoped that this operation would allow her to go back to a normal life without breathing issues. The operation was successful and Carolyn returned home with her father 3 weeks later.

Our thanks to Ear Nose and Throat surgeon Mr Mark Guirgus, St John of God hospital in Ballarat and all the hospital staff for their wonderful work, without charge, to ROMAC.

#### **Elina**

Elina, a 5-year-old girl from Vanuatu with a left clubfoot, came to Melbourne in June.

Her foot was examined by Dr Leo Donnan at VicOrtho and put in cast for 3 weeks, followed by an operation to release her tendon. Her foot was put in a cast again after the surgery. Elina recovered well and is able to walk normally.



#### **Thanks**

Many thanks to Dr Leo Donnan, his assistants, the staff at VicOrtho, Julie Wain at St Vincent's Private Hospital (East Melbourne) and all the hospital staff for their kindness.

Southern Region is seeing increasing interest from Rotary Clubs for ROMAC presentations. This is very encouraging to all us volunteers in carrying out the wonderful work giving children life-changing opportunities.

We would like to acknowledge and thank all the surgeons, the hospital staff, the hosts, Jared Dunscombe Foundation, the sponsor Rotary clubs, and the Rotary clubs in Districts 9780, 9790, 9800, 9810, 9820 and 9830.

Also thanks to PNG and Vanuatu local communities both in-country and in Victoria, all donors and all volunteers for their continuing support.

I would like to also acknowledge and thank Jill Oliver for her support and efforts bringing children into Australia, and into Southern region.

Thanks to Bernie Jenner, our Southern Medical Consultant, for his support during the cases.

Many thanks to all the District Chairs for their commitment and promoting ROMAC to their clubs.

I look forward to the year ahead and to seeing more children going back to their home countries with their medical conditions successfully treated for a better life.



**Elizabeth Davis**

Central Region Chair

### **Central Report**

**T**he ROMAC Central Region Committee's endeavours can be well measured through its many avenues of operation.

Members of the Committee were delighted to be joined by members of Burnside and Walkerville, and Unley Rotary Clubs for the arrival of our first post-COVID patient from Honiara, Stanric.

#### **Stanric**



Stanric was born with Spina Bifida-Meningocele, which meant he had a sac of spinal fluid bulging through an opening in his spine. As a 16-month-old baby, he arrived in Adelaide unable to walk. He was admitted to the Adelaide Women's & Children's Hospital. Through the outstanding work of surgical team of Dr. Sonja Latzel, he departed Adelaide, walking and talking, to return home to live a full life.

Members of the Committee cared for Stanric and his mother Seraphina through the post-surgery phase. The Committee was extremely grateful for the accommodation for Stanric and Seraphina at Ronald McDonald House, which is in close proximity to the hospital, and for the support of the team there.

#### **Other Committee activities**

Policy development has also been a feature of our year. As we are all volunteers, the

Committee endorsed a Volunteer Policy and Code of Conduct. These policies outline how we work, ensuring the quality of our service is maintained at a high level.

Over the past 18 months, the Central Region Committee has developed, and continues to develop, strong ties with the Pacific Islands Council of South Australia. This wonderful group provide emotional and cultural support for our Oceanian families. We are indeed grateful for their assistance. The Committee learns so much from this group and their support is immeasurable.

The Committee would be delighted to meet with Rotary Clubs or groups in our community who support Australia's closest neighbours and the wellbeing of their children.

#### **Thanks**

Promoting the work of ROMAC throughout the Rotary District 9510, and beyond, has and will remain a priority. This totals about 79 Rotary Clubs. Through the year, over 32 presentations have been made by members of the Committee with 13 clubs donating \$34,428. On behalf of ROMAC, we thank them all for their support of our work.

We could not undertake such work without the help of others. Over the past few years, the Somerton Rotary Club has raised funds for ROMAC via the Symphony by the Sea Concert. This is an outstanding event, showcasing the talents of the Brighton High School Music students. Thank you.

I would like to acknowledge the dedicated work of committee members including Brendan Kenny, Bronwyn Kenny, Paul Duke, Wendy O'Connor, Nigel Stewart, Ian (D'Arcy) Walsh, Sarah Huang and new members, Sue Morisset and Alfredo Cababo. Their input and endeavours have greatly supported the work outlined within this report. Thank you.



## Wayne Litherland

Northern Region  
Chair

### **Northern Report**

**P**atients began to trickle into the Northern region in 2023, after a long COVID-stalled hiatus.

#### Senri



Senri, a burns victim from the Solomon Islands, continued his journey and has undergone his third and hopefully, final operation to repair his damaged hands. Now it's back to the hard work of rehabilitation sessions with schooling in between.

Senri has been a fine ambassador for his country and ROMAC. He is ever willing to present his story to Rotary Clubs or schools. His journey has generated considerable media coverage for ROMAC.

#### Joy



Joy is a 19-year-old from the Solomon Islands who has had 3 treatments for a heart condition since 2008, all facilitated by ROMAC. She was operated on at Cairns Hospital in June to fit a new pacemaker.

The Rotary family of Cairns did not miss the opportunity to showcase their region. Joy and her father Namona have been hosted by several Rotary families during this journey and have been welcomed to two local Rotary clubs. This was a new experience for Cairns Rotary and we thank them for embracing the process so warmly.

Our region, particularly Brisbane, is a prime hub for patients transiting to ports south or on the homeward journey. We are often on hand to provide assistance through domestic and international terminals.

In this process, we also acknowledge the considerable assistance provided by airlines, customs and baggage staff, particularly Solomon Air, for assistance with the often daunting journey for those unfamiliar with the arrival and departure process.

While support from all clubs can be sporadic we thank our regular supporters, our new supporters and welcome any club to book a presentation to understand the great work of ROMAC.

We give particular recognition to the Sunshine Coast clubs of District 9620 who continue to run an annual fundraising trivia night, donating a significant amount to ROMAC. There is also support from generous benefactors who prefer to remain anonymous.

Northern Region has the privilege of the inclusion of numerous clubs on the Pacific off-shore islands in its footprint. Apart from being a source of patient referrals, they can be tremendous support by in-kind assistance or financial support.

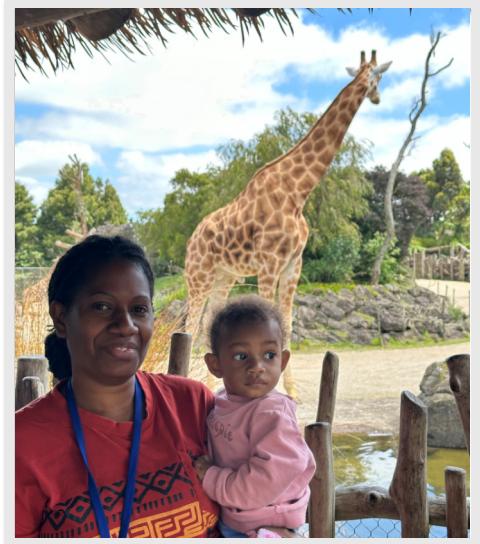
We would thank and acknowledge the Clubs of the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste and Nauru. Thank you to all members who have assisted in the 2023-24 Rotary year.

## Who's Who in ROMAC 2023-24

Board of Directors	Name	ROMAC Email	Club Affiliation
<b>Chair</b>	Ian D'Arcy Walsh	chair@romac.org.au	Adelaide
<b>Deputy Chair</b>	Glenys Parton	deputychair@romac.org.au	Tauranga Sunrise
<b>Treasurer</b>	Stephen Noble	treasurer@romac.org.au	Adelaide
<b>Medical Director</b>	Nigel Stewart	medical@romac.org.au	Somerton Park
<b>Operations Director</b>	Judy Holland Richard Woodburn	operations@romac.org.au	Redlands Bayside Randwick
<b>District Governor Rep</b>	Neta Kirby	neta@sandplaytherapist.com	Tatura
<b>District Governor Elect Rep</b>	Stephen O'Connell	socax@ozemail.com.au	Albury
Associates	Name	ROMAC Email	Club Affiliation
<b>Secretary (ex-officio)</b>	Brendan Kenny	secretary@romac.org.au	Unley
<b>Operations Manager (AU)</b>	Jill Oliver	opsmanager@romac.org.au	Alfredton
<b>Operations Manager (NZ)</b>	Sue Smith	opsnz@romac.org.au	St Johns
<b>IT Support</b>	Richard Woodburn	itsupport@romac.org.au	Randwick
<b>HR Manager</b>	Jim Prokhovnik Maggie Alexander	hr@romac.org.au	Albert Park Gold Coast
<b>Marketing and Engagement Coordinator</b>	David Mayne	marketing@romac.co.nz	Port Macquarie
<b>Operations Evaluation</b>	Bob Richards	evaluation@romac.org.au	Sutherland
<b>Organisation Evaluation</b>	Mike Hetherington	evaluation2@romac.org.au	Gold Coast
<b>Communications Coordinator</b>	Maggie Alexander Sarah Huang	communications@romac.org.au	Gold Coast Adelaide
<b>Communications Editor</b>	Maggie Alexander	editor@romac.org.au	Gold Coast
Regional Chairs	Name	ROMAC Email	Club Affiliation
<b>Northern</b>	Adele Hughes Wayne Litherland	northern@romac.org.au	Discovery Coast Rockhampton South
<b>Eastern</b>	Anita Robinson	eastern@romac.org.au	Gregory Hills Next-Gen
<b>Southern</b>	Minh Nguyen	southern@romac.org.au	Keilor East
<b>Central</b>	Elizabeth Davis	central@romac.org.au	Adelaide
<b>Western</b>	Phil Cordery	western@romac.org.au	Southern Districts
<b>Australian Capital Territory</b>	Sandra Goldstraw	d9705chair@romac.org.au	Ginninderra
<b>New Zealand</b>	Peter Garnett	newzealand@romac.org.au	East Coast Bays



*John on his 1<sup>st</sup> birthday.*



*Fransisca at the Zoo with her mother Fiana.*



*Malisha.*



*Habib and his doctor Prof. Miniter.*



*Elina with her mother and aunt, Dr Leo Donnan and Physiotherapist Meredith Watson.*



*Stanric and his mother Seraphina.*



TOGETHER, WE

# SAVE LIVES

Thriving communities start with healthy people. That's why ROMAC facilitates life saving and/or dignity restoring surgery for children in Oceania – that's what people of action do.

Learn more at [ROMAC.ORG.AU](http://ROMAC.ORG.AU).

Rotary



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# ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

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