



Maya sits for the first time in her special wheelchair as Larrissa from Abt takes her for a ride.

Maya from Kagi receives a special wheelchair

Maya Dibuda, a 13-year-old girl from Kagi, Central Province, can sit upright on her own thanks to the delivery of a special wheelchair.

Maya lives with Cerebral Palsy – a permanent movement disorder that can cause poor coordination, stiff and weak muscles, and tremors.

Maya needs support to sit upright and her father Steven would sit her on his lap for mealtimes or to rest, but she gets tired after some hours and needs to lie down.

Maya's two younger siblings, Martha and Steven Jnr., helped their parents look after Maya when they are out working, gardening or at the river.

Steven walks the track as a porter to earn an income for the family while Vagigi sells food from their produce to trekkers.

In August last year, a team from Callan Services for Disabled Persons visited Maya during a disability pilot assessment for the Kokoda Track region.

Not everyone is born without disabilities - but everyone deserves to equally participate in social activities and fulfil their potential without barriers.

The pilot was supported by the Kokoda Initiative and Central Provincial health authorities and was integrated in to the regular maternal and child health patrols that occur throughout each year.

The assessment was conducted by Callan's ear and eye trainer Brother Desmond Taboeya and project manager Peter Sindu, who said Maya's case needed special care and attention.

Peter and Br Desmond took her measurements and constructed a chair using local resources as an immediate

intervention to address her need to sit upright.

The Callan Services and Kokoda Initiative teams came together and agreed to provide a wheelchair for Maya.

The wheelchair allows Maya to sit up comfortably and relax.

A small attachable table supports easy access to food and water and her independence at mealtimes.

Her parents say Maya is now able to move around in the community. Her family and friends love pushing her to church in her wheelchair.

"I see how happy she is in her wheelchair and I am so thankful that Maya was able to get help through this program," Vagigi expressed.

Not everyone is born without disabilities - but everyone deserves to equally participate in social activities and fulfil their potential without barriers.





New bridge under KTA, PNGDF personnel partnership

The Kokoda Initiative is working in partnership with the Kokoda Track Authority (KTA), Conservation and Environmental Protection Authority (CEPA), National Museum and Art Gallery (NMAG) the PNG Defence Force (PNGDF) Australian Defence Force (ADF) to increase safety along the Kokoda Track.

Personnel from agencies worked together to inspect key river crossings to identify a site for a new permanent bridge that will increase safety for local communities and trekkers.

The scoping team included KTA chief executive Julius Wargirai, NMAG director Dr Andrew Moutu, CEPA hydrographer John Ari and the Head of Australian Defence Force Staff in PNG Colonel James Kidd.

The party also included PNGDF and ADF engineers who surveyed four sites at crossings near villages at Agulogo, Templeton's, Eora Creek and Efogi.

The project is led by the KTA with Kokoda Initiative support as part of efforts to ensure the Track is well managed, improves the livelihoods of local communities, and protects the rich cultural and military heritage of the region.

Julius Wargirai said the Kokoda Track is typically one of PNG's top tourist destinations and emphasised the KTA is working with stakeholders during the temporary Track closure forced by the Covid-19 pandemic to further Track priorities.



PNGDF and ADF personnel inspecting sites for new bridge construction along the Track.

“We’re taking this opportunity to carry out important track maintenance and improvements,” he said.

“When trekkers are able to return to PNG, the Kokoda Track will be ready.”

Colonel Kidd said the Kokoda Track is a symbol of the enduring partnership between Papua New Guinea and Australia.

“The strong relationship between PNG and Australia has its foundation in the bonds formed during World War II – on the Kokoda Track and in other parts of Papua New Guinea,” he said.

“These connections are strengthened every day through the partnership between the PNGDF and the ADF, and the friendships formed by local people and visitors to the Kokoda Track.”

The project provides PNGDF and ADF personnel a field engineering course with local community engagement and will construct a bridge that is durable, sympathetic to local conditions and provides improved access, trade and commerce for remote village communities along the track.

It also promotes PNGDF engagement with Kokoda Track communities, local ownership of the completed works and an opportunity to transfer skills gained through the course further afield in PNG's remote locations.

The project complements the KTA and Kokoda Initiative's annual track maintenance works and Owers' Corner Road repairs, which were conducted with Australian Government support.

Museum supported with two new officers



Nancy Simeon (left) and Hamaru Turia (right) with Efogi community museum curator Gaksy Siosi (centre) in Efogi, Mt Koari.

The National Museum & Art Gallery (NMAG) recruited two new officers who are responsible for ongoing museum operations on the Kokoda Track.

Nancy Simeon is tasked with war and transport curation, while Hamaru Turia takes on the role of technical officer.

The officers joined NMAG in August last year and are assigned to the museum's modern history branch. They each hold a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in history, from the Pacific Adventist University.

The pair are looking forward to working alongside the Kokoda Track Authority and meeting the communities and other stakeholders as they progress in their roles.

NMAG director Dr Andrew Moutu said the museum was grateful for the support of the Australian Government through

the Kokoda Initiative, which supports the engagement of these two young officers.

“They will be mentored in curatorial work and including the field extension work along the Kokoda Track and the ongoing implementation of the Museum's military heritage management plan.” Moutu said.

Nancy and Hamaru will be working with the communities of Alola, Efogi and Buna on their community museums as well as the ongoing development of the Etoa battlefield site.

The officers will be based at the NMAG and will be part of the museum's ongoing education program delivery to school children.



TWG discusses strategies for Kokoda Initiative

The Kokoda Initiative Technical Working Group (TWG) held its first strategic meeting in January 2021 to reflect on the project outcomes from last year and focus on the plans and priorities in 2021 concerning the three pillars – People, Track and Environment.

The meeting was held with TWG representatives from KI partner agencies – Kokoda Track Authority (KTA), Conservation and Environment Protection Authority (CEPA), Tourism Promotion Authority (TPA), National Museum and Art Gallery (NMAG), Central and Oro Provincial Governments, the Department of Provincial and Local Government Affairs (DPLGA) and representatives from the Australian High Commission with Abt’s Kokoda Initiative Partnership providing secretariat services. The meeting highlighted the impact and benefits of the current projects, strategic priorities were identified including responsibilities of each partner agency.

The TWG provides a forum for agencies representing the Governments of PNG and Australia on the Kokoda Initiative to



TWG members at the first TWG meeting in 2021

maximise coordination, resources and project management between partners working together under the Kokoda Initiative promoting collaboration on projects provide sustainable and tangible benefits for the Track, the People and the Environment.

The TWG acknowledged Australian Government funding assistance towards KTA during the COVID pandemic to ensure KTA maintained its operations.

They discussed developments towards progressing the Kokoda Track Management Authority under the legislation currently being drafted, the Landowner forum and the new KTA Ranger Capacity Development Project.

Other discussions included Track developments, KTA’s Kokoda Track Tourism Master Plan and the Gazettal of Interim Protection Zone amongst others.



Oro artisans weave pandanus mats during the product development workshop

Craft to boost business

Local artisans in Alola and Abuari villages in Northern Province have boosted their business prospects by improving their ability to craft cultural items.

Thirty participants received training at a wee-klong product development workshop that took place in October 2020 at the Alola Trade Centre.

Participants that completed the program are now confident to create authentic, high-quality Oro products – including cane baskets, bilums and pandanus mats – to sell to tourists once trekking resumes in the Kokoda Track region.

The workshops are part of the trade centre program supported by the Kokoda Initiative.

New weapons cache to protect WWII remnants

A new enclosed display cache will allow historic World War II artefacts to be properly protected and exhibited at Guvava near Alola village in Northern Province – an important step to preserve the region’s military history for future generations and visitors.

The Guvava weapons cache near Alola is the second of three enclosures to be constructed by the National Museum and Art Gallery (NMAG) in partnership with local communities and the Australian Government through the Kokoda Initiative.

These weapons enclosures are part of the NMAG Kokoda Track Military Heritage Master Plan, also supported through the Kokoda Initiative which aims to keep the track open and well-managed, and protect the environment, cultural values and military heritage of the region.

The collection had previously been preserved by locals and includes Australian and Japanese weapons from World War II battles along the Kokoda Track. The Guvava artefacts displayed were discovered almost 10 years ago by local landowners, including Sam Segga.

NMAG director Dr Andrew Moutu said implementation of the plan involves



Local landowner Sam Segga and NMAG curator Kenneth Miamba at the Guvava weapons cache.

partnerships with local communities to preserve artefacts and educate current and future generations.

“This is a significant discovery and an important site for management and protection,” Dr Moutu said.

“The protective structure balances security and safety with access for trekkers and local people.”

Many relics were scattered in the area during WWII battles and have subsequently been hidden in the thick jungle and washed down mountains.

Menstrual hygiene project aims to keep girls in school



Mothers in Northern display the reusable sanitary hygiene kits in Kokoda.

Female students along the Kokoda Track region received free reusable menstrual hygiene kits, ensuring women and girls can continue to attend classes throughout their menstrual cycle.

More than 700 sanitary kits were produced by a team of 17 women in Kokoda, Northern Province, as part of the Seif Meri Mun project.

The production team were engaged to undertake two weeks of intensive sewing under the leadership of local seamstress Theresa Kila Pat and with support from the Kokoda Initiative.

Ms Kila Pat is an expert in sewing and overlocking and brought three electrical and three manual sewing machines which were used to produce the kits.

“The project has helped me teach the other mothers to sew sanitary kits,” she said.

“They can use the skills learnt to produce kits for themselves and their daughters as well.”

Misplaced taboos around menstruation can limit the inclusion of women and girls in village activities and unfortunately it is common for them to miss school during their cycle to avoid feelings of embarrassment and shame.

The kits are being distributed free of charge to remote track communities.

Each kit contains two reusable cloth pads, two shields to hold the pads, one face cloth, bath soap, a sealed bag to store the used pad for washing after each use, and a menstrual flow chart to help them track their cycle.

FROM THE TRACK

Hamaru Turia - NMAG intern



Where are you from?

Hamaru Turia, who is of mixed Gulf and Central parentage, joined the National Museum and Art Gallery under the internship program in August 2020 as the Technical Officer – a role that involves conserving the military heritage objects (war relics), monitor and maintain the collections and liaising with stakeholders and landowners near War Memorial Sites.

What was your first task with NMAG?

I commenced when the organisation was running a workshop with Buk Bilong Pikinini. This program helped paved way for me to relate well with the other counterparts.

Your first time on the Track?

Yes. I finally got a glimpse of the famous Kokoda Track!

First village to visit was Efogi – I was told I made it to the middle of the Track. Travelling with a group of like-minded people from KTA, TPA and KI made me understand the kind of work they do. For me, personally, I felt a sense of acceptance shown by the people along the track – it was welcoming!

Future plans?

I have plans to assist community museums along the track to promote the military heritage and history in their area, showcase their collections and help bring in more stakeholders. Our country possesses more cultural and military history and it should be in our best interest to promote what we have for the world to see and that is what I want to do.

Extraordinary biodiversity found on Kokoda Track

Around a quarter of mainland PNG’s plant and animal life is found in the region between Mount Victoria, the Kokoda Track and Mount Kenevi, according to a new report commissioned by the Kokoda Initiative and the Conservation and Environment Protection Authority (CEPA).

The report by zoologist Dr Allen Allison, who has been studying PNG’s animal and plant species since the 1970s, found that the region has exceptional scenic beauty and many species found nowhere else in the world (known as biological endemism), which mean the Kokoda Track and surrounding Owen Stanley Ranges region is of international conservation significance.

The study found that, as a result of over 70 million years of complex evolution, the region has extraordinarily rich animal and plant life with nearly 900 species



INSERT: Unique butterfly with patterns similar to the Oro tapa. ABOVE: Myola Lake in Northern Province.

of vertebrates (birds, fish, amphibians, reptiles and mammals) and 6,700 species of plants.

Dr Allison’s report concludes that it is likely to be the biotically richest region in New Guinea.

The study was undertaken to better understand the potential international significance of the region as the PNG Government considers a possible nomination to the UNESCO World Heritage List.

