

## Study Tour with the Blind and Low Vision Education Network, New Zealand: Building capacity for implementation of the model of education for children with visual impairment in Papua New Guinea

Papua New Guinea presents the highest level of blindness and low vision in the Pacific and one of the highest levels worldwide. There has been very little hope for children with visual impairment that face high risks for survival, often living in social isolation and missing out on an education. In fact, over 130,000 children with moderate to severe disability are estimated to be missing out on school in Papua New Guinea. For this reason, the work of **cbm** is not only providing medical attention to children with visual impairment, but also access to quality education by supporting teams from Resource Centres to work closely with schools in Papua New Guinea.



In November 2018, ten staff from Inclusive Education Resource Centres in Papua New Guinea under the Callan Network traveled to New Zealand to up-skill in techniques and use of specialised equipment and resources to increase the quality of education for children with visual impairment. Six days of intensive training was hosted by the Blind and Low Vision Education Network New Zealand (BLENNZ), the key provider of education services in New Zealand for children and young people who are blind, deafblind or have low vision. The Study Tour focused on developing skills for early intervention with visually impaired preschoolers, how to teach mathematical strategies and spatial concepts to visually impaired students and how to assess vision using informal and standardised Functional Vision Assessments. Over the last three years, BLENNZ has supported **cbm**'s programme which is funded in partnership with the New Zealand Aid Programme, visiting Papua New Guinea twice for training and providing technical advice in the design of a model of education for children with visual impairment. The model has now been developed by a local team and submitted to the Government of Papua New Guinea for endorsement.

To further the dialogue for increased connection between health and education services in Papua New Guinea, Dr John Pokana representing the National Department of Education in Papua New Guinea, and **cbm** Ophthalmologist Dr Geoffrey Wabulembo also participated in the Study Tour. Important round table discussions facilitated by **cbm** with the delegates, the New Zealand Aid Programme and the New Zealand Ministry of Education in Wellington took place to share the progression of inclusive education through this government funded programme. This exchange between Papua New Guinea and New Zealand specialist service providers and policy makers has been a unique opportunity to share very similar challenges in very different contexts. These opportunities are proving to be highly valuable for both countries, creating collaboration across the Pacific Ocean to improve the future of children who are blind or have low vision.



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