



PRESS RELEASE

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An effective partnership for delivering help, hope and healing

For nearly four years, Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF) and PNG Sustainable Development Program (SDP) have worked together to deliver an innovative primary health care service to remote communities in Western Province.

In 2017, MAF began surveying remote areas of PNG, to learn about the areas of greatest need. As part of that process, MAF reached out to SDP who had been conducting similar research and as a result, this special partnership developed.

After careful research and consultations, SDP devised a health patrol program specifically designed for the Western Province context. The initiative was also closely aligned with the Western Province 5-Year Development Plan. A seven-person team of health professionals with different complementary skills visit remote rural communities; stay on-site for four days; and return on a regular six-week cycle.

A major challenge was the logistics and that is where MAF's aviation support played a vital role. SDP purchased two aircraft for MAF to operate in support of these aerial health patrols.

The partnership is successful because both organisations recognize and respect their differences and focus on their strengths. SDP develops and delivers a health program tailored to local requirements; and MAF delivers safe and reliable aviation support.



From left to right: The SDP health team in 2019 and January 2022.

“We invest in development initiatives which provide lasting benefits for the people of Western Province and see ourselves as a major catalyst for positive change,” says Juddy Aoae, SDP Health General Manager. “We focus on four areas – Health, Education, Agriculture and Enabling Infrastructure. The wonderful MAF pilots enable our aerial health patrols to reach very remote communities. We are delighted to work with such an inspiring partner.”

These health patrols currently prioritise maternal and child health, vaccinations, health awareness, WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene), outpatient clinics, training for Community Health Workers and community leaders; and health awareness for communities and schools.

“It’s the sustainable change which strikes me the most,” says Jan Ivar Andresen, an MAF pilot who frequently flies the SDP Health teams in the Western Province. “To see the difference, it makes for the community, when these health workers visit every six weeks to work with the people in these communities is really encouraging.”

Joseph Tua, a Papua New Guinean pilot, has been flying the health teams from the very beginning: “I’m proud to say that I, together with Joel Rominger, flew SDP’s first flight into Wawoi Falls in 2019 during my early days with MAF. I’d like to think that I grew with SDP health patrols because we started at the same time together. And I really like it. It’s not like a one-time thing...this is a long-term program. SDP is here to stay and they plan to be here for the long haul, despite all the challenges they face.”



Pilot Joseph Tua at work with the SDP health team in Western Province.

MAF has been serving the remote communities of PNG with its air service for more than 70 years and currently employs 19 missionary pilots from 10 countries around the world. Corné Noordhoek from the Netherlands also flies the SDP health patrols out to remote communities. “I really appreciate seeing the true heart of the teams we fly out. You can see that they are passionate about making a change for their people in their country. They are enthusiastic about the challenging time they spend in these remote areas,” he says.

Throughout the first year of the COVID 19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns in 2020, many NGO’s and aid agencies repatriated their staff and stopped providing regular services. SDP took the decision to take a major role in delivering COVID 19 vaccinations and maintaining their regular health care services having been granted special exemption by the Pandemic Controller.

This was only made possible because MAF was willing and were given special exemption to continue flights for SDP’s aerial health patrols. When they arrived at the Morehead Health Centre in South Fly, the Officer-in-Charge, Sr Guma said: “We had heard about COVID 19 but we were confused and afraid. We had no masks but we knew we had to keep ourselves safe. So, everyone stayed in their houses.”

The SDP health team provided face masks, drugs, vaccines, hand sanitizers and soap, snake bite bandages and anti-venom serum. Sr Guma said SDP’s visit gave a huge boost to the whole community as the health team worked with community leaders, nurses and the school.

As they were departing on the MAF pickup flight, she said: “All these things, we have never seen before and we are impressed. Morehead is a very big station looking after many people across the

South Fly plain. We didn't know where to seek help until you came to our surprise. We don't know what to say, but only to thank you all."



SDP health team when they first visited Morehead Health Centre two years ago. Since then, SDP is partnering with the Western Province Health Authority (WPHA) and is currently refurbishing and upgrading the facility.

We have come a long way in a few short years. Today MAF flies 8 patrol teams to 37 communities on their six-weekly rotation. The pick-up flights are used to deliver medical and other supplies for the communities.

"Having strong partnerships is key for SDP's success and we are proud to be working with MAF for our aerial health patrols and airstrip maintenance programs in Western Province," added SDP's Juddy Aoae.

MAF Country Director Todd Aebischer concurs: "We want to serve the people of Papua New Guinea and make sure that the change we bring for people lasts for generations to come. This truly is a win/win relationship for all involved. It's a win for SDP to be able to invest in and be a catalyst for positive change in the Western Province...and it's a win for MAF, to see isolated people changed by the love of Christ, as demonstrated through the care and compassion of MAF and the medical teams, and it is definitely a win for the remote communities who are having regular access to basic health care like never before."

SDP also funded and worked closely with Rural Airstrip Agency (RAA) to maintain and re-open the seriously deteriorated rural airstrips in Western Province. In 2018 only 12 airstrips were open. There are now 45 in operation and, over the next 12 to 18 months, more will be re-opened meaning that we will be able to access 55 airstrip communities across Western Province.

What is perhaps surprising about this successful partnership is the two organisations are very different. SDP is an "impact investor" (not an NGO, donor, or arm of government). It applies commercial disciplines to achieve social outcomes and has a real focus on efficiency and effectiveness. It is a nimble, action-oriented organisation.

MAF's vision and mission is to see isolated people changed by the love of Christ by bringing help, hope and healing through aviation and has been serving the people of Papua New Guinea since 1951. With 10 aircraft, MAF is reaching over 200 airstrips around the country.



MAF pilots, November 2022.