

Angels of mercy

From the slums of Bolivia to Syrian refugee camps and remote Pacific eye clinics, New Zealanders are making a difference. **LYNDA BRENDISH** talks to 12 gutsy Kiwis to find out more

PHOTOGRAPHY **JESSIE CASSON**

There's an ingrained sense of fairness in the fabric of Kiwi society – from the ongoing popularity of the telly show *Fair Go*, to fair play on the sports field and the way we've embraced Fairtrade. When you read the stories of Kiwis pitching in to create better lives and environments around the world, you get a sense of this innate barometer for justice, along with our typical can-do attitude and modest pragmatism.

Daniel Walker Nvader, Global

Imagine the inside of a brothel; it could be a high-class joint in the midst of Bangkok's urban sprawl, a grimy shack in an Indian slum, or on the outskirts of a bustling East African capital. The location is incidental. What matters is the high-tech recording equipment you're concealing under your clothes and the evidence you're gathering of illegal sex trafficking. Evidence that can later be used to rescue the trafficked women and children being forced to work there, and to ensure the pimps are prosecuted.

Daniel Walker, founder of Kiwi anti-sex trafficking organisation Nvader, doesn't need to imagine the scenario; he's lived it many times over. His job on anti-trafficking squads has seen him go undercover into brothels all over the world, meeting

women and children forced into sex slavery. In seedy bedrooms he's heard and clandestinely recorded their heart-wrenching stories, returning later with local authorities to rescue them and arrest those in charge.

"When you go into a brothel you're thinking about your own safety and the safety of your team. If the recording equipment is disclosed it could be very dangerous," says Daniel. "You're watching your exits, making sure there's a way out, monitoring security. You're trying to work out who's running the brothel, how it operates, taking cues from other customers on how to act, and trying to identify the victims."

Valued at around US\$32 billion, human trafficking is the second-largest illegal global industry, behind drugs. Not all trafficked people are sold into sex, but the vast majority are, with the highest proportion of those being women and children. The UN estimates between 700,000 and 2,000,000 people are trafficked every year. The victims are often women from already vulnerable communities, lured by the promise of work in factories or hotels. When they arrive in their new home, they're beaten, raped, kept captive, and their bodies sold to work off 'debt'. "The tools of sex traffickers are deceit and coercion, lies and force," says Daniel.

Daniel established Nvader after years working in similar organisations based in the USA, where he moved after a long career with the New Zealand Police. They were years that took their toll on him – and his marriage.

"It's not the work itself, it's the failure ... When you've got to get back on a plane knowing a child you met is still getting raped," he says. "You're not just fighting sex trafficking anymore. You're talking about Maria, who is 12 years old and you've held her hand while she's cried, and expressed fear and terror."

Daniel says he developed a "dangerous mindset", becoming consumed with success. "Failure wasn't an option."

He returned to New Zealand divorced, feeling broken and convinced he would never again work in the anti-trafficking world. It was only after a police psychologist encouraged him to write his experiences down that he began to realise how much he still had to contribute. The writings formed the basis for Daniel's challenging book *God in a Brothel*.

"I realised how much I had learned doing this work and recognised the mistakes that had been made, both personally and professionally, and how they could be improved," he says.

Daniel has built these lessons into Nvader's structure, and today his investigators are

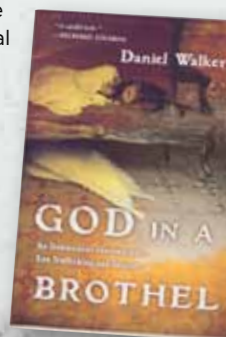
provided with briefings, debriefings and clinical psychologists – and spouses are encouraged to be a part of the process. Daniel believes having these supports in place is essential when faced with the darkest elements of humanity.

Nvader carries its work out in three ways. First it gathers the evidence, with investigators posing as paying customers. Then that evidence is translated into the local language and presented to police in the proper format. Daniel says they approach the police in a culturally sensitive way, offering their support and staying out of the limelight. The laws are in place, but possibly not always the manpower or the political will to enforce them. Finally, the rescued women and children are placed with secure aftercare facilities dedicated to supporting and empowering them so they don't have to return to sex work.

New Zealanders come from the least corrupt country in the world and are friendly, culturally sensitive travellers – traits, says Daniel, that make Kiwis ideally suited to this specialist line of work.

In just the last few weeks, Daniel's team located and rescued a group of girls in Laos, trafficked from neighbouring Cambodia, some as young as 10 and 11 years old. "It's amazing to be able to say, as a team, because we showed up this 11-year-old girl is now free, and living her life and her childhood like every child should. And that local community is able to see, through media and the public justice system, these people with real names and real crimes are being publicly held accountable and going to jail."

For more information, visit www.nvader.org. You can also make a tax-deductible donation or order *God in a Brothel* through Nvader's partner, **TEAR Fund**: www.tearfund.org.nz





Angel McNamara Spinning Top, Thailand

A display in The Body Shop set Angel McNamara on the path to teaching Burmese refugee children with Spinning Top, a Wellington-based organisation that provides shelter, nutrition, and therapeutic arts programmes to children in extreme poverty. Angel hails from Canada but has adopted New Zealand as her home. With her background in film and television she thought she could help out teaching kids stop-motion animation. "I always wanted to make some sort of difference and this seemed like a life-changing opportunity," Angel says. So she travelled to Mae Sot, in Thailand, near the border with Burma to teach children – often orphans or victims of trafficking. "It's difficult to see people suffer and see such poverty, but it was so rewarding seeing my students laugh and have such a great time."

Back in New Zealand, Angel is editing a documentary of her time in Mae Sot, with a percentage of proceeds to be donated to Spinning Top's work.

You can donate to Spinning Top at www.spinningtop.org – and look out for the documentary in November!

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ANGEL MCNAMARA

Chatu Yapa Médecins Sans Frontières, Iraq

"I've always had a strong social instinct and a strong desire to do more, to live a life less ordinary," says Chatu Yapa. And now, as medical team leader for Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) at the Domiz camp in Kurdish Iraq, where thousands of Syrian refugees are fleeing, she's doing just that. Chatu, who was born in Sri Lanka and lived in Samoa before New Zealand, remembers seeing news reports about the Rwandan crisis when she was a child. "That memory really stuck with me and being a doctor was the most obvious choice to think about helping people," she says.

The opportunity to shoulder the responsibility of a clinic in South Sudan, where Chatu's first volunteer stint sent her, followed by a refugee camp in Iraq, has been both challenging and rewarding. "To find yourself in these positions and push yourself to these limits, you discover so much about yourself and what you're capable of," she says. "And you can really see the impact of the work you do ... It's quite empowering for a young doctor like me."

The clinic in Dohuk sees about 250-350 patients a day. Most of the

health needs are basic – coughs, colds, diarrhoea and the like. "It's not high acuity emergency intervention, but people need it," says Chatu.

Chatu's proud to be a Kiwi out in the field and she's grateful for the grounding her Kiwi upbringing and education has given her. "New Zealand is doing really well in the way we incorporate socio-economic factors and cultural factors into the way we deliver health. It's cool to have that background."

Learn more or donate to Médecins Sans Frontières at www.msf.org.au

Philippa Robinson Library advisor, Bougainville

Aucklander Philippa Robinson arrived in Bougainville more than a decade after the end of the conflict that tore it apart, and three days before the opening of the island's first post-conflict library. She has plunged right in to the challenges of running the library, with school and community visits filling her days. She's also planning literacy and reading workshops and an ambitious project to digitally archive oral histories of the island. The library has been embraced with enthusiasm by a community hampered by a lack of basic infrastructure. "It's really rewarding seeing people come through the door, their faces lighting up when they see books on the shelves, or being engrossed in their reading," Philippa says.

The Wellington-based Bougainville Library Trust, founded by New Zealand novelist Lloyd Jones, was set up to establish and support the library. You can find out more and support the work at www.bougainvillelibrary.org.nz



PHOTOGRAPHY CHATU YAPA/MÉDECINS SANS FRONTIÈRES AUSTRALIA

PHOTOGRAPHY PETE CARTER



Kristina Cavit
NPH New Zealand, South America

Travelling through Latin America, Kristina Cavit visited a Bolivian slum where she saw children working as prostitutes and slaves. "Being Kiwi and coming from such a privileged society, it was unbelievable to experience such utter destitution ... I felt compelled to give back." Kristina ended up at the NPH (Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos, or Our Little Brothers and Sisters) orphanage in the Dominican Republic, where she stayed for two years.

NPH runs orphanages throughout South America for children who have been abandoned, abused, or orphaned. The difference is children in an NPH home are never asked to leave, nor separated from their siblings.

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KRISTINA CAVIT



Kristina recently launched the New Zealand office of NPH and works with volunteers to raise awareness and fundraise. She also leads trips to the homes, where volunteers work on tree plantings, house painting, construction and other needed tasks. "These children have no other security blanket ... the level of poverty is so extreme, it's impossible to turn your back," she says.

To donate, sponsor a child or volunteer, visit www.nph-newzealand.org

Janna Hamilton
Oxfam – emergency media officer, Lebanon

For the last two years, Janna Hamilton has been flying into the world's hotspots in her role as an emergency media officer with Oxfam. Places as far-flung as South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Palestine, and now, Lebanon. She's there as part of Oxfam's humanitarian response to the Syrian refugees, to be a point of contact for the world's media as they seek to understand what's going on, and to ensure the refugees' stories are told. "When I'm talking to these families, I can see it helps to have someone listening to them, and even though what I'm doing might not have an immediate result of relief that day, or week or month, I do see the impact of these stories," says Janna.

And that's an impact we here in New Zealand feel, when we connect to someone's story and are motivated to get involved.

Janna, who grew up in Tauranga, says her role in the past two years has been a "dream job", and an incredible opportunity to learn about different places and people in the world. She's also crossed paths with some truly memorable people. "It's the simple



things, the small moments, I'll never forget," she says. Like the woman she met fleeing fighting in the DRC. "She said it was the fourth time she'd been a refugee, the fourth time she'd had to flee her country – and she said enough. She's not going back." Another one involved a search for the first baby born after South Sudan's independence, one year on, only to find the baby – named Independent – had died a few months before.

The connections she makes with people from all over the world, and the chance to make a difference, keep Janna going. "With my job I feel like I'm doing something, even if it's a tiny something."



Visit www.oxfam.org.nz/syria to donate to Oxfam New Zealand's Syrian refugee response, or sign the petition to urge presidents Obama and Putin for peace at www.j.mp/1edIsJm

Graeme Nicholls
Fred Hollows Foundation, Pacific Islands

Kiwis tend to think of the Pacific as a verdant food bowl or a lush, tropical escape. But as optometrist Graeme Russell points out, extreme poverty exists just a few hours' flight from Auckland.

Graeme travelled to Suva, Fiji in 2011 to train nurses at the Fred Hollows Foundation's New Zealand-funded Pacific Eye Institute, but he's been involved in eye care in the Pacific since the early 80s. His role now sees him travelling monthly, from his home base in Tauranga, to one of the Foundation's training locations in Timor Leste, Papua New Guinea, or Fiji – where about 80 percent of blindness is

treatable. There, Graeme helps staff – many of whom he helped train during his time in Fiji – with everything from training to sourcing clinical equipment. "The key reward is watching nurses at work when you've spent a year training them up. To see them in their own location, providing eye care, treating eye injuries – and knowing those people wouldn't have had that service unless you'd been able to invest time and money."

The Foundation is always looking for volunteers skilled in health and eye care. For more, go to www.hollows.org.nz

Sal and Gregg Beisly
Cross-cultural workers, Bolivia

Sal and Gregg and their three young children moved from New Zealand to El Alto, one of the poorest cities in Bolivia, to work with youth affected by gangs, drugs and violence. The family undertakes a variety of activities, from tutoring and vocational training to leading youth hikes into the nearby mountains – and they plan on opening a youth drop-in centre to help keep kids off the streets.

Sal says it's sometimes hard missing home and the convenience of Kiwi life, but it's rewarding seeing youth gain skills and flourish. "[The youth we work with] are mostly from harsh backgrounds and have had huge challenges in their lives," she says. "But they're motivated and wanting to make a difference in their community for good ... That totally inspires us to keep going."

You can support Sal and Gregg's ongoing efforts by emailing info@pioneers.org.nz





In New Zealand ... We hold politicians to account. Good things come with that ability to be an active citizen at local and national levels

JANE FOSTER

Jane Foster Oxfam – country director, Tanzania

Dar es Salaam is a long way from Jane Foster's home on Waiheke Island, but the country director for Oxfam's work in Tanzania loves the vibrancy of the Tanzanian capital. Much of her time has been spent on dusty roads, covering the vast distances necessary to visit the local NGOs Oxfam partners with. Around 70 percent of the Tanzanian population lives rurally and struggles to survive beyond a subsistence level. Jane oversees programmes that aim to support agricultural livelihoods, water and sanitation needs, and active citizenship. "In New Zealand we are open, we're not hierarchical," she says. "We do hold politicians to account and those are the things I expect people to be able to do. Good things come with that ability to be an active citizen at local and national levels."

Some of the most inspiring people Jane's met so far are the Female Food Heroes – so named for their efforts to raise awareness of the role of women in food production. "They are the most extraordinary women," says Jane. "They have the potential to really change the face of farming here in Tanzania."

You can support Oxfam's work at www.oxfam.org.nz

JD Koppel Destiny Rescue, Mozambique

Founded by New Zealander Tony Kirwan, Destiny Rescue works to prevent trafficking, rescue children from traffickers, and provide them with employment and rehabilitation opportunities afterwards. JD Koppel works as a rescue and project manager, which sees him involved directly with rescued children in Mozambique, via stints doing the same in Thailand and Cambodia. "I'm uplifted every day I see these children who were once trafficked, raped and abused multiple times a day – now laughing, playing and enjoying life," says JD. "Doing the things children should do and building a new foundation for a great future."

JD says Destiny Rescue operates aftercare facilities



for rescued children, where they receive vocational and education training, as well as physical and mental healthcare. The size of the problem can be daunting, but the rewards keep him going. "My reward, greater than money, status or

recognition, is transformed lives," he says. "I get to be a part of children being rescued from this evil injustice and then restored and given the hope and future they deserve."

Go to www.destinyrescue.org for more information or to support their work

Kaaren and Jeph Mathias Climate change adapation and public mental health, India

Jeph Mathias spoke with me from Mussoorie in Northern India, where he and his wife Kaaren, and their four children, have made their latest home. Jeph supports local communities responding to the effects of climate change, while Kaaren works in public mental health. This, in a place where the most vulnerable communities are also the most susceptible to the effects of climate change, and mental health needs are largely misunderstood.

Kaaren and Jeph met on the first day of classes at Auckland University's School of Medicine, discovering a shared sense of justice, of the privilege of their own upbringing in New Zealand – and of their power to turn that privilege to the benefit of others.

Years later, a run-in with the Colombian militia FARC threw the luxury of choice into sharp relief for Jeph. He and Kaaren were working on a malaria project with Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) in the jungles of Colombia, when – as Jeph describes

it – "in the coagulating and dark night air" a boy with a machine gun ordered him out of camp. Fearing he'd never see Kaaren again, Jeph obeyed. He treated a FARC soldier for minor wounds and afterwards was ordered to speak with the rebel leader, a man he describes as his "shadow self, in a 'there but the grace of God, go I' kind of way". They spoke for several hours in the heat of the jungle, bonding over whether Maradona or Pele

was the greater footballer, and a mutual desire to do good. "But fate gave me a stethoscope and him an AK47."

These days in Mussoorie, Jeph thrives on the complexity of his work in climate change adaptation, which, he says, has no easy answers. "There's no expert, no one to tell you how to find solutions when the solutions are all about justice and unequal resources. That's a challenge and an attraction."

One success is the community that took advantage of dams built to reserve monsoon waters during the dry season. When the water inevitably dried up, villagers decided to use the wet mud to make bricks to sell, meaning the men no longer need to look for work elsewhere during the dry season. That itself has benefits – including lower alcohol consumption, avoiding diseases otherwise brought back by the men returning from the cities, and fewer women being

pushed by circumstance into the sex trade. With the extra money the village was able to set up food gardens and a grey-water system. "Two years ago where there was complete hopelessness, now a five-by-five patch of green is a picture of hope."

Jeph stresses the adventurous life is one he and Kaaren chose for their family. "It's a flipping fantastic life," he says. "I'm passionately in love with my wife, I passionately believe in what I'm doing and we have great kids. It's not all fantastic, there are issues, but overall it's the life we've chosen and we're happy."

Jeph hopes people might take questions about justice and the environment seriously. "Stop using plastic bags, or start riding a bike instead of driving. Do whatever's in your heart and be passionate."

Kaaren and Jeph work through EHA, a non-profit hospital association in India. You can find out more at www.eha-health.org





Marni Gilbert UN Women, Solomon Islands

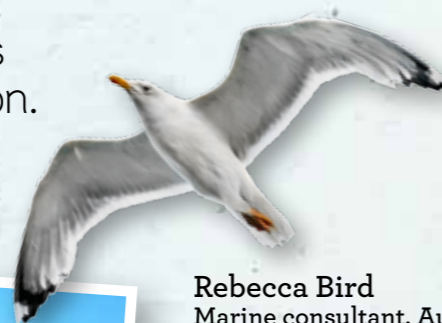
Marni Gilbert is living in Honiara, in the Solomon Islands, working on a Volunteer Service Abroad posting with UN Women. In a region where women still face inequality and increased poverty, UN Women seeks to support the economic empowerment of women vendors at local markets. The six-year project Marni is working on is designed to achieve this through partnerships as well as to undertake research, training and practical market assistance.

"I love being around marketplaces here and really agree with the rationale behind this project," says Marni. "There is huge potential in markets, and especially with women vendors, for economic empowerment and poverty reduction. It's really exciting to be a part of that."

You can support the work of VSA volunteers throughout the Pacific at www.vsa.org.nz

I'm quite optimistic about the international movement, we're starting to see reforms and increasing democratisation. You have to believe in that

ANDREW ERUETI



Rebecca Bird Marine consultant, Australia

After a long career in marine conservation in New Zealand with WWF, and Forest & Bird before that, Rebecca Bird headed to Australia in early 2013. There, Rebecca volunteered for a time with a project studying humpback whale populations, observed them from clifftops on the remote Dirk Hartog Island, and is now working with the WWF on its Antarctic and Southern Ocean Initiative.

Key goals include sustainable fisheries, a network of marine reserves, and seabird protection.

Rebecca says she's always been passionate about the environment, an attitude fostered by participation as a child in Forest & Bird's Kiwi Conservation Club and childhood visits to Barbara Todd's Kaikoura whale-watch tours. "I think New Zealanders as a whole value our natural capital and environment. It's a really important value to instill in future generations."

Rebecca encourages others to get out and enjoy New Zealand's marine reserves, as well as to get involved with local marine conservation efforts. You can find out more at www.wwf.org.nz




Andrew Erueti Amnesty International, London and Geneva

Until recently, Andrew Erueti was a Geneva-based advocate for indigenous rights with Amnesty International. Andrew left the corporate law world in New Zealand after he got involved with land claims on behalf of his Taranaki iwi. "I could see [in Taranaki] the impact land confiscation had on communities and that it was an enduring injustice."

From there, he began working more closely with the UN, involved in taking the Foreshore and Seabed legislation before the UN's Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and the drafting of the UN's Declaration on the Rights of

Indigenous Peoples.

At Amnesty, Andrew was an advisor on indigenous rights to the researchers the organisation sends out into the field. While human rights is often a work in progress without big wins, there were rewarding victories – such as his involvement in successfully protecting the hilltop home of an indigenous Indian tribe from destruction by an extractive industry. "I'm quite optimistic about the international movement, we're starting to see reforms and increasing democratisation," says Andrew. "You have to believe in that." 

You can support Amnesty International's human rights work around the world at www.amnesty.org.nz



BLINDED for beauty's sake

Urge John Key to "hop to it" and ban animal testing for cosmetics

Animal testing is the beauty industry's ugly secret. Around the world, rabbits, guinea pigs, rats and mice are used in painful eye and skin irritation tests and other cruel procedures for consumer products, enduring untold suffering.

Unlike Europe, Israel and India, **in New Zealand there is no legal ban preventing cosmetic companies from testing products or ingredients on animals.** SAFE and Humane Society International are working to change that, and we need your help to make it happen.

Please ask Prime Minister John Key to make New Zealand the next country to become cruelty-free by banning animal testing for cosmetics.

Send an e-card at safeshopper.org.nz