

STEPPING STONES

n e w s l e t t e r



Volume 1 Issue 1

"keeping you in touch with the rest of the region"

January 2010



To all Pacific Stepping Stones (SS) organisations, facilitators and friends, welcome to the first edition of our new SS newsletter!

This newsletter has been produced for facilitators and organizations involved in the program throughout the Pacific region. For some of you, you may have been involved in SS from its inception, almost four years ago now. For others, you may be new to SS, like our most recent addition of facilitators in Chuuk and Guam in the Northern Pacific. Whether you are experienced or still have a lot to learn about SS, this newsletter is for you. We hope you will enjoy each edition, contribute articles, pictures and stories and share success and challenges with your colleagues across the region.

There has been a great deal of change to the SS program that has taken place over the last year and I thought this; the first

edition of the newsletter would be a good space to re-visit some of those changes.

For those who weren't aware, the SS program was first introduced to the Pacific region through funding and technical assistance made available from the Pacific Regional HIV/AIDS Project (PRHP) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). PRHP was a five year HIV grants program, (amongst other things) which on the 30th September 2008 transitioned to SPC. Part of this grants program is what has now become the Pacific Islands Regional Response Fund for STI's and HIV.

Upon the transition of PRHP to SPC the SS project was looking for a home. A home that could offer good networks to regional NGO's across the Pacific, and a home with an organisation that has a long history and strong reputation throughout the region. In October 2008, the SS program and day to day management and coordination of funds were placed with the Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific International (FSPI). I have been working with FSPI since October 2008, (and before that with SS at the PRHP) as the Health Adviser, coordinating and sourcing funding for the continuation of SS. Today, FSPI continues the strong partnership with SPC in order to deliver technical assistance and support to the program.

From now on, this newsletter will be out quarterly. It is part of our continual effort to promote, share and monitor and evaluate SS. For this to happen, we need you to let us know what has been going on in-country, and share any pictures or Most Significant Change stories you've collected from the field. For many of us, it is remembering these stories and the communities you've worked in which continue to motivate us.

Til next edition, Emily



By now most of us will know that Robyn Drysdale, Prevention Adviser has resigned from her position with SPC. Robyn had been working on the SS program since the very first training in Fiji back in 2006. She was always and no doubt will continue to be a vocal and passionate supporter of the program and its potential to become a successful behavioural change program in the Pacific.

We will all have our favourite memories of Robyn, mine would have to be having a race at the 2007 regional SS facilitator training in Fiji to see who could put a condom on with their mouth the quickest, i think i won?

In this first issue of the SS newsletter, I'd like to acknowledge all of Robyn's dedication and hard work to SS and thank her from all of us for being an excellent source of information, kindness and laughs.

I'm sure we will see Robyn back in the Pacific very soon. Certainly the SS program can't afford to lose all of her knowledge and skills so here's to next time!

Vinaka, ko-rabwa, kinisou chapur and Tank iu tumas Robyn!

The Pacific Stepping Stones Program Shines at the 9th International Congress on AIDS in the Asia and Pacific (ICAAP)



In August 2009 the Pacific's SS Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit was given an opportunity to shine at ICAAP, held in Bali Indonesia. The toolkit, which was finalized with the support and recommendations from in-country partners in July was introduced to the region through a 90-minute skills building session.

This session was jointly facilitated by Robyn Drysdale, Emily Miller, and Ben Angola and Nelly Hano, Solomon Islands National facilitators. The aim of the 90-minute session was to:

1. Introduce the toolkit to participants
2. Demonstrate how the three tools recommended in the toolkit are used
3. Give participants the opportunity to practice using the tools

Excitingly for the Pacific, to date, SS has been implemented in a number of countries across the Asia Pacific region however there has been no standardized method of monitoring and evaluating the program. This skills building session aimed to provide all those working with SS the opportunity to learn from the Pacific M&E Toolkit and also share ideas and experiences from their own countries.

Feedback from the session was extremely positive with a number of participants stating they felt it was one of the best and most interactive skills building sessions they had been to for the duration of the conference.

Stepping Stones Steps its Way into the North Pacific



Since Stepping Stones started in the Pacific in 2006, the countries piloting and implementing have all been in the south. This all changed recently with Chuuk State, of the Federated States of Micronesia, to be the first North Pacific Island Country to introduce SS. The program will be piloted initially in four communities on the main island of Weno: Nepukos, Iras, Neauo, Penia.

During the two-week long community facilitator's training held in November, 17 community facilitators and 9 SS core group members participated in all 17 of the SS sessions, participating as they would if SS were implemented in their communities. Through this direct approach, participants experienced and learned how to facilitate discussions and share information through role plays, games, and drawings. During the process, they also developed good listening and communication skills. Often times, participants' beliefs were challenged and some tears were shed, however, for the most part, all the participants had a really fun time.

"I've been to many trainings and workshops, however, this workshop was the first one I've attended where I laughed from the beginning to the end of each day!" Eleanor Sos, HIV Coordinator for Chuuk State, FSM

Another "first" for SS was the training on the Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit for the SS core group. Over a three day period, the SS core group received an overview and practiced using the three evaluation tools: the

Gender (G) Scale, the Community Self-Assessment, and Most Significant Change (MSC) story collection. The Facilitator's Journal was introduced to the group as a means of monitoring implementation at the community level.

"One of our weaknesses in implementing projects has always been the M&E component, it was exciting to see an M&E toolkit that's easy to use and requires little resources to conduct."

Lastly, the SS training workshop would not have been a success without the assistance of the Solomon Islands. Under the facilitation of cross Pacific sharing funded by the PRSIP support grant, Mr. Henry Oti of the Ministry of Health, Solomon Islands, an experienced SS facilitator and trainer, provided his assistance in conducting the facilitator's training for the men's peer group, offering his wisdom and lessons learnt from implementing SS in the Solomons over the past three years.

Written by: Mary Ensico – Programme Development Officer, SPC Pohnpei



Strengthening Partnerships and Program Outcomes



In January 2010, FSPI welcomed a new member to their health team. Nic Turrentine, (preferred name Niko in Fiji) will be working with FSPI for 2 ½ days per week for the next 6 months. Niko has been in Fiji for over two years seeing out his service recently with Lavena village on Taveuni island. He comes to FSPI with an excellent understanding of the SS project as he and 4 members of Lavena village were present at the Fiji June 2008 facilitator training. After the training, Niko took on the role of supporting and mentoring the Lavena SS facilitators and therefore has first-hand knowledge of the challenges and potential for success for SS in a village context.

In his new role, Niko will be responsible for recruiting new Peace Corps villages and volunteers into the SS project. After the next facilitator

training in Fiji, (tentatively planned for March/April 2010) Niko will take over the ongoing support and site visits to these villages. He will also be invaluable in the planning and organising for this up-coming training. Finally, you'll all hear much more from Niko over the next few months as he will be taking on the role of moderator of the e-forum and the production of this quarterly SS newsletter. Of course, to make these two activities a success he will need your input, both in discussions on the forum and with potential ideas and stories for the newsletter. FSPI is in the process of organising an email address for Niko and once up and running he will contact all of you for your suggestions and recommendations.

FSPI is very excited about this partnership with Peace Corps volunteers and we hope it will continue to benefit and expand implementation of SS throughout the Pacific.

Building Stronger Stepping Stones Across the Region

In 2006, the Pacific Regional HIV/AIDS Project (PRHP) applied for a Rapid Response Grant in order to pilot and support the implementation of Stepping Stones (SS) into four Pacific Island Countries (Fiji, Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands and Kiribati). PRHP partnered with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) in order to provide technical assistance and project support to each SS country. In September of 2008, the PRHP grants program transitioned to SPC. At this time the PRHP SS Rapid Response Grant transitioned to the Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific International (FSPI), the Pacific's largest Regional NGO. FSPI signed MOUs with all in-country partners and SPC stating their commitment to maintaining and strengthening SS relationships built since 2006.

Now, FSPI and SPC have been successful in gaining the support of a Pacific Response Fund grant in order to continue to provide technical assistance and support in the implementation of Stepping Stones in the Pacific and promote and facilitate regional sharing of Stepping Stones activities.

In partnership, we will continue to provide both financial and technical assistance to Regional SS activities and to assist each PICT involved in SS to share experiences and lessons learnt over the last two years. Pivotal to this process is the on-going capacity building of countries to independently facilitate SS in their respective communities and this will be a key focus of our support at regional level. It will also enable SS to be introduced in additional PICTs which have requested it. The first of which was Chuuk state in FSM last November (see opposite page for article). There, the Chuuk Department of Health and Chuuk Youth development and resource center partnered to carry out the facilitator training program.

Other Regional support activities:

- This Regional Newsletter! (3 times a year) to highlight and promote stories from the various SS countries.
- Ongoing technical assistance and in-country support visits to SS countries when requested and required.
- A Regional SS conference scheduled for 2010 that will bring experienced Pacific SS facilitators together. An opportunity for facilitators to share experiences to date, learn from each countries rollout methodology and commit to working together as SS continues to be implemented across the Pacific.
- Providing opportunities for experienced SS facilitators to carry out regional exchanges.
- Ongoing support in the production and distribution SS manuals and support translation into PIC languages, as well as the SS M&E Toolkit.
- Establishment of a Regional SS e-forum to facilitate sharing of experiences and lessons learnt among SS facilitators and country partners.



The Response fund grant will make sure there is a coordinated Regional response for SS and facilitate the process for sharing experiences and lessons learnt in the implementation of SS in our region. It will also ensure there is continued technical assistance and support provided from the regional level to facilitate effective delivery and monitoring and evaluation at the national level. In this way, we will be building a firmer foundation for more Stepping Stones across the Pacific Ocean.

Written by: Robyn Drysdale – former Prevention Adviser, SPC

The First Multi-country Evaluation of Stepping Stones in the Pacific

Written by: Emily Miller

In the second half of 2009 FSPI commenced a process evaluation of the SS project in Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Kiribati. This was the first time to date that a multi-country look at SS implementation has occurred.

While the draft evaluation report is currently with partners and undergoing final editing we thought that this; the inaugural newsletter would be a great opportunity to share with current and future in-country partners some of the preliminary recommendations of the evaluation. In brief, these include:

- ❖ Before countries or organisations begin implementation of Stepping Stones they need to consider and answer questions such as; does the organisation have the required human resources? Are there sufficient funding capabilities to implement and support the program? What capacity and funding support is needed? It was found that in countries like the Solomon Islands, where there was a number of organisations, (5 in total) working together in implementation there was an increased chance of success. A multi-sectoral approach, with agencies pooling resources, skills and expertise is seen as particularly beneficial for the future success of the program. This shared vision and commitment as seen in the Solomon Islands was noted as a definite success in-country and was seen as one key area for improvement for future implementation.
- ❖ FSPI and SPC will be working towards increasing the pool of regional technical assistance available for the project. The program is also currently at the stage of being able to provide cross-country sharing, with more experienced national facilitators travelling to partner countries to assist in facilitator trainings. In the past, this has involved national facilitators

from the Solomon Islands travelling to Vanuatu and now, most recently Chuuk, Federated States of Micronesia. This is seen as a definite positive in relation to national facilitators continued capacity development and cross fertilisation of the implementation experience. In addition to this, FSPI, SPC and Fiji Ministry of Health are in the process of planning the next round of facilitator training in Fiji, mapped out for April 2010. This will provide the opportunity to identify and train Stepping Stones facilitators who will be available to travel regionally to conduct national level trainings.

- ❖ In 2010, FSPI and SPC are committed to building upon and improving capacity in relation to facilitation of discussions around gender sensitisation and domestic violence prevention. Through a recently funded engaging men and boys grant proposal FSPI will work towards identifying and training up a cadre of male advocates who will work with community SS facilitators to improve the gender sensitivity of program implementation. Preparing facilitators to become more effective communicators around gender inequality and to have confidence to challenge the typical excuses given by people who either agree with, promote or allow violence against women to continue was a critical recommendation of the evaluation.

Finally, I'd like to personally thank all of those facilitators, organisational managers and communities that made themselves available for consultation during my in-country visits. I was given invaluable and thoughtful feedback and recommendations, a sure sign that we are all continually trying to improve and learn from our experiences to ensure that SS is a responsive and ever evolving project.



What's New and Hot

New SS resources available include:

Community Solutions:stepping stones in the Pacific. A 25 min DVD of SS roll-out across the region

Stepping Stones Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit

SS facilitator e-forum

Upcoming Events

Fiji is planning another facilitator training in April 2010

Vanuatu is planning their next facilitator training in partnership with Peace Corps for April 2010

Tonga hopes to be on board with their first facilitator training in May-June 2010

Planning for the first Regional SS retreat will start very soon! It's tentively booked for June 2010 (stay tuned)

For more information on any articles in this issue of your STEPPING STONES newsletter please contact:

emily.miller@fsp.org.fj



SPC
Secretariat
of the Pacific
Community



**Foundation of the Peoples
of the South Pacific
International**