



The Kokoda Track Foundation



**The Kokoda Track Foundation**  
**In Partnership with**  
**Back Track Adventures and the Kokoda Development Program (AusAID)**

**“Community Health Worker Scholarship Program”**

***The Need***

There is currently a pressing need for qualified Community Health Workers (CHWs) to be trained and supported to work in their home village aid posts and health centres along the Kokoda Track. The Kokoda Track Foundation (KTF) conducts regular audits and community consultations with all community groups along the Kokoda Track. Recently, it has emerged that there is urgent need for local community Grade 10 and 12 school graduates to be given opportunities to train as Community Health Workers and to be supported to return to their home villages and work in these positions in the village aid posts or health centres.

Many entrenched and severe health issues continue to face Papua New Guineans today, particularly those people living in remote and rural communities. Access to basic healthcare is often limited and sometimes nonexistent. Community aid posts and health centres are often under resourced and do not have access to trained professionals to administer basic healthcare.

In adults in PNG, malaria, tuberculosis, typhoid, and pneumonia continue to be the leading causes of death across the country, whilst HIV/AIDS became the leading cause of death in PNG hospitals in 2000. Maternal health continues to be a major issue for PNG. Currently, a woman in PNG has a 1 in 25 chance of dying as a result of child birth complication. These maternal deaths occur anywhere between the onset of labour to several days after delivery and safe delivery environments can prevent these deaths from occurring.

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Among PNG children, the leading causes of death are preventable and/or treatable and include pneumonia, measles, meningitis, malaria, and neonatal sepsis. Furthermore, during the past 20 years, the child mortality rate has not demonstrated any improvement in PNG. UNICEF has found that this is the case in only four countries in the world – Burma, Niger, Zambia, and PNG. Vaccine-preventable diseases, such as measles, whooping cough, and *influenza* infections, still kill children in PNG.

### ***The case along the Kokoda Track***

The Kokoda Track is a remote, isolated web of walking trails that stretch across the Owen Stanley Ranges throughout the Central and Oro Provinces in PNG. Dotted along the “Track” are numerous villages from Koiari or Orokaiva heritage. It was this Track that was the setting for the Kokoda campaign that took place in 1942 between the Australian and Japanese Forces and was the scene of many brutal and bloody battles.

Today, many Australians make the pilgrimage to walk in the footsteps of the heroes of the Kokoda campaign – the Australian diggers and the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels. Over the past 8 years we have witnessed exponential growth in the number of trekkers setting out to conquer the Owen Stanley Ranges and hike the Kokoda Track. Numbers reached an all time high in 2008 with almost 6,000 trekkers crossing the Track.

Despite this booming trekking industry, many of the local communities have not been able to capitalise on the increase in tourism and continue to struggle to earn a living through subsistence farming. Many of the villages along the Track continue to lack access to basic education and health care and in the past the profits of a lucrative trekking industry have not made their way back to assisting the local communities with access to these basic services.

Community health centres, aid posts, and schools often do not receive their allocations of basic medical and educational resources, and can remain closed due to the lack of qualified staff posted to work in them. Since AusAID began working in the communities along the Track via the Kokoda Development Program, many of the health facilities have opened and been equipped with drugs and medical supplies.

However, a key barrier that communities face at the moment is that health workers and teachers who are posted to the health centres and schools along the Track are not from the local community. In the past, this has caused a number of issues due to the cultural sensitivity and the remote setting of the villages along the Track. All too often, these professionals leave their posts and return to Port Moresby (to collect their wages) or go back to their home community and as a result the health centre, aid post, or school closes down.

There is currently a need to identify local Grade 10 and 12 graduates who are interested in becoming Community Health Workers or Teachers, supporting their tertiary studies, and supporting them to return to their home village to work in their profession.

### ***Community Health Worker Scholarships***

The Kokoda Track Foundation has run its successful Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel Scholarship Program since 2003. In 2010, they are launching the Community Health Worker Scholarship program which will provide tertiary scholarships for local community members along the Kokoda Track to train as Community Health Workers. Students will undertake a 2 year diploma at the Veifa School of Nursing and the scholarships will cover students' tertiary tuition fees, stationary and resource allowances, travel costs between their home village and the college in PoM, and a living away from home allowance.

Five students have been selected and mentored to apply for the CHW scholarship positions at Veifa's School of Nursing. We are currently awaiting their entry examination results and successful students will be supported by the KTF's scholarship scheme. Scholarships costs \$2,000 (AUD) per student per year and students are committed to for the entire 2 year duration of their course. The 5 students have been identified from the 2010 priority communities namely Naduri (2), Efogi (2), and Manari (1) villages.

In 2011, we plan to select and mentor additional students from the Orokaivean side of the Kokoda Track to support to become Community Health Workers. These students will receive scholarships to attend St Margaret's Nursing School in the Oro Province and will also be supported to return to their home village after graduation and work in the village aid post or health centre.

### ***The Power of Partnerships***

The Community Health Worker Program is only possible through the combined efforts of the Kokoda Track Foundation, the Kokoda Development Program (AusAID), and Back Track Adventures (Brisbane based tour operator).

Trek operator ***Back Track Adventures*** is joining forces with the Kokoda Track Foundation to fund the Community Health Worker Scholarships in 2010. Back Track's fundraising initiatives will first be allocated to the Naduri scholarships as Back Track are keen to see the aid post in Naduri re-established and supported to become operational.

The ***Kokoda Development Program (AusAID)*** has been vital to the success of the program to date and will continue to play an integral role in 2010 when the scholarships begin. Alongside the CHW scholarships, the KDP are undertaking a number of initiatives to assist the local communities along the Track with their health centres and aid posts. The initiatives relevant to this particular project include:

1. Construct Community Health Posts (new at Naduri; refurbished at Efogi and Manari)
2. Construct a rural staff haus (Naduri)
3. Construct a kook haus, haus win, and tool shed for the Naduri health facility
4. Construct a rural incinerator, pit toilets, and bucket showers for patients and health workers
5. Procurement of essential clinical (medical) equipment, aid post drugs and supplies, furniture and fittings
6. Broker relations between various Health Centre Health Workers, including ongoing training, supervision, and support
7. Support teams to undertake 6 weekly outreach programs to the catchment communities

8. Ongoing support to the qualified Village Health volunteers who live and provide public health activities in the Naduri and surrounding communities
9. Ongoing support to the VHVs and HIV Peer Educators to undertake HIV education and prevention strategies.

Through these partnerships, the Kokoda Track Foundation's Community Health Worker Program will be situated within relevant and appropriate PNG systems and culture and will utilise the strengths of the various partners and contributors. The KTF will commit to the ongoing support of Community Health Workers in general from the Kokoda Track catchment area and will continue to work closely with AusAID and the PNG Provincial Health Departments to ensure that the scholarship students are posted back to their home village aid post and supported after they have graduated.

***How can I help?***

The Kokoda Track Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation with tax deductibility status (Deductible Gift Recipient Status). We cannot do the work we do in education, health, and community development without the support of generous donors. Supporting the 5 Community Health Worker scholarships over 2 years will cost the KTF \$20,000 (AUD). Please contact Genevieve Nelson from the KTF for more information on how you can contribute to the Community Health Worker Scholarships and how to keep up to date with the work of the KTF in PNG.

**Kokoda Track Foundation**

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