

Turaga ni Koro,

I am writing you to open up the dialogue between The Nakavika Project and the village of Nakavika, as you are the voice of its residents. I think if there was one mistake I could find from looking at our time in Fiji, it was that Garrett and I didn't **communicate** well enough to you, to the village members of Nakavika and were not fully prepared for the differences in cultures that affected our communication.

On behalf of Garrett, Jackie and myself, I apologize, and I'd like to end that lack of communication now, to begin speaking with you about our project and how it can realistically develop.

The project began because I was interested in returning to Nakavika, to a village where I felt I had certain skills that would benefit the people. I also wanted to experience a lifestyle I found beautiful.

Garrett and I believe in a few main things:

- that everyone has a right to a quality education,
- that everyone has the right to good health care and information on how to live the way your body wants you to,
- that those who cared for our educations while we were young are the reasons why we love to learn today, the reasons why we have gotten as far as we have in this world, and the reasons why we've become the people we are today - people we're proud to be.

There are many organizations at home and around the world that promote the same ideas: quality education and health care. Because I felt a connection with Nakavika, I wanted those things to come to your village, and since the other organizations of Rivers Fiji, Wilderness Ventures, and Madventurer were not working directly on these things, I felt it was important that I try.

Garrett and I teamed up to use our skills and approached the village to see if it would be needed. At this time, I didn't know how the Fijian social system worked and didn't come to you first, which I should have. I'm sorry for this. Instead I went to one person I knew and trusted: Abel. I'm glad he welcomed us to Nakavika and accepted our project, but I wish he would have told me or I wish I would have known I needed to give this information to you.

Because of this start, I think the project was more difficult to begin. We started our time in Nakavika by getting comfortable with the environment, with the kids, with our living situation and soon concentrated fully on creating a project that could thrive in Nakavika.

We were told by a couple helpful people that we needed to go through many steps in order to make this all right and formal. We needed to tell you our whole plan and inform the elders in order to allow you both the opportunity to help us change the project for the better. Unfortunately, a village meeting never occurred while we were in Fiji, which would have given us time to talk to everyone, especially the elders, about what we wanted to do. We thought two and a half months would be a good amount of time to work out all the details of the project, but we didn't realize at the time that we were working on American time, not Fiji time. This was another thing we had trouble getting used to.

The classes we conducted for the children were a great success. Even though we had problems with the details of the whole project and making it official and accepted, the classes with the kids proved our ideas would work in helping them learn better English and health skills. That made us very proud. We were able to accomplish our biggest goal of connecting with the kids. Even the youth were interested in our classes, and we helped many of them learn more words, learn how to spell words they use often, and get them interested in many other topics, such as: personal reading, athletic injury treatment, nutrition, budgeting money and much more.

We realized a very important part of connecting with children is connecting with the parents, to make sure that good practices are not just taught in school or classes with us but also at home. We appreciated your story of how you act when your wife is upset with you. You explained to us you have respect for your wife and are giving your children a great example to look up to. It is very likely that your sons will grow up to treat women very well, and that's mainly because of your influence on them. In the same way, we hoped to talk to the parents about other great ways they can help their kids: helping them understand the importance of keeping clean, taking care of cuts and colds, staying healthy to live a long life, working hard in school, and much more.

We offered classes for the adults, if anyone was interested, and we were happy to tell people anything we knew that would be helpful. I'm glad we were able to talk to Leo about how to take care of athletic injuries because he's the manager of the rugby team and could help those boys who hurt themselves. This is what we love to do: teach.

In our homes and schools, it's very important for teachers to let every parent know what's going on with their child and with their community. Therefore we found it important to tell all the parents what we were doing in class and how we wanted to help their children, their youth, and their whole families. We hoped the fundraiser would be a perfect opportunity to explain important facts we wanted them to know. Our fear was that parents would come to buy clothes or bags, not get a chance to talk with us, and walk away not knowing that because of their donation, there would be children's fever reducer in the dispensary for their use. It also worried us that the first people in would take as much as they could and not leave any for other families who could have really used more clothing and bags. The way we conducted the fundraiser would have worked perfectly in our home towns, because this would seem most fair to us.

We realized too late that the way we wanted to run the fundraiser was disrespectful and offensive to the residents of Nakavika. We should have talked to more people to realize how our rules would seem to others. Though we would have appreciated a little bit of understanding from people, we didn't build a bridge and meet in the middle. We forgot to work together to create the best possible plan for the fundraiser.

The main reason why we decided to leave two weeks before our flights home to America was because we didn't feel safe. After having disagreements with people and trying to sort them out in conversations, we realized Fijians and Americans have a different way of working out differences. When conversations involve screaming, throwing things, or hitting people, we feel very uncomfortable and unwelcome. We realize now that we should have come to you about our problems with people in the village, but as Americans it is our first idea to talk to those people first and try to resolve those issues. We also don't like to cause problems, and we were afraid coming to you about a problem would have been a big deal in the village and brought shame to people. Usually problems have a way of working themselves out, so in certain situations we like to wait and see if problems are fixed when left alone.

When I first came to Fiji, I had a feeling Fijians were very accepting of cultural differences. If I made a mistake and didn't wear my sulu, someone would tell me to put it on and take care of me. If I forgot to do something in the proper way, I was told what to do and everything was fine. It seemed like people wanted me to be happy and be a part of the village.

By the end of my time in Nakavika, I felt as though there was a bigger gap between cultures that couldn't easily be bridged. We have different beliefs in what women should do, different beliefs in respect and possessions/personal space, and many more things that were hard to deal with every single day. As three Americans coming to Fiji, we expected to change our ways in order to fit into Fijian culture without being offensive or causing problems. We wore sulus, spoke as much Fijian as we could remember, moved around seated people in a proper way, and tried as best we could to not make mistakes. However, there are some things that travelers don't feel comfortable or able to give up, things that make them who they are. We can change our clothes, our environment, but we cannot change the things we believe in. Because of this, I believe we made even more mistakes that could have been seen as rude to the people of Nakavika.

What I've found to be very important in any country I visit is that those people I meet try to build a bridge with me and meet me in the middle of our two cultures. If one person builds the bridge themselves and walks all the way across it to the other person's side, they have changed themselves in order to be seen as right to the other person. That other person then doesn't learn about a different culture. If two people meet in the middle, both learn about the other's culture, both try to make the other feel comfortable, and both learn to tolerate the other's mistakes that happen by accident. Near the end of our time in Nakavika, we felt people expected us to build that bridge completely and to have us walk all the way across to fit into the Fijian village life. This didn't make us feel understood, comfortable or accepted.

We are not sure what caused this problem of intolerance to occur. Did we stay too long in the village? Was there a problem of intolerance because people didn't see the value in the information and donations we brought? Do people value money over education? Did we cause a financial burden on anyone in the village, which then made us unwelcome? We didn't intend for any of these things to happen.

We want the children to benefit from all the good things happening in Nakavika. We think if you invest in your children, you make a great investment in your own village. If your children understand that education is important, the village will soon be filled with teachers, doctors, nurses, lawyers, carpenters, scientists, hard workers that want to make your village even better.

Money cannot buy passionate learners, but great education causes children to care about themselves, their communities and their futures.

Nakavika has a lot of tourism, and this has the potential of doing two things to the village. The first thing tourism could bring to Nakavika is advantage: more money for school development, more supplies for their health, more opportunities for sports, art, reading, more exposure in the tourism industry, more exposure to different countries in the world, and a better chance of going to tertiary education.

The other thing that tourism could bring to Nakavika is greed. This is not what will benefit the village. This is what will hurt the village. If people see tourism as simply money coming in, making it easier to pay for things, then people will miss a much more valuable opportunity to learn, to meet people, to grow personally and have their families benefit for years and years in the future. On top of all these things, coming from personal experience around the world, when tourists are seen as simply people who are supposed to pay a lot, they do not feel welcome and won't come back.

I know I keep using the word "value," and I want to make sure you know what I'm talking about:

Value - the regard that something is held to deserve; the importance or preciousness of something; the usefulness of something considered in respect of a particular purpose

We wanted to bring additional education for the kids, youth and adults of the village. We wanted to help all types of learners learn important things in order to help them get better jobs, feel more healthy, use their money wisely, and help them in many other ways. This was the value we wanted to bring to the village. We also wanted to set up a volunteer project that would allow other people with the same skills and passion to bring the same type of value to the community. I have friends in medical school who expressed their interest in coming to Nakavika when they graduated in order to lend their medical expertise to the village, giving free check-ups and quality advice on how to help the sick. While simply bringing money to the village could seem like a great value, the money is gone quickly and life continues as it is, without the benefit of knowledge that much of the world has. However bringing education and ideas to the village is a MUCH better value, because those never go away and those help other great things happen - things that money cannot buy.

We wanted to bring this to the village because Abel told us it was needed. After speaking with you on the first day, you also told us these things, education and health benefits, are things the village needed. We never wanted to bring things to the village that weren't wanted. This would be forcing ideas at you. This is a terrible way to be and a terrible way to act in another country.

My brother taught me so many important facts about life that helped me try harder, learn more, and be the best person I could be. I am lucky to have this kind of person in my life. I wanted to help others by telling them the things that would benefit their lives: love to learn, take care of your body, things like this.

If you still believe its important to have us bring these things to the village, I would appreciate you asking us formally in order to make sure these things are most welcome.

We have decided The Nakavika Project must change in order to work best. We cannot support a volunteer program for many reasons, one of the most important reasons being the cultural differences that made us feel uncomfortable and unsafe. However, we have the ability to change the project in a way that still brings good information and resources to the village, but not people.

The idea is to stay in contact with the village by speaking with:

-Turaga in Koro: about how the community is doing, what developments and events are going on in the village, what help is coming to the village, and what still needs to be done in the village; how the students in need of scholarship funding are doing and getting them to contact us about their studies and future plans

-The headmaster: about the status of the school, what is working and what isn't working, what supplies they have and what they need, what projects they are working on and if they need any help through consultation, fundraising, supply donations, etc.; understanding the needs of the teachers and the situation with first aid or health care in the schools, also the situation with hygiene in the schools

-The manager of the dispensary, Vitalina: about what supplies are needed, how the village uses the dispensary goods, what she needs to know about health and what illnesses are affecting the village, what the kids know about their health already and what they need to learn

[*Note: The following plans of action are no longer current. Check [The Nakavika Project website](#) for an update.]

With this knowledge, we could help by sending informational DVDs that cover these topics as well as the following topics:

- How to stretch before playing rugby to avoid injury
- Do's and Don't when you're pregnant or nursing
- How to better manage your money
- Nutrition and how to feel healthier and live a healthier life
- ...and many more

With this knowledge, we could also try to get health supplies up to the village for the dispensary and school, as well as school supplies and teaching tools for the teachers.

With this knowledge, we could try to fundraise and create a Nakavika Project scholarship fund; however, as I've told you, people are more interested in donating to a cause if they feel very connected to the people. People are also more inclined to help students who show they really want to attend school by actively pursuing and working for their scholarship money. Simply giving money would be missing an opportunity to teach another valuable life lesson. We will soon send you more information on this possibility.

If you feel it is in the best interest of your village and its future leaders (the children) to accept our new Nakavika Project, I'd be happy to receive a formal acceptance of these ideas and begin speaking with you of how we can work together and help in the best way possible. Here are the ways you can contact me:

Mail:
Lindsay Clark

OR

E-mail:
lindsay@nomadderwhere.com

OR

Phone:

It is, however, our right to stop this work if we ever feel upset by the interaction between ourselves and the village. We will never make a profit off this project, and both Garrett and myself must spend lots of our time at our own jobs to raise money for our own lives while we still continue to work on this project separately. Any donations we receive that are intended for the village will go to the village, not to our pockets to pay for our own lives. If we decide the project won't work, we will still give everything we've collected by that point to the village. But as we have the best interest of the children in mind, we don't want to stop the project, unless something hurts us deeply.

I would like to make sure you agree with this and support our right to stop if we feel upset and unhappy with the interaction with the village.

It is very hard to build strong bridges between cultures that think very differently, but it is the project's interest to try and build this bridge. We however will only work on building this bridge if Nakavika also builds it, too. We must meet in the middle and tolerate both cultures in order to work best together.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you soon. Please send your response at your earliest convenience.

Lindsay Clark and Garrett Russell
The Nakavika Project