

Ambulances for Tonga 2022

Rotary Clubs of Christchurch Sunrise and Hornby



Christchurch Sunrise Club members with the ambulance before departing to Auckland February 2022

Two ambulances sent to Tonga, at a critical time for the Kingdom as they recover from a volcanic eruption, tsunami and Covid-19 outbreak. How did this timely and essential project come about?

2019, Chapter One of the Ambulance story, Rotary New Zealand World Community Service (RNZWCS) chairman Stuart Batty, Roger Turner, of Christchurch Sunrise Rotary, working with St John's Ambulance contacts, was instrumental in the delivery of an ambulance to the main hospital in Tonga
<http://www.rnzwcs.org> <https://www.sunriserotary.org.nz/sitepage/ambulance-for-tonga>

Mid 2021 a member of the Tongan Olympic team, who had been stranded in Christchurch for several months told Stuart Batty, who was in the process of working with St John's to source another ambulance that Tonga was "really desperate for another ambulance".

2022, Chapter Two opened, in the wake of both the Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha'apai eruption, ensuing tsunami on January 15 2022, (which killed five people, injured eighteen, and severely damaged island infrastructure) and the Covid-19 community outbreak which sent the country into lockdown.

This chapter resulted in delivery of two more ambulances to Tonga after St John's again generously agreed to donate not just one but instead two ambulances. Sourced from Dunedin and Hamilton, they were to be serviced and repaired by Rotary Passport Club in Rotorua and Rotary Hornby and Christchurch Sunrise clubs in Christchurch and then shipped from the Port of Auckland to Tonga.



Christchurch Rotary Sunrise's Roger Turner was, as in 2019, the project liaison person, and his previous experience said that to get the South Island ambulance from Christchurch to Auckland the best way (particularly with sponsorship across Cook Strait by Bluebridge ferries) would be driving it up.

The call went out for drivers and club member Pauline Cowens, with support driver her husband Brent Cowens, volunteered for the road trip.

On Thursday February 3 the ambulance was handed over to the drivers after a blessing ceremony at the local Falelotu Kosipeli Methodist Church.



Thank you to the wonderful people from the church for your hospitality and support.

Saturday February 5 saw some work on the number plates, in preparation for deregistration when we reached Auckland (thank you Roger Turner) and on Sunday February 6 the road trip got underway.

First stop was Picton, after a wet and wild journey north with an early night in preparation for an early start with Bluebridge ferries on Monday morning.



Thank you to Bluebridge Cook Strait Ferries for providing free sailing for the drivers and ambulance. <http://www.bluebridge.co.nz>, <http://www.facebook.com/bluebridgeferry>

Monday morning, 6.45am and the ambulance boarded MV Straitsman for the journey to Wellington. Hi-vis vests resulted in some good conversations and publicity for Rotary on the journey across Cook Strait.



The end of a long day on Monday saw the safe arrival of the Christchurch ambulance at the home of Lynne and Chris Joseph of the Rotorua Rotary Passport Club, organizers and supporters of the North Island ambulance. The two ambulances were together from this point on to Auckland. Thank you to Chris and Lynne for some amazing hospitality as we compared notes on all things Rotarian over dinner.

Monday also brought news of a TVNZ Breakfast Interview about the project, with John Campbell, timed for 7.45am Tuesday morning, highlighting its importance of the project and profiling the work of Rotary.

Stuart Batty, for Rotary New Zealand World Community Service Ltd., Rotorua Passport Club President Don Gollan, and Mata Mafileo of the Pacific Islands Development Charitable Trust shared the story of the project and how much it will mean to Tonga.



Travelling north on Tuesday, the last leg of the journey, the Breakfast Show's effects were felt when the ambulances stopped for diesel and were duly spotted, identified and photographed by members of the public who had seen the show.

Early afternoon brought the ambulances to the port gates and then also, through security and Covid temperature checks, onto the wharf. Security was very tight with an escort that included, among others, Swire Shipping representative Tony Spelman and Jeannette Drysdale, from Rotary New Zealand World Community Service Ltd.



The ambulances were photographed, stripped of plates and other registration details and then parked up ready for the voyage to Tonga, where they will take the ambulance fleet to a total of three, all provided by the generosity of New Zealanders to those in need.

Pauline Cowens

Rotary Club Christchurch Sunrise
February 2022

