



Issue No. 4 April 2023



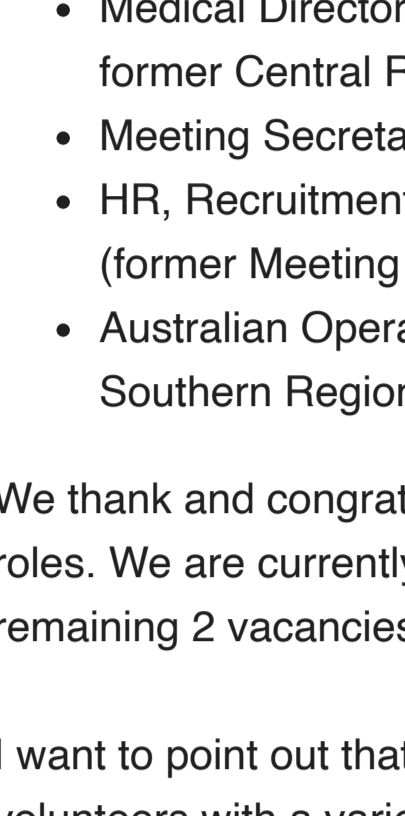
**CREATING NETWORKS | IDENTIFYING NEED | TAKING ACTION**

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Banner Photo: Melenaite at 6 weeks.

## Message from the Chair



Things are really moving again on the ROMAC front. We are currently treating 7 children in New Zealand and Australia and we have at least another 20 under consideration. We are updating our systems and processes. We have recently completely revised our By Laws which, in line with Rotary practice, now clearly limits the time our office bearers can hold a particular position to 4 years.

In this regard, two of our long-serving Regional Chairs, Jill Oliver (Southern) and Wayne Litherland (Northern) have recently been replaced by Minh Nguyen and Adele Hughes respectively. Our sincere thanks go to Jill and Wayne for their outstanding contributions to ROMAC over the last five years and we welcome Minh and Adele. We also thank Jim Prokhovnik, who after five years, is standing down as our Meeting Secretary.

We have recently been advertising another 6 Zone 8 positions, some new roles and some filling casual vacancies. It is very pleasing to see the level of interest in these roles, and to announce the following appointments:

- Medical Director - **Dr Nigel Stewart** (South Australian Paediatrician and former Central Region Medical Adviser)
- Meeting Secretary - **Brendan Kenny** (former Central Region Secretary)
- HR, Recruitment & Training Coordinator (new position) - **Jim Prokhovnik** (former Meeting Secretary)
- Australian Operations Manager (new position) - **Jill Oliver** (former Southern Region Chair)

We thank and congratulate these 4 people and welcome them in their new roles. We are currently working through the selection processes for the remaining 2 vacancies.

I want to point out that most Regional Committees are still looking for volunteers with a variety of skills in areas like fundraising, communications and media, hospital liaison, club involvement, patient care and hosting, and any other roles like Secretary and Treasurer. Please contact your [Regional Chair](#) if you would like to volunteer and help ROMAC continue to provide life saving and/or dignity restoring surgery to children from our Oceania neighbours.

As we get even closer to the end of this Rotary year, I make one last plea for donations to ROMAC if any Rotary club has any surplus funds. They will be well used to help mothers and children in need.

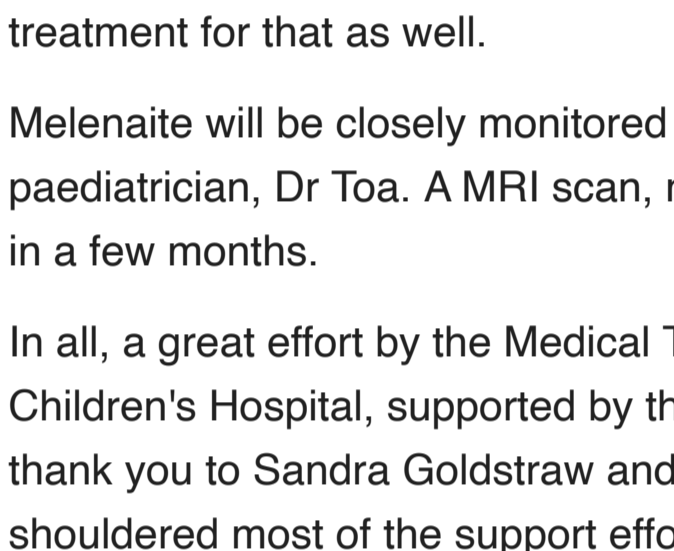
Yours in Rotary

Ian D'Arcy Walsh

## Patient Updates

### Kim from Vietnam

Born in Vietnam with a Tessier Cleft in 1995, Kim was a ROMAC patient of Plastic Surgeon Prof. Tony Holmes at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne in 2001. Prof. Holmes reconstructed her face, reducing her brain deformity, rebuilding her forehead and moving her eye sockets together over several operations.



In December 2021, Kim graduated from college with a major in Tourism and Travel Management, aged 25. She has a job at the College, recruiting students to the school. She says she really enjoys the job and has a good life with the love of friends and family.

Photos: Kim age 6. Kim at her graduation ceremony in 2022 age 25.

### Melenaite Update

It was a very early 4am check in on 8 April at Mascot Airport for baby Melenaite and her mum Michelle. But it was well worth the effort as they were flying home after 9 months of treatment at the Canberra Hospital and Sydney Children's Hospital to be reunited with father Sione, whose only contact has been by phone and Zoom.



Melenaite underwent two major surgeries to remove a 2.5kg teratoma (growth) on her lower back, first in Canberra and then in Sydney when regrowth of the teratoma occurred. As a result of the teratoma, she also has lost bladder control and has been receiving treatment for that as well.

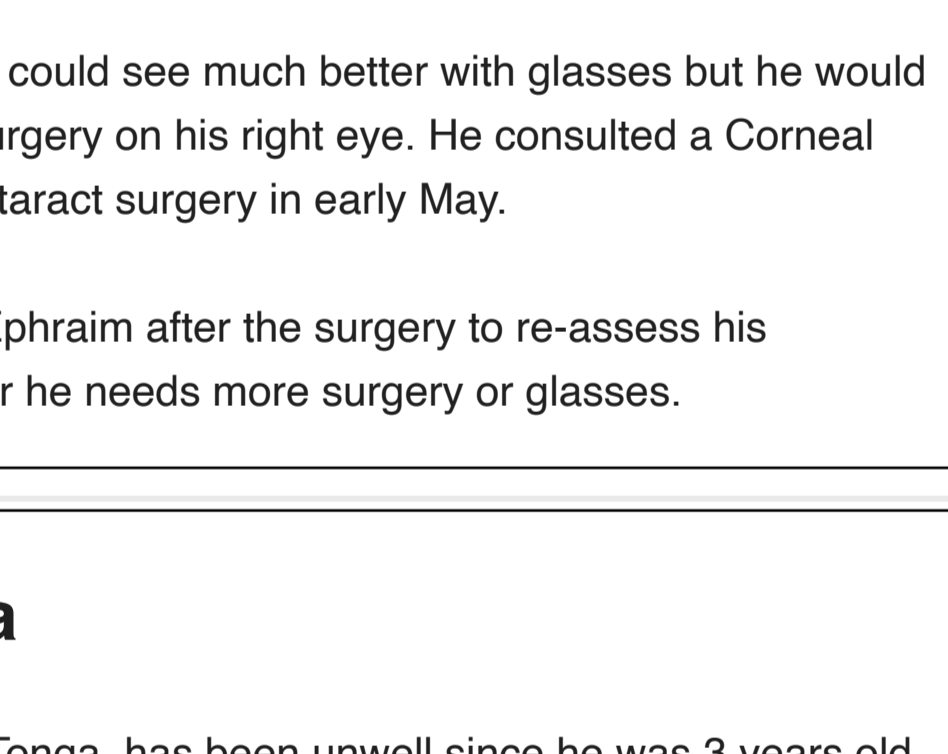
Melenaite will be closely monitored over the coming months by her Tongan paediatrician, Dr Toa. A MRI scan, most likely in Auckland, will also be required in a few months.

In all, a great effort by the Medical Teams at the Canberra Hospital and Sydney Children's Hospital, supported by the ROMAC teams in both cities. A very big thank you to Sandra Goldstraw and Debbie Whitfield in Canberra who shouldered most of the support effort, and to Richard Woodburn, Bob Richards and Anita Robinson in Sydney. Photo (l to r): Richard Woodburn, Michelle, Melenaite & Anita Robinson.

### Senri Update

Thirteen-year-old Senri, from the Solomon Islands, is our latest patient at the Sydney Children's Hospital in Randwick. Senri was badly burned in 2021 when an old WW2 phosphorous grenade exploded as he was playing with it. He suffered full-thickness burns to his left hand, leaving it dysfunctional, and partial-thickness burns to his right hand.

[Dr Sarah Tolerton](#), a Plastic Surgeon who specialises in hand and reconstructive surgery, and Registrar Dr Phaethon Karagiannis successfully operated on both his hands in a nearly 8-hour operation in April.



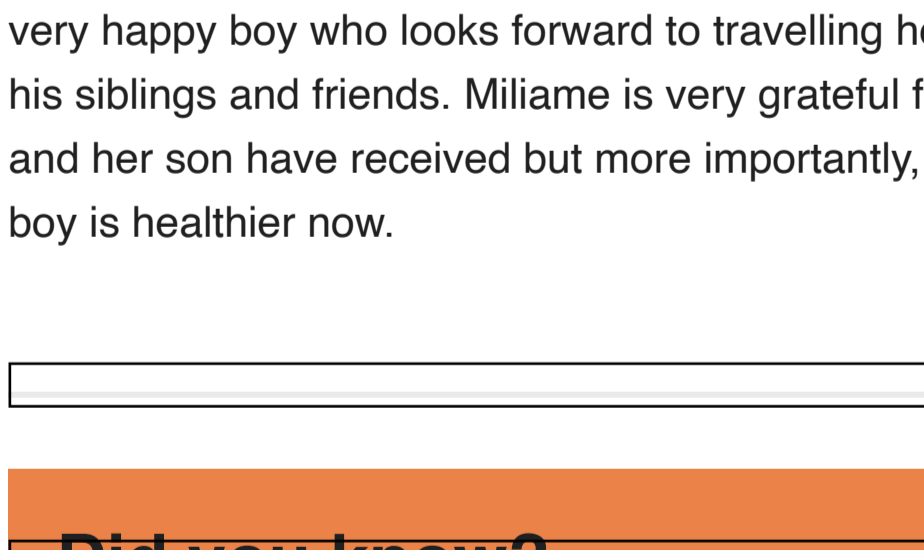
In a further blow to Senri and his family, his mother, who was to accompany him to Sydney, sadly passed away. Then his older sister agreed to step in but found she was pregnant and unable to travel. Rotarian and Past District Governor Ros Kelly stepped into their shoes and agreed to act as Senri's guardian for the trip to Australia.

The surgeons are very happy with Senri's progress to date. He will have a lot of physiotherapy over the next few weeks, with more surgery in about a month to "tidy up" his wounds. Photo (l to r): Anita Robinson & Senri.

## New Patients

### Ephraim from the Solomon Islands

One of our new patients at the Children's Hospital at Westmead is 9-year-old Ephraim from the Solomon Islands.



Ephraim's school teachers noticed that he was having difficulty seeing and advised his parents to have his eyes tested. His test showed that Ephraim had bilateral congenital cataracts, which could cause blindness.

Ephraim was accepted for treatment by ROMAC at the Children's Hospital at Westmead, under the care of Ophthalmologist Dr Frank Martin. He had a thorough 3-hour eye examination in April after he arrived in Australia with his mother Priya.

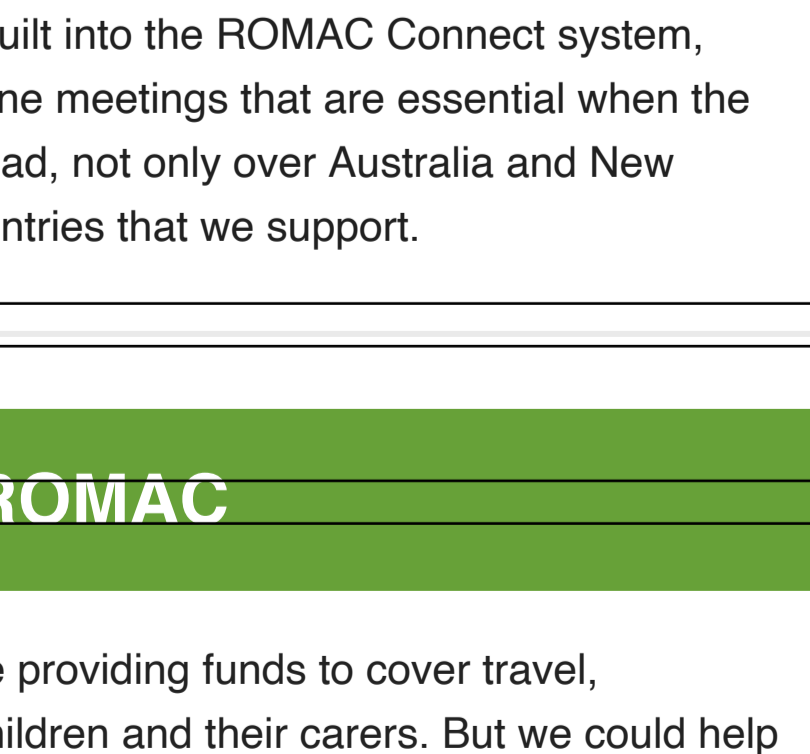
Dr Martin found that Ephraim could see much better with glasses but he would also need to have cataract surgery on his right eye. He consulted a Corneal Surgeon who will perform Cataract surgery in early May.

Dr Martin will follow up with Ephraim after the surgery to re-assess his diagnosis and decide whether he needs more surgery or glasses.

### Isileli from Tonga

Isileli, a 9-year-old boy from Tonga, has been unwell since he was 3 years old. He first presented at hospital in Tonga with pneumonia in the lower lobe of his right lung. He had antibiotic treatment and returned home. But his condition continued to cause concern over the next few years.

In August 2022, Isileli was admitted to hospital with Bronchiectasis and right middle and lower lobe collapse. Isileli's doctor in Tonga successfully referred him to ROMAC for treatment. He, and his mother Miliame, travelled to Australia in early April 2023.



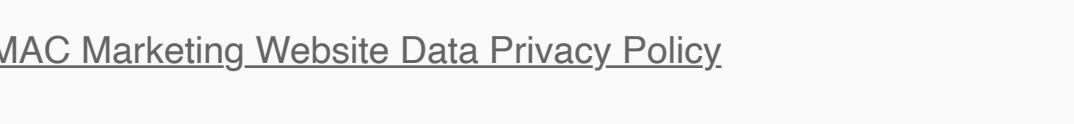
Isileli was admitted to the Children's Hospital at Westmead for a Bronchoscopy under the care of [Dr Selvadurai](#). He remained in hospital for further tests and in late April, Isileli underwent a Thoracotomy and Lobectomy in the care of Surgeon Dr La Hei.

Isileli is doing well after his operation and medical staff are happy with his progress. He will remain in hospital for ongoing medical treatment. Isileli is a very happy boy who looks forward to travelling home to Tonga as he is missing his siblings and friends. Miliame is very grateful for the help and support she and her son have received but more importantly, she is elated that her beautiful boy is healthier now.

## Did you know?

ROMAC is an entirely volunteer organisation facilitating medical aid for children in Oceania. It relies on good information technology (IT) systems and communication between all involved to make it work. Making this happen is a bespoke IT system, known as **ROMAC Connect**, which provides a secure gateway to all the tools needed to ensure the children can be appropriately managed. The ROMAC Board recently approved a project to upgrade ROMAC Connect to a new platform, which will allow further enhancement and ensure that our IT needs are satisfied well into the future.

The ROMAC website provides a lot of information on our organisation. It also has an [Online Referral link](#) in the top right corner of the home page that allows medical practitioners and others in our source countries to refer children and to provide all the patient information needed to assess the merits of each child's medical case. Referral information from the website link feeds into the secure patient database **ROMAC eHR**, which then allows the medical and logistic aspects of the case to be managed.



Many team members are required to bring a case to fruition. The Medical Director assesses the merits of the case, and identifies treatment opportunities. The Operations Director manages the logistic aspects of the case – passports, visas and travel. In-country Rotary Clubs liaise with local medical staff and the families of patients. Regional and District volunteers coordinate with Australian and New Zealand hospitals, doctors and carers.

Finally, **Google Mail** and **Meet** are built into the ROMAC Connect system, allowing the communication and online meetings that are essential when the ROMAC team is geographically spread, not only over Australia and New Zealand, but also over the many countries that we support.

## How you can help ROMAC

Every day Rotarians and Friends are providing funds to cover travel, accommodation and treatment for children and their carers. But we could help more children if we had more donations. Donations all go directly to children and their care. ROMAC funds its administration costs through investment and other income. Volunteers run the organisation.



Give a little, care a lot.  
Rotary Clubs: If every Rotarian in Australia and New Zealand donated \$20 and every club matched with \$20 for everyone of their members, we could cover the costs of all the children referred to us annually.

Friends of Rotary: If every Friend donated \$20 we could help even more children.

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