

What inspired Cathy to accommodate handicap

What's the hidden strength that leads someone to achieve something most people thought of as impossible? What makes them want to try out something everybody has less confidence in doing?

It is very common for people to look at children with disability as those who do not have the potential to contribute much to our societies.

Cathy Anilafa, pioneer of the Solomon Island Red Cross Special Disability Centre has been working with the disable children since 1970's, first as an audiologist.

With humble passion for her job, she has travelled to various parts of the country, reaching even the most remote communities.

It was while performing her duty as an ENT (Ear, Nose and Throat) specialist that she came to realize the need to create a special school for disable children.

According to Cathy, this realization stem from the fact that generally children with disability are often treated unfairly, over protected, and even at times, people who are responsible for them often overlooked the fact that disable children have special needs, which should be addressed in a special way.

As a result in 1977, she started a disability school with the support of the British Red Cross, initially with only three disabled children. Since then she has gone through many challenges, especially the lack of financial backing to run the school with growing demand from the public for

spaces. However, in 1984 with the support of some senior citizens, she secured a piece of land and constructed a school building where the current school is now located. Unfortunately, as the result of non-recognition and very little financial support from the relevant authorities, the building was incomplete until 1998.

Today the school continues to care, train and provide for the special needs of multiple disable children from as early as 3 months to 18 years old.

Her success over the years has been grooming and watching disable children, whose parents had lost hope, and thought that it was impossible to help them improve from their disabilities, go out of school better equipped to face the everyday challenges. Some of the happiest moments of Cathy's work are when parents shed tears of joy when they realised that what they thought is impossible is possible.

Her phrase, "The impossible is what nobody can do until somebody does it", was derived from these special experiences which she dearsly treasures.

Recognizing such vision and commitment the "International Day for Disaster Reduction" which fall on the 13th of this month (October), with the theme "Living with Disability and Disaster", will be celebrated by the disable children of the SI Red Cross Special Disability Center. With support from AusAID through Plan (Australia), the Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT) in collaboration with its regional NGO partner

FSPI- as part of its "Child Centred Climate Change Adaptation (4CA) project-will assist the disability centre to conduct prevention talks and discussions on how to include this disadvantaged group in decision making.

The actual activities will feature these children doing art work, colouring and straw painting on different disasters facing the country. Activities which the public will

have the opportunity to see include actual lessons on disaster related topics, using auslane (deaf) and braille (blind) languages. Other related activities involve reading, writing, mobility skills and singing.

As we prepare to celebrate this important day, spare a thought for those who have dedicated their lives in caring for the disabled children in the country. During the "International Day for Disaster Reduction", our prayers should also go out to those who continuously advocate for the inclusion of this special group in making decisions relating to reducing disaster risks. Remember "we must make plans for the disabled before, during and after disasters in Solomon Islands".

