



Theresa Reu riding on a section of the Boluminski Highway. — Pictures courtesy of ADI.

Peddalling for a cause

Growing up in Lae and Port Moresby, Theresa Reu had only been accustomed to what is, in PNG standards, the best health care.

She was therefore, quite struck by "the other side" of the country's public health system when she visited New Ireland recently.

Even more so were those accompanying her on an adventure in which they visited health centres between Namatani and Kavieng. To say the least about the state of the facilities, the very basics such as running water and 24-hour electricity are lacking, like in practically all such facilities around country.

Reu and nine other kind-hearted and adventurous individuals from New Zealand, Singapore and Australia took on the Pedal4PNG bike ride in aid of Australian Doctors International (ADI). They tackled the 260km Boluminski Highway from May 15 to 18 to raise money for the volunteer doctor programme.

Unfortunately, injury forced one of the bikers out of the ride before it began.

Pedal4PNG is a fundraising event in support of ADI which sends volunteer medical specialists to serve in New Ireland and Western.

ADI, a not-for-profit charity, specialises in integrated health patrols and health in-services, deploying volunteer doctors and health coordinators to work in partnership with local government, private companies and faith-based health providers to deliver unique value through the three-way combination of:

- clinical services and public health education delivered to remote and rural populations;
- patrol-based training that exposes health care workers to practical up-skilling opportunities; and
- an opportunity for those health care workers to deepen and/or refresh their clinical skills in a niche topic area previously identified as lacking.

ADI chief executive officer Klara Henderson was also among the riders who took part in Pedal4PNG and Reu, of course was the only Papua New Guinean in the team.

Recalling her adventure in an interview last Friday, Reu confessed that her one-month training in Port Moresby prior to the ride did not quite prepare her. Much to her chagrin, the oldest rider among them (at 72) rode doggedly on while she, the youngest, had to load her bike onto an escort vehicle and rest her

limbs for parts of the journey!

"It certainly was not something like ordinary biking I had been used to. There were a lot of hills and the hot sun made it worse.

"I thought I knew how to ride a bike but the Pedal4PNG gave me a real challenge. The Boluminski Highway became my bike riding classroom and I learnt very well how to use my different bike gears when going up and down hills.

"Also I would like to acknowledge the support of the Australian High Commission in Port Moresby for giving me this opportunity to take part in a worthy cause, an experience of a lifetime seeing parts of New Ireland on a bike.

"If it happens again, I will be better prepared for it," Reu vowed.

The cyclists' itinerary started with arrival on Sunday, May 13 at Kavieng to overnight at the famous Nusa Island Resort. They drove the next day to Namatani and called into the Lemakot, Bol and Kimidan health centres along the way - and finally the Namatani district hospital.

They did the first 40km of the return bike ride on Tuesday, May 15 and had a stopover at Rubios. Wednesday saw them touring the Rubios plantation and its chocolate making facility before riding another 110km to Fissosa.

On Thursday, they rode the final 100km into Kavieng, but like most other visitors to that part of New Ireland, they would not miss Cathy Hiob's Besta mackerel-loving eels at Larabina.

They had a final dinner together at the Nusa Island Resort before departing on Friday and Saturday.

Reu recalled that during their stopovers at the health facilities they learnt from the staff and

patients about the invaluable assistance provided by ADI volunteers.

"The staff especially spoke highly about the ADI and the work they do."

The ADI volunteers normally take 12-day tours to major health centres in the province providing vital medical care and training for the local staff which is greatly appreciated.

"It was a whole new experience seeing the struggles of these health centres."

Reu has a background in health information management and works with the Public Policy and Health Security team at the Australian High Commission.

"There are so many good things that I have experienced in this bike ride. Among them was the outstanding hospitality of the local people who came out to the highway to greet us; some threw flowers as we rode by."

At Fissosa, the staff and students of the St Joseph Technical School staged a traditional singing and laid out a feast for the tourists.

At Rubios, the group witnessed chocolate making and sampled plenty of it as well.

In an interview prior to the bike ride that was posted on the high commission website Reu said:

"I am motivated to undertake the ride for three reasons - firstly, the high rate of maternal and child health morbidity and mortality is a serious concern in PNG and I would like to see and hear firsthand how ADI's work has impacted maternal and child health in New Ireland, and secondly, to experience the wonderful culture and nature that New Ireland has to offer despite having been there before, every ex-

perience is different and lastly, I am a sucker for a good challenge, especially one for a good cause."

Bike riding has always been a favourite pastime for her since childhood, but she had stopped riding for a few years. In 2015 her desire to ride was revived when she rode around a small tourist island in Western Australia.

"I have since bought myself a bike and ride on weekends just for leisure.

"When I'm not riding a bike, I am hanging out with my family or I am indoors with a good Lee Child or John Grisham book. I am somewhat between an introvert and an extrovert but what I love most is travelling and new experiences. Not one day is the same as the one before, adventures and new experiences come in all sorts of shapes and sizes and that's how I view myself living...one day at a time.

"My impression of the work ADI does in PNG is that of assisting government close the gap in the human resource and building its skill capacity but more importantly partnering with government to bring much needed vital services to the remote areas of the province," she said in that earlier interview.

She said after her adventure last Friday: "I have been privileged to have had this opportunity to be part of the first group of amazingly crazy, fun and inspiring people to have done a charity fundraiser.

"As I am inspired by these people, the challenge and the cause, I hope the story I tell will at least inspire one girl out there.

"The world is our playground, but you don't have to look far to enjoy the incredible beauty PNG has to offer."