

# IMPACT REPORT

**12-16 MAY 2025**
*In partnership with the MAFF*


## OUR TEAM

**VETERINARIANS** Lead Vet Dr Victoria Chapman, Dr Oliver Walkinton, Dr Phoebe Ellis, Dr Brechtsje Tacoma

**VET NURSES** Akiko Shimoda, Loni Gillespie, Nicole Doriguzzi, Teigan Brennan

## CLINIC OUTCOMES

Desexing – dogs	<b>143</b>	Clinic hours total	<b>47</b>
Desexing – cats	<b>28</b>	Vet volunteer hours	<b>188</b>
General medical	<b>254</b>	Vet nurse volunteer hours	<b>188</b>
Livestock	<b>2</b>	Admin volunteer hours	<b>85</b>
Parvovirus vaccines	<b>175</b>	Volunteer flights	<b>5</b>
Parasite treatments	<b>425</b>	<b>TOTAL ANIMALS TREATED</b>	<b>425</b>

### CLINIC VALUE **NZ\$178,050**

The calculation is based on SPAW costs, donated products, administrative expenses, and professional services. While SPAW does not charge for services, donations are welcomed.

## LEAD VET COMMENTARY

I have volunteered multiple times with SPAW but this experience was nothing short of incredible. We had a hardworking, adaptable and positive team of eight vets and nurses who worked extremely well together to treat hundreds of animals in what were very challenging conditions.

Torrential rain, high winds, a power outage, having no water at our accommodation and illness among the group, were some of the issues the team worked through during the week-long clinic. Despite this, laughter was abundant and the support from those with more experience was invaluable. Many of us picked up new techniques and I'm certain that everyone walked away having learned something.

One of the most challenging cases we attempted was a dog suffering from a diaphragmatic hernia after being hit by a car a month earlier. The dog was struggling to breathe and the damage was extensive – its liver had shifted into its chest and fused to the heart with fibrin. Despite the combined efforts of two veterinarians and three nurses, the surgeons ultimately had to make the decision to euthanise him. The complexity of the case exceeded what could realistically be handled in the clinic. Nonetheless, they were heroes for trying, giving the dog every possible chance under very difficult circumstances. The owners were aware that the outcome was likely grim before the surgery began.

We were grateful to have the support of MAFF and Volunteer Services Abroad (VSA), who entered surgery cases, worked through consultations and ensured everything ran smoothly. Their ability to oversee patient recovery and discharge surgical cases helped enormously in ensuring the team could handle the volume of cases that came through the doors.

On the final day, with our flight scheduled for 10:45pm, we made the most of our time with an island tour. It was the perfect way to wrap up the trip – relaxing on the sand, swimming in the ocean, seeing some sights and enjoying a delicious local BBQ lunch. A great finish to the week!

It's been nearly 10 years now since I went on my first SPAW clinic. Despite the challenges, it is a privilege being able to give back to communities where our skills are needed and the services provided make such a huge difference. As always, the pet owners were grateful for all of the support offered.

Thank you to my team and to the other volunteers that made this trip such a success for Tonga but also for me. Working with such great people under trying conditions was definitely my highlight and one of the reasons I keep going back.

**Dr Victoria Chapman, BVSc**  
 Lead Veterinarian



## VOLUNTEER STORY

**In May, Nicole joined our field trip to Tongatapu, bringing her vast experience in animal welfare. She manages the desexing caravan at the Masterton SPCA, providing essential care to sick animals before rehoming them. In 2019, she founded Ellie's Canine Rescue and Rehome and since then, she and her team of dedicated volunteers have helped over 1,500 dogs find new homes.**

My good friend Lesley Gibson had previously visited Tonga. She witnessed firsthand the poor condition of the local dogs – many lactating and un-desexed. Upon her return, she shared information about SPAW and encouraged me to get involved.

Having worked as a vet nurse across South America, I was familiar with the challenges of stray dog populations. However, I was surprised by the sheer number of roaming dogs in Tongatapu, many of whom limped from untreated injuries and exhibited deep-seated fear of people.

The SPAW and MAFF teams, alongside local helpers, were outstanding. Their camaraderie and shared dedication ensured smooth operations, allowing us to provide care for as many animals as possible.

Adjusting to "island time" was a new experience for me – appointments weren't scheduled and people simply arrived as needed. As someone who thrives on planning, this required a shift in perspective. However, the clinic set up was excellent – sterile, well-equipped, and stocked with everything required, thanks to SPAW's careful preparations.

The Tongan people are incredibly kind and appreciative, genuinely wanting the best for their animals. Their gratitude for SPAW's support was evident throughout our time there.

One of the most rewarding aspects was being able to treat these animals free of charge. Many arrived for desexing but had additional health concerns – fleas, ticks, injuries, burns and more. Addressing these issues drastically improved their quality of life in the long term. Parvo cases were prevalent but thankfully SPAW's vaccination programme is helping combat this devastating disease, which can linger in the ground for up to two years.

A particularly moving moment was witnessing children accompany their families to the clinic, eager to learn about the importance of vaccinations and desexing. Many owners dedicated an entire day to waiting at the clinic, ensuring their pets received the care they needed.

The need for veterinary assistance remains immense. One case that stood out was a dog at a resort, severely injured in a fight. He had open wounds and a dangerously high temperature. Before the clinic officially began, we visited the resort, sedated the dog, cleaned and stitched his wounds, and administered antibiotics and pain relief. Without treatment, he likely would not have survived the infection.

Volunteering was an incredible experience – I learned so much, made meaningful connections and saw firsthand the impact of our work. Without a doubt, I'll be doing it again. SPAW's trips to Tonga are vital, and the need for support remains urgent. Countless un-desexed and suffering dogs and cats still require help. Please consider supporting SPAW in any way you can.

**Nicole Doriguzzi**  
Vet Nurse



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