David Gawler - NT DGRS Representative

After 17 years in a very busy public and private Vascular Practice in Melbourne, my wife who was the manager of the practice and I, were ready for a change. We heard, via Russel Gruen, a former Registrar of mine, that a vascular surgeon was needed in Darwin who could do some general surgery including outreach and head up the Foot Service.

My wife and I then visited Darwin and decided to come, arriving in June 2001. Our children were independent by then and gave their blessing.

Moving to a tropical environment with snakes, frill neck lizards and goannas in the back yard was interesting and the work was a challenge with many problems presenting late and proving difficult. The Vascular work was similar to down South apart from trauma, e.g. bleeding stabbed aortic arch, speared subclavian artery and vein, late presentation of ischaemic limbs due to distance, crocodile bites etc.

Very soon after arrival, the plight of aboriginal people became a major concern. Although we talk of the 17 year gap, in town camps around Darwin, not many people reached their mid forties and many die in their twenties and thirties. Many young adults and older children are illiterate. There are few functional families due to ravages of alcohol and marijuana which effect a high percentage of people. Relative to the need, the health service at all levels has been woefully inadequate.

My wife and I decided that as Christian believers, we had a responsibility to help to lift morale and have been involved in assisting community people in the largest town camp in Darwin with the permission of the community council. We have been involved in all sorts of crisis, be it all too frequent bereavements and funerals, financial tangles, addictions, domestic problems, community conflicts, supporting people in jail visitation, attempted suicides and marital breakdown. We started a Christian fellowship in the community and have often had people with problems stay with us. In addition we have taken part in supporting positive human rights initiatives.

All this has cost us time, sleep, emotional energy and money but it has been wonderfully worthwhile to see people’s lives change and to see the restoration of hope. Life in Darwin has been challenging and difficult at times but never boring.

By Mr David Gawler