

Eternal Investment: Education on a remote Pacific island

Children in the Marshall Islands must pass a high school entrance exam in order to continue their education past the 8th grade.

Forty percent of that exam is in English, but depending on the island, only 2–20 percent of the children can pass basic English proficiency. It's a seemingly monumental challenge that can severely hinder their chances at a brighter future.



In the capital city of Majuro, Nel Nathan runs The Salvation Army's After-School Program, which aims to tutor and assist kids in passing the entrance exam.

But the program goes far beyond helping them pass just one test—it also provides community, activities, and an opportunity to share the love of Christ with all who attend.

Below is a transcript of the video edited for readability.

Sergeant Major Nixon Jabnil: We are in Majuro, the capital city of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. This is where they call it Rita. My concern is we see so many kids that are not attending school. Which I know their future won't be good.

Major Nancy Ball: They have to pass a high school to even qualify to go to high school. Twenty percent down to even as low as 2 percent can pass math or basic English proficiency levels. Forty percent of that test is in English. So, if they can't pass that test then they're done at the eighth grade. Then to get a student through high school is also challenging. There are no job tracks here. There are very few jobs and that creates another barrier in the process of getting an education.

Nel Nathan: One of the kids asked me, "Why is it so important to learn all these things when we're just going to be here on the island?" They're not going to go to the mainland. They're just gonna be here. I just shared with her and told her that, "You know it's very important we learn all these things so we could use the brain that God has given us to be a blessing to those around us."

Major Stephen Ball: Here in Rita, we have an afterschool program for seventh and eighth graders. Monday through Friday they are engaged in physical activities. They eat dinner together, they sing, they do homework.

Nel Nathan: The main purpose of this program is to help students pass the high school entrance exam. We help them go over the math problems or English, reading. Sometimes we go out on field trips, play basketball, volleyball, and sphere.

Major Stephen Ball: Nel is very passionate, goes the extra mile for kids, and really goes the extra mile for the kids, and really has ministry on his heart when he works with them. I mean, it's not just a place to come and do your homework and go home. He is very carefully crafting the program and making sure these kids are getting every opportunity they can to succeed.

Major Nancy Ball: He puts a lot of time into making connections with their parents, and he also meets with their parents, and he also meets with their teachers, tracks their progress to be sure that they are getting the homework they're working on turned in. They need other influences who will say, "You can learn, and you can grow and understand the world you better."

Nel Nathan: I tell these kids they shouldn't be intimidated by what the world thinks of them because they have God who loves them, who cares for them, and would want to see them be successful not only in school but in living a life that is pleasing to him.

Major Nancy Ball: I have told the kids getting an education is not my first priority for you. My first priority for you is to know the God who made you. But he gave you a brain and that's for his purpose so use it like you use your legs and you use your arms to grow, to be healthy, to improve your life, and to invest in your community.

Nel Nathan: At the heart of the after-school program, that is why we're here, to let them know that someone really cares about what will happen to them in the future

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