

Growing the Pasifika Health Workforce

Growing the Pasifika health workforce means increasing the number of Pasifika in the workforce. It also means developing the capacity and skills of the current Pasifika health workforce to bring connections with Pasifika communities, personal understanding of Pasifika issues and Pasifika cultural and language skills into the workplace. Ultimately, it's about connecting care and culture

In 2016, Pacific NGO Le Va and the Ministry of Health supported 49 Pasifika tertiary students to progress their studies through the Pacific Mental Health and Addictions Scholarships. Since 2010, more than 200 scholarships have been provided to workers and students studying towards mental health and addiction related qualifications.

Each recipient brings their own background, history, community and passion. The 2016 cohort included multi-year recipient Athena Tapu.

Athena Tapu, Master of Psychotherapy AUT

1. What inspired you to study towards a career in the Mental Health & Addictions sector as a Psychotherapist?

My family and community nurtured the spirit in me to help others. I was inspired by my parents who are teachers and community leaders. They gave me space and guidance to follow my curiosity first into Psychology in my undergraduate studies then Psychotherapy. I was drawn to Psychotherapy because it works with the therapeutic relationship between therapist and client. It has a holistic understanding of treatment that takes mine and my client's cultures and values into consideration; that is important to me.

2. Describe the difference between a Psychotherapist and a Psychologist?

Both are psychological talking therapies - A Psychotherapist is trained in human behaviour, relationships, personality, unconscious mental processes, early childhood experiences and emotional regulation. Psychotherapy is usually long term but can be short term also. This gives you time to build a trusting therapeutic relationship

with your therapist to be able to talk about things that might be taboo or not allowed to be spoken about. Psychologists are trained in shorter intervention focussed treatments for acute mental health problems. They also use the therapeutic relationship to build rapport with the client and may lean towards a directive approach using scientifically based interventions.

3. What does it mean for you to become a Pasifika Psychotherapist?

It means making another space for healing in our Pasifika communities. It means breaking moulds and trying new things. It means being allowed a voice to speak your truth in a safe way. It means holding the two worlds of Psychotherapy and being Pasifika and navigating how to walk in those worlds with love and integrity.

4. What support do you have that motivates you to ensure you achieve your ultimate career goal?

My God and faith guide me and keep me grounded. My son motivates me to always keep pushing and never give up. My family connect me firmly to my values and Samoan culture. My friends keep me sane with laughter. My youth humble me and keep me reverent. My mentors and supervisors challenge me to look at my blind spots and hold a light for me when mine dims. My community support me by funding scholarships that have help me reach my goal of being a Psychotherapist. These people and networks of supports are my blessings.

5. How has the Pacific Mental Health and Addictions Scholarship programme supported you this year?

It has funded my Masters this year which has lightened my financial burden that would

Athena Tapu



have otherwise caused a lot of distress! It gave me the opportunity to attend the Le Va GPS Conference and meet other Pacific mental health workers and scholarship recipients. This has started some conversations on where Psychotherapy might fit or be used in our communities. I feel looked after by the team at Le Va who keep me connected to the Pacific Island mental health and addictions community.

6. What advice do you have for anyone aspiring to work in the mental health and addiction sector as a Psychotherapist?

Do it! We are skillful navigators that travelled the Pacific seas guided by the stars and an innate knowing that our journey would take us to new places. Trust that courageous spirit of our ancestors and remember where you came from. This a journey like no other so don't forget to laugh.

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