

The journey towards Pacific families flourishing in Aotearoa



Dr MONIQUE FALEAFA, Chief Executive of Le Va, states a strengths-based approach embracing Pacific solutions and collective responsibility will lead to establishing and maintaining a greater positive state of mental health among families

Pacific people will truly flourish in New Zealand if we look carefully to our culture, families and communities – and take collective responsibility.

Although Pacific people have had a presence in New Zealand for well over a century, most of our parents came in the 1960s and 70s with a vision of finding a good quality of life and flourishing in New Zealand – and for their children and generations to come to flourish well into the future.

Our parents had a shared vision of what flourishing looked like for themselves and their communities. Unfortunately, some might say that we may have had a “nek minute” moment – we now have huge inequality, inequity, intergenerational poverty and decades of disparity that prevents our communities from collectively flourishing.

The Le Va approach

At Le Va we take a strengths-based approach to creating opportunities for families and communities to flourish through embracing Pacific solutions. We come with aspiration, courage and forward-thinking, much like our parents who came to the ‘land of plenty’.

This helps us to imagine what it would look like if Pacific populations flourished in Aotearoa. And if we do this, we may find that the solutions lie in our culture and in our own families and communities.

What we need to do

We need to look at the reality of statistics, but we also need the hope and aspirations that uplift us and call us to action in a positive way.

For Pacific people to flourish in Aotearoa, we need to take collective responsibility for our most vulnerable and under-served populations, and the conditions which influence this.

From a traditional indigenous Samoan perspective, a person may be seen as a relational being, a person does not exist as an individual, and there is no such thing as an independent person (Tamasese et al) – a person only exists in a collective context of genealogical lineage, family, village, nation, and the roles, responsibilities, identity and sense of belonging that comes with that.

So, just as a person’s identity exists only in relation to others, flourishing is largely determined by others.

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From village to nation

In New Zealand, we can transpose the village situation from a social justice perspective. For our most vulnerable to flourish we need our social, political and economic structures to support this. So, all people have access to equal rights and equal opportunities.

We all have collective responsibility by contributing to society through being employed, participating in education, tautua (service) and other forms of giving. And importantly, we have mutual responsibility for each other – we have compassion and care for one another and the environment, as individuals, but also from a corporate perspective.

This is not a benefit of social justice; it’s an obligation we abide by. This is a win-win situation for all of us because it’s a relationship of reciprocity where caring for others and nurturing and maintaining the relationships with people and things is fundamental to our own flourishing and happiness. We find fulfilment in this.

Towards an inter-generational vision

Who was it that said “A vision without a plan is just a dream. A plan without a vision is drudgery. But a vision with a plan can change the world”?

Our parents had a vision and they had a plan. They came for a better life and for future generations to flourish – and what this looked like was being mentally, physically and spiritually healthy, having a good education that would open up opportunities, and being successful and financially stable.

If we treat relationships with people and the environment as sacred, look to our own cultures for solutions, take collective responsibility for our underprivileged, vulnerable and under-served populations, and draw from our past to achieve our future potential, all New Zealanders will benefit.

WHAT IS FLOURISHING?

Flourishing is having meaning and a sense of purpose in life, positively engaging with people and our environment, and nurturing those relationships over time. The Mental Health Foundation of NZ defines flourishing as “a state where people experience positive emotions, positive psychological functioning and positive social functioning, most of the time.” This state is dependent on the inter-relationship with society and social determinants of wellbeing. It is more difficult for people to flourish and have positive mental health if they are subject to oppressive institutions, discrimination and societal inequalities.

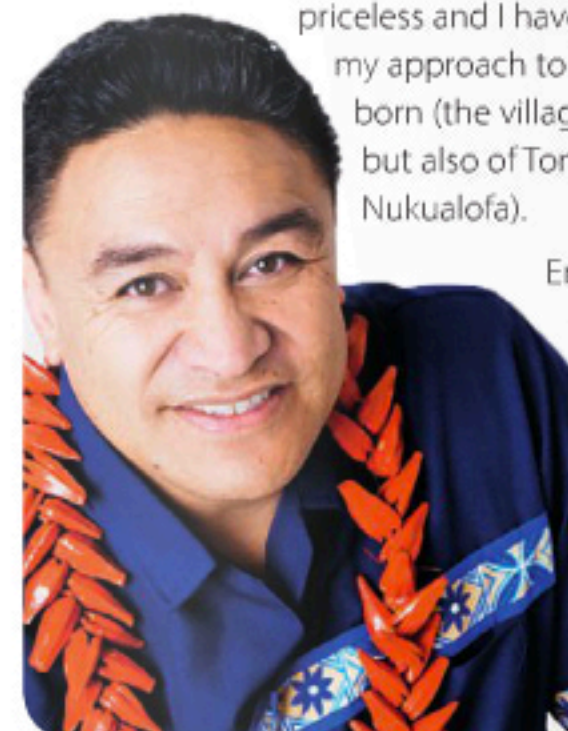
LeVa www.leva.co.nz

From All Black to Advocate

Since retiring from rugby in 2006 after a 15-year career playing for the All Blacks, Samoa Barbarians, Auckland and the Blues, Eroni Clarke exchanged the glamour of being a professional sportsman to building Pacific communities.

His work has included pastoral care and support services through the church, in promotions and careers for tertiary education, and personal development at all levels from students and athletes through to corporate groups and one on one training.

“The opportunities and life experiences I gained from rugby were priceless and I have adopted so much of them in my approach to life,” says Eroni, who is Samoan born (the villages of Saluafata and Vaiala), but also of Tongan heritage (Kolomotu’a in Nukualofa).



Eroni worked with Tupu Services as a regional clinician offering cultural support and practices to our Pacific clients in addictions and mental health. In 2013 he joined Le Va and Matua Raki, National Addiction Workforce Development Centre within Te Pou.

As Pacific Addictions Workforce coordinator Eroni is based at Le Va in Manukau on the implementation of the Pacific Workforce Strategy. He’s enjoying the challenge.

“The big shift is changing from being at the coalface of our communities to working at a strategic level. I’m part of a team that ensures there’s a Pacific voice within the addiction sector at a level where policies are made,” he says.

“At the end of the day it’s about advocating to create more opportunities for Pacific people to provide skilled, quality service and care for our people suffering from alcohol and other addictions. There’s a lot of work to do, but I’m excited by it.

“I’m looking to expand on this role by using my networks and experience, guided by our teams at Le Va and Matua Raki.”

Eroni says his experiences in the sector have made him appreciate the sacrifices his own parents made to forge a new life in New Zealand. While many aspects of modern day life have changed, some of the principles in dealing with the inevitable challenges that arise haven’t.

“We still exist as part of a family and even though the definition of what a flourishing family looks like might differ from our parents’ views, there are commonalities,” he says.

“As a Pacific person that’s to have happiness, even though we know life can be tough, our children are provided for and our cultures and where we come from are at the forefront of our lives. ■

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Le Va’s purpose is to create opportunities for Pacific families and communities to flourish through embracing Pacific solutions. Our focus is to improve mental health, addiction, public health, disability and social services for our families.

Check out www.leva.co.nz to see a range of resources, tools and information.

