



# Collaborations for Action

Le Va hosted the Growing Pasifika Solutions Satellite Seminar in collaboration with the Drua Pasifika Addictions Network to share knowledge, innovative methods in effective prevention and treatment intervention strategies. LAUMATA LAUANO spoke with Epenesa Olo, the Ministry of Health's Principal Advisor, Child & Youth Mental Health & Addictions and Le Va's chief executive Dr Monique Faleafa

THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH'S PRINCIPAL ADVISOR - CHILD & Youth Mental Health & Addictions Epenesa Olo, who identifies herself as a Savaian from the village of Fogasavaii, has a strong passion for and an extensive background in mental health and addictions.

As a registered Clinical Psychologist who has worked in infant, child, adolescent mental health, adult mental health, and addictions, along with extensive work in the community, Epenesa is keenly aware of the high demand for mental health and addiction services, the workforce issues in the specialist area and the inequities in outcomes for Māori and Pasifika populations.

Providing advice for the implementation of a mental health and addictions system that can be transformed to be fit for the future brought her to the Ministry.

"Ala mo'ui, the Pacific Health Action Plan, is being redone and so there were around 13-14 talanoa sessions with the sector and the community around Aotearoa Niu Sila," she says.

"This was a chance to hear from the community about what they wanted and what's important to them, because sometimes what's important to the ministry is not necessarily what our people see as important.

"What came through strongly was that our people and communities want action. They don't want a lovely plan that's written down. They actually want to see some action."

That step to action enables providers to access funding for services used by our people in the community. It includes training and development for the workforce behind these services. The GPS seminar is important in bringing together service providers and the workforce to absorb knowledge from each other to put plans into action.



Epenesa Olo

# Aid to fight Addictions

Le Va's national 2019 GPS conference in Auckland in September, partnered with the Drua Pasifika Addictions Network, brought together Pasifika addiction workers to share knowledge, innovation, effective prevention and treatment intervention strategies. INNES LOGAN speaks with Helen Schmidt, Clinical Team Leader Community Alcohol and Drug Service South Auckland in Manukau Waitemata District Health Board

FOR HELEN SCHMIDT (FROM SAFOTU, IVA AND PAIA IN Samoa), Le Va's GPS conference provides a proven platform to share innovative and integrated wellbeing solutions that address the needs of Pasifika families.

As Clinical Team Leader Community Alcohol and Drug Service South Auckland in Manukau Waitemata District Health Board, she has seen the effects of addictions on Pacific youth grow. But while Methamphetamines, also known as meth, blue, ice and crystal among other terms, generate alarm as a highly addictive stimulant that adversely affects the central nervous system, alcohol dominates as the drug of choice which creates the most damage.

"Across all measurements of harm through drugs and alcohol across society, alcohol is by far the most damaging with cannabis second, due to the sheer numbers who have taken them," says Helen who, after studying a chemistry science degree, followed up by studying psychology, zoology and psychiatry.

Her actual lack of work experience in these fields proved a barrier until she applied for and was granted a teacher aid position at Odyssey House in West Auckland, working as part of a youth day programme model for therapeutic communities. Despite the challenges, Helen had her foot in the door and soon found her niche.

"Initially, it was hard and challenging work being involved with kids in that spectrum, because they weren't equipped to go to the usual schools," she says.

"Many of them are there because their families can't manage them. Youth can be very impulsive and demanding. But it's why they're here and we're here. Their families need support because their situations often seem overwhelming."

One of their saving graces comes from CADS – Community, Alcohol and Drugs Services in Auckland.

It includes Tupu, a team of Pacific Island workers who support Pacific people and their aiga/fanau/magafaoa who have alcohol and/or other drugs and/or gambling issues, problems or questions. It offers a range of free support services delivered in a culturally



relevant way which include consultation, assessment, individual counselling/talanoa and group support, which often occur after hours.

One after-hours event that brought the house down at the Mangere Arts Centre – Nga Tohu Uenuku - was *More Than Enough* - a collaboration between the Black Friars and Mangere Catholic youth with support from Le Va and Drua.

"The creativity that came from such a space that our Pacific community call part of their home was very emotional," Helen recalls.

"People opened up on all sorts of issues, like the impact of social media and social justice for youth in relation to how they're judged and treated. They see the selling of land for housing which they can't afford anyway as hugely frustrating. But their sense of pride in where they came from and where they are now, still holds strong."

In November 2020 the New Zealand cannabis referendum will be held as part of next year's General Election on the question of whether to legalise the personal use of cannabis.

Helen hopes those Pacific youth that have a voice and an opinion on cannabis will utilise their democratic right by voting.

"One of the things I see is that particular organisations have their strengths," she says.

"Rather than competing against each other to provide services, if somebody is better at something, they can join with someone who is better at something else," says Epenesa.

"So, rather than an organisation trying to do everything, which we know we can't, the benefit of having collaborations are important."

For Dr Monique Faleafa, the main thing is providing a platform for our Pasifika addiction workers to come together; but it's also for the funders, so we can facilitate that conversation, particularly around the wellbeing budget.

"It's important our Pasifika people doing amazing things in our addictions sector know how to apply for funding and can contribute to the Ministry of Health Fono that's happening.

"It's important to us that they've got a voice and are in the game."

Te Rau Hinengaro, the 2006 New Zealand Mental Health Survey, found that Pasifika peoples have higher rates of alcohol abuse (5.3%) than the general population, (3.5%), and that substance use is the third most commonly reported lifetime disorder for Pasifika adults.

While Pasifika peoples report higher incidents of violence and injury from other people's drinking in general, the use of drug and alcohol services by Pasifika is very low, at 27% less than the national average.

Te Rau Hinengaro, the New Zealand Mental Health Survey, found that Pasifika peoples have higher rates of alcohol abuse than the general population.

In addition, a study by Haukau et al identified: 57% of Pasifika peoples were drinkers (males 61%, females 51%), compared with 85% of the general Aotearoa/New Zealand population (males 88%, females 83%).

# PM Opens NZ's first Suicide Prevention Office

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and Minister of Health Dr David Clark marked the opening of New Zealand's first ever Suicide Prevention Office on November 27 at the Ministry of Health office in Wellington. Le Va also hosted the health minister at its Manukau office for further announcements in mental health investments

FOLLOWING WORK ALREADY UNDERWAY TO TACKLING the nation's persistently high rate of suicide the opening was boosted by the launching of a \$12.4 million community suicide prevention fund for Māori and Pacific communities.

"Last year, 685 New Zealanders are believed to have taken their lives through suicide. Each of those deaths was a tragedy and we must do more to support people in distress, or struggling with addiction," said the Prime Minister.

"The new Suicide Prevention Office is a crucial part of the Wellbeing Budget's record investment in mental health and addiction, which included \$40 million on suicide prevention."

Over the next four years the \$12.4 million Māori and Pacific suicide prevention community fund will be used to support Māori and Pacific providers to design and deliver culturally responsive suicide prevention initiatives. As New Zealand's national Pasifika suicide prevention lead, Le Va welcomes the announcement.

Le Va's work combines an internationally proven,



Health Minister David Clark



Le Va CEO Monique Faleafa

evidence-informed approach with local knowledge and experience, to provide suicide prevention programmes that are community focussed, clinically safe, and culturally responsive.

"We know Māori and Pacific are over represented in suicide statistics and we need to find and support new community responses that will help change that," said the PM.

Minister Clark says the Suicide Prevention Office will galvanise work towards making New Zealand a better place for all to thrive.

"As well as our work in suicide prevention, we're investing in new frontline mental health and addiction services up and down New Zealand," he said.

"We want every New Zealander to know that when times get tough, if they are in distress or they reach a crisis point, there is someone they can turn to for help."

The Suicide Prevention Office will initially be established as a team within the Ministry of Health's Mental Health and Addiction Directorate, led by Director Carla na Nagara.



PM Jacinda Ardern

PHOTO: RNZ / DOM THOMAS

And while Pasifika peoples report higher incidents of violence and injury from other people's drinking in general, the use of drug and alcohol services by Pasifika is very low, at 27% less than the national average. Pacific youth (aged 15 to 19 years) appear to use these services as frequently as any other New Zealand young people.

Monique says it's also an issue of being under resourced which is being addressed now.

**"This investment provides us with the opportunity to enhance the quality of services so they are culturally safe and relevant, increasing access and ensuring the best possible outcomes for our Pasifika communities."**

"We've had quite a few years of being under resourced in the Pacific addictions and mental health sector. MOH acknowledges that it's exciting we're finally being able to provide the quality and the culturally competent services and programmes that our Pacific communities deserve," she says.

"It's not going to happen tomorrow, but maybe in five to 10 years to build that capacity and capability to get that quality that we need."

Monique wants to see more Pacific people working in mental health and addictions, both as clinicians and community workers.



"We need our own people working with our own people. It would be good to see a lot more focus on Pacific youth, because that's where mental illness and addictions start."

The Addiction Seminar was a pre-conference event to the Addictions Cutting Edge GPS conference. Le Va's national *Growing Pasifika Solutions* bi-annual conferences have demonstrated to be an effective platform to showcase innovative and integrated solutions that meet the needs of our Pasifika families.



For more information go to [www.leva.co.nz](http://www.leva.co.nz)



# Growing Pasifika Solutions 2020

*“If we give full participation with radical acceptance and absolute inclusion, we will unleash the full potential of our young people.”*

*GPS Pasifika Youth Action Komiti*

This conference is for anyone whose work impacts on Pacific young people, particularly across social sectors such as:

- ★ mental health
- ★ suicide prevention
- ★ whanau ora
- ★ violence prevention
- ★ justice & corrections
- ★ health workforce
- ★ addictions
- ★ disability support services
- ★ education & training
- ★ sports & wellbeing
- ★ research & policy
- ★ social services

GPS for our Young People aims to:

- share effective & integrated solutions
- facilitate insights & innovation.

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