



EMPOWER PACIFIC Newsletter

Volume 1 Issue 2

August 2012

From Pacific Counselling & Social Services to EMPOWER PACIFIC

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Pacific Counselling & Social Services is currently going through a period of growth and development as we transition to a sustainable, transparent and multifaceted NGO. In order to facilitate a smooth change of public image, a two-day workshop was conducted for staff at our Head Office in Lautoka.

The workshop looked at enhancing the communication strategy of Empower Pacific to change our image of that as predominantly a counseling service provider- to an organisation that is a significant contributor to health and wellbeing targets established by the Ministry of Health and other key stakeholders.

Ms. Nicole Gooch, a Communications Officer at the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), facilitated the workshop and highlighting the importance of staff to reflect on where we have been as an organisation to where we are heading.

During the workshop, staff began to explore the link between the services we provide as an organisation, to that of government policies, regional development agendas, as well as to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This was an important aspect of the workshop as staff began to shift their focus from their daily roles to their contributions towards big picture outcomes.

One such example is EMPOWER PACIFIC's HIV

VCCT Program delivered in partnership with the Ministry of Health. This holistic program contributes to Government's effort to meet goal number 6 of the MDG's that is, combating HIV/AIDS, Malaria & other diseases, as well as MDG's aimed at promoting child and maternal health, and reducing gender inequality.

The workshop also helped staff to acknowledge their collective effort to the Health Sector, Prison and the Social Welfare Department at the same time recognizing their role as a regional organization. One of the activities during the workshop included staff having to name stakeholders and rate their importance to the organization in terms of relationship. As a result, the staff were able to identify the need to build and strengthen relationships with other regional stakeholders and community groups. This was an important aspect as communication is a vital part of strategic developments, in which EMPOWER PACIFIC seeks to facilitate a more effective partnership to support government agencies and other NGOs to achieve the MDGs.

The workshop ended with the planning of the EMPOWER PACIFIC Launch program due to be held at the end of this month.

Small Business Training in Suva

The Income Generation Program (IGP) recently conducted business skills training in Suva. The training was held on the 18th of July at the National Diabetes Centre Training room and it was conducted by our Suva based Income Generation Program Officer, Koroka.

The participants consisted of 16 IGP clients who are aspiring entrepreneurs. These participants were referred from various programs within EMPOWER PACIFIC, in addition to referrals from the Salvation Army. The purpose of the training was to empower clients and provide them information and on the basics of business skills and management. One of the key objectives of the training was to provide participants an opportunity to draw up their own business plans, in addition to equip-

ping them with the necessary skills to run their own business.

According to Koroka, who conducted the training, participants found the sessions very informative and in their evaluation, they reflected that it was something new, it was very encouraging and inspiring.

As a result it has motivated many to go back and start their own business.

EMPOWER PACIFIC will provide these participants a business loan to kick-start their business and continue to follow up with them regarding the long-term sustainability of their business, as they (participants) make their loan-repayments back to the organisation.

Sexualities, Sexual Rights and HIV in PNG and the Pacific Symposium Feedback

For three intensive days from July 11-13, a congregation of fifty-three scholars, activists, policy-makers, and practitioners met at ANU, Canberra, Australia to exchange perspectives and engage in discussion on *Sexualities, Sexual Rights and HIV in Papua New Guinea and the Pacific*.

This workshop symposium was jointly convened by Professor Gilbert Hertz and Dr Katherine Lepani and received support from the ANU Research School of Asia and the Pacific (RSAP), the AusAID International Seminar Support Scheme (ISSS), and the United Nations Development Programme Pacific Centre in Suva, Fiji.

Participants at the workshop symposium came from Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Solomons, Vanuatu, the Cook Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, France, Canada and Australia and consisted

of Government representatives, academics, faith-based organisations, advocacy groups, and NGOs- including two of our own Empower Pacific team members.

For our EMPOWER PACIFIC staff, Vero & Lani, the experience was both challenging and eye-opening. Whilst the overall experience brought some key learning points, it also highlighted the need for research initiatives to be strengthened, encouraged and cultivated within the Pacific Islands.

Some key messages which the team took away from the symposium included;

- Patterns of stigma, discrimination and violence against women, sexual minorities and people living with HIV in the Pacific;

- The persistence of punitive laws, many dating from the colonial period criminalizing sodomy and sex work and the urgent need for law reform

- The prominent role of Christian churches in both the prevention and treatment of HIV and the increasing conjunction of biomedical and faith-based healing.

- The crucial advocacy role of organizations representing women and sexual minorities and people living with HIV in defending human rights.

The Symposium has enabled the staff to bring back some valuable knowledge as well as constructive feedbacks that can be positively directed towards the professional development of EMPOWER PACIFIC's Research Department as a whole.



Semisi Siga at a bridge in Waimakutu village, Namosi.

Health in Prisoners Research (HIP) Fiji update

EMPOWER PACIFIC in partnership with Burnet Institute has been intensively involved in a longitudinal (2011-2013) study of Health in prisoners (HIP). The research explores patterns of health, including HIV and sexual health, as well as risk taking behaviours amongst prisoners as they prepare to leave prison and return back into the community.

So far, HIP Research Officers have been involved in pre-release and post release interviews of prisoners and ex-prisoners at the pre-release stage, as well as 1

month and 4 months after release from prison.

One of the HIP Research Officers, Semisi Siga, recently paid a visit to Waimakutu village in the Namosi highlands to conduct a 4 month post-release interview. Upon his visit, he stated that it was a great opportunity to realistically experience how participants live and interact with their community members.

The family and community of this particular participant was receptive and provided their full support to the re-

search, as well as to the information given by the Research Officer (as he was able to provide information on HIV & STI to the community).

With the aim to recruit 200 participants for this research project, so far, HIP Fiji has recruited a total number of 113 – pre-release participants, 62 – 1 month post-release participants, and 10 – 4 months post release participants. The preliminary results will be presented at the upcoming Pacific Islands Health Research Symposium to be held in Nadi.

Gender Based Violence Statistics Update

General Based Violence (GBV) as declared by UN definitions, refers to any physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse, rape within marriage, dowry-related violence and violence related to exploitation of women or children within the household. GBV also refers to any physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution; and physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the state, wherever it occurs. For EMPOWER PACIFIC, we have been working with a variety of GBV cases involving those perpetrated by a man against a woman,

sexual assault, sexual abuse and cases of violence/abuse against any person because of their gender – including people who identify as transgender. These clients have been captured from Hospital wards, the Department of Social Welfare, referrals from community welfare organisations, as well as self referral.

Another key way in which GBV cases are identified and referred to Empower Pacific is through screening questions administered during HIV pre/post test counseling at Anti-Natal Clinics in which our staff operate. Between the periods of March to June 2012, PCSS/EMPOWER PACIFIC facilitated a total of 3716 pre-tested clients at antenatal clinics across Fiji. Of these clients, 302 identified as being exposed to gender based violence or being afraid of their partner.

Furthermore, 180 expectant mothers reported to having experienced physical violence in the past 6 months. 208 mums out of the 3716 seen during pre-test sessions were referred for Counselling. In light of these statistics EMPOWER PACIFIC hopes to work in collaboration with government departments and other key stakeholders to address issues of gender based violence and uphold our commitment to MDGs aimed at reducing gender inequality.

Once referred to us, our goal is to provide continued support and encourage clients to take steps to ensure their safety, and that of their unborn child. Empower Pacific supports these mothers by offering counseling as well as social work services and referrals to other agencies, as appropriate.

Some of the clients seen have reported back that through our services, they have been made aware of the Domestic Violence Restraining Order and other laws relating to Violence, including their rights to feel safe and the rights of their child to be protected from harm. For many, these fundamental rights were something they hadn't been aware of.

It is reasons such as these that EMPOWER PACIFIC's Social Work and counseling interventions in any GBV case are very much valued. Well done to the combined efforts of the whole Empower Team for facilitating effective referrals and contributing to the enhanced well being of many survivors of GBV.



GBV Most Significant "Change" Story

"My husband and I have been married long time now.

He never used to hit me but one day we had a fight with my aunt (mother's sister).

He got angry and came to hit me.

Now he doesn't hit me that much but only if my aunt talks to me or say something to him.

I never reported to the Police because I didn't know how they would help me.

I came to the hospital because my baby got sick.

I meet with the Counsellor and we talked about my baby and me.

And I told her that I am scared of my husband and what happens between us.

She told me about your services and how you could help me.

So I continued talking to her and she told me about the Police and how they could give me help.

She further told me about the Domestic Violence Restraining Order (DVRO) and the law in Fiji.

I know now that the help is available for me.

Today we talked about the safety plan and she told me how it will help me but only if I use it.

I feel safe now because I know about the Police and the law and they suppose to help me.

I have the safety plan with me and I can use it."

SCHOOL OUTREACH PROGRAM

COPING WITH DISASTERS... NADI PRIMARY SCHOOL



Branch Manager, Lautoka Counselling Centre, Vijayanti in action with her placard



Joey with a very interactive audience



Nadi Primary School Children all very eager to answer questions



A presentation on Basic Tools for Working with Primary School Children was conducted by EMPOWER PACIFIC (Lorraine & Rekha of Team Vunibaka) on the 27th of June 2012 at Jasper Williams Primary School. This presentation was attended by more than 23 teachers from 5 Primary Schools in Lautoka



DRUG & CHILD ABUSE AWARENESS DAY...LOVU SANGAM PRIMARY SCHOOL



Rashika & Joey bringing awareness to the children of Lovu.

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BRANCH UPDATES

Nadi

- A 3 day workshop on “Zero Tolerance for Domestic Violence” was attended one of the staff
- Senior Counselor, Alumita to be providing counselling at the Sigatoka Hospital for two days in a week.
- Branch Manager, Emi attends outreach with MOH every Thursday.- last week was their trip to Nagado.

Labasa

- Clinical Practise Leader, Alita Waqabaca was up in Labasa Centre for a week for the certification of counsellors and assisting the CS in debriefing and in Clinical work.
- The IGP programme had a half-day workshop on the 18th of July, training theirclients in budgeting .

Suva

- 12 families in the Waila & Navuso areas in Nausori were provided with flood relief items, such as clothings and beddings. The families were grateful to the assistance provided by Empower Pacific, Suva Branch.



(Social Worker Monica & IGP Officer Koroka Bale delivering the flood relief items to one of the families.)

EMPOWER PACIFIC LAUNCH

In less than one month, PCSS will formally become EMPOWER PACIFIC as we officially launch our new organisation name and logo on the 31st of August 2012. The launch is an important event for the staff, as well as a network of stakeholders from various Government Departments, Donor Agencies, Non-Government Organisations, and Civil Society groups.

The purpose of the launch is to showcase the important role that EMPOWER PACIFIC plays in supporting stakeholders (such as Government Health, Prison and Social Welfare Departments) in achieving sustainable development outcomes for Fiji. It is also an opportunity to highlight the holistic services that Empower Pacific provides (no less than 11 different programs and services) and an opportunity to reflect how much we have grown from our humble beginnings as solely a counseling service.

The launch will be commemorated by His Excellency, the President of the Fiji Islands, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau at the Holiday Inn in Suva. This is an exciting time us as an organisation, as we move towards a new era of leadership, professional service and strategic alignment with government. As one of the key highlights, with PCSS helping sustain a professional counseling service within major divisional hospitals around the country, EMPOWER PACIFIC seeks to maintain this service and enhance its relationship with the Ministry of Health. EMPOWER PACIFIC also has a dynamic vision to extend its services to the region with an additional goal of supporting the professional development for its staff and programs in the years to come.

(To be featured in the next issue, please send in your articles and photos to hipfijilani@gmail.com before the 20th August 2012)

