

PACIFIC WOMEN & YWCA BOARD CHRISTCHURCH
1ST Pacific HIV/AIDS FONO
BREAK THE SILENCE-SIGNS OF HOPE
Saturday 11 November 2006

Welcome: Tufuga Lagatule introduced the Organising Committee to begin the fono and also acknowledged the representatives from the National Council of Women of New Zealand.

Lotu: The Fijian Community – Mrs Ateca Tuisoso said the Lords Prayer, led the choir and shared a bible reading (Acts 1:1-4) reminding us to remember God. After more singing, Mrs Tuisoso declared the conference open.

Apologies:

Hon. Winnie Laban – “...congratulations of taking the first step...”

Hon. Ruth Dyson – “best wishes”

Debbie Ryan – “best wishes and have a great time, alofa atu”

Lianne Dalziel

Elizabeth Cunningham

Linda Brynal

Ann Dysart

Acknowledgements and thankyous:

Direct Papers – for the pads of paper in the handout pack

Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs – folders

Breast Cancer Screening – pens

Just Water – water

Hinemoa Connor – contributions to fono

Greetings: YWCA Christchurch President – Mary McGiven gave a warm welcome to the guest speakers. She emphasised that we were there to listen and learn, to spread the message and break the silence.

YWCA Christchurch Kuia - Marlene Kamo shared her long association with the YWCA and felt honoured and privileged to be a part of the fono. She was also representing Linda Grinell (Maori Mental Health) and had a special thank you for Margaret and Ted Arnold.

The day's guest speakers were introduced:

Lisa Hayes – World Executive Board YWCA – New Zealand

Tarusila Bradburgh – World Executive Board YWCA – Fiji

Marama Smith representing the HIV Positive community - Maori

Silipa Take – Counsellor/Health Promoter NZ Aids Foundation - Samoa

Zoe Bake-Patterson – Pacific Islands AIDS Foundation – Cook Islands

Zoe Bake-Patterson

Zoe works for the Pacific Island AIDS Foundation in Rarotonga, the only regional AIDS foundation. Zoe had a powerpoint presentation outlining the work that the Pacific Islands AIDS Foundation undertakes in the region.

There were 5 themes:

positive living,
positive health,
positive partnerships,
positive action and prevention,
positive investment
for an AIDS free pacific

Zoe explained that the foundation educates people to understand the difference between HIV and AIDS and how the virus is transmitted. The foundation also works with improving the lives of those living with HIV/AIDS.

Some of her main points:

- The HIV virus is found in your blood, some body fluids and breast milk
- You can live with the virus without knowing you have it. Get tested!
- There is a delay between infection and a positive anti-body test
- “You are HIV positive until you are HIV negative”
- Not all hospitals in the Pacific Islands can screen blood
- Protect others and yourself, follow the ABCD:
 - A – Abstinence, delay sex
 - B – be faithful
 - C – Correct use of condoms or condoms every time
 - D – Do other things

Zoe went on to talk about what HIV/AIDS in the Pacific Islands has to do with us.

- People are private and hold incorrect views and stereotypes on who can catch the virus; we must dispel these myths and stigmas with information.
- Given the low population numbers, the low number of recognized cases of HIV/AIDS actually has a HUGE impact on Pacific Island nation populations.
- Confidentiality is an issue in small communities.
- Low numbers get tested. Some travel to NZ for testing and therefore we are in this together as services are better here.
- Anti-retroviral treatment is not available on the islands, and a further issue is that drug treatment needs to be combined with diet to be effective.
- We need to begin conversations here in New Zealand in order to get the message through to communities in the islands.
- Sharing information is of utmost importance due to the diversity of languages and barriers to open discussion.

Marama Smith

Marama is an advocate for people living with HIV/AIDS. Marama contracted HIV in 1993 and after living for many years with a 'living to die' attitude she discovered her traditional upbringing, supported by her spiritual strength and whanau, plus access to Anti-retroviral drugs has given her a new perspective on life.

Marama explained that it was important to recognize the similarities between the Pacific community and the Maori community with regards to HIV/AIDS education and spreading the message.

Marama belongs to Positive Women, supporting HIV positive women in their life journeys. Her emphasis is on mental health. She reiterated that the issues positive women face isn't necessarily virus related but just 'life related'.

It was highlighted that New Zealanders are not getting tested either and often do not know they have the virus until death. We need to understand that the virus is everywhere – small towns, small islands, everywhere. Spreading the message, talking face to face and actively role modelling safe behaviour will begin to change attitudes and the stigma attached to the virus.

Marama is the proud mum of a five week old baby girl; she is currently living in the Taranaki with her partner from PNG.

Distinguished guests honoured Marama and Zoe with a show of love and solidarity.

Papa John Pitomaki blessed morning tea.

Silipa Take

Silipa is a Counsellor and Health Promoter for New Zealand AIDS Foundation. He works with the Pacific Peoples Project with health promotion, education and resource development. His approach is aimed at targeting the whole family through Church, Youth and Community groups, using skits and music, myths and traditions of the Pacific to get the message across. The Foundation has been successful in using Pacific Icons in calendars to promote safe sex and HIV messages.

Silipa stressed that:

- We need to start with us.
- We are all ambassadors for HIV/AIDS.
- Knowledge + Action = Power
- Support, care and love Pacific Peoples living with AIDS and HIV.
- Love yourself, care about yourself and protect your community.
- LOVE LIFE

Tarusila Bradburgh

Tarusila is on the World Executive Board YWCA and also works as a Youth Officer for the Ministry of Youth and Sports in Fiji. She emphasized that the Pacific is no longer protected by its remoteness and HIV/AIDS represents a profound threat.

She informed us that the reality of sexual exploitation, denial, low literacy, poverty and unsafe sex means that everyone must be involved in the fight to struggle against this disease. All have the right to know about AIDS and HIV and how to protect themselves and others. All must decide to speak openly, with sensitivity and compassion, or we will suffer with loss of life, loneliness and parentless children.

She closed her talk with a quote from the Vice President of the Fiji Islands, Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi, "Nothing threatens our future like HIV/AIDS, global warming is a concern but by the time our islands are submerged there will be no one left".

Lisa Hayes

Lisa and Tarusila are the Pacific representatives on the World Executive Board YWCA and Lisa began by advising that this fono is the first initiative of the YWCA in carrying out its worldwide strategic goals in addressing this topic.

Lisa reminded us to check our attitudes towards others and supported this with bible references (John 12:24-50, Matthew 7:1-3 and James 3:12). The main point being - "Are we going to save the world *because* of our actions OR kill it because we *judge*?" We must work together in a non-judgemental manner in order to fight this disease.

Lisa talked about the vulnerability of females, poverty, high illiteracy, barriers to education, power status, violence against women, financial dependence and female physiology, all add up to an overwhelming disadvantage in the face of HIV/AIDS.

- Women are 1.6 times more likely to contract HIV
- Women bear 100% of HIV infected children
- Women are the carers of those who are ill
- Most at risk are female – 15-25 years old
- Women are the guardians of the future

Overall, Lisa recommended talking openly to dispel myths and replace them with truth and reality, to challenge social, religious and cultural stigmas and to practice Gods message. She also advised us all to reflect on our own values and ask ourselves 'do we practice discrimination?'

Silipa, Tarusila and Lisa were embraced by the Fijian community demonstrating awahi and solidarity.

Edith Ieremia, Vice President of the YWCA Christchurch Inc introduced the workshops, each guest speaker held informal sessions with participants. After this the participants reunited to listen to Tim Barnett MP.

Tim Barnett

Tim reported on a trip to Papua New Guinea organised for the NZ Parliamentarians Group on Population and Development by Family Planning International. The trip took place in April 2006 and was attended by 3 NZ MPs and an Australian Senator, the focus was – the Pacific's AIDS/HIV crisis point.

Tim presented a PowerPoint that outlined the Millennium Development Goals, agreed in 2000 by world leaders, to be achieved by 2015 –only 8 years away.

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop global partnership for development

Papua New Guinea is far from achieving these goals and West Papua even more so. Tim advised of an unfolding tragedy set in a challenging political and physical environment. The lack of basic services, access to information and extreme oppression face this nation, with little hope for improvement in the near future.

Feedback from workshops and considerations

- Testing is not an end in itself, there are mental health considerations and ongoing support is required.
- Funding is required for Pacific island communities for ongoing HIV/AIDS education. Tim Barnett has offered to take this to a national level for further discussion. CDHB and the NZ AIDS Foundation will continue to improve their services to Pacific communities.
- Spreading the message is up to all of us. The responsibility is ours as individuals and as a community.
- Confidentiality in testing must be assured. This, combined with family openness is the way forward.
- Talking about the realities of sexual behaviour without blame or shame will develop understanding and lead to support of those living with HIV/AIDS.
- The Pacific Island AIDS Foundation works in conjunction with the Regional Pacific Islands Strategy on HIV/AIDS. Education and support are key functions, however, it was reiterated that everyone must be a part of spreading the message given the barriers to open and frank discussion with regards to sex.

In closing the fono, everyone was thanked for attending, for their openness and willingness to continue discussions with families and communities. Guest speakers received mealofa/gifts; Louisa on behalf of the Fijian Community was thanked and received a token of appreciation for their contribution to the fono. Acknowledgements were made to Laura from the NZ AIDS Foundation and Michael O’Dea from Partnership Health Organisation. Special thank you to Ted Arnold “*who never says no*”.

Edith Ieremia reminded everyone to keep safe, have a balanced diet by choosing a variety of healthy foods from the four food groups and maintain a healthy weight by keeping physically active every day. She then summed up the messages from the fono.

Gay Barton, National President YWCA, thanked YWCA Christchurch for starting the initiative in Aotearoa “*thank you for your vision, Margaret and thank you for making it happen, Tufuga*”

Fagaloa Stanley closed the fono with a word of prayer and blessed the food.

Reflection:

The fono was very successful and enjoyable. More than eighty people attended. The messages were not only informative but stimulated open communication amongst participants.