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Pacific Islands Field Education (PIFE) 2016 Report

Jioji Ravulo

University of Wollongong, jioji@uow.edu.au

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Pacific Islands Field Education (PIFE) 2016 Report

Abstract

We have successfully completed 4 years (2013 - 2016) of facilitating the Pacific Islands Field Education (PIFE) initiative, striving to achieve the following three key components: 1. Provide international learning opportunities for Western Sydney University students 2. Enhance social work education; including teaching, learning and research resources through University of the South Pacific (USP) 3. Promote the development and identity of professional Social Work across Oceania region. Within this active partnership with University of the South Pacific, the project has provided scope to develop ongoing relationships with community based services, whilst bolstering the manner in which social work education is manifested through field education across both institutions. To date, 20 Western Sydney University Bachelor of Social Work students have successfully completed their final year social work placement in the Pacific, 15 in Fiji, 3 in Samoa and 2 in Tonga. We have now partnered with 7 agencies in the region, which includes family and health services in the Kingdom of Tonga.

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Pacific Islands Field Education (PIFE)

2016 REPORT

WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY



Social Sciences
and Psychology

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Project Manager: Dr Jioji Ravulo

PIFE 2016 Team: Fiji: Sami Elayoubi, Sarah May, Kula Muamua, Jessica Reynolds
Samoa: Caitlyn Johnson, Sam Lane
Tonga: Jane Walter, Emily Whyte

PIFE Field Educators

Fiji and Tonga: Kim Tilbury
Samoa: Luagalau Foisagaasina Eteuati Shon

Partnered agencies and supervisors

Fiji: Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation: Mr Rupeni Fatiaki
FemLINKpacific Pacific: Sharon Bhagwan Rolls and Tabua Salato Prasad
Homes of Hope: Christine Waqamailau, Alita Waqabaca, Turenga Nakalevu
Samoa: Samoa Prisons and Corrective Services: Levao Rose Siaosi
Tonga: Tongan Family Health Association: ‘Amelia Hoponoa

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Western Sydney University respectively acknowledged the traditional owners of the lands in which we carry out this work across Oceania, and pay respects to First Nations peoples both past and present.

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PIFE PROJECT

MANAGEMENT REFLECTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Jioji Ravulo

We have successfully completed 4 years (2013 – 2016) of facilitating the Pacific Islands Field Education (PIFE) initiative, striving to achieve the following three key components:

1. Provide international learning opportunities for Western Sydney University students
2. Enhance social work education; including teaching, learning and research resources through The University of the South Pacific (USP)
3. Promote the development and identity of professional Social Work across Oceania region

Within this active partnership with The University of the South Pacific, the project has provided scope to develop ongoing relationships with community based services, whilst bolstering the manner in which social work education is manifested through field education across both institutions. To date, 20 Western Sydney University Bachelor of Social Work students have successfully completed their final year social work placement in the Pacific, 15 in Fiji, 3 in Samoa and 2 in Tonga. We have now partnered with 7 agencies in the region, which includes family and health services in the Kingdom of Tonga.

In addition, scholarly outputs have been a focal point for the project over the last 2 years; manifested through a research project specifically focused on the process, progress and outcomes of the model. Other key outputs have now ensued, including the recent guest editor role of Social Dialogue; an international social work magazine, and a book proposal to Routledge currently being peer reviewed. We are greatly excited about other possible opportunities the partnership across the Pacific is also creating for local agencies, with view to discuss future scope to assist in research agendas and projects.

As a result, we are now committed to compiling a yearly PIFE report, alongside a video, on the achievements of PIFE, assisted through individual student written reflections of their experience on placement. This will continue to assist in the general profile of the program, and how we outwardly promote a positive approach to implementing a sustainable program.

The 8 students that completed their placement in the Pacific in 2016 have provided personal and professional insights into their experience. As part of their final 50 hours of placement, undertaken back in Australia after completing 500 hours in their agency, each student needed to answer the following 6 reflective questions:

1. What were the key activities undertaken on placement?
2. What did you learn from doing a social work placement in the Pacific?
3. What professional challenges did you experience whilst away?
4. How did you personally grow (provide feedback where appropriate)?
5. How will you utilise what you've learnt back home in Australia?
6. What could be done differently in the implementation of the PIFE initiative?

Through their reflections, it was exciting to see how each student meaningfully experienced personal and professional growth; through both their individual commitment to learning, and collective experience across the PIFE initiative. Some students came to a greater understanding of how important traditional culture, values and belief systems pervade the way in which people think, act and behave; whilst others were thrown completely out of their comfort zone to unique and life changing moments.

In my own professional commitment to upholding a critical reflective approach to social work education, and its impact on practice, policy and research, I have developed the following recommendations below based on the feedback gained from the student reports within. Such recommendations will be utilised to further shape and nuance the way in which the PIFE program is implementing in the future, whilst fostering a spirit of sustainability by learning to change, and adapt from previous experiences.

As project manager, I am grateful for the ongoing support of the School of Social Sciences and Psychology at Western Sydney University, and the opportunities this has created for students, agencies and community groups. I look forward to our ongoing work in the area, maintaining a strong commitment to meaningful, engaging and relevant regional development across Oceania and beyond.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure Field Educators are employed locally, in each Island state, to support face to face meetings during placement in the Pacific.
- Actively profile the Pacific Islands Field Education (PIFE) more broadly to support more social work students at Western Sydney University to be involved, or aware of the project to support fellow students going overseas.
- Promote local homestay opportunities for students where possible and appropriate, in turn providing a more nuanced cultural learning experience, insight and knowledge in living and working across the Pacific
- Create scope to utilise additional screening and assessment tools to better support and assist student wellbeing before, during, and after placement in the Pacific. This may include assessing areas of health, and Cultural Intelligence (CQ).
- Working with national and regional organisations to also provide more localized learning opportunities and community based engagement
- Providing more options for Western Sydney University social work teaching staff and students to actively engage with PIFE team members whilst they are on placement
- Encouraging students to learn key words and phrases from language(s) in the country of their placement to support better knowledge / insight / understanding in working effectively with clients
- Encourage student to obtain cultural attire in Pacific Islands to enhance rapport building with local communities
- Integration of more cultural awareness training and skills development during pre-placement meetings with PIFE students, including concepts of white privilege and decolonizing social work.
- Continue to promote scope for The University of the South Pacific social work students to be paired on placement with Western Sydney University students to enhance reciprocal learning opportunities
- Support PIFE team members to actively develop rapport and collegiality before placement through additional team building activities and meetings

“ We are greatly excited about
other possible opportunities the
partnership across the Pacific is
also creating for local agencies. ”

TEAM FIJI

Sami Elayoubi

MINISTRY OF WOMEN, CHILDREN AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION

What are the KEY activities that were undertaken on placement?

For the duration of the placement, there were numerous and various tasks and activities that were completed with the aim of building the capacity and further developing skills and knowledge of Pacific social work. My role as a social work student completing their placement in a government agency came with it a surprise of privileged opportunities. Working alongside and supervised by the Director of Social Welfare the tasks and activities that were completed, addressed the various observations following the critical analysis and recommendations made to the Director and his superiors both the Permanent Secretary and the Minister of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation (MWCPA). I was nourished and rewarded with the reality and appreciation for community development and social work practice. From visiting communities both villages and settlements across the various divisions and provinces, socially educating and bringing awareness to the issues of child abuse and child protection I enjoyed and further developed skills and competencies in many areas of social work development. Examples of the work that was completed ranged from facilitating and participating in various training seminars, assisting in restructuring and the development of the Fiji Association of Social and Community Workers, the creation of psychosocial assessment forms, training modules, and staff wellness programs. Throughout the fourteen weeks in the country, I aimed to fulfil and take advantage of all opportunities that would build on my capacities and skills both professionally and personally.

Following my settlement and own analysis and critique of the context and environment, it was recommended that there was a growing need for forms and training in psychosocial assessment and support. From this identified need I was given the primary and quite privileged task of creating and implementing a National Psychosocial Assessment form and a complimentary training module that was devised in collaboration and consultation with staff and community leaders in the Suva division. Having reviewed existing forms and training, it was also identified that

these proforma documents and modules were previously created and devised from very western models and ideologies. It was documented such as these that did not take into account the very domains in the Fijian people's lives that made the work of a welfare officer a lot more difficult. Having critically analysed this, it was more of a reason as to why I needed to work collaboratively further with staff and produce materials that were both culturally sensitive and appropriate in use.

Privileged with an opportunity that as a student back home in Australia I would never be handed, it was over six weeks that I used multiple theories and evidence-based perspectives from both western and Pacific contexts to inform myself on the various domains I would need to include in the forms and training module. From the research, I was able to expand further my capacities and knowledge of the various cultural practices, values and beliefs of the country that I was living in. Use of the Fonofale Model, Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems Theory, Strengths Based Perspective, and Client Centred Ideologies were the core foundations of the work that I would complete in attempting to achieve my goals and tasks. Inclusive to devising these forms and modules, I was very much involved in the restructure and social work practice in the Fiji Juvenile Rehabilitation and Development Centre (FJRDC) for boys. Working closely with staff and clientele in the agency further reaffirmed and assisted in the implementation of such forms and training modules. It was chosen that upon completion of the forms that I would pilot the project in the FJRDC and train staff on the use of these forms. Initially I was quite anxious and had mixed feelings of handing over and training staff with these forms and module, as I felt it could cause somewhat more damage than good, however through supervision and the motivation and mentoring of the Director, it proved to be a success, with the forms and module due to be utilised and implemented nationally across all divisions and offices in Fiji nationwide.

Moreover, during my time with the Department, the most rewarding critical endeavour that was undertaken over the

duration of the placement was that of working with the fifteen to seventeen Juvenile boys that were held in the FJRDC. The Juvenile boys that were detained in this centre ranged from various backgrounds and ages between twelve to seventeen. My role as a social work student in the centre was to assist in the development of programs and profiling of the boys that were admitted and resided at the centre. Commencing my job in the centre, it was evident that western methods of social work would prove to be difficult as there were great barriers in the implementation of interventions with both staff and the boys themselves. Mainly the barrier of language was evident which did not assist in our ability to conduct assessments with the boys and work collaboratively to reach and devise goals. Working on the strengths of these boys, it was evident that alternative means of assessment needed to be implemented. As a result of this, working through the means of a program, I with the assistance of my fellow peer devised a method of collating data through music and art therapy. The program consisted of various topics that would be explored, in the attempt to both build the rapport and better understand these vulnerable and developing young people.

Art and Music became an outlet for these boys, assisting them in best expressing emotions and feelings through the final products they would produce. It was of great interest and shock that the boys opened up more and worked better as a group than on an individual level in a counselling room. Through the group programs, there was always an opportunity to build the rapport with these boys one on one and in most cases ended up in a request to speak to me further individually. Rewardingly though, through these programs hidden talents were identified and a new form of assessment for myself was born, through the exploration of subjects in self-identity, the narrative of their stories, family and environments, culture, spirituality, drugs and alcohol, domestic violence, and most importantly goals and aspirations. Using methods such as this broke down the walls and reservations these boys had, and they took a chance on us, letting us in on their stories and working together to help achieve the change they envisaged for the centre



and themselves. Nonetheless, although this came with it, its many challenges of political, systemic and societal attitudes and barriers, it was the highlight and most rewarding part of the placement. I will forever hold close and near to my heart the narratives and stories of these boys, both professionally and personally, and have found a new passion to working within the Juvenile Justice sector, striving to creating change and making a difference in the lives of many more disadvantaged and vulnerable youth as I was able to in Fiji.

As one of the first students to be placed in a government agency, pioneering the program for future students to come, there were initially mixed feelings and systemic uncertainties over tasks and duties that would be completed over the twelve weeks in the agency. This resulted in a delay in starting at the office for about ten days and led to my working with the Fiji Association of Social and Community Workers.

The Fiji Association of Social and Community Workers is an association that has long been struggling with becoming the governing body that will oversee and represent the many social and community workers in Fiji, nationally. Over the past two decades, there have been many ups and downs about changing governments, the political climate and many other unethical practices that occurred in and within its body. As a student assisting the association, initially, my role was to help with the restructure and evaluation of existing frameworks. This proved tough due to the under-resourcing of individuals unable to fully and wholeheartedly give up more time in doing the necessary admin tasks on a purely voluntary basis. It was our very first Monday evening in Fiji, where myself and the other students made our way to the associations Secretaries apartment and met both her and the leading and most inspirational woman Malinda Tugaga, the first fighter and advocate of such an association over the many years that had gone by. It was truly something out of the movies as we were students from the suburbs of Western Sydney, sitting in this apartment in the town of Nabua, Suva, being written in the history books for assisting in the rebirth of a much need and crucial association to the social work profession over the three hundred or so islands of the nation of Fiji.

Throughout the first month, I worked on the association's election campaign, seeing it through from candidate nominations, to the very end of announcement and launch of the new committee. Inclusive to working on all campaign material, candidate interviewing, the creation of ballot paper, and the launch night event, I also had the privilege to be the

producer, first editor and writer in the first ever published and electronic newsletter of the Association. Working alongside and networking with the many wise and passionate social and community workers on this project and the remainder months with the association, it was great to be able to encapsulate the various narratives and suggestions of working in a Pacific and cultural context in Fiji.

What did you learn from doing a social work placement in the Pacific?

An opportunity such as this was nonetheless an overall learning experience on a day to day basis. From the very beginning of arriving at Nadi Airport to catching local buses and living the everyday life of that of a Fijian was all a learning experience. Coming from an ethnic culture myself I was accustomed for the anticipated traditions and rituals that I was to engage, and I welcomed throughout my time in Fiji. Apart from experiencing and learning new things about a new culture and often religious and tribal customs and traditions, being a social work student in Fiji and upon commencing placement I could say that I began to understand that I had a power of advantage and privilege coming from a western and first world country. The power came from the colour of my skin and the knowledge and skill that I had attained. Although it was unfortunate that the colour of my skin and background that often held an assumption of superiority and wisdom, I had this power I had to be aware of it as it could have been a lot more damaging than good. Living in Australia as part of ethnic culture and minority group this was foreign to me. Often labelled and stereotyped by ignorant ideology, I was challenged with an adjustment for seeing me for who and what I am. A student and a social worker, nothing more and nothing less. I was perceived as a human being and someone who was there to assist and complete their journey. Personally, I have a belief that these negative experience that I have endured have further developed my understanding and ability to empathise and work within the many social issues and situations that were presented in Fiji.

As far as a social work placement the key things that were learnt from this experience were that relying on purely western theory and ideology to inform your practice and community development is not as effective and from a personal perspective can be detrimental to the cultural practices and traditions of the Fijian people. Developing such an attitude came from my learnt ability to critically reflect on my practice daily. Critical reflection proved to be my saviour in practice. It taught me to look beyond what

it is that I had done and to explore areas of which I can improve and most importantly can be done through evaluation. Learning new methods of practice and communication (both verbally and non-verbal), through my work with the adolescent boys and staff from various locations and provinces all contributed to my building of capacities that I did not know that existed. I learnt capacities of resilience and patience, and most importantly I discovered 'what not to do'. Overall I would say I gained a new appreciation for the social work profession and a need for this initiative to continue with the assistance of its development.

What professional challenges did you experience while you were away?

Although the social work profession is in its early stages of development, elements of social work practice can be seen to be practised but at the expense of it being the 'textbook theory' kind. Completing this placement in Fiji, I initially had difficulty in finding my professional purpose and was challenged with the already existent nature of social work that was vastly different to that I was used to. The conceptualisation of social work in Fiji, was identified as being flexible in the definition and most often presented as a helping profession and had no boundaries or even practice standard over who could be called a social worker by profession and status. This could be due to the struggling nature of a governing body for social workers, or better yet, maybe at the result of unintentional oppression through the means of the white man telling it how it is because of a lack of having a code of ethics. In particular, I found it hard to come around to terms of welfare officers within the Department of Social Welfare, having tertiary qualifications in disciplines of business, tourism, geography, marine biology, and environmental science were employed to provide the ground crisis intervention and psychosocial support.

It was evident that the social work practice nonetheless concentrated on the management and physical needs of clientele rather than on the therapy and interventions needed to eradicate and create the change and make a difference in an individual's life. The case management system that was existent in particular to the child services and poverty monitoring systems may be perceived as a band-aid effect. A lot of the work that was completed was that of crisis-intervention and most often was practised in unintentional unethical manners. Of great challenge was the breach of confidentiality, an unethical imposition of religious beliefs in residential homes, and the provision of basic human rights to juveniles detained to

serve a sentence. Most of the work that was completed was that of advocacy. Advocating the needs and wants of the community and individuals was of utmost importance and intervention was necessary on a daily basis. Moreover, the predominance and influence of western theory and ideology, and at times petite insight and knowledge to these theoretical underpinnings have resulted in a lack of resources and values/ethics into Pacific social work. Nonetheless, I have learnt from these challenges, and I can hold to account that social work varies and can be seen to differ among various countries and there are not one universal means of social work practice that can be taught, in particular to cross-cultural social work.

How did you grow (provide feedback where appropriate)?

On a personal level, this experience is something that I would not trade for anything. Being a part of the PIFE initiative, it has provided me with a new lens of how I perceive the world and make sense of what is happening in a country, community, culture, and individual. I have grown to be a lot more empathetically driven and passionate about the work I do. Coming from a Lebanese, Muslim background that is enriched with its customs and traditions, I now understand these customs and traditions a lot more with a new appreciation for the communal and collective way of life in which has provided me with greater personal growth and understanding of who I am. Fiji was a life changing experience in which I dealt many challenges and complexities over my way of life, from living with my peers to being a minority once again in Fiji.

Living with my peers proved to be a challenge. However, it assisted in my understanding of how and why people interpret other cultures and their tolerances towards them. I learnt to be patient, tolerant and accepting of individual's opinions and judgements. Reflecting on the living arrangements, I would find it suiting that students get the opportunity where possible to reside with a host family, and nurture their learning of a new culture from a firsthand and lived experience. Moreover, being the first male student to initially be selected for the PIFE initiative and dealing several challenges from this; it was through this that I learnt how I interacted within the dominant culture of Fiji while trying to hold on to my values and beliefs that made up my identity. At many times, I felt confused and frustrated over many little things that were different to what I was used to. But over time and through the mentoring and support given to me by the staff at the ministry and other friends, that helped me

“ ...relying on purely western theory and ideology to inform your practice and community development is not as effective...”

find new capacities that I never thought would have existed and built on my character and professional identity as they both merged to create a new appreciation for the theory, skill and wisdom that has been engrained within me through the four years of this degree.

How will you utilise what you have learnt back home in Australia?

Completing my placement in the South Pacific and Fiji, I have grown and built on capacities that I never thought I had. This experience working with Juvenile boys and within an international government department, has changed my perspective of the world. It has provided me with a new insight to what it means to develop further the knowledge and skills to adapt western theory and ideology to suit cross-cultural and indigenous social work practices. Crucial to my practice I have gained skill in being aware of my professional power that I hold in therapeutic relationships. Power imbalances could have been so easily and unintentionally detrimental to that of the work that was conducted. However, it is through my understanding and caution of white privilege that I held a deeper and meaningful gratitude for the indigenous and traditional customs that complement social work practice and principles.

Moreover, this culturally communal context and environment provided me with the elements of a new form of psychosocial support and assessment. A form of new knowledge and skill devised for the intervention of peoples from different ages and populations. Utilising mixed methods and approaches to practice, whether it be through music or art as a means of expression and a tool for the assessment of youth and juvenile offenders. Overall I bring back with me a competency in working with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) populations, including the First peoples of Australia and my own cultural and religious community. It is the learnt appreciation and ability to work within and challenge the delusional model and attitude of the political sphere, which are devised and implemented through policies with the aim of ‘one size fitting all peoples’ (including First Nations people and CALD Backgrounds) that I will benefit from here back in Australia.

What can be done differently in the implementation of the PIFE initiative?

Over some time, and through careful critical reflection over the processes and practices of the PIFE initiative, I express a greater need and importance in the continuation of such a program. In regards to recommendations on how things can be done differently, there is room for improvement in an already growing initiative. In regards to the recruitment processes of the initiative, I believe that there should be some screening/assessment process of a student’s cultural competence and tolerance, both of their own and of others, and an optimistic assessment of a student’s mental health. Secondly, about the recruitment process and placement of students to the agency of Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, I would recommend that student not be placed within the headquarters office in Suva. Rather students would benefit in their learning greatly from being placed in divisional offices, contributing and gaining knowledge in direct and community development aspects of the social work profession. In particular, I think that staff including welfare officers (case managers/community workers) would benefit from skills students may bring along in regards to micro skills in interviewing, psychosocial assessment, data collection and analysis, and grassroots social work in application to community development approaches.

Thirdly, I would suggest an importance of having extra support provided to future students from academic’s and staff back home in Australia, like the Zoom sessions, although limited relatively benefited and provided myself and the other students with a sense of normality of being a student. Nonetheless, I would make one last suggestion of exploring areas and assisting students in processes of attaining accommodation. My experience of this was challenging, and of which contributed to the frustrations that may have arisen while living with my peers. However, this did assist in my personal growth; I would suggest for future students that this process made smoother in transition and moreover an option of living with host families would benefit the student greatly.

Sarah May

HOMES OF HOPE

I undertook my final social work placement in Fiji, working at an NGO called Homes of Hope, in Wailoku, Suva. Homes of Hope work with women and children who are victims of sexual violence, with both residency and community programs. Homes of Hope has an accommodation campus for girls and women who are pregnant or have children through sexual assault to reside. They also run a training program for girls from the community who are doing sex work as a means of income. Both residents' and community girls do training every day, in financial literacy, inner life, mothering skills, physical/sex education and hard skills such as sewing, agriculture, computer skills and jewellery making. Homes of Hope strives to empower young women to be able to make positive choices and change in their lives, for themselves, for their families and for their children.

What I did...

In the first week of my placement, one of the fellow volunteers at the agency who was employed to create a new case management system accepted a new job, and the task was given to me. As a student social worker, this was an enormous task, which I knew needed to be completed efficiently and most importantly, effectively. With not much to go on, and minimal supervision within the agency, I agreed to make the case management system my main priority and task during the length of my placement.

I started by going back through my readings and notes from previous units from my degree that focused on case work, as well as some copies of forms that I kept from my first placement with NSW Family and Community Services (FACS). There were a few preexisting forms from the process that Homes of Hope had been using, and there were specific questions that the staff wanted to keep in the new forms. The case management system I developed consisted of the following documents: First Contact card, Assessment form, Intake form, Action Plan, Progress Measurement Tool, and Case Closure form.

The element of the system that took the most effort was creating a person-centred planning tool, or 'progress measurement tool'. Originally, Homes of Hope was planning on using a tool that had already been created and was copyrighted and required training to use. I had to explain that being able to have rights to an idea or concept was legitimate, and that I thought it would be an unethical and unprofessional decision to try and simply change the name of the tool in an attempt to avoid paying for rights and training. I told my team that I would try to come up with something that had a similar affect in tracking a client's progress, but would be original to their agency and they could make their own. I spent a lot of time trialing different ideas, and eventually settled on something that had imagery that would be meaningful for a Fijian context, and would be simple for staff to explain, and for clients to understand.

Although most of my work was in the office, I was also given opportunities to do practical work with the clients. I helped run some empowerment programs and

a camp for some community clients, and spend considerable time getting to know them. Whilst not a direct social work role, I supported a young client through a long period of labour during the birth of her child, and during that experience, had to advocate quite strongly on her behalf. Due to Fiji being a predominantly conservative and Christian country, the fact that she was unmarried and pregnant meant that staff treated her very differently to other patients. During the days I was with her at the hospital, it gave us a lot of time to talk about her past and how she came to be in her current situation, and ended up being quite a therapeutic time for her, having the space to say how she was feeling about upcoming motherhood. I enjoyed having some one-on-one time with a particular client, and building the rapport and relationship with her.

What I learnt...

Although there was so much to learn in relation to social work, upon reflection, I realised that a lot of what I learnt was about the Fijian culture in general. I enjoyed learning another language as I went through my placement, and it helped me to relate better to my clients. Being a part of the Fijian sense of family and community helped me to understand the lives of my clients, and the way decisions need to be made. The Samoan fonofale framework depicts family upholding everything about an individual and their life. This was evident in Fiji; even in seemingly small decisions, it was important to consult relevant family members, as all decisions tend to have an effect on the whole family unit.

I learnt that even though I consider myself as having a reasonably holistic and empathetic practice, working with clients from another culture requires you to have a level of sensitivity and awareness that I had not experienced before. Going into the placement, I did not realise how influenced I was by individualistic Western ideals. I learnt a great deal about the importance of the history and traditions and how they impact professional practice. The communal nature of Fijian culture was something I learnt a great deal about, even in a professional sense, as most of my work had to be done in collaboration, not just with my superiors, but with every member of the team. Given that the new case management system

would have an impact on every member of the team, it was common practice that everyone gets to give input and opinions.

I also learnt a great deal about the realities of sex work, how it comes about and how it affects an individual. Selling sex is seen as a quick and easy way to make a decent amount of money in a night, and through the conversations I had with some clients, it was not as though they 'wanted' to do it, but seemed to just accept it as what was necessary. It was incredible to see how nonchalantly some of the girls would discuss their previous evenings or weekends, making jokes about things that I found quite serious or confronting. It showed me the harsh reality that many of those clients lived every day, and their way of getting through it was to trivialise it. After having more in depth conversations, it was clear that doing sex work took its toll on all of them, and their families. There is a conflicting cycle in which some girls are pressured to provide a certain level of income, but are then shamed for how they acquire the money. It creates complex issues for the clients to try and work through, as they go through the Homes of Hope training program and build up their skill set.

Another thing I learnt was that poverty can sometimes be a perspective. Most of the people I came in contact with in Fiji were, by my standards, poor. They however, did not see themselves that way. Logically, to many Fijians, if they have enough food for each day, and a safe place to sleep, they have what they need. This was eye opening for me, and again challenged they ways in which I am influenced by my privilege.

What challenged me...

I went to Fiji thinking I was very culturally sensitive and understood the importance of not viewing everything from a Western framework. It was not until I had been working on the case management system for a few weeks that I came to the realisation that I was very influenced by Western frameworks and understanding. I had completed the Intake Assessment form, and had given it to my team leader for a final check, and she told me that I had left out some important questions that are essential to Fijian understanding and expression of identity. The 'koro dina'

and 'koro ni vasu' are the places from which a person's father and mother originate. In Fiji, family (included extended family) is such a huge element of every person's life, and someone's ties to a particular village, province or confederacy can convey a lot of information about their identity and background. Having this conversation enlightened me to how differently I naturally think about things in comparison to the Pasifika context, and from that experience, I worked much harder at actively seeking out the opinions of people who understood the culture in which they were practicing.

It was also difficult to undertake work as a professional social worker in a country where social work was not typically recognised as a legitimate profession. Rather, it is synonymous with charity or mission work; doing 'good' because it is the right thing to do, albeit not in a professionally informed way. As the only person at Homes of Hope with a tertiary education in social work, it was challenging to have a more comprehensive understanding of social work as a profession and the need for professionalism in the agency. It was challenging to explain things that I see as important to social work practice, such as documentation, when in Fijian social work it is not always seen as a priority. Although those conversations were challenging, I enjoyed considering things from new perspectives, and to be constantly learning as well as teaching.

How I grew...

In a professional sense, I feel I grew immensely. In my first placement, even though I learnt a lot, I was mostly shadowing caseworkers. In this placement, I had a lot of autonomy in my work and decisions. I had to learn to trust my professional judgment whilst developing the case management system, due to the fact of having little supervision or opportunity to check with people before decisions were made.

As I have already mentioned, widening my capability in working with clients from another culture was a large element of my learning experience in Fiji. Previously to this placement, I had not worked with any clients of a culture other than white or Indigenous Australian, so I found myself in

situations that I had never experienced before. Particularly so, seeing as I was the 'odd one out' racially speaking, it was very different being a white social worker in a Pacific country, than being a white social worker in a predominantly white country, working with a Pasifika person. Whilst I had an academic advantage in comparison to my colleagues, having done a very comprehensive social work degree, I was surrounded by people who were of the Fijian culture, and therefore understood things about the country and its people that I had no knowledge in. There were many times I tried to convey something to a client, and a staff member would tell me that it would make more sense if they rephrased it in Fijian. Although I am slightly ashamed to admit it, I felt a little insulted at the notion of my thoughts or suggestions not being seen as 'good enough' and needing to be translated differently. It was not until a colleague asked me to consider that even though I could recognise and use certain Fijian phrases, I would be quicker to hear or understand those phrases in English, given that I had more experience of that language. That opened my eyes to seeing that Western ideals and a subconscious level of superiority still very heavily influenced me, even though I had been working really hard on being culturally open and sensitive.

What will change now I'm home...

This placement has changed how I see social work, as both a profession and a personal passion or purpose. I have a newfound confidence in my knowledge and professional skills that will carry through into my future career. I also have a greater understanding of working with people of another culture, and the importance of prioritizing and including their language, traditions and any other cultural aspects that form a part of their identity.

The experience of doing social work in a country where it is still emerging and developing as a profession is not something that many new graduates can claim to have done. I thought that social work was undervalued in Australia, but going to Fiji showed me how developed it is as a profession. There is so much need in Fiji, but not enough people to do the work. I have a newfound appreciation for how many

resources social work has in Australia, and the high level of support (albeit, not perfect) that the profession has. There are so many things to learn through living abroad, let alone working abroad, and all of those things have changed me personally and professionally. This placement has made me a more confident and empathetic person, which will definitely impact my work in the future.

What could be done differently?

If I could have changed one thing, I would have preferred to be living with a Fijian family. The students in Tonga and Samoa had amazing relationships and safe places, and through that, a bigger connection to the culture and country. I personally feel I could have gained much more knowledge about Fijian culture and been a bigger part of that had I had more connections with iTaukei Fijians. Depending on personality and expectation, I would recommend that students try to have either locals to live with, or some solid connections to contact so that settling in is an easy and positive process, with people who can provide support throughout the placement.

Even though there were hard times and challenges, I am so grateful for my time in Fiji. I experienced and learnt things that would not have been possible in Australia, and have enhanced my understanding of social work at its core. Fiji is an incredible country, with a rich and welcoming culture, which is a joy to be surrounded by and included in. It is inspiring to work with people who have a passion for helping others, and a willingness to learn more about social work as a profession, and how to do it effectively. I have and will continue to recommend the PIFE initiative to students looking for a unique and richly educational placement experience. It is unlike any other placement program I have heard of anywhere else. I am so grateful for this opportunity, and will value it throughout my entire career. Vinaka vaka levu to Jioji for making all of this a possibility!



“ Being a part of the Fijian sense of family and community helped me to understand the lives of my clients... ”

Kula Muamua

FEMLINKPACIFIC PACIFIC, FIJI

What are the key activities undertaken on placement?

The Key activities that were undertaken during my time at FemLINKpacific, involved my assistance in dealing with issues women face on a day to day basis, that have been impacted as a result of either social constructs or natural disaster. Tasks that were completed over the duration of the placement included the various and numerous consultations and training projects and programs over many divisions and provinces of Fiji. These consultations presented from a grassroots level, considered the narratives and voices of women that have been afflicted with hardship and challenges, that have been of great disadvantage to both themselves, their families and numerous communities. Following my participation and input of these consultations the key task that was my role as a social work student, involved the transcribing and critical data analysis of these narratives and stories. From these stories and analysis, a publication was produced and was brought forth with knowledge and recommendations to the parliament and relevant Ministry, to inform policy and assists in its drafting and execution.

Moreover, during my time at FemLINKpacific, I was privileged to participate and attend radio broadcasts. My role that I undertook whilst assisting in these broadcasts was that of both a participant and broadcaster. Coming from an iTaukei (indigenous) Fijian background and speaking three languages (Fijian-numerous dialects, Hindi and English), I was privileged to socially educate and share my experiences as a woman to the Fijian public. These broadcasts served as a means to campaign and socially educate the Fijian women and LGBT community about their basic human rights and provide them with empowerment for their voices to be heard. This part of the placement was of most reward to me. To be able to broadcast and participate in interviews as a woman from Feminist ideology, brought me great comfort to know that the knowledge and skill I have acquired as a student, is assisting me in empowering the people of my nation. To be able to be a stepping stone on the path of change brings

me great joy to know that there are people and professionals in Fiji that share the same progressive viewpoint, whilst holding on to our indigenous values, customs and culture (religion included).

What did you learn from doing a Social Work placement in the Pacific?

Over the duration of my placement I would say I had various mixed feelings, but most importantly I took every opportunity as a new learning experience. Being a woman from an iTaukei background and having a gained knowledge from a western perspective, I struggled to adjust to the patriarchal and hierarchical barriers that were still evident in the traditional villages that were afflicted and presented to have detrimental social issues. Examples of this presented in my work as I was faced with the barriers of fear and lack of trust as a result of women not sharing their stories and narratives due to the disadvantage and intimidation they may face by village elders and leaders. Interestingly I found this to be the case in various consultations when interviewing the iTaukei populations, in particular about social issues of domestic violence, social roles of women and men, and most importantly sexuality and religion. However, this was not a predominantly evident case of the Indo-Fijian women. Throughout the consultations I had identified that Indo-Fijian women were not restricted from sharing their experiences and stories, as the fear of retribution was not evident as these women were not bound by cultural codes. This was evident as Indo-Fijian women came from the most disadvantaged squatter settlements and more likely urban communities of Fiji.

Additionally, through my social work learning experience in Fiji, the influence of media in both a positive and negative standpoint was clearly evident as a means of empowerment and social education. I was fascinated with the progressive nature that FemLINKpacific had taken in regards to using social media as a means of engaging its clientele and citizens. This provided me with a greater insight and perspective of integrating technology and social media in my practice as a social worker in a positive manner that is effective.

Nonetheless, it was through various training programs that consisted of members from various divisions and provinces that I was able to further develop my skills in Pacific psychosocial support assessment.

What professional challenges did you experience whilst you were away?

Challenges that I faced commencing the placement were very evident from day one. The first of challenges professionally was that of organisational challenge and disadvantage. The lack of resources and staff in particular to the social work profession was of most challenge for me over the duration of the placement as a whole. Lack of resources and staff meant that I was not able to link the theory to practice and gain the support of like-minded ideologies that I would have liked. Examples of this were evident whether it be the underdeveloped and lack of updating of their website and contact listing, which initially resulted in me not being able to find the correct address and location of the office on my first day, to the day to day support needed in debriefing and communicating my needs and wants as a student in the organisation was not met as various staff came from diverse professions. Another of those organizational challenges I faced was due to the under maintained and durability of equipment and tools needed to complete the role of recording and transcribing of the women's narratives. This took a toll on my ability to complete tasks in the timely manner that was needed and required my own improvisation and use of personal laptop and time.

Overall the biggest challenge I faced in Fiji as a developing professional was the lack of code of ethics and governing body, in particular as a woman from an iTaukei background, returning to my home country with western knowledge and ideologies and attempting to structure and integrate aspects of this for the betterment of the society and individual wellbeing. Furthermore, and nonetheless, as an iTaukei woman it was difficult in setting professional boundaries with clientele and staff, on whether I was going to be accepted as a woman from traditionally native roots and ideologies, or as a native woman who

has overcome boundaries and barriers and returned with western skill and knowledge to assist in the development of a profession that was much needed in the country.

How did you professionally grow (provide feedback where appropriate)?

As a developing professional, I believe that my experience in Fiji has assisted me vastly in terms of my growth as a practitioner. Initially as a social work student in Fiji I was faced with a stereotype of not having the capability and knowledge of a professional as a woman from an iTaukei background. A result of this I sensed the feelings of being invisible and not having the capacity to complete a task, in particular whilst being present with fellow PIFE students undertaking their placement in Fiji. Examples of this would be when attending a function or event with my peers, and a question would have been asked of us, I would not be looked to for answer, rather it was expected from a student with a different colour of skin. Having experienced this type of preconception I seen the need of taking initiative and overcome barriers and try to change the perception of my people to encourage and empower women to know that regardless of age or gender, they too can overcome barriers and do have a life outside the main patriarchal expectations of the home.

Additionally, as a professional my growth cultivated from my passion to assist in the creating of change in Fiji. As a change agent my duty is to uphold an advocate for the rights of individuals and this was certainly developed through my work at FemLINKpacific. Being given the chance to hear the voices and stories of these courageous women, brought forth the importance of the social work profession in building the capacity of the individuals, families and communities. It was a privilege to have developed skills on data collection, analysis, and policy recommendation as I am able to take away skills and knowledge from an unconventional method of social work in a communal and cultural setting. It has also helped me identify my sense of self and purpose, in releasing my capabilities and capacities through the most complex and challenging situations.

How will you utilise what you have learnt back home in Australia?

From the initial stages of the process of being a part of the Pacific Islands Field Education (PIFE) Initiative, it was always my aim to travel to Fiji and gain skills and knowledge to bring back and apply some of these resourceful tools here in Australia. Throughout my learning process I developed the skill of taking initiative for my own learning and further development. In a country where Social Work is still developing you would think that there would not be much to gain opposed from giving and although this may have been the case at times, I certainly gained a lot more than I had expected. The biggest thing that I have gained from my placement in Fiji that I can utilise here in Australia is that of working with Indigenous and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse populations and backgrounds. Skills and knowledge that I have gained from the general public and clientele has given me a skill in better understanding the feelings, emotions, need, and wants of people through an alternate method of taking to account the communal, cultural and spiritual domains of an individual and their Nation.

Although I am a native woman of Fiji, I still had more to gain in working professionally within my own community and its people. I learnt the ability to use aspects of western ideologies and theory as a means to critically analyse situations that back home in Australia I can use with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As I hold a passion and aim to work with Indigenous populations this greatly will assist me when it comes to the psychosocial assessment and implementation of interventions, with tribes, communities and elders of the First Nation people. The connection to land and resources from nature was also a predominant method to connection and the building of rapport with Indigenous peoples. This further developed my knowledge and skill in ethical and empathetically driven communication and micro-skills of interviewing in the aim to empower clientele and build on their capacity, to gain the best outcomes for the client's mental health and physical wellbeing. Skills such as these assisted me in my ability to fully understand the individual and if not the time



“ ... it is of utmost importance that we take initiative in creating a sense of belonging and being the agent of change...”

and place they come from. Utilising these skills will assist me in continuously critically reflecting and understanding the systems in which they live in and the underpinning impacts of social work practices and governmental policy and practices.

Nonetheless what I have gained in skill and will utilise in my practice as a social worker is that of facilitating culturally sensitive and appropriate training in practicing with CALD and First Nations populations. Crucial to the practices of cultural identity it is of utmost importance that we take initiative in creating a sense of belonging and being the agent of change to the neo-liberal ideology that hinders and impacts vulnerable and disadvantaged peoples. Inclusive of working in groups and most importantly working collaboratively from a grass roots level to achieve a sound and content change to the lives of these individuals and communities.

What could be done differently in the implementation of the PIFE Initiative?

Firstly, I am grateful and privileged to have been a part of the PIFE Initiative, as it has given me an opportunity to take back to my home country a profession that I know can be a benefit to the current and up running agencies and communities trying to eradicate social issues and dealing with the outspread of poverty. The PIFE initiative has proven to be somewhat successful in Fiji over the past four years. Although we are faced with challenges and complexities there is always room for improvement. My recommendations on what can be done differently with the program would be that of the initial assessment and selection of students that

are express an interest in the initiative. From my own experience it is crucial for a student to be aware of the cultural capacity and in particular to that of different nationalities and religions. This occasionally was evident and showed a greater concern of not being able to understand a culture or religion and remarks or questioning had been made in which offence could have been taken. In an aim to improve this challenge, would suggest thorough assessment and a few more in depth cultural awareness and education sessions, opposed to the fortnightly meetings.

Another aspect of PIFE that can be improved is its assisting non-pacific students to find accommodation in their respective countries. From my own experience it was a very stressful and challenging time for me as a student, on top of the requirements that were needed of me both as a developing social worker and an academic student. This process also led to various complications in the living standard and conditions for the students. It would be recommended that PIFE assist students to either give options and locate residence for them or make opportunity for students to reside with host families, to better delve and understand the culture and customs of their respective country.

Furthermore, for Pacific Island students it is often the case they feel responsible for the protection and care of non-pacific students. I would recommend a process of students being aware of their roles as a student traveling to a Pacific country and differentiate between being a group and holding on to their individuality, and independence.

Jessica Reynolds

MINISTRY OF WOMEN, CHILDREN AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION

The beginning

On the 8th of November 2015 I got the email telling me I could now apply for the Pacific Island field education (PIFE) initiative. As soon as I saw this, my mind lit up with so many different emotions. Do I apply, don't I apply, do I leave family and friends for three months, or do I give up the chance to claim an opportunity of a lifetime? After two weeks of deciding with mostly me thinking I will not get in, I applied not expecting anything to happen from it. A week or two goes by, and I get a call from Dr Jioji telling me that I have made it to the interview process, I was shocked I could not believe that I had got a response and was going to have an interview. So I went to uni for an interview, I was so ridiculously nervous beyond belief. After sweating a ridiculous amount and answering everyone's questions, I thought I had made a terrible impression. Another week goes by, and I get a call from Dr Jioji and what I hear him say is congratulations "Jessica you have been accepted into the Pacific Island field education initiative in Fiji"! I was in complete disbelief probably up until February 2016 when we had our first PIFE meeting, and I even went so far to email Jioji to check that he hadn't made a mistake and chose me by accident. But it turns out there was no mistake, and I was going to Fiji with three other students in July 2016.

Months went by, and I was a part of the PIFE team, attending meetings and organising fundraisers for our agencies we will be working for in the Pacific. Even during this time I was still in disbelief that I was going to be going to Fiji! Months went past when it was suddenly July 12th, 2016 our departure day to leave for Fiji. It was the most emotional day I had in a long time, leaving my boyfriend and my mum was the hardest thing, knowing I won't see them for three months just killed me inside. I don't think anyone could have prepared me for that day and all the emotion I felt; I balled my eyes leaving my boyfriend and mum, but it still had not sunk in yet that I was going to Fiji for three months. It wasn't until we hit Fiji; got out the airport and into our hotel that it finally hit me, I won't see my loved ones for three and a half months, and I don't think I can do that and I don't know if I'm strong enough to make this journey alone. So that night I broke down and cried a lot, and I

called my boyfriend and my mum telling them I wanted to go home and that I couldn't do it. But they both said that they knew I could do it and that I have it in me to complete this journey. However, I was yet to believe them and wanted to go home the whole first week I was in Fiji. After the first week, I realised I was in Fiji and needed to enjoy every moment I had there because not everyone gets this opportunity.

What did I do on placement in the Pacific?

Before long I was starting my final social work placement at the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation with of course some hurdles at the beginning. My first day at placement alongside fellow student Sami, was not at all what we had planned it to be. We arrived at the Ministry early Monday morning ready to start doing some social work. However, they were not expecting or ready for us to begin placement there. So it wasn't until two weeks later that we began working at the Ministry. At the time myself and Sami were worried we would be spending all our time at home watching the time go by not doing anything proactive. However now looking back at it I would not change how placement began for us, we had the incredible opportunity to assist the Fiji Social and Community Workers Association (FASCW) while we patiently waited to start at the Ministry. I had a chance to help FASCW develop their election to select their new committee for the year, as well as assisting in contributing to creating their very first newsletter. It was a fantastic opportunity to meet passionate social workers within Fiji, and help re-establish the association to help these eager workers thrive in their profession as social workers.

It wasn't before long while we were delving into FASCW work that we finally began work at the Ministry. In our first week within the ministry, we had the opportunity to meet the permanent secretary for the Ministry, to start the MOU with Western Sydney University and the Ministry. Leaving Sami and myself to be the pioneers for the placement being the first students to do their placement at the Ministry, so there was a lot of pressure to make it go well! In our first week we were bombarded with visiting settlements, going to the orphanage, visiting different offices,

and also visiting their Juvenile rehabilitation and development centre. After visiting the juvenile centre, we were blown away by its potential and also found that it needed the most assistance especially in regards to developing assessment forms. So I began assisting Sami to develop a psychosocial assessment to use in the juvenile centre, while I also developed support and goal plans for the boy to utilise in setting a plan on what they want to do when they leave. However at the beginning I did not want to work at the boys centre, as I never thought I would want to work with boys or in a juvenile centre, I also did not believe I would be able to relate to the boys in any way. However, in the end, I loved every minute of working with the boys, and I learnt so much along the way from working with them, it was emotional to have to say goodbye to them when we had to leave in October. I did not begin to work with the boys until half way through my placement where I worked with Sami and a University of South Pacific student Laisani to develop weekly art and music therapy programs. The programs concentrated on the boys finding their identity of what makes them who they are and giving them a voice to tell their story. Further the programs were also about giving the boys the self-confidence to achieve in life. We also provided workshops for the boys on drugs and alcohol. Working at the juvenile centre with the boys on a weekly basis, became so rewarding, particularly when I began to see small changes in them particularly, around their self-confidence and seeing some of them talk in groups when at the start they would not say a word. I am proud and feel so privileged to be able to have worked in that centre and be able to get to know those boys and empower them to be confident in themselves.

When I wasn't working with the boys at the centre, I was working on the policy review for the national policy on aged care. Working on a national policy was an incredible opportunity that not many other social work students would have the chance to do. Therefore I utilised this opportunity and worked on it every second I had when I was in the office. I made some recommendations; one of those being the need for more research on elder abuse, and have strategies for it developed

into the national policy on age care. I also reviewed the social pension scheme brochure and adjusted the brochure to communicate key messages in plain language, I also created diagrams of how to apply and receive the pension for those who may be illiterate. Furthermore, I also created a brochure for children on the child helpline for children to understand in their language of how to utilise the helpline and how it operates.

During my time at the ministry, I also had the opportunity to work with students from the University of South Pacific. It was such an amazing experience to be able to work with them and share each other's knowledge of social work from both cultures. The experiences at the Ministry became more enriching when Sami and myself began working collaboratively with Laisani, a second-year social work student from the University of South Pacific. Laisani was able to teach us about the culture and tell us her ideas on how to implement programs effectively in the Pacific. Collaborating with Laisani in developing programs for the boys centre was so beneficial, she was able to tell us things about their culture and how and why they boys may do certain things when we work with them.

The professional challenges

During my time in Fiji completing my placement, I came across numerous challenges that helped me grow as a worker. One of those was a language barrier, although the majority of the country did speak English their interpretation of English and certain words could be completely different to my own, with English often people's second language. I began to understand that if I did not use the same language or words as the other person I was communicating with, there was no meaning to the communication we were having. Moreover using words that

individuals did not understand made the discussion unproductive and prevented the meaning that I wanted to deliver accurately.

For example, while working at the boys centre during the first few sessions with the boys not all of them always understood our instructions as they understood English differently and I may have been speaking too fast. Moreover, how the boys wanted to express themselves in their language may come out differently or not how they wanted in English. That's why it was very beneficial to have Laisani with us so she could interpret to the boys what they had to do in a way they would understand. Further, having someone who understood the boy's native language allowed them to express themselves in their language even if I could not fully appreciate what they were expressing. However, it was most beneficial for them to communicate and express themselves in a way that they felt most comfortable.

I also faced the challenge while at the ministry with many of the workers seeing Sami and myself as the experts often viewing "white as right". It was definitely a challenge and a struggle particularly at the beginning because we were far from experts in a foreign setting; we were social work students wanting to learn. In the beginning, Sami and I were viewed differently from the other USP students, which made us feel very uncomfortable because we did not have the knowledge of the country like they did. There was definitely a big push for us to make them realise that we were not the experts and could not solve everything. We also wanted them to see that they were the experts, they knew more than we could ever know about their culture, faith and beliefs in the country. The whole way through I always reminded myself of my white privilege coming into a developing country and always ensured

I wasn't telling them how it should be, but working with them to find the best solution that fits their culture and not mine.

What was learnt from doing a placement in the Pacific?

Coming from a western country in which culture valued and viewed differently, I discovered that culture is an essential for a person's identity, and the development of a strong cultural identity is vital for a person's sense of who they are and where they belong in the world. Thus that is why it is vital to respect and appreciate the preservation of people's culture as it affects their identity within different spheres of their life. Furthermore coming from quite an individualistic western society where my family consists of myself, my mum and brother. I learnt that within Fiji, the extended family is a vital foundation of support that plays a significant role in an individual's identity. Thus questions of where your father or mother came from may seem meaningless within the Australian culture, but within the Fijian/Pacific culture that can paint a picture of who that person is and their identity.

I learnt to be culturally competent and to be aware of my worldview understanding that what I studied back home may not apply and work in all cultural contexts. From this, I was able to learn how social work is approached differently in the Pacific and how important culture, family and spirituality are to a person's wellbeing. Moreover, I also learnt that social work is about standing up for the rights of others and giving people a voice who don't have one. It is important as social workers not always to follow what is happening but challenge the status quo and question why things are going on in a particular way. Thus human rights and advocacy are essential to the social work profession.

How will you utilise what you've learnt back home in Australia?

By completing my final social work placement in the Pacific, I have become more culturally competent in working with a variety of different cultures which I will be able to utilise when practising back in Australia. When working with clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, I will take the time to understand and effectively communicate with them within their culturally setting. Moreover, I will be respectful and open to different cultural perspectives, to strengthen and work towards equality in opportunity for all within Australia. Furthermore, within my practice as a social work in Australia I will continue to be self-aware of my privileges and power that I hold being a white Australian and the impact that can have on my clients who may come from a culturally and linguistically diverse background. I will use my skills learnt in Fiji to create cultural sensitivity in my practice and ensure I am giving my clients the power and advocating for their rights in all areas of social action. Also, when working with people, I will take the time to thoroughly understand their cultural context and how it may affect their identity, as well as their family including the extended family operation and how it affects that individual's life overall.

Personal growth

During my journey of completing my final social work placement in the Pacific, I underwent a lot of personal growth and change. Particularly working with the boys at the juvenile centre I learnt that I had to "practice what I preached" and also be confident in myself. I learnt that if I'm not confident and believe in myself how I am meant to tell these boys that they need confidence in themselves, it had to start from myself to set an example of self-love and self-confidence. I learnt that I was stronger than what I thought I was, and that girl at the start who did not believe she could finish this journey was so wrong and had no idea what she was capable of doing. I found the inner strength I never thought I had and pushed myself continually to challenge myself to things I never thought I could do, such as: speaking in front of a group of people, assisting in training days, running group

programs, and even telling people when I think they may be wrong.

By gaining my confidence, I finally felt ready to graduate and be a social worker who could advocate for social change. I found who I was and what I wanted to do as a social worker, I realised the importance of standing up for what I believe in and not backing down when people try and say I'm wrong and I just have to keep pushing forward and fight for what is right. I realised that I need to give a voice to those individuals who do not have one so they can have a voice tell their story. Fiji helped me to find my voice that I never thought I had to stand up for not only myself but others and I want to empower other people to find their voice.

What could be done differently in the implementation of the PIFE initiative?

I suggest for next year's PIFE imitative students receive more assistance about finding accommodation. Finding housing this year in Fiji was tough and lead to many stressors. Moreover, we did find accommodation however that also lead to a headache that none of us was prepared to deal with in a foreign country. I suggested students for next year perhaps board with other families in Fiji for them to learn and be surrounded by the culture.

Furthermore, I also suggest more teamwork building workshops before leaving for the Pacific islands. Team building workshops could be beneficial in having people understand and learn who they will be living with and maybe work with for the next three months. Thus this may prevent too many arguments occurring while over in the Pacific as the students were able to discuss their differences before they lift and work through them appropriately and have a plan if a disagreement occurred.

Also, I would also like to suggest that students that go to the Ministry next year, not be sent to the head office but go to the offices around Suva who deal with clients. It would be very beneficial for not only the student but for the staff as there will be shared knowledge from both sides.

“ Working on a national policy was an incredible opportunity that not many other social work students would have the chance to do. ”

TEAM SAMOA

Caitlyn Johnson

SAMOA PRISON AND CORRECTION SERVICES

What were the key activities undertaken on placement?

My field education in Samoa was with the Prisons and Corrections Services. There was myself and one other student, Sam Lane, and our role initially was to create programs for the prisoners. Initially we created two eight week programs, one was a sex offenders relapse prevention program and the other was an anger management program. We also created a manual for art therapy which was used to introduce all of the behavioral programs and later on in the attachment a four-week mental health program. We then implemented all these programs with the male prisoners, with the exception of the mental health program which we ran with the female prisoners.

Another big role we had was to evaluate the programs and improve them for the next round of participants. Evaluation happened from a professional point of view where Sam and I evaluated the programs as a whole and then each session individually and also a participant's point of view where participants were asked to share their thoughts and constructive criticism. This was an important task as it will impact on how effective the next round of programs will be.

Each program concluded with a graduation, which was planned and presented by myself, Sam and our Social Work Field Educator, Luagalau Sina Eteuati Shon. These graduations played an important role in improving the self efficacy of the participants and further acknowledging their effort and willingness to make positive changes.

Other activities included attending meetings with stakeholders to discuss the building of a new correctional facility, visiting the other correctional facility sites, running a sports program and helping with the restructuring of the correctional structure.

What did you learn from doing a social work placement in the Pacific?

I learnt a lot from doing social work in the Pacific, about myself, about social work and about the culture.

I learnt that the essence of social work is the same no matter where you are. It's about helping people live the best lives they can, empowering people to make positive changes and giving a helping hand when needed. However, culture and values will have drastic implications on how the role of a social worker is perceived and implemented. I learnt that every single person is different and has their own unique skills, culture and values that impact on their perception of right and wrong, priorities and the decisions they make.

I learnt the importance of cultural sensitivity and diversity, I already knew it was important but when you see it first hand it's more of a revelation. The first time I worked with the women I was wearing a dress without sleeves, it was long so I thought it would be fine. I had even asked the mother I was living with and she said that it was fine. I noticed that some of the women were reserved and looking at me strangely throughout the session, I put it down to it being the first session and that I needed to work on building rapport with them. The next time I worked with the women I wore a traditional Samoan outfit called a puletasi. The women were so much more engaged and after the session one of the women approached me and said thank you. I thought she was talking about the session but I realized she was referring to the way I was dressed. I didn't think it was a big deal and I brushed it off. The women said to me "Before you were a white woman teaching us, now you're a Samoan girl working with us." There was no respect lost, in fact they respected me more for something that seemed so simple to me.

The simple gesture of wearing the traditional Samoan clothing helped break down walls in a way that I wouldn't have had the time to do otherwise. It created an open and safe environment for the participants to share and there was a mutual understanding about the respect that we had for each other. This was huge in the way of building their self esteem and self efficacy.

After reflecting on the situation I realized that most people don't expect an individual to want to know about their culture, let alone actively engage with it. That's why the Samoan mother said what I was wearing was fine, fine for me a white girl, people would understand, why would they expect any different? They weren't offended by the way I dressed, but it meant that there was a barrier that was affecting my ability to work effectively with them. Wearing the puletasi said so much that words couldn't say. It said that I knew that I didn't know everything about their culture but I was willing to learn and adapt. It said that I wanted us to work together, to engage with one another and learn from one another. It said that although I came with authority I wanted us to work together as equals and most importantly it showed that I actually cared, that I was invested.

I will take that with me into my social work career no matter where I work or who I work with.

What professional challenges did you experience whilst away?

Language was a big barrier to being able to deliver information, build rapport and ensure that all the content was appropriate and translated correctly. The first few sessions we had a staff member from the development team come and translate for us. We were able to see from the way the participants

responded that the content wasn't being translated correctly. This was a big concern and compromised the effectiveness and relativity of the program. The professional issue was that we had spoken to the staff member about the translation a few times and they still were not able to deliver the program effectively. We were unsure of how to approach the issue further without undermining our colleague while also prioritizing the wellbeing of the participants. The issue was brought up in supervision and was resolved with our supervisor offering to use the program time as our supervision time, with some debriefing at the end.

We spoke to our colleague with respect and explained that we felt it would be in the best interest of ourselves as students to have our supervisor observing so they could give direct feedback.

This was a professional challenge of barriers within the workplace and how to show respect at all times whilst still ensuring the client's wellbeing is the forefront of the work.

Another professional challenge I experienced whilst away was the conflict of cultural beliefs with social work and my own personal values. In one of the sessions for the sex offenders relapse prevention program we were discussing victim empathy. Whilst discussing this, there was a theme of victim blaming. Comments were made such as "She shouldn't be walking alone" and "If she comes from a good family then it's not her fault, but if she comes from a bad family then the shame will be placed on her family."

When we tried to explore this issue further in the hope of breaking victim blaming. They left understanding the content, but the cultural beliefs and attitudes were so deeply embedded in their identity, that they still held the same views.

I found this was a professional challenge for myself as I was unsure of how far to push the issue. Cultural sensitivity and respecting diversity is a key element of social work, especially when you are practicing social work in a country with strong cultural values and beliefs however, understanding the different between social norms, morals and law when comparing different cultural practices is important to know how to approach an issue. This was the most professionally challenging moment for myself.

How did you personally grow (provide feedback where appropriate)?

Within my attachment and time in Samoa, my values and skills were solidified. I was able to realize where my passion lies and what I am good at and area's I need to work on. I realized I have skills that I wasn't aware of before. Things that come so naturally that you don't recognize as a skill.

On the first session of the sex offenders program I stood in a room of thirty-five convicted sex offenders and I wasn't nervous or scared of my safety. A few times inappropriate comments were made and I brushed them off and shifted the focus back on the content of the session. It wasn't until later when Sam and I were reflecting on our attachment that I was able to acknowledge the skill I held of resilience. Resilience is an important quality to have and it turns into a skill when implementing it in a professional setting. As a new social work graduate I will have to work with people who are from different cultures, ages and backgrounds from myself. Being able to acknowledge these differences but not let them affect my ability to work with them in an effective way is a skill that I will need. I realized that it's a skill I already have and it makes me feel more as prepared as I can to dive into the unknown of my social work career.

I also realized my value of empowerment and equality. I found that was so passionate about working with the prisoners and the work came surprisingly naturally, although I still have a lot to learn. When people in Samoa asked us why we were in Samoa and they found out that we were working at the correctional facility they were so shocked. People would often say "How can you work with those people." I would always answer the same "because they're people, just like you and me." My passion for equality of all people regardless of what they have done or who they are was so evident. When we were first asked to create a sex offenders program I felt so overwhelmed. Firstly, because it felt like work that beyond my experience and knowledge but also because we had never looked at working with offenders in my studies, always working with victims. I wasn't sure how working with people who were convicted of sex crimes would conflict with my personal values. As I reflected I found that over the years most of my personal values and social work values had become intertwined.

How will you utilise what you've learnt back home in Australia?

As mentioned earlier, I learnt the importance of cultural sensitivity and respecting and celebrating diversity. This is something I am excited to implement in my social work career. I learnt a lot about the Samoan culture and although I am sure I will have the chance to work with many people from Pacific backgrounds, Australia is a country that is proudly diverse. There are many cultures that I will not have any knowledge of or experience working with, my experience in the Pacific has taught me how to engage with people from diverse backgrounds and effective ways to build rapport. One example is to never assume something about a culture or person based on something you've heard, even though it may be true, the reason being is that asking a person about their culture gives

the social worker insight into that individual's perception of their own culture and how deeply embedded the values are with that particular individual. Asking the person directly also helps build rapport and creates mutual understanding. I will utilise this skill in all areas of my social work career.

Another part of my experience that I will utilise back home in Australia is the theory that was used in our approach to social work within the correctional facility.

As I am very interested in working with people who are in a correctional facility or are transitioning from a correctional facility back into the community I can see the benefits of a strengths based approach.

Although we learnt about numerous theories, the strengths based approach was a reoccurring theme throughout my entire social work degree. Theory to practice gave me the opportunity to intentionally and actively put the strengths based approach into practice. Using the strengths based approach was effective within the correctional system but also within the Pacific. Many of the prisoners with serious convictions had had life experiences that seriously compromised their emotional and psychological well being.

What could be done differently in the implementation of the PIFE initiative?

Buddy system

In the first few weeks of being in Samoa, a PIFE alumni student who went to Samoa last year was also visiting for a few weeks as she is of a Samoan background. We were able to critically reflect with someone who understood and held the Samoan culture and values, but also understood and had lived in a western society for many years. This created an open space to ask questions about the two cultures that at times seemed so conflicting. The Samoan culture was being carried out all around us, even in the smallest situations such as having a meal, there was so much that

I wasn't realising, until the student who went last year would point certain things out to us.

If possible, the PIFE initiative should implement a buddy system where there is a point of contact for the students within the Pacific to spend time with and ask questions. This person would preferably have understanding of both the Pacific and Western culture.

Split Home Stays and Accommodation

Whilst on my placement in Samoa, I was fortunate enough to be placed in a home stay. The benefit of staying with a Samoan family were outstanding. We were able to really grasp the Samoan culture, ask a lot of questions and see traditional Samoan ceremonies/rituals. The homestay bridged the gap between what we didn't know about the culture. It meant that we were able to understand concepts around eating and gifts etc. within the workplace.

For example, the staff would often eat together at work, a meal cooked by one of the prisoners that worked in our office. If I needed a drink or something in the middle of our meal, I would get up and get it myself as I felt rude asking the prisoner to grab it for me. This seemed to cause a commotion and was frowned upon. It wasn't until I tried to get something in the middle of dinner at home that the father told me it was Samoan tradition that once you sit at the table you cannot get back up until you are finished eating. It is seen as obnoxious and rude to not ask the servers to get it for you.

This was a concept I would never have understood unless explained to me within the home and I would have continued to offend my colleagues without realizing.

This is one of the many benefits of a home stay accommodation and where possible should be implemented into the PIFE initiative.



“ However, culture and values will have drastic implications on how the role of a social worker is perceived and implemented. ”

Sam Lane

SAMOA PRISON AND CORRECTION SERVICES

It's difficult to articulate my emotions and even more structure what I have learnt into some sort of literacy. What I have experienced though feels a lot more like growth than a lesson learnt. I suppose it's happened again and as I have always felt, being away from what is familiar and challenging myself continues to trigger significant realisations and epiphanies. I am struggling to find a way to express my experience in a way that reflects what I have learnt accurately without undermining just how important my PIFE (Pacific Islands Field Education) experience has been for me both personally and professionally. It may be a cop out to format this essay in explicit sub-headings, however if I am ever a chance of covering all bases this is probably my best bet. I have chosen to split my lessons into both 'personal' and 'professional' categories as I believe that I have grown immensely in both of these domains.

Personal

Identity

For me, understanding who I am, what I represent and where I belong has always been a place of tension like any human being trying to find themselves. And while I would love to say that it's happened and I am free of this labyrinth, my search for a sense of identity continues. But here's the catch – that's okay.

It's like this. I have always felt the need to categorise myself; whether it be through my interests, hobbies or the way I dress and I have detested the fact that I never felt I belonged to one of those 'categories'. It sounds preachy and maybe even somewhat lame but I feel it is the fact that we don't belong that makes us unique. I am comfortable being this ambiguous, grey, blurry personality of a person that is not only one thing but many things. Here's what led me to this realisation:

See in Samoa the pressure to label everything is not as intense as I am accustomed to in Australia. I don't know how to explain this in fewer than ten thousand words, but picture this: you sit with a family of Samoans as they watch Samoa play rugby and they cheer with the sort of enthusiasm you would expect the most proud patriots to do. Another day you watch New Zealand and with the same gusto the family cheer for their compatriots at a level that matches the excitement and volume of a few days ago. Now picture me, confused and looking to justify why, insisting they choose a side. Interrogating them as to how they can support New Zealand if they have nothing to do with New Zealand. I can't imagine this helps explain what I am saying, but I suppose its relevance is that it is okay to belong in column A and column B. In fact, it's a lot easier to sit in the middle than to push yourself in one direction or the other.

Family and Friends

Is it selfish to say that I have undervalued the role of family? I've always felt that while my family was important to me, they were simply a group of people in my life. That we are responsible to each other but it was always genetics that kept us together, not necessarily a burning sense of mutual interest. I love my family, I always have, but I have a history of thinking I would survive just fine without them. Being away from home this long, having experiences which have challenged me and tested me has shown me how wrong I was, how stupidly egotistical I can be, and importantly – how dependant I am on their support. The comfort of unconditional love is something worth wrapping in gold.

I get that this is starting to look like a dictionary of clichés, but it's really quite remarkable how being away from home gives clarity on the important people in your life. I guess when I separate myself physically and socially there really isn't anything left keeping a relationship together. What continues to persist through that challenge reveals itself in many ways but all represent something of deep importance. My desire to see my family, to just be in their company says a lot to me.

Similarly the influence of a few significant friends resurfaces. When away from home it's very easy to separate friends by acquaintance and those who serve a genuine purpose in your life both spiritually and emotionally. There must only be a handful of friends I feel this way about and I am lucky to have met each one of them. It brings a real genuine warmth and sense of fortune to be able to care about them.

It wasn't just being away from home that brought these sentiments along – it was observing a collective culture and appreciating all that it brings to a sense of

belonging and support. I was constantly in awe of the social web that strings right across Samoa. It felt as though every single person had a place – whether this was with family, the church, or village ties. There was always a place, support and mutual responsibility. I feel very comfortable in a collective society, I think they're beautiful.

I'll talk a little more on the value of collective societies soon...

Passions

I guess realising the wonders of your life doesn't just stop at the people in it but extends to your passions. My desire to be a Social Worker has flamed into this raging monster ready to tackle the world and I am aware of just how privileged I am to feel this way. I know that only few get the opportunity to. There is no question that my time away with PIFE nurtured this feeling and continued to inspire my passion for Social Work. Appreciating foreign cultures, understanding different ways of living and having insight into the things that bring life joy and bring life hardship is a valuable experience both personally and professionally. I think this experience has set a wonderful precedence moving into the Social Workforce.

Religion and Faith

While I won't necessarily make comment on my personal stance toward faith, I will talk openly about how my time in Samoa gave me an appreciation for the role of religion. Influentially, my host family were heavily involved in the church and I can say that it was a privilege to be able to participant in that involvement. It was wonderful having

the opportunity to experience being in their environment and to see firsthand the sense of community generated from it. There is value in the way that the church had shaped their lives and I can appreciate the benefits it has had on their wellbeing and sense of belonging.

It was an important time for me personally given that my own experiences with religion and the church have largely been negative and only pushed me into developing prejudices that I have always felt uncomfortable holding. It was incredibly refreshing to have this positive experience and break down some of those misconceptions I held. It has to some degree allowed me to open my mind to faith and I don't at all underestimate the value in that.

**Professional
Cultural Competency**

While I have always acknowledged and understood the weighted importance of cultural competency, I feel that it wasn't until I really experienced working with culturally diverse and vulnerable populations that I began to properly appreciate its worth. For me, this experience was had through PIFE and my time in Samoa.

To provide some context my main duty working in the correctional services was to develop, implement and evaluate rehabilitation programs for inmates. This involved a sex offenders relapse prevention program, anger management program, mental health psychoeducation program and art therapy. While I did make a conscious

effort to involve culturally applicable practices throughout the development of the program, it was really in the implementation stage that I began to comprehend the great influence it can have. Simply as a tool for communication, culturally competent practices provided a unique way of engaging my audience and helping make content accessible across the many barriers. A simple example of this was replacing the label of a 'debrief session' to a 'talano circle' (a Pacific term used to represent a free flowing discussion where each member has equal freedom to contribute). Consequentially, using this term made the exercise non-confronting and relatable.

On another level, I felt that by understanding and valuing cultural competency I had gone a long way in undermining my privileged position as a white educated male amongst staff. I felt that I was often put in a unique position where my knowledge and contributions were held in higher esteem than that of the local staff within our team. I believe this has a lot to do with my education background and the infancy of social work as an established profession within the region. It meant that what I offered was valued and trusted, giving me an enormous sense of opportunity and heightened responsibility. While I relished in the chance to have a genuine influence on programs, I was also mindful that my contributions would be vulnerable to a Western influence that could be largely ineffective on a Pacific audience. It was only through constant recognition of this position and ongoing consultation with my supervisor that I was able to keep the program culturally applicable.



Punitive vs Collaborative Approaches to Correction Services

From the moment you walk into Tafa'igata Prison you are confronted with a unique environment that is nothing like the punitive prisons we are familiar with in a Western society. Having spent some time working in prisons in Australia I was particularly struck by just how differently the prisons in Samoa are operated. Most noticeably, Samoan prisons have incredibly low security. In addition to this, the skills and talents of inmates are valued and utilised. In effect, the prison makes a conscious effort to create an environment that reflects common village life.

Negatives associated with the prison operations are typically focused around the escape rates of inmates and the recidivism rates of escapees. It is difficult to make comment on what system is more effective, particularly given the varying contexts between Australian and Pacific cultures. I would say however that there is enormous potential to effectively marry the progressive and collaborative environment found in Tafa'igata with informed rehabilitation practices that could potentially see remarkable outcomes for inmates.



Sadly, after recent unfortunate events SPCS (Samoa Prison and Correction Services) has received a great deal of criticism from mainstream media locally and internationally. This scrutiny has forced the Samoan government in to relocating and redeveloping the prison towards a significantly more punitive and Western approach. While I understand the reasons behind the shift I personally feel it is a great indignity to have not seen the opportunity for ongoing development of rehabilitation programs within the current system and their outcomes.

Structures for Rehabilitation

As in any prison context the issue of human rights and ethics persists. It can be a particularly uncomfortable space to be; that is to see people have their lives dictated upon. It certainly helps to be in a facility where security is not so aggressive or violent, where inmates tend to stay through commitment to culture rather than physical restriction.

For me however, this quickly becomes a discussion of approaches to care that critiques the dichotomy of punitive vs collaborative structures.

One component of operations at Tafa'igata is to value and utilise the skills and talents of inmates. This sees inmates practice their qualifications and contribute to the running of day-to-day operations. It isn't hard to see the positive outcomes that this creates – an improved sense of self-efficacy, the ongoing utilisation and improvement of skills, the sense of ownership given to inmates within the prison. While Tafa'igata may lag behind in terms to infrastructural progression, socially there is a lot Australia could learn from Samoa about implementing anti-oppressive practices.

That being said, there are still issues at Tafa'igata that are common place across both contexts. Most prominent, there are running tensions between officers and

inmates which can only be assumed to be premised upon the power relations and the cultural understanding amongst operational staff about how to exercise that power. Unfortunately, my observations lead me to understand that the training processes given to operational staff is largely premised upon social control, where the insight into how their role has an important role within the rehabilitation process is largely overlooked. I believe exploring this relationship could be an effective way to deconstruct this tension. It seems fairly consistent across context that prisons tend to represent punishment rather than as 'corrective services'. This comes to me as a real shame when considering the progressive environment that the Tafa'igata prison exists in.

An exploration into restructuring the approach to corrective services that matches the safety of a punitive structure with the rehabilitation benefits of the 'collective' environment may be a direction worth heading towards.

The Social Work Persona

Working with vulnerable populations takes a certain level of awareness and a considerate manner. While much of our studies push the calculation of interactions through the conscious use of theory, the value of a 'social work persona' should not be underestimated. It was in periods of uncertainty that I

recognised my social work persona to kick into gear and steer my organisation. Often this meant letting respect, dignity and acknowledgement create an atmosphere of equality that nurtured a healthy working relationship. It is a process of reciprocity where an expectation to participate must be met by an action of invested engagement by the worker. Simply it's working with rather than for. It is a great comfort to know that our social work training operates in mysteriously unconscious ways that mean we are never entirely lost. The excitement of seeing where a process will go by letting go of any predispositions consequentially makes the working relationship organic and stimulating for both worker and client.

Final remarks

The PIFE experience has been one I wouldn't trade. What I have gained in my world views and perspective on social work has been invaluable. It has been such a privilege and honour to contribute to the pioneering of social work throughout the Pacific region. Without question I would recommend it to future students, but more than that I would recommend ongoing participation to corresponding and potential organisations overseas. I believe that the PIFE program is achieving extraordinary things and will watch on in years to come with eager interest and involvement.

“ I was constantly in awe of the social web that strings right across Samoa. It felt as though every single person had a place... ”

**TEAM
TONGA**

Jane Walter

TONGA FAMILY HEALTH ASSOCIATION (TFHA)

What were the key activities undertaken on placement?

My second field education placement took place in the Kingdom of Tonga at Tonga Family Health Association (TFHA). During my time with TFHA, there were a variety of activities I was involved in. This includes:

- Outreach with the clinic team (clinic nurses) to outer lying villages; during this time, I would shadow/follow a member of the clinic team and observe them during their outreach programs. For example, the clinic team ran a condom demonstration program where they would assist and educate females or males on the importance of condoms and demonstrate how to safely and effectively use a condom.
- Attend or participate in the Filitonu drama group outreach programs. Each of these programs had specific topics where the Filitonu drama group would utilise their acting and singing talents to create awareness and educate communities. Topics included teen pregnancy, drugs and alcohol as well as domestic violence.
- attending board meetings, conferences and trainings
- Visit two of the outer islands of Tonga; Vava'u and Ha'apai.
- The creation and implementation of the Case Management Toolkit

However, the key activity I spent most of my time doing was creating and implementing the Case Management Toolkit for TFHA. Emily Whyte (another social work student who completed her field education two placement in Tonga) and I realised through observations and discussions with the Executive Director,

Project Manager and staff that there was a need for case management. Emily and I spent a lot of our time researching and gathering information to create a toolkit that was easy to understand and "fit" within the context of Tonga not Australia. On the completion of our toolkit, stakeholders who played a vital role in the operations of TFHA including IPPF (International Planned Parenthood Foundation) needed to approve and review the case management toolkit. This led to our toolkit being officially launched by the Minister of Health for Tonga and was publicized on live TV in the Kingdom of Tonga.

What did you learn from doing a social work placement in the Pacific?

Being an Australian born Tongan completing my final social work placement in Tonga, has enabled me to develop my skills and attributes personally and professionally. Living away from home for three months can really change the way you think, feel and behave. For instance, growing up in Australia, I would hear stories from my parents, aunts and uncles of the struggles and hardships they faced when living in Tonga. I would be constantly reminded of how lucky I was to have the education and life I had here in Australia. It wasn't until I actually lived in Tonga where I was able to appreciate the sacrifices my parents made for my siblings and me. I learnt to appreciate life; period. I learnt that forcing views that were the "norm" in Australia to the Tongan community was not going to work and that in order to effectively and efficiently help the Tongan community I needed to understand their way of life "why they do what they do" and be mindful of their traditions and values when creating the toolkit or working with Tongans. I also learnt how

to deal with conflicts and found that talking directly with the person about the issue was the most effective way in resolving the issue. This however may not apply to all conflicts as it depends on the individual and issue. Overall, this has been a very humbling and beneficial experience. If I had to decide if I wanted to do this PIFE project, I would do everything the same!

What professional challenges did you experience whilst away?

I'd be lying if I said "I faced no challenges on this experience" because I did and I'm grateful for them. I encountered many challenges such as language, internal and external expectations and more. One of the biggest struggles I faced while being on placement was this feeling of invisibility. I felt as if I was being treated like Emily's tour guide instead of a student on placement. For example; every time Emily and I would be introduced to someone, Emily would be introduced and the conversation will continue and no eye contact would be made to me. This led to internal battles where I would question my own intelligence. It wasn't until we had a conference meeting where I noticed another group of people which consisted of two white females and an Indian female. I noticed how the two white females would get much more attention. I spoke to my external social work supervisor and explained my dilemma. This was the first time Emily realised that what I was saying was true. During this skype session, we spoke about pride and power but also dug deeper into white privilege. I also struggled with the Tongan language in the beginning but was able to overcome this through practice and conversations with family and staff.

Growing up in Australia, you could say I had views that were strongly westernised. However, being exposed to the Tongan culture at a very young age, I was able to adapt or change these perspectives. One challenge I faced in the beginning of placement, occurred due to these perspectives. Because I was brought up the “Tongan way” in a sense, I would feel offended when someone would question why we would do things a certain way or why we had certain rituals for events. However, I learnt that by talking directly with this person, I was able to acknowledge the fact that having different opinions is okay and that talking with the individual about why they felt or perceived our actions in a certain way would resolve questions and settle tensions. Ultimately, these challenges have been crucial to my personal and professional development.

How did you personally grow (provide feedback where appropriate)?

As aforementioned above, these past three months have been life changing!!! Yes I have been to Tonga many times before for holidays and occasions but never to work. This opportunity to work and give back to the country that birthed many of my ancestors is an experience I will never forget. Personally, my most memorable experience of the trip was listening to the stories of Tonga, whether it be about the Royal family or my family; I learnt to appreciate the importance of time, family and history. I am more aware of my surroundings and am able to confidently speak and approach people that I usually would shy away from. As cliché as it sounds, I really did learn so much about myself; who I am, how other’s perceive me and how I perceive myself. Arriving back in Australia has made me realise that I want to do something that is relevant and helpful to the Pacific. I know how to cook, budget, navigate and be independent. I know who I am, what my limits are and where I come from. I am an Australian born Tongan who has benefited from this experience tremendously.



How will you utilise what you've learnt back home in Australia?

"How will I utilise what I have learnt back in Australia". For me, it has to be through actions. As you have read, I have been able to gain a wealth of knowledge and practical experience both professionally and personally while being on placement in Tonga. I have learnt how to create and implement a Case Management Toolkit, specifically on how Case Management can be used as well as the strengths and weaknesses of Case Management. I know how to work with people from different backgrounds especially Tongan's living in Australia. It will be through my actions that I know I have been able to convert what I have learnt into practice; and this placement was evidence of it. There is however a saying that goes "It is what we think we know, that keeps us from learning". Now that I am back in Australia, one of the biggest skills I have acquired would be to remain a "LEARNER" not an "EXPERT". I have learnt that I need to be mindful of what I say to Australian born Tongan's as well Tongan's who have migrated here from Tonga as I could presume this role of "I know" everything about Tonga because I lived there for three months. Instead I will utilise what I learnt in a way that still empowers individuals to feel open enough to share their thoughts and opinions; work WITH the client.

What could be done differently in the implementation of the PIFE initiative?

PIFE is a great initiative for social work students to experience not only the Pacific but working and living in a country that upholds different values and traditions to their own. Two areas where I felt need improvement for next year include having a social worker in country (TONGA) for the students doing placement there and the promotion and awareness of the initiative as well as more support from Western Sydney University and staff.

Not having an in-country social worker supervisor made it harder at times for Emily and I. This was because Emily and I would sometimes have issues where we were unable to gain internet connection to skype call our external supervisor, time differences or unavailability's. Ultimately, having that face-to-face interaction and a social worker in country would have benefited Emily and I greatly.

I also believe greater support from the university and staff whether it be promoting the program in class or more recognition of the program by the university will help future students take interest in the PIFE initiative.

“ I learnt that forcing views that were the “norm” in Australia to the Tongan community was not going to work... ”

Emily Whyte

TONGA FAMILY HEALTH ASSOCIATION (TFHA)

What were the key activities undertaken on placement?

While undergoing placement in the Kingdom of Tonga alongside Tonga Family Health Association (TFHA), there were many activities that I was able to be involved in. However, the key activity was the writing, publication and implementation of the case management toolkit which was completed by myself along with one other social work student (Jane Walter). I was working on this project throughout the entire placement experience, as well as other activities at the same time. Jane and I were encouraged to create a resource that would be useful for many years by the staff in working with different clients. We then began by having conversations with staff and brainstorming different resources that we believe would be useful, we then soon discovered that there was no case management system that was specific for TFHA and agreed that this would be extremely useful. Jane and I then had to create our own specific case management model which was modified to suit the specific needs of the community and related to the services which TFHA provides. We then started doing research and began writing the toolkit, which once finished, ended up to be over 100 pages long. The finished copy of our book was then sent to many different stakeholders for editing as well as gaining approval from the IPPF (International Planned Parenthood Foundation). Once approval was made, there was then a book launching event where the Minister of Health attended. Jane and I had to make a speech which was aired

on live TV as well as the official signing of the toolkit. Jane and I were extremely grateful to be able to create such a useful resource for TFHA and were very excited and proud to have this publication aired on TV. Along with this key activity we were also involved in the Filitonu drama group and many community outreach activities.

What did you learn from doing a social work placement in the Pacific?

While undergoing placement in the Pacific I learnt so much, not only in regards to social work but also about myself. I have gained a deep understanding of what the term 'cultural differences' actually means, and how this can be seen in many aspects of day to day life. This has taught me to respect other cultures and the traditions that are held so strongly in this country. I have learnt that to many people, family, spirituality and culture can be the root of all decisions that they make and how they feel about all aspects of life. As a social worker, it is very important to respect these traditions in our work, and I am very thankful that I have had the chance to experience this first hand. Many things about myself have changed after living in the Pacific for three months. I have changed my worldview on many things, such as family, religion and the importance that I had once placed on material objects. I had once placed such a high importance and significance on material objects such as having a nice car and access to internet 24/7. After living without basic luxuries such as a washing machine and dryer for three months I have gained an appreciation

for all that I have living in Australia and have a stronger appreciation for things then I did before I had this experience. Overall, my outlook on myself as well as the social work profession has changed dramatically while living in the Pacific, and I would not change a thing.

What professional challenges did you experience whilst away?

There were many professional challenges which I was faced with while living in Tonga, however the hardest challenges that I faced would have to be the language barrier and also trying to not force my westernised views into consideration. Living in a country where you do not speak any of the language was extremely hard, and then working in a country where you don't speak the language was even harder. There were many times when I would shy away from different tasks only because I knew I wouldn't be able to complete things to the best of my ability. I soon realised that this was going to be a massive issue, so I started to learn some basics to the language. Once I did this I was able to build a report with some clients and staff members as they could see that I was trying to be respectful and to learn the language. Another way that I tried to overcome the language barrier was to use art therapy techniques when I was running different group exercises. Getting people to draw or write down what they were feeling helped significantly in building a stronger relationship as communication became slightly easier.

“ I have gained a deep understanding of what the term ‘cultural differences’ actually means, and how this can be seen in many aspects of day to day life. ”

Coming from such a westernised view, I faced many challenges. I was told many times that what I was thinking was wrong and I needed to think of things from a Tongan or Pacific perspective. At the beginning of placement, I was unsure of what this even meant and was sometimes offended when I was told this. However, after having many conversations with my supervisor and Jane I was able to understand this challenge and learn from it. I was able to listen and learn about the way things were run in Tonga and adapt my work style to suit the needs of the clients. Although on some occasions my western view was encouraged by staff, there were many times when I needed to think from a different cultural perspective and change the way I was thinking.

How did you personally grow (provide feedback where appropriate)?

During this experience, I grew in every way possible to grow as a person. I honestly am completely shocked at how much this opportunity changed me and I would never change it for anything. Going into this experience I was very unsure of myself as a social worker and I was unsure if I was going to be able to complete this placement. I was very shy and lacked confidence in myself and was almost thinking of dropping out of the PIFE programme. Now that I am back in Australia I know I am ready to be a social worker and I know I have the skills to work in any situation I am placed. I have gained a confidence in myself that I didn't even know existed, and this has come solely from this opportunity. I have also grown in my understanding of what is truly important in my life, in doing this I have been able to eliminate things from my life that have been causing me stress and negativity which has positively impacted my overall wellbeing and state of mind.

How will you utilise what you've learnt back home in Australia?

Everything I did while in Tonga, big or small, will be used while I am back in Australia. I have learned so much about social work that can be used in many different organisations in Australia. I will be able to use my strong knowledge on case management and how specific models can be used for many different issues such as domestic violence, drug

and alcohol use, and sexual health. Before going to Tonga, my understanding of case management was limited and I was unsure of how this would be implemented in real life work. However, I am now confident in both my understanding and implementation of case management and how this can negatively or positively impact an individual's life, therefore I have an understanding of the importance of the correct use of case management. As I had the experience of training staff on case management, I strongly believe I could implement this in Australia confidently and could use my case management model in different situations. Having created my own case management model gives me the chance to implement it in many different organisations as teach it to different staff members. I will also be able to work well with people from different cultures as I have a strong respect and understanding of the importance of different cultural traditions and values.

What could be done differently in the implementation of the PIFE initiative?

The PIFE initiative is a great way for social work students to experience both living and working in another country as part of their degree. This is such a unique experience that can open many doors for students in both their personal and professional futures. While implementing this initiative, I believe a stronger focus on supervision while living overseas could be helpful. Not having a direct supervisor in the same country as you can make it very difficult to talk about any issues which you are having. As Tonga is a developing country, Internet connection can be very hard to find, which make supervision limited (as it was undertaken via SKYPE). Jane and myself struggled to have a solid supervisory relationship with our Field Educator, which became an issue during some stages of the placement. I believe that if a social work supervisor was located in Tonga, this could have assist us in communicating different issues and/or feelings that were evident during the three months. The promotion of the PIFE initiative could also be improved as many students are unaware that this exists.



Contact Information

School of Social Sciences and Psychology

Western Sydney University
Locked Bag 1797
Penrith NSW 2751 Australia



WESTERNSYDNEY.EDU.AU