

REPORT: Pacific Youth Voices forum

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The Pacific Youth Voices Forum 2008 was a great testament to the people who were involved in planning of the day and also to the goal that was successfully achieved on the day. 'Giving Pacific Youth opportunities to reveal what their thoughts and ideas were for their future' – this statement was the drive of the forum. For too long, Pacific youth have not only struggled in our society due to identity issues, but they have gone without a say. This forum not only allowed them to speak their mind, it also enabled dialogue to occur that would have been otherwise forbidden.

The planning group consisted of roughly 20 Polynesian individuals, all with either hands on experience with working with young people or who were just Pacific young people willing to devote their time and effort into such an ingenious task. At the first meeting the overall plan was looked at and debated upon, by the end of the night ideas were juggled around the table resulting in our five workshops for the day. These workshops covered the main issues we believed as a group that young people were facing within their families, church life or school environment.

In the meetings that followed the timetable was drawn up the venue was discussed and one vital part of the day was also thought about- *the food and drink*. Not to mention the awkward silence that was to follow when trying to persuade a hesitant group on who should not only MC the event or who should facilitate and co-facilitate.

On the day of the forum, a cold winter breeze filtered through the streets of Melbourne. However this did not at all deter the adventurous and eager young people from crowding the doorways to the prestigious Monash University building. The event did start on what we like to call 'island time', where the flyer said 9.30am start and the bulk of the participants didn't turn up till 10.30am. This was to be expected and was catered for.

The day started off with a welcoming of every Pacific island, and after much debate as a group we decided that it would be best if we didn't start with a prayer. However this ended up being the only problem presented to the planning group on the day. After the introduction and brief house keeping rules, the individuals were asked to write their names on a post-it-note and stick it onto a map of the Pacific islands. This activity was not only prepared to break the ice but to also get a rough idea of where everyone was from or where they called home.

Our first key note speaker Rosita Tavita was then introduced. She talked about her life as a young Samoan girl, growing up with the same difficulties in which most young people face. She spoke with such passion and honesty that there wouldn't have been a dry eye in the crowd.

Following on from this the first of the two workshops commenced. Within this time of 45-60 minutes, facilitators were asked to dig in deep and shed light on the opinions of the young people. A short break for morning tea saw the fairly relaxed audience meet other people and mingled within their workshops.

Matt Rua, our second key note speaker was to follow. He started off by chanting a moving prayer-like opening, then went on to discuss how even high profile rugby stars like himself often feel the way most young people feel, with identity issues: he touched on how some young people are so confused or ashamed of their heritage that they now take on a black Americanised persona. What Matt was identifying rang true to most young people sitting and listening intently.

After this the second workshop commenced whereby possible resolutions were written up and discussed. Before lunch, each workshop group was given the opportunity to discuss or perform what their findings were. Many of the groups chose a format of poster to express their ideas from the workshops; one group decided to use a skit as a way of expressing their ideas, this was very humorous and was easily related to by the audience.

To end the day we were tantalised by the traditional Maori food provided and then we were taken back to the streets and the Cook Islands by two groups that entertained us. Fusian as always lived up to their reputation by giving a little taste of what they would do, and the group Pacific Rhythms not only performed magnificently but also got the audience involved. To end the entertainment the audience was surprised by a group of seemingly shy guys who chanted with passion and fire the Maori Haka.

From the feedback and word of mouth the Voices Forum was a great success and should be done again in the near future. We have to thank CMYI and especially Faten, who not only worked in cohesion to make the day a success she also went out of her way to provide a welcoming and terrific day.