



Casey Pasifika Community Youth Justice Consultations Summary Report

“Facilitate meaningful and intentional inclusion of Pasifika voices in reform initiatives, especially in the decision-making processes”

– **Samoan female, age 24**

For more than two decades, Pasifika young people have been overrepresented in our justice system, yet there has been little investment in work directly with communities to understand the contributing factors and generate solutions.

The Casey Pasifika Community Consultations are part of the Victorian Government’s work to develop a new approach to crime prevention that supports community-identified and led initiatives to address the key drivers of crime. As part of the project, CMY’s Le Mana team hosted more than 20 conversations with young people, parents, workers and elders and leaders from the Pasifika community in Casey to understand what they see as the key drivers of youth disengagement and offending, where investment and action are urgently needed.

In this summary, we share their views and experiences on the devastating impact this unaddressed problem has had on their communities, and how, by working together, we can bring about positive change.

Overwhelmingly, this report presents a picture of strong and proud communities experiencing great desperation, frustration and pain. These are the voices of young people, families and leaders who carry a deep and well-founded fear for their children and their future – of communities who recognise there is a crisis that they need to address, but that feel forgotten and unheard. This isn’t the life these families imagined when they came to Australia. Now, after years of being left to solve their own problems despite a recognised lack of community capital and resources, many feel powerless to change their own fate, or that of their children.

Despite these obstacles, young people and communities remain adamant the solutions lie with them, but they need support. They want the barriers in front of their kids addressed, they want a voice and a say in matters that impact their lives, and they want to be driving the change to build futures they value.

What is happening?

“Despite the immense struggles Pasifika youth face, they do not receive nearly enough support within their families, their schools, their places of employment, their communities, and society in general.” – Samoan female, age 24

Participants were asked to share their views on what factors were influencing the overrepresentation of young people from Pasifika communities in Victoria’s justice system. Conversations with young people and community revealed a complex and interconnected range of factors influencing offending behavior and the overrepresentation of young people from Pasifika background in youth justice, including:

- A lack of belonging and identity, influenced by experiences of racism and discrimination, disconnection from culture and community, peer pressure and negative influences during adolescence, and a lack of positive role models from Pasifika communities.
- Educational disengagement, driven by a lack of cultural safety and experiences of discouragement and exclusion in education, insufficient support for young people and their families, a lack of culturally relevant curriculum/learning contexts, and financial pressures.
- Poor parent/family relationships, effected by intergenerational and family conflict, family separation and stress, parenting practices and approaches including discipline, and family violence.
- The migration experience, including the challenges experienced negotiating settlement in a new country, in particular experiences

of financial disadvantage, and the impacts of uncertainty and depravation due to visa status and conditions.

- A lack of accessible programs and supports to meet their needs, including support to engage with and navigate the youth justice system and post-release supports.
- Poor mental health and wellbeing, influenced by limited knowledge of and engagement with services and experiences of shame and stigma associated with mental (ill)health and help-seeking, as well as services lack of understanding how to effectively support Pasifika young people.
- The lasting impacts of offending on young people, families and communities, including enduring effects of trauma, the impacts on young peoples’ social and emotional development, the experience of stigma and shame and impact on the capacity of young people and families to rebuild their lives, as well as the criminogenic effects of incarceration.

Encompassing these challenges and concerns however were some clear overarching themes that demonstrate the critical ways in which self-identity, place, opportunity and culture/community underpin all of these experiences. These conversations reveal a need for responses that understand and engage with how young people relate to their world, including the way they form relationships, access resources and opportunities to advance their goals, and how they build a sense of identity within the multiple groups and places they live and play.

What is needed?

“It’s extremely lonely, isolating, alienating ... There is a lack of accountability on all ends, we need to tangibly empower these young people’s lives.” – Cook Islander parent

We asked young people, workers, parents and community leaders and elders to tell us what gets in the way of young people accessing help, and what else is needed to address overrepresentation of young people from Pasifika communities in Victoria’s justice system. Conversations overwhelmingly highlighted the need to address underlying financial barriers and address access and equality issues for Victorians from Pasifika backgrounds, particularly non-citizens, including a significant need for greater community representation and engagement with government and services, and support for community-led services and programs.

However, participants also spoke more directly of the need to address fundamental inequities and discrimination within our systems and structures as a way to reduce exposure of young people to the many risks associated with justice engagement. Addressing this requires:

- Systems and structures, particularly education and welfare systems, to recognise and respond to the particular needs and challenges of Victorian’s from Pasifika backgrounds. This includes the importance of acknowledging the unequal experiences young people and their families from Pasifika backgrounds face in the justice system and the need for improved cultural safety and targeted services and supports in this area.



**Designed by Alofa Taula*

- Increased support for community-led solutions, including investment in bicultural and bilingual workers and collaboration between services and the community.
- Research and evidence building with a focus on the experiences and needs of Victoria’s Pasifika community in relation to service-utilisation, justice experiences and gaps in supports and services targeting this cohort.
- Increased outreach for both Pasifika youth, their respective families and communities, with a focus on increasing information and knowledge within the community of rights, services and systems of supports.
- Support for youth-centred and youth-led programs and services, including opportunities for young people to rebuild connection to culture, family and community.

Where to from here?

These conversations have provided our CMY Le Mana team with an important opportunity to share more broadly the heartbreaking stories of the crippling impact of Pasifika youth offending, recidivism and overrepresentation in the criminal justice system, through the cultural lens of Pasifika young people, their families and the broader Pasifika community.



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Listening intently throughout the consultations, as participants shared their experiences, we witnessed a collective narrative emerge that clearly identified a failure of support systems and responses to address this problem. This is a failure that is preventing many of our young people from realising their dreams and aspirations for a safe and prosperous future. Instead, they are confronted with the brutal reality of poorer outcomes in and significant barriers to education, employment and training, health and wellbeing. They are also struggling to build respectful relationships and develop the skills and tools they need to transition successfully into adulthood.

This summary and the full report are tools to help guide ongoing discussions with our communities, providing important insights to inform future work that we hope to see change and reform current support systems. We need to rebuild the house from the ground up, beginning with a solid foundation anchored in the bedrock of family and community, so that when the strong winds of adversity and life challenges sweep through, the home remains steadfast for our young people. This all starts with strong partnerships between government and the Pasifika community. Effective collaboration and resourcing is needed for youth and community service sectors working with Pasifika young people and communities.

We must invest now in a collective approach to strengthen the village that will raise the child.

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This is a summary of the full report produced by CMY's Le Mana (Empower) Pasifika Project for the Victorian Government as part of the Crime Prevention Initiative, 2021 © Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2021 | www.cmy.net.au