

No individual names to be published – only group name Westside Pasifika

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Westside Pasifika Youth Committee

Submission to the Federal Parliament Joint Standing Committee on Migration: Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes

Who are we?

We are a group of young people aged 16 – 24 years, who have formed a youth committee called Westside Pasifika to represent young people from Polynesian, Melanesian and Micronesian communities who live in the Western Suburbs of Melbourne. We have been supported to start our committee by our local council Youth Services.

We have now been working as a committee for over a year, and during that time we have contributed to positive cultural sharing and education in many ways. For example, we have run cultural education events, been involved in multicultural events, educated teachers about our cultures, worked together in volunteering, supported young people to get jobs, helped run a youth consultation in our neighbourhood, facilitated groups in local schools and planned and implemented a cultural youth festival for our area.

You can find out more about us here: <https://vimeo.com/149602313>

Our Purpose

Our purpose is to support other young people from Pacific backgrounds and to create mutual understanding between cultures and appreciation for the strengths of cultural diversity.

We aim to build unity and tolerance between cultures and to build a positive future for our communities.

Where are we from?

We have come from Tongan, Samoan, Maori, Cook Islander, Tahitian, Fijian and Tokalauan backgrounds and our families have migrated to Australia to make our home here and contribute to Australia and Australian society.

Dear Joint Standing Committee on Migration,

We would like to tell you about our experience living in Australia as migrants and to make some recommendations to inform the Federal Parliament Joint Standing Committee on Migration: Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes.

What is our experience of living in Australia?

For people of Pasific Island backgrounds living in Australia, we have noticed that there is a lot of ignorance towards our culture about and the things that our people are capable of. We have all met people who don't even know where the Pacific Islands are or anything about Pacific cultures.

We are struggling to find our identity in Australia and it would be helpful if people understood the diversity of cultures we come from and that even within the Pacific there are many different islands and many different cultures and many cultural expressions. It would have helped us and our families and friends fit in better when we came to Australia if people had understood where we came from.

What are the things we find difficult?

We feel like many of our people face injustice and are often not able to find a job due to our appearance and culture. Sometimes people are afraid of us and make assumptions about the kind of people we are. Sometimes when we go to the shops we get stared at and feel like we are being targeted specifically. We have all faced labels and stereotypes at some time or another, especially when we have recently come to Australia.

Regarding education, we ourselves have faced discrimination from our teachers who often treated us differently to other students. For example, at one of our schools the verbal abuse and discrimination was so bad that one student in the class of Pasifika background was afraid to go to school. People seem to assume the negatives about us, not the positives, just because of our cultural background or because we migrated to Australia.

We want to see more of our people graduate and go to university and then graduate from university to become doctors, teachers, lawyers, politicians, and contribute to society in a variety of ways. But we can only do this if we are given support in our education. Sometimes this might mean extra time, and sometimes it might mean being understanding if we don't have as much money as other students. We need teachers and people in the community to understand where we come from and to respect our culture and realise it is strength, not a weakness.

What do we think is the answer?

We recommend more funding for support, not only in housing, health and education, but in giving us the tools we need to use our strengths and create change in our communities. If we have people to work with us, and the resources that we need, we can empower one another to be the best we can be and use our many talents to enrich Australian society. But this action needs be changing our opportunities and building our skills to start with, not waiting until things go really bad for migrants, especially young people.

Through Westside Pasifika, we have contributed to our community through groups that we facilitated in our schools and a festival that we put on for our community. This event was a performance for young people of Pasifika backgrounds living in Australia to share their cultures and their talents. From being part of this event young people like us made friends, built positive relationships with students from other cultures and other schools and built skills for getting jobs in event management, creative arts and media and promotion.

As a result of this event we gained knowledge and deeper insight into our cultural backgrounds, and we felt more connection between cultural communities and in the broader Australian society. We experienced new roles in organising the event and some young people even gained employment through connections and experience we gained at the event. We felt like we were finally home again, even though we were in Australia.

You can see an example of the event here: <https://vimeo.com/190203172>

What supports are needed?

There are so many positive examples of people who have migrated to Australia, but they all had supportive and understanding people around them. If people in Australia are supportive and understanding of people from Pasifika backgrounds then we could build a much more peaceful and understanding future.

We are all studying or working. Some of us are in year 12 this year, we plan to go to university and go on to a wide range of fields, including social work, youth work, community development, health sciences, media and promotion, sports and fitness, the creative arts, the army, and the police force. We volunteer and contribute to our community in many ways.

We have so much to offer but we need to support to move ahead, and we need others to learn about our cultures. We want our teachers, counsellors, youth workers and police to appreciate where we come from and the strengths we have. We also want to see people like us filling these roles so that they can be role models for us and can educate others and speak on our behalf to those who don't understand us.

The things that we recommend are:

1. Support for young people to get involved and take positive action in a way that they can use their strengths and their skills. We need the support of adults who are well trained and understand where we come from.
2. Support for migrants like us in our schooling when we might need extra time, extra help or some support to get books and uniforms.
3. Professional development and support for teachers to learn about diverse communities and how to communicate with and build on the strengths of young people from different cultures.
4. Professional development and support for police to learn about diverse communities and how to communicate with and build on the strengths of young people from different cultures.
5. We would also like to see people from different cultures in positions such as teachers where they can be role models, but also people who we can relate to and who understand us.
6. Funding for projects to support learning about different cultures and to build understanding between cultures and to celebrate cultural strengths.
7. Funding for events that celebrate and share cultural skills and traditions and break down barriers between cultures.
8. More support for people who are not yet Australian citizens, to help them get there and so that there isn't such a big divide between people who are and people who aren't, especially in things such as education.

From Lyle, Tyra and Rachel on behalf of the Westside Pasifika Committee