

## ***Westside Pasifika Youth Committee***

# **Response to Hearing - Federal Parliament Joint Standing Committee on Migration: Inquiry into Migration Settlement Outcomes**

Thank you for your acceptance of the submission put together by the Westside Pasifika Youth Committee, and commitment to listening to our representatives at the inquiry hearing we attended. We were honoured to have the opportunity to present our perspectives on the issue of migration settlement, having experienced this ourselves first-hand and through our families. We sincerely hope that the information and stories we provided will contribute to better policies and support for migrants and their families in the future, and therefore the wellbeing of all Australian communities.

### **Feedback on the hearing experience and inquiry structure**

We thank you for accepting our submission and inviting us to be part of a hearing to speak to the committee, however would like to provide some feedback on elements of the process we felt could be improved.

### ***The positives of the hearing process***

- We appreciated that even as young people we were welcomed to attend and contribute to the hearings.
- We greatly appreciated being able to share our stories and our experience of living through migration in Australia.
- We also appreciated the flexibility and patience of the committee when we had confusion about the venue.
- It was great to be able to contact the inquiry secretary as needed and we are grateful for the support offered by the secretary throughout the process.

***Concerns about issues with the hearing process and ways to improve the process in future***

- It was not evident from the questions or discussion of the committee that they had read the group submission from Westside Pasifika that was provided. It would be beneficial to the process if the committee were familiar with the submission when the hearing occurred
- The committee appeared to come to the hearing with their own preconceived ideas of solutions. In this context, it would be helpful if the committee focused on listening to the stories and expertise of young people who have lived through migration experience in present-day Australia to arrive at new conclusions.
- The committee appeared to want to focus on small-scale interventions and did not engage with any of the points raised about structural and systematic barriers that prevent more positive and equitable experiences of settlement. It is essential that the inquiry consider these structural barriers and inequalities in order to find meaningful and lasting solutions.
- The committee was not representative of the cultural diversity in Australia. It would be good if the committee was culturally diverse themselves, in a way that represented some of the variety of Australian migrant communities.

**Recommendations**

1. Greater funding 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 trained and understand where we come from.
2. Support for migrants like us in their schooling when they 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 build on their strengths.
4. Professional development and support for police to learn about diverse communities and how to build on their strengths.
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 education and building understanding between different 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.

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Thank you for the opportunity to present at the recent joint standing committee hearing on migration on 12 April, 2017.

As I outlined at the hearing, I have been working as a volunteer and a health researcher with Westside Pasifika since September 2015. My doctoral research into the health and wellbeing of young Pasifika women has highlighted areas of relevance to the inquiry into migration settlement outcomes. One of the key areas I would like to focus on is education.

#### **Education**

Access to appropriate support services for young Pasifika in schools would contribute to increased levels of wellbeing by ensuring that a) schools offer young Pasifika and their communities an inclusive environment in which to learn and flourish and b) pathways to further education are not stymied by barriers that require young Pasifika who are not Australian citizens to pay full fees to access tertiary studies.

Young Pasifika and members of their communities express concern that in some school settings, their voices are not being listened to and curriculum choices do not reflect the lives and aspirations of young people. It appears that Young Pasifika are being directed towards VCAL programs without adequate consultation with families and based on assumptions about their educational capacities and pathways. Other evidence points to young Pasifika being stereotyped within the school system. The negative experiences of some young Pasifika in the school system have far reaching impact on their wellbeing. Especially concerning are subtle and insidious forms of stereotyping.

Young Pasifika from New Zealand who are in the Australian education system will have limited opportunities with the introduction of full fees for New Zealand citizens from 2018. Some of the young Pasifika women in my study who had arrived here within the last five years were unable to consider going onto university after completing year twelve because of the high costs associated with post secondary education. Instead, they were opting for low skilled entry positions in retail and hospitality. In the long term, these barriers to education diminish the opportunities to acquire skills that are essential for participation and success in the modern labour market. Currently, the prohibitive costs of full fee tertiary studies are deterring many young Pasifika, and they are compromising their future prospects by taking jobs with little training or career development prospects.

At the joint parliamentary hearing, one of the committee members commented on the success of events such as Harmony Day in his electorate. While such events have benefits, they do not address structural causes underlying the lack of access to education and successful settlement outcomes for young people. If we are serious about

addressing these underlying causes, we need to think about lack of access to education and its impact on health and wellbeing. We also need to consider what lack of pathways mean for a generation of young Pasifika and the impact it will have their settlement and participation in Australian society.

My recommendations to address the issues associated with educational opportunities for young Pasifika include:

### **Recommendation 1**

Schools adopt an inclusive approach that acknowledges the cultural understandings of Pasifika communities and work with community to address issues of concern to all parties. Creating welcoming spaces in schools will go a long way towards making young Pasifika and their families feel part of the school and the broader community.

### **Recommendation 2**

Schools address issues of stereotyping, bias and racism through a whole of school and community approach. The long-term impact of stereotyping and bias on the wellbeing of people has been documented in the literature and if we want young people to be a valued part of our community, we need to ensure their voices are heard and their barriers to inclusion and belonging are addressed.

### **Recommendation 3**

For many young Pasifika from New Zealand who have a temporary visa status in Australia, access to affordable tertiary education is out of their reach. It is difficult for young people to stay engaged knowing their options are limited at the end of high school. If we are serious about positive settlement outcomes and life chances for young Pasifika, this is an area that needs to be addressed urgently.

Attention needs to be drawn to the effects arising from the disqualification of young Pasifika from accessing income contingent (deferred) fees through the Higher Education Loans Program, particularly the undesirably low rates of transition from secondary to tertiary education.

My research has shown that young Pasifika have demonstrated persistence and resilience in pursuing their work and educational goals. They need to be fully supported to bring out the best of these qualities.

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