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| Speak Up - Kōrerotia  21 October 2015  **Pasifika cultural identities** | |
| Male | This programme was first broadcast on Canterbury’s community access radio station Plains FM 96.9 and was made with the assistance of New Zealand on Air. |
| Female | Coming up next conversations on race relations and human rights with “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia”, here on Plains FM. |
| Sally | E ngā mana,  E ngā reo,  E ngā hau e whā  Tēnā koutou katoa  Nau mai ki tēnei hōtaka: “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia”.    Join the New Zealand Human Rights Commission as it engages in conversations around race and diversity in our country. Tune in as our guests “Speak Up”, sharing their unique and powerful experiences and opinions... May you also be inspired to “Speak Up” when the moment is right.  Nau mai haere ma ki tēnei hōtaka: “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia” and I’m sorry I don’t know how to say that in any of the Pacific languages. I’m your host Sally Carlton from the Human Rights Commission and our topic for today is Pasifika cultural identities and this ties in really well because this week is Niue Language Week and we’ve just had a whole run of Pasifika language weeks which I’m sure we’ll speak about a bit later. But we’re thinking a bit today that we might talk about what is ‘Pasifika’ and what are Pasifika cultural identities? Is there a single identity or should we be talking in the plural? We’ve got three guests here: Josiah, Sera and Maria and if you could all please introduce yourselves that would be fantastic. |
| Josiah | Talofa lava everybody who is listening, my name is Josiah, I study at University of Canterbury. I did a little bit of work for Pasifika young people in Christchurch and also just young people across New Zealand. |
| Sally | I just want to refute something you said… you said a *little* bit of work… |
| Sera | I was going to say that… *little* bit lot of work… |
| Josiah | It’s the same for all of us! |
| Sera | Kia orana koe **57:16**. My name is Sera Thompson and I am a Regional Advisor at the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs [MPIA]. So yes, I’ll hand over to Maria. |
| Maria | Kia orana and **57:00** too, I am Maria Pacini, Pacific Health Manager at Pegasus Health, mother of three, an eight year old girl, ten year old boy and a 53 year old man. |
| Sera | I was thinking. “Where’s the third child come from, oh you’ve got a new child”! |
| Sally | Sera, you mentioned you are one of the Regional Advisors, how many staff do we have at the MPIA here in Christchurch? |
| Sera | MPIA here in Christchurch, so we have three staff. Regional Manager, Amanaki Misa, and myself, and a Senior Regional Advisor which is Diane Fenika and so we three service the whole South Island so it’s…. |
| Maria | Big area. |
| Sera | That’s what we do. |
| Sally | Do you travel much? |
| Sera | I always tell people no but Sally will know that she struggled to get a hold of me because I’m either in Dunedin or in Invercargill or Oamaru, Timaru or Wellington this week. So we don’t generally travel a lot but it’s just been a busy period with language weeks and the regions as in Dunedin having their Polyfest in the last month, Oamaru hosting the Tuvaluan Language Week events, they have the largest population of Tuvaluans in the countr;, not in the country, in the South Island. I think in the weekend Temuka hosted the Ashburton, Timaru and Oamaru Fijian community for Fiji Language Week so that sort of takes us to the regions so language weeks has been a good vehicle in engaging with our Pacific communities that we haven’t seen in the past. So it’s been a great benefit of the language weeks in helping us see everybody. |
| Sally | It’s also great to hear there are pockets of people spread around the place, it’s nice. Now I thought to kick this off we might think about what is ‘Pasifika’. I read somewhere it’s a term that refers specifically to people from the Pacific who live in New Zealand. Do you think that’s right? I hadn’t heard it before coming to New Zealand, I have to say. |
| Maria | Yeah I think it is that you’re correct and it tends to be a term that… I think it was a term that originally was developed by non-Pacific people because actually as Pacific people we identify as Niuean or Cook Island or even Rarotongan - we talk about our individual islands - but usually in reports and when you read about our communities we’re called Pacific Islanders often and even that term is kind of outdated. |
| Sally | Yes I got the impression that it used to be ‘Pacific Islanders’ and now it’s ‘Pasifika’ and perhaps who knows in the future it may well change again. |
| Maria | Yeah no I think ideally if you are referring to us as a bigger or wider community it’s even better to say, like, ‘Pacific peoples’ which acknowledges that we’re not homogenous, we’re really diverse and we’re different nations. |
| Sera | And that’s the term that the Ministry uses to define Pacific is Pacific peoples so not Pasifika because there’s disagreement on ‘Pasifika’. |
| Maria | *Pasifika*. |
| Sera | Pasifika or I’ve also seen Pacific written as the word Pacific with an “a” on the end because everyone has different views of what that looks like. ‘Pacific peoples’ is the more…. |
| Maria | And it’s because in every language it is written differently so you’re better to kind of stick to Pacific. Did I spell that right? |
| Sera | Everyone’s going hmmm…did she spell that right? |
| Sally | When I was doing some research for this I checked out what is Pacific… How big is it? Over 10,000km² and three ethnographic groups, Micronesian, Melanesian, Polynesia and however many cultures, it’s massive. |
| Maria | Over 20 Pacific nations can be counted but usually if you’re talking about official documents between six, seven, eight nations are usually reported on. |
| Sera | I guess when we’re talking about what’s reported we’re really talking….when we talk about Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs it’s usually the Polynesian group… |
| Maria | But Fiji… |
| Sera | Yeah Fiji is a funny one, that sort of sits in Polynesia and is also Melanesia, it’s both. |
| Josiah | It’s interesting because the linguistic similarities for the seven are more similar but the reason Fiji initially was in Melanesia was because of the skin colour of them…well ‘mela’ means black and so it was a racial grouping that just seemed to work for… I think it was France in the 16th… or early, many centuries ago. |
| Maria | But in terms of how we operate as communities Fiji is always included in the things that we do as Pacific peoples. |
| Josiah | Yes. |
| Sally | I’m not sure about this but I imagine it must be one of the bigger countries in the Pacific in terms of population. |
| Maria | I think the Fiji population here is about third or fourth in Canterbury and it usually goes between Niue and Fiji nations depending on which city you’re talking about. |
| Sally | If we’re talking about this idea of a single label, ‘Pasifika’ or ‘Pacific peoples’ which definitely acknowledges diversity more, do you see there are advantages or disadvantages to having a label? |
| Josiah | I guess we talked about it a little bit before, the label can be quite awkward because even ‘Pacific’ or ‘Pasifika’ still doesn’t recognise necessarily the differences between all of us. I mean it works when we work together but when we want to have that individual acknowledgement it’s not there so… |
| Maria | And response like being clear that the way in which you might work with a Samoan community or family can be quite different to when working with a Tongan community or family. Where it helps to join together is as communities when we work on projects, particularly in Canterbury, it is quite unique to this region. We’re really strong collaborators because if it comes down to numbers the strength is in supporting each other and we know each other so it kind of differs depending on regions. |
| Sera | And I guess where the label doesn’t fit is when we’re trying to raise the confidence in retaining our own languages and culture and that’s where we… that’s where we need to divide ourselves up and this is only for my own children. I, when people ask them if they’re Pasifika, I tell them to say no, we’re Cook Islanders because they’re not Pasifika, they do come from that region, we do come from that region but it is differentiating themselves from the wider group because we are different and unique otherwise we do get treated all the same and thrown in the same basket that we’re all the same but nobody sees that there’s so much diversity within us and we all have very different views. We may have similar upbringings but our culture and our parents have shaped us very differently. |
| Maria | Language. |
| Sera | And our language. |
| Maria | Traditions. |
| Sera | And traditions do shape us in all the things we do and we’re trying to… One of the Ministry’s priorities is language, culture and identity and being proud of that culture and knowing what to identify yourself as because some of our kids still don’t know and I mean I had that problem growing up. |
| Sally | I think we’ll get back to this idea of identity and particularly I think growing up is crucial. Just one other question on the idea of label and that is something that strikes me a lot is in particularly Government documents to see ‘Māori and Pasifika’ and I think that’s problematic but I’d be keen to hear your views as well. |
| Maria | Agree. |
| Josiah | Oh it’s interesting because what we’ve just talked about the different Pacific islands and regions is the same thing that’s happened for tangata whenua. I mean each of the tribes have their own identity, have their own… I mean some of the linguistic differences… They in themselves considered they had their own sovereign right over their sovereign territory and I guess what I’m trying to say here is in themselves they considered their own… they’re their own country and we consider… We have our own sovereignty where we are in the Pacific so it’s being linked together… We do have a history but it’s not always useful as Maria was talking about before, we’ve got different interventions that need to be given to different groups based on different needs and different understandings of the world. |
| Maria | And I think that something it actually compromises the service that is offered, where the resources go, what those resources might look like even in terms of prioritising because Māori as tangata whenua do have a unique status in New Zealand and therefore have to be considered in a different way to Pacific. And my experience of particularly working with Government as working in Government services is that when Māori and Pacific are put together that often the Pacific stuff kind of takes a back seat and I don’t think that is helpful for anyone, particularly for our Pacific nations. So I mean we’re different, we do have some things in common with Māori but we are very different. |
| Sally | I think that’s probably a great spot just to have our first break, Josiah you’ve chosen a song for us. |
| Josiah | Oh yes so this song is called ‘We Leave Our Islands’, it was actually sung as a choir at the first launch of the Pacific Strategy at UC. I just thought it would be quite interesting, you know, juxtaposition with our conversation around the differences amongst each of our cultures. |
| Sally | And you spoke about the UC Pacific Strategy, maybe just briefly what is that? |
| Josiah | OK so it’s the document which UC Council have put out as a policy of their own to roughly, like, increase student numbers, increase Pasifika student numbers at UC, increase numbers of staff, to work in retention, extra programmes for support, that kind of stuff. But it’s just a firm commitment from Council so that means a senior management team and all the staff have to implement that through to 2019. |
| Sally | Fantastic. |
| Sera | Yes UC didn’t have that prior so everything was just…. |
| Josiah | Just in plans really. |
| Sera | So that’s actually good that they’ve set some… Now it’s from the top down that Pacific is important and it’s on the radar, it’s on the agenda, you can’t ignore it, it’s a policy now. |
| Sally | Do you know if they have a comparable policy for other groups? |
| Josiah | Lots of or if not all of the key tertiary institutions have their own strategy and the city is developing them at CPIT as well and the DHB, most of them are getting towards having strategies for Pacific people/ I mean Pegasus has a group which help them with their strategic stuff. |
| Maria | Actually early childhood education and primary do it really, really well. Have some great responses to Pacific communities so in some ways tertiary institutions are kind of catching up on some of that stuff. |
| Sally | Ok great well here it is, ‘We Leave Our Islands’. |
|  | **MUSIC – WE LEAVE OUR ISLANDS COMPOSED BY IGELESE ETE** |
| Sally | So welcome back to Speak Up – Kōrerotia, here on Plains FM 96.9. We’re speaking with Josiah, Sera and Maria about Pasifika and whether that label should be applied and we’re talking perhaps more around ‘Pacific peoples’, acknowledging all the diversity. For this section we might talk a little bit about what it is like being a Pacific person in New Zealand, how long have you been here, what’s your experiences, did you grow up here, were you born here, do you speak the language, those sorts of things. So I’ll just open it up. |
| Sera | I guess, I’ll start with me, Sera. I am a New Zealand-born Cook Islander and I say that because in my own community I would not be considered a real Cook Islander and what does a real Cook Islander look like? It depends on who you ask. So I am a real Cook Islander and even if I wasn’t born there and I may not speak the language fluently, I consider myself a Cook Islander but the other thing that is really important with that is anybody looking at me will automatically say I don’t belong here and I say that all the time because the colour of my skin actually defines what society is going to think of me and label me. So people will look at me and automatically label me or us as Pacific, even if I tell everybody I’m from Auckland and I am a born and bred Aucklander. People look very confused when I say that so it really depends on the communities but I have been into community situations where I’ve been told I’m not Pacific enough or not Cook Island enough and it doesn’t matter, I’m a Cook Islander and that’s all that matters is how I feel, sorry. And I don’t know how you guys feel. |
| Maria | So I guess for me identity is self-determined and so my father is Niuean, he’s from the village of Alofi and my mother was born in Rarotonga but her father was from Aitutaki which is another island and her mother was from Atu so there’s already real diversity there. I was born in Lower Hutt hospital and brought up in Wellington and I’m one of seven children so again people have often referred to me as being New Zealand-born. I don’t speak a Pacific language and that was the choice of both my parents because they were sent here when they were teenagers to finish off their schooling and they really struggled to adapt to New Zealand culture, including language. Even though they both spoke English initially they had quite strong accents and so that was quite noticeable and they came up against quite a lot of racism in the workplace. So they made a decision that it was really important for us to be successful Kiwis. So that’s kind of my story. |
| Sally | It’s a real shame listening to that that your parents felt that in order to be successful Kiwis you had to drop part of… |
| Maria | Our identity, yeah. I mean in some ways I feel sad about that but I also respect their reasoning behind that, that was a decision they made to invest in our success and that’s how they saw it. |
| Josiah | My story is pretty similar, I don’t speak Samoan, I was born in Dunedin and my dad is Samoan and my mum is Australian and we grew up with my nana and grandad and that had a real big impact on what I saw about Pacific people and my kind of… I guess some prejudices that had sort of subconsciously taken on and it wasn’t until I started high school that I realised that I was quite angry towards my dad and towards Pasifika people in general and sort of had made this grouping I guess, used the grouping that we have in some Government documents and stuff to put my anger on Pasifika people and that was purely just because I had some really bad experiences with some people I trusted. And so I sort of judged everyone based on one or two people and it wasn’t until I met some cool young people like myself through the PYLAT [Pacific Youth Leadership And Transformation] Council and our Christchurch community that I saw that wasn’t what it was and I started to learn what it was to be a Pacific person. And so that was only five years ago and before that I hadn’t done anything in this space or even identified that I was a Pacific person at all and so that was quite a challenge and even still now it can be quite awkward. I guess we all talked about there’s sometimes uneasiness about us feeling secure in our identity and it really has been me having to say, “Yes I believe that I am and I know that I am Samoan and I’m a Pacific person” and feel comfortable in that. I mean there is still spaces I guess where there’s sort of the treading of the boards, am I more “European” or am I more towards my Pacific heritage, it’s a balancing act I guess. |
| Sally | Are there times when you feel more strongly connected to one over the other? Does it depend on the circumstances, or who you are with, or can you kind of choose when and how to balance? |
| Josiah | I guess there’s only one place where I feel like I have to choose and I mentioned my grandparents before and they had a massive impact on my upbringing and in that space there I’m still not yet comfortable to be completely honest in who I am which is really sad but I guess it’s the truth of it just because I’m still working towards that. But everywhere else it’s comfortable, I’m happy, I’m not worried, it doesn’t matter who it is or where I am it’s who I am. But I guess my experience in trying to have to… don’t know if you call it mitigate but there are others, is what I am trying to say. |
| Maria | I think for a lot of us it is a real journey and different people are on different parts of that journey, some people haven’t even started so they may not be interested in their Pacific identity, others may be on their way, others are kind of really clear about what that is for them and I think that any of those positions are absolutely fine and I do feel really strongly it is self-determined. At the end of the day you’re the one who determines who you are and you kind of just own it, if you’re on your way – yeah, so, at least I’m on my way! |
| Sally | I think that’s pretty critical isn’t it, is having the confidence to be able to do it, and I think that came through in your story a lot Josiah, you have to grow into it and you have to be able to have the confidence to say, “I have grown into it”. |
| Sera | I mean I’m a bit older than Josiah. |
| Josiah | Further along. |
| Sera | And it’s taken me a long time to own that and it is because you have… I’m from five different islands and four of them in the Cooks so you’ll go to one island event and they’ll say, “Here come the tourists” and that’s the island that I most identify with but they consider my family and I tourists so we’re only visitors, we’re not part of the community. And then I’ll go to one of my dad’s islands and they go, “There’s those people from over there” so you never quite belong. And Josiah has heard me say this before… Then you go to school and school doesn’t accept you because you don’t fit… So if we’re all constantly being told we don’t belong it’s really hard to find ourselves when that’s all you get growing up. We don’t have a place of belonging, we look like we… or we just go through the motions but we actually don’t belong anywhere and it’s hard to find that as an adult further along as Josiah says, that I still feel like that in certain spaces. |
| Maria | But the interesting thing is because in the 90s I set up a group here called Daughters of the Pacific and the group was set up specifically to explore Pacific identities for New Zealand-born women and that group was set up because there were a whole lot of women who for one reason or another were separated from their Pacific cultures but were really genuinely interested in exploring that but we needed a safe space in which we could do that. And at that time we did a whole lot of research around what is it to be Pacific in New Zealand and in fact our stories were more common than not, our identities were what it is to be Pacific in New Zealand and that is born in New Zealand, may not speak a Pacific language, born to mixed heritage so either mixed Pacific nations or other ethnicities. So there’s real diversity there and also our struggles with identity, so at the end of the day who we are is actually who it is to be Pacific living in New Zealand. We are the majority not the minority, and that’s why I do feel really confident about that identity because I just think this is who it is to be Pacific in New Zealand. |
| Sally | Maria can I just check with you when you say we are the majority do you mean of Pacific Islanders? Is that…. |
| Maria | So for Pacific peoples in New Zealand that whole identity around being born in New Zealand, not speaking a Pacific language, a lot of those kind of things, from diverse ethnicities… for the majority of Pacific peoples, that is actually our story. |
| Sally | Great well we’re going to have a song in celebration of Niue Language Week. |
| Maria | Vagahau Niue. |
| Sally | Great we’ll have a listen now. |
|  | **MUSIC – NIUEAN NATIONAL ANTHEM** |
| Sally | Hi and welcome back to Speak Up - Kōrerotia, here on Plains FM. We’re speaking with Josiah, Sera and Maria about Pasifika cultural identities and we just have listened to a song, the Niuean National Anthem and it’s Niuean Language Week so it seems a great time to pull in the role of language to cultural identity. And perhaps the first thing to do might be to talk about exactly what Pacific languages weeks we celebrate here in New Zealand because there’s a few of them. |
| Sera | So we celebrate seven language weeks here in New Zealand, there are a couple of groups that would like a language week going forward but at the moment we have the Samoan Language Week at the end of May, the Cook Islands Language Week in the first week of August, then the Tongan Language Week towards the end of August. We have just come off Tuvalu Language Week a couple of weeks ago, we are currently in Niuean Language Week… |
| Maria | Last week Fijian. |
| Sera | We had Fiji Language Week sorry last week and we also have Tokelau Language Week at the end of this month so a lot of people will say, “Why do we have three language weeks one after the other, Tuvalu, Fiji and Niue?” and that is because the language weeks are around important dates to that community. So the Government doesn’t set these dates, the dates are actually set by the communities themselves. So for instance this week is Niue Language Week, their independence day is 17 October. For Tuvalu Language Week, their language is usually set in and around October the 1st, their independence day and likewise for Samoan Language Week, their independence day is 1st of June so these dates are important to those community groups. Cook Island Language Week is set on 4th August because of our Constitution Day when we became a self-governing nation on the 4th August in 1965. We’re 50 years old this year so we’ve been celebrating that all year. So people may get stressed out dealing with a lot of language weeks in one go but they are important to the communities that they celebrate so this is why our language weeks are set up this way and that’s why… And those are our current suites of seven language weeks and if we’re going to add another one to the mix recently, we celebrated Chinese Language Week so not a Pacific language but it’s good to see that there are… |
| Maria | It’s Samoan isn’t it? |
| Sera | Another language out there as well so there has been a lot of support for language weeks in the last few years so that’s been great. |
| Sally | What’s done to promote them? What do people do during the language weeks? |
| Josiah | There’s heaps of videos, MPIA puts them out so do lots of the tertiary institutions and mainly they’re like a competition around using some sort of phrase in the video or some activity that you’ve got to respond to. There’s other events like sometimes there’s a church service… |
| Maria | Community craft events or learning traditional craft. Lots of different stuff. If the celebration of our traditional food which as Pacific people is really important to us. |
| Josiah | Other ceremonies. |
| Sera | I guess in a way it’s almost like we’ve had to give our communities back permission to celebrate themselves because they haven’t wanted to and so the language week is just a vehicle or just a reminder that here we are, we can do this stuff. But it’s not to say you just do it during language week. I mean it would be better… We want to maintain our cultural identity and our languages and our crafts, it would be better if we could do that across the year but I guess it’s just a little reminder that… |
| Josiah | Yes it is a Government priority, it’s quite nice to see that that’s something that they’re pushing forward so I guess we celebrate it as Sera was saying throughout the year but that’s their priority and commitment once a year. |
| Maria | I think too, as Pacific peoples living in New Zealand, that in the past we have felt quite invisible and so this is about a visibility too and kind of declaring this is who we are, we’re here, we’re part of this ethnic make up in New Zealand and that’s something to be celebrated. |
| Josiah | I guess it’s one of those ways where we are celebrated individually which is quite cool. |
| Sally | Yes I mean it’s a very good indicator that there are multiple Pasifika languages for a start but also nations behind that. |
| Maria | One of the main reasons for these weeks is actually about reviving our Pacific languages and strengthening that because as we mentioned before many of us are New Zealand-born, many of us weren’t brought up with a Pacific language and so it’s about encouraging us to consider developing that skill as well. |
| Josiah | It’s a good point because recently 80% of funding was declared that it be lost to the Pacific Education Centre [PEC] and so that was like one space where the different Pasifika languages had… Or cultural competency as well had… You could go to it and get some of the work there or the resources even but now that that’s gone or going to be losing funding it’s going to affect some of the spread of the language and maintenance of it… |
| Maria | Access to resources. |
| Sally | Was it based here in Christchurch? |
| Josiah | No up north but it seems strange since it’s been around since the 1970s and we don’t have that base anywhere else in the Pacific so we’re losing a real important… |
| Maria | Resource… |
| Sally | I suppose on the other hand I just saw that CPIT is going to be holding free Samoan language courses. So there are some positives. |
| Josiah | Definitely. It’s cool that they are doing it but that’s just one group. I guess the dissemination from PEC was quite cool because as it was on the internet anyone could get to those resources. |
| Maria | Nationally and internationally. |
| Sally | One thing I’m really interested about is we’re thinking about language and you’re all New Zealand-born Pacific peoples and you guys have both got children who presumably are also New Zealand-born, I’d be really interested to hear how you feel your children are doing as well in terms of are you helping them, encouraging them to pick up the language? Do they feel like they’re more New Zealander for example? They’re another generation on. And also to think about the other side of the coin and the elders in the Pacific communities and they are less likely to be New Zealand-born, they’re more likely to speak the Pacific languages and this idea of identity and language across the generations. |
| Maria | I think one of the challenges for us as communities is that there is actually a real gap between generations that for many of our communities the language sits with our elders, they are the fluent speakers and if they don’t pass the language on to the next generations when they pass it’s gone.  For me in particular I have two children but my children are adopted so my daughter is Niuean and Māori and my son is Māori and Palangi but they actually think they are Niuean and Cook Island and Māori and that’s just because who I am and that’s kind of what they observe in our family activities and connections. And I really embrace that but because I’m not a native speaking Pacific… I don’t speak Cook Islands Māori and I don’t speak Niuean, access to that is harder for us. Because it’s about the everyday use of language and we don’t have that opportunity, my parents are both passed and we don’t have that exposure whereas I hear Sera talking to her children and using the language because she has that skill. |
| Sera | And I guess I practice that skill more when I’m around family so we’re talking intergenerational. My mum would hate it if I called her an elder, she was from a generation where… and this isn’t very PC but anything brown or black was bad. So she’s raised me to only speak English, it’s unfortunate for her and fortunate for me I was still around family members that continued to speak to me in my language and I got a bit of practice: even when I was living in the islands I was sent to the only English speaking school on the island for five years. But you still manage to pick up some and retain it and my siblings, two of my siblings are fluent speakers because they spent 18 years there instead of the five and they weren’t forced to go to the only English speaking school so they have a balance. But now mum is struggling because she’ll speak to my children in our language and I’ll go, “You’re wasting your time and this is your own fault, you did this, you did this to us and now none of us know how to speak”. And I don’t practice it enough because I don’t have people to practice it with. And with my children: up until four years ago my son considered himself a Cantabrian and only a Cantabrian, he wasn’t anything else and if anybody told him he was Pacific person he would scream at you and cry. |
| Maria | So that’s one of the challenges because even if we genuinely desire to develop our Pacific language it’s actually about access, it’s about opportunity and there aren’t many, although in saying that our… so church is one of the places that our children will hear and possibly learn Pacific languages, community events and days because even if we’re not regularly speaking, the fact that they’re surrounded by language will make a big difference for them and it will also change how they see themselves too in terms of their connection to community so there are challenges around it. |
| Sera | Yes and that’s how my son became a Cook Islander, it was actually Cook Island Language Week, the first one I took him he was living and breathing it and a few weeks later his teacher told me that he’d asked if his name could be changed to his island name and not his English speaking name because he’d decided he was going to be a Cook Islander from then on. And prior to that I guess I didn’t expose my children to a lot of Pacific events where they would be confident in saying they were Pacific but it took me working at the Ministry to actually start that journey for my children. |
| Sally | Ok well we might have a break now and Sera you’ve chosen a song which ties in super well to this. |
| Sera | And it is Annie Crummer’s ‘Language’. |
|  | **MUSIC – LANGUAGE BY ANNIE CRUMMER** |
| Sally | Kia ora and welcome back to “Speak Up – Kōrerotia” on 96.9 Plains FM. We’re speaking with Josiah, Sera and Maria about Pasifika cultural identities and we’re moving into the role of the church in Pasifika identities and it’s a massive topic, obviously everyone has got pretty strong opinions around it but just to kind of open it up to think about what role does the church play in identity for Pasifika people, or for you guys personally if you prefer? |
| Maria | I guess it’s like any ethnicity or nation or community, there’s diversity in terms of our affiliation, our connection and our involvement in things around church- and faith-based activities and commitment. In our wee chat beforehand it was very evident that we all have kind of perspectives on that so as I mentioned before my father is Niuean, he was a pastor of a Pentecostal church and I was brought up in the church and so I have really core values that I really hold dear but there are other things in terms of my upbringing that I don’t connect to or follow and as an adult that has changed and developed just from my life experience really and my perspective on that has changed. |
| Sera | I guess if we can think about the earthquake and the role of the church after the earthquake, the church, the different church affiliations were core in bringing the community together and they became a hub for certain groups who didn’t have anything else, they rallied to the churches and the churches looked after them, brought them together, it was food dissemination, information dissemination, all of that was done through the church. So the church does play an important role for our Pacific communities. Even when we want to run information sessions and I know Maria has done this, we’ll work with church groups… maybe not the church Ministers, depending on which leader is available, but a lot of programmes these days are run through their wives. So there is a role definitely for the church around languages because it’s how we disseminate a lot of our information is through church. |
| Maria | Settings. |
| Sera | Settings and church leaders and that’s where many of our Pacific community congregate but not all so there is a percentage of the Pacific community that don’t actually attend church and that’s a group that we’re missing that we can’t get information to. So that’s probably something we need to look at addressing at some stage in the future. |
| Sally | Do you have any suggestions as to how that group might be addressed or reached? Is there any other gathering place? |
| Maria | The churches are probably the most evident place where Pacific people gather in a setting that… a place where they’re easily accessed. Sports clubs might be another place and obviously school settings for our children and young people are another way in which you can communicate with Pacific communities but a lot of the places where Pacific people are nobody accesses… workplaces, for example, because a lot of us are out there working and we can’t attend these meetings and workshops and community days because we’re in our workplaces. |
| Sally | I guess one thing that is very commonly thought about Pacific peoples is attendance at church and you’ve sort of spoken about a lot of people do attend and then we’re talking about identity so I guess the values and the messages that are coming through church, do you see those tying into the identity of Pasifika peoples as a broad concept? |
| Maria | Yeah well when I was being brought up in the church, as a child I felt like it was oppressive because literally your whole Sunday - and some of Saturday because you prepare for Sunday on a Saturday - is taken up with your commitment to attending church and participating in church activities and during the week because you’ve got to go to bible study as well and you’ve got to go to youth group and all of that. So as a child sometimes I felt that was really oppressive, it was like I had no choices. But now as an adult when I stand back and look at it I also see that the church actually was where I developed as a leader: so I was teaching younger kids at ten in the church setting and then you go into Sunday School and then you go into youth group leading and so for me it actually was a great environment to develop a lot of those community and leadership skills. And Pacific peoples seek leadership through service and so for me that’s really where it happened. |
| Sally | Actually you brought up another point, that’s another thing I associate a lot with Pasifika peoples is responsibilities to your communities and it’s not just about the individual but it’s about the community as a whole. |
| Josiah | It’s an important point that you raise because for young people particularly and for our community as well there’s lots of different things we need to go to and that’s just partly because we want to do to serve our community and also partly because it’s important for us in how we identify ourselves and how we feel about ourselves. I mean Le Va, the health based organisation in the North Island, put out the top five tactics for keeping well and spirituality, connecting with culture were the two core ones, they are really important parts of you being well and so where we take culture and spirituality out of the equation sometimes for our community and our young people, they actually feel worse about themselves and so it’s maybe it’s a balancing act with expectations. I meant there probably is times where it is… where maybe missing one church service might need to be OK but definitely we’ve got to acknowledge that it’s an important part of us as young people being who we are and developing who we are. |
| Sera | Important part of being a Pacific person as well so even the Are You Allright? campaigns research supports Le Va’s finding on the five ways because the campaign didn’t cover spirituality - and so now, for Pacific, it does include spirituality as a really important factor because that was the big huge missing element of the five ways of wellbeing, spirituality wasn’t even in that… And spirituality can look like different things. |
| Maria | And so we actually see spirituality overarching all of those five ways of wellbeing because if you look at them you can gain all of that within a kind of church community setting. The other thing is that culturally our cultures are really strong on reciprocity so it is kind of one of those “you come to my thing and I’ll come to yours” and the sharing of resources and skills. And so part of your attendance at things is about building that relationship and reputation in order to be effective in your role. |
| Sally | From an outsider’s perspective I always think it’s so much about supporting each other as well, the young people have a responsibility to help the older people, the older people who have a responsibility to pass on their… |
| Maria | Absolutely… guide and… |
| Sally | Exactly, I see it… Lovely actually. |
| Maria | And it goes through the generations too because in our culture anyone younger than you is your responsibility, anyone older than you you show respect to - which I think is a real strength. |
| Sally | Definitely. I guess one thing to finish up on: do you see any tensions between these values and responsibilities that we’ve been talking about that are kind of innate to Pacific and living in New Zealand? |
| Josiah | Definitely! Got stared down there, pushed into the… |
| Sera | Young man! What do you think?! |
| Josiah | I think there’s always going to be a conflict and part of solving any anxiety or any problems with it is just knowing that it’s there and working out ways with people around you to sort of balance it. As I said before, I don’t think there’s any problems with some of the pressures that there is just there can be times where it just needs to be mitigated particularly around exam time, it’s practical that our young people are out there studying and that’s what we really want them to do, we want them to succeed in education and go on to be successful Pacific peoples in the rest of our community. And sometimes that might just mean one or two little things that buck outside the expectations but again that’s only just a small portion of the time. |
| Maria | Yeah and I don’t think it would be… It’s unique to Pacific peoples, I think the generational stuff is kind of common across different ethnicities but our community obligations can sometimes be in conflict with other expectations our communities have on us. So they want us to be successful in our education and careers but then we have to be committed to community events and attending church events and sometimes there aren’t enough hours in the day to do all of that. |
| Josiah | Yes it’s good that places like University of Canterbury and I guess CPIT are recognising that and so students are able to get extensions when they need it and there’s more flexibility than there ever was. |
| Maria | And you know things like if somebody dies, everything else gets put aside including your exam at university. |
| Josiah | And even if that’s not like a direct relation as well, because sometimes you might need to be the brother or sister or close cousin but that’s not how the relationships are, a cousin could be a brother or sister… |
| Sera | And that whole process… I know we’re just wrapping up but a funeral, it’s not taking off a few hours to go to the funeral, it’s taking off maybe a week to two weeks. |
| Maria | That’s a whole other programme! |
| Sally | Maybe we’ll do that one time; that would be great actually. So it’s a good place to wind up actually – like, food for thought – what are the differences between cultures and what thought needs to be given to find a space to accommodate everyone and every need that people might have. |
| Josiah | If I could throw one more thing in there, it’s interesting too because the city is developing a multicultural strategy and I ended up being the Pasifika person on the working group there as well as the youth so if anyone did have any thoughts about that they can send them through to Sally or me or others and we can help include those ideas into that strategy. |
| Sally | Awesome and while we’re doing notices you also wanted to talk about the Prime Minister’s Youth Awards. |
| Sera | PM Youth Awards, the applications have opened this year for… |
| Maria | Pacific youth. |
| Sera | The Prime Minister’s Pasifika Youth Awards. So that will be celebrated and the awards presented in December but if you’d like to apply there are five award categories and you can get up to $10,000 for each category so great prizes, great scholarships. So all you need to do is go to the pacificyouthawards.org.nz website. |
| Josiah | And look for two really cool referees. Our community leaders have spoken on the programme today, maybe ask them! Your teachers at school, also good people to talk to, Ministers. |
| Sera | Nice. We’d really like to see as many applications come through as we can get. |
| Josiah | Canterbury young people have done a lot of cool things for a very long time and it’s time that a lot of you get recognised so please put in an application. |
| Sally | Great, that’s a good plug. We’re finishing up now, thank you so much for coming on and just to shout out to the listeners, our next topic on Wednesday the 18th November or Sunday 22nd, we’ll be talking about domestic violence and ethnicity because it’s the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. So tune in then. |
| Sera | Thank you. |