Talanoa
Clearing
Pathways
VILLAGE
COLLECTIVE

Talofa and Warm Pacific Greetings

We often hear about the challenges our young Pasefika Rainbow community face growing up in Aotearoa. There is the stigma placed on our Rainbow Pasefika community through fear and lack of knowledge. İn 2013, the Village Collective listened to the voices of our young people and established that there is still some work to go in ensuring our young Pasefika Rainbow are connected and valued for who they are.

We wanted to explore how we can add to what is already being delivered in the community to support Rainbow Pasefika Youth – including Fa'afafine, Fakaleiti, Akava'ine, Fiafifine and Vakasalewalewa to grow in confidence and make great life choices. Family play a big part in supporting and nurturing our young and while a lot of resources have been developed to support our young people, we were surprised to find a lack of resources sharing the voices of our parents.

This resource is a collection of beautiful stories. İt is a celebration of the untold stories of parents and caregivers who have raised Rainbow Pasefika children. These parents and caregivers have respectively given a special part of themselves, in the hope that their testimonies will comfort and help in clearing loving pathways for other parents and families.

İ would also like to acknowledge Otto Wendt who played an important part in bringing this project to life. Not only did Otto identify the need, but he also worked tirelessly to connect with our families.

Ma le fa'aaloalo lava. Fa'afetai ma ia manuia.

Siaosi Mulipola
Sexual Health Advocate
Village Collective

Riki & Isileli

My name is Riki Nofoaki'folau and I come from Ha'apai, Tonga. Our family moved from Tonga in 1993 and settled in Mangere where we all attended school locally.

Growing up in a big Tongan family meant that we had plenty of parents and caregivers. Aunties and uncles were also seen as mothers and fathers. As a result, I grew up being cared for by many and it was also the case for Isileli (Isi). My mother (Isi's Grandmother) also plays a big part in her life as do I.

When Isi was younger, she came home crying and told us that she thought she liked boys. I thought it was a phase and that eventually she would grow out of it. Even though I had plenty of friends who were Fakaleiti, who I loved and accepted, having one of our own children identify as Fakaleiti was too close to home and initially made me feel uncomfortable. I guess I was thinking about the things that Isi would have to face such as bullies at school and how other people would react.

However, Isi is growing into an awesome person and I am thankful that she has her grandmother in her life. They bond with each other on another level now. Her grandmother quite proudly proclaims that Isi is her granddaughter and I know this makes Isi happy.

As a parent, I am working to give Isi the things that we missed out on. I want Isi to be strong so that she can reach her potential and not let anyone make her feel less about who she is. I like to keep it real with Isi and sometimes that means I talk to others to sound things out before making decisions or reacting to whatever is going on at the time.

I also make sure that Isi and I have great communication; I listen a lot to what is going on with her – and I also share how I overcame my challenges and try to inspire her to do the same.

As a parent, I want to enjoy my time with my children as much as I can before they get older and move on with their lives. Unless we talanoa and have those talks where we are real with our kids, things won't be any clearer for them. Growing up in a Tongan household in New Zealand, provides unique challenges, but more importantly also has great opportunities. Raising Isi has helped me to open my eyes to myself and challenge how I go about doing things. The best thing is that I grew and learnt with her.

"I also share how I overcame my challenges and try to inspire her to do the same"

Isileli U'la

Isileli is 16 years old and the eldest grandchild. Raised by her maternal grandmother and aunty Riki, Isi gets the best of both worlds learning traditional and cultural values and how to cope with issues that are out there today. She currently attends a local high school and is involved supporting other Fakaleiti and Fa'afafine around her. Isileli hopes to study sports science to assist in the performance of elite athletes or fashion design.

Emo, Wayne & Jozie

Emo Toeava (Samoan) and Wayne Pallanger (New Zealander) reside in Mangere, South Auckland. They have four children, Jozie, the second youngest and has recently graduated from Auckland University of Technology (AUT). Jozie identifies as a Fa'afafine.

As a mother, I've always known in my heart since he was little. Jozie used to play with my shoes. I'd walk in on him in the middle of the night and see he's dressing up. I didn't see anything wrong with it, he's my son. I would often hear other parents say that if their son was gay or lesbian they would disown them. Our relationship has opened a lot of eyes in our family, but it wasn't always like that as others in our family 'struggled' with it. I'm proud of Jozie and especially proud of his academic achievements.

As a father, I don't think he's different, he's always been our son. To be honest it was pretty hard to accept and I thought it was a phase he would grow out of - pretty naïve, but now it doesn't worry me. Being gay or lesbian is not a condition or something to cure.

"Our whole family supports him"

As parents we encourage other parents to open their minds, there is nothing wrong with your child. Go out and seek advice if you need to, but more importantly try and understand them. At the end of the day that's your child.

The last thing you want to see is your son or daughter struggling because they have no one to talk to. It doesn't come down to if you're gay or straight, it's about family. Kids have their friends but there is something about a mum and dad that all kids need.

> "At the end of the day, that's your child"

Jozie Toeava

Jozie is 26 years old and is the second youngest of four loving siblings. He has recently graduated from AUT University with a Bachelors of Arts degree majoring in Japanese language. Being Fa'afafine has never stopped Jozie from chasing his dreams. Jozie looks forward to working in Japan in the near future.

Caroline & Marcus

My name is Caroline Johnson and I am of Maori descent. I was born in Gisborne and moved with my family to Pakuranga, Auckland where I was raised. I am a single parent to Marcus. Marcus also has Niuean heritage from his father (Lakepa/Motulau).

> "I had to learn to stop being judgemental but I didn't know how."

My upbringing was different to how I've raised my own children. Both my parents were farmers and while I love them very much, I wanted my children to experience what the world had to offer. I was fine with Marcus being different, I just didn't know how "different" he was. As a parent I was initially scared, I didn't know what it was, I often heard of somebody else's child being gay or lesbian but this time it was my own boy.

I needed support and advice, and it was my lesbian friends that came to my need. One friend put it this way "if you love your boy and you think it's hard for you, think about how hard it is for him. Not only does he have to front up to you, but to everybody else that you represent". I had to learn to stop being judgemental but I didn't know how.

Since finding out my son is gay I've put all my barriers down. As a parent I learnt to give all my children unconditional love no matter how different they are.

As a parent you have to be there, even if it means doing it alone. You got to have an open mind and tell them it's ok. Meet their friends and get to know them too. Everybody has a story, as a parent our challenge is to walk the journey with their child.

Marcus Johnson

Marcus is 21 years old and is the eldest of three siblings. He has recently graduated from AUT with a Bachelor of Arts degree majoring in Japanese language. Marcus now lives and works in Japan as an English teacher.

Ula & Nicole

My name is Ula Osasa Mano. İ am Samoan and mother to four children, of which, Nicole is the youngest.

İ knew from a young age that even though Nicole was born male, she was different. İ think every parent can tell. İ could accept it, but my fear was that others in our family would not. İ was afraid of the physical and verbal abuse Nicole would get for being different. My other fear was that people would treat my Nicole badly and she would get hurt.

İ chose to give her the support she needed to make the right choices. İt took time for Dad and her siblings to understand and accept Nicole, but we did it as a family. We did this by having the challenging conversations, and through this it brought us closer together.

As her mother İ have always prayed for her spiritual wellbeing and education. Nicole has helped me grow as a parent, and İ am grateful to God for all of this.

> “İt takes a whole village to raise a child”

When Nicole was year 12 she was confronted by an older student. Following this experience, Nicole turned to her older brother for help for the first time. Later that day, Nicole was plesantly surprised to see her brother waiting at the school gate to walk her home after school. As a mother I want my children to be there for each other.

My advice to other parents is to accept them the way they are and to just focus on loving them. Embrace your child's hobbies and don't discourage them. Nicole loves dance and I have always supported her passion for it.

Sometimes working out what you should do as a parent can become too much to handle by yourself. If this happens, don't be afraid to look for professional support. A counsellor can help you out, but just remember that your child may also benefit from seeing them too.

There is a saying "it takes a whole village to raise a child". If you have to be that village for your child no matter who or what your child is, then be that village".

"Accept them the way they are and focus on loving them."

Nicole Osasa Mano

Nicole is 21 years old and identifies as transgender. She currently working full time in retail and also assists her father in running the family business. Nicole looks forward to studying commerce in the near future.

Final Word

Otto Wendt

My name is Otto Wendt, I was born and raised in South Auckland. I am Samoan, I am a son, I am a brother, I am an uncle and I am gay.

I come from a loving family who support and love me for who I am. However, when I first came out as gay it was definitely an obstacle, not only for myself, but for my family as well. It's a journey that we have gone through together and like everything in life the journey had many high and low points.

I am humbled and grateful to be where I am now with my family. I know from my own experience that this journey was especially difficult for my parents. I had a lot of loving support growing up dealing with my sexuality, but I realise now that there was little support for my parents.

How does a Pacific Island parent deal with raising Fa'afafine/fakeleiti/fiafifine/akavaine/whakawahine/gay/lesbian/transgender child?

I hope this resource goes some way into supporting other families as they too support their child.

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"A Programme of Village Collective for the Pasefika Rainbow Community"

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