

EMELINE AFEAKI-MAFILE'O

GROWING FROM YOUR ROOTS



Emeline Afeaki-Mafile'o

Emeline Afeaki-Mafile'o has created a unique Pasifika approach to mentoring young people that is especially adapted to migrant families. She has established an enterprise that employs a team of young Pasifika people to provide mentoring support and lifeskills education to hundreds of young students in South Auckland.

Two out of every five children born in the Auckland area are from Pasifika ethnic groups, of which the six major groups include Samoan, Cook Island, Tongan, Fijian, Niuean and Tokelauan. 60% of these people were born in New Zealand, and by 2026 they will make up 12% of New Zealand's workforce.

Unfortunately these Pasifika people have the lowest qualification levels of any ethnic group in the country. This is related to the high percentage of Pasifika young people who leave school with little or no formal attainment. Mentoring is a way to help address these gaps in achievement, and it also helps create a bridge from the opportunities and resources of schools to the lives of local families and their communities.

Afeaki-Mafile'o points out that in a country where the majority of European people are getting older, it is the Pasifika groups who have the youthful population: "They will grow to become the future earners and taxpayers of this country. We need to invest in the education and development of these young people now ... so that they can make their fullest contribution to the well-being of New Zealand."

- Afeaki-Mafile'o is a New Zealand-born Tongan (Kolofo'ou and Ha'apai), Samoan (Falefa and Savelalo) and Maori (Ngati Awa). She was raised in the Mangere suburb of South Auckland, and has been involved in youth work in the area since the age of 19. She worked with various social service agencies as she studied and completed three degrees —

a Bachelor of Social Work (with honours), a postgraduate Diploma in Social Sciences, and a Masters of Philosophy in Social Policy.

At the age of 25, Afeaki-Mafile'o began *Affirming Women*, a new support services agency that would connect local young women with role models who could mentor and educate them on various life skills. In particular, Afeaki-Mafile'o targeted those young women who were seen as being "at-risk" because they were identified as being involved in teenage prostitution or had suicidal tendencies. She knows that every young person has potential, and her goal is to ensure that every one of them can connect with an adult who would be a positive influence in helping to achieve that potential.



In the early days of her agency, Afeaki-Mafile'o ran the services from a two-bedroom unit (belonging to a grand-aunt) in Papatoetoe. She survived without government funding, relying instead on donations and church tithes. *Affirming Women* proved successful and gained attention, and government contracts soon followed.

The agency expanded its services to also include mentoring to young men, and children, and the business name was changed to *Affirming Works*. Afeaki-Mafile'o moved into a larger Papatoetoe home in order to accommodate her growing team of Pasifika men and women who had been employed as mentors. Within a short time, over 400 young students each year were participating in an *Affirming Works* mentoring programme in a South Auckland school.

- Mentoring is the process of helping young people achieve wellbeing as they grow into adulthood. The aim of mentoring is holistic personal development which supports physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual wellbeing, and fosters healthy family, community and cultural relationships.

The mentoring process reaches into areas that are not usually accessed by our formal education system. It helps young people establish goals and learning journeys that are woven into a wider context of their communities and cultures.

In the Pacific, the traditional way that young people have been mentored is in the context of large families and community collectiveness. But, to a New Zealand-born generation, their families are faced with completely new challenges which put considerable strain on these traditional bonds. They need to know how to navigate between two worlds and two sets of expectations — the Pālagi (European majority) world and the Pasifika world of their ancestral cultures.

Afeaki-Mafile'o: "As Pasifika people, we share commonalities that set us apart, such as our religious and family beliefs, our identification with culture, our inherently collective response, and our shared history of migration. We have also attempted to import the values and principles found in our home cultures to New Zealand, in order to keep our families healthy.

"The Pālagi majority seems to expect that we should have left part of ourselves and our culture back in the islands, making sacrifices so that our children could fit in. Pasifika youth have to deal with a lot of peer pressure, and the stereotypes of media. There is sometimes a



*Emeline Afeaki-Mafile'o
presenting her social innovation
workshop at the NZSEF Retreat*

real absence of family because their parents are trying to meet the demanding living standards of families in New Zealand, as well as often sending money back to the islands where they have ongoing responsibilities.

“Cultural identity provides an awesome sense of belonging, but it is important to realise that growing into adulthood involves many areas of well-being. Mentoring is a way that we can make sure our kids are well in every area.”

- It was from reflecting on her own journey of exploration into self, cultural and community identity that led Afeaki-Mafile'o to create the innovative *Affirming Works* approach to mentoring.

A major influence, while growing up, was attending an English-speaking, predominantly Pacific Island church. The dominant Pasifika cultures within the congregation included her own Tongan culture, which taught her “... to unashamedly identify myself as a product of Tongan communality, and as a descendant of the Pacific’s oldest kingdom.”

Her main mentor and role model throughout her life has been her paternal grandmother, Emeline Francis Afeaki. This grandmother was an English-Samoan woman who married a Tongan husband and had twelve children. She then left Tonga and emigrated to New Zealand, worked three jobs, and brought all her children and her husband out to settle in South Auckland.

Afeaki-Mafile'o: “My grandma has always been my motivation, partly because I am named after her and also because if I made a name for myself, I felt she would be proud and honoured. She was one of those ladies that, even though she had over sixty grandchildren, twenty great grand-children and three great-great-grandchildren, she managed to make you feel you were her favourite. That’s how I try to make all my young people in my programmes feel: special.”

- *Affirming Works* has created a *collective model* of mentoring which is designed to support the holistic development of any young person, irrespective of their ethnicity. The *Affirming Works* mentor assesses the needs of the young people and organises the encouragement and activities designed to bring into fullness the talents and skills of each individual.

A team of specialist mentors is also available — such as a psychologist or social worker, a literacy and numeracy tutor, or perhaps a sporting or educational coach.

Almost all the *Affirming Works* mentors are fluent in their own Pasifika languages, but the mentoring involves much more than just dialogue. The mentors are expected to be role models who are actively demonstrating the shared Pasifika principles of love, respect, humility and support.

Afeaki-Mafile'o: "These values form the basis of how our Pasifika mentoring is structured. We explain that the programme is *lifestyle-led*, which means we employ mentors who are themselves role models and "walk the talk" of their expectations for the young people. It is *family-oriented* because we highlight the importance of the young person belonging to the collective, including the wider extended family. It is *culturally-encouraged* because we assume that the young person's culture will continue to provide protection and sense of resilience as they develop into adulthood. And the programme is *community-contributed* as we explore opportunities to grow in responsibility and contribute to the community and nation."

The main mentoring programme offered through *Affirming Works* is called *Tupu'anga* (to grow from your roots) and it is delivered to Year 11-13 high school students. Each of the three years has a specific focus and objective:

- Year 11 (Sophomore) *Vision and Engagement* — holistic personal development, learning tools to engage in their academic environment, and the setting of personal goals.
- Year 12 (Junior) *Careers and Leadership* — development of leadership skills through initiating, organising, and implementing activities in their community.
- Year 13 (Senior) *Ambassadors* — the young people formulate and develop their post-school transition plans. They exercise leadership in their school, family and community, and also have the opportunity to act as ambassadors for their cultures and nations.

(left) Taanilasike Isaac Mafile'o, Alipate Mafile'o and Emeline Afeaki-Mafile'o

(right) Viv Maidaborn, Gael Surgenor with baby Sepasetiano William Mafile'o





Affirming Works students

For some of the students, the ambassador year also involves participating in a group trip to Samoa for which they fundraise with sponsorship provided by Air New Zealand and local South Auckland businesses. While in Samoa, the mostly New Zealand-born students mix with Samoan-born young people and explore an ancestral village lifestyle.

Afeaki-Mafile'o: "The students act as ambassadors for South Auckland, and for New Zealand, and help tutor the local youth in English skills. In exchange, they get to explore village life and do things like experience the kava ceremony. The students can't get over the hospitality and the village lifestyle and the huge difference it is compared to living in South Auckland. They are always in tears when they have to come home. And when they do come home, the whole learning process of the last three years seems to 'click' for them. They have a better sense of belonging, and they have a sense of gratitude for who they are. They know the roots of where they have come from, and they understand how this fits and aligns with their goals for the future."

- Local schools are enthusiastic supporters of the Affirming Works programmes, because they help weave the educational environment in with local families, and keep the young people interested and engaged with their personal learning goals. In the years 2006-2008, over 300 students were on the *Tupu'anga* mentoring programme in high schools, and 95% of these students either remained in school, or made successful transitions into higher education or the workforce.

Schools do have an ongoing challenge in getting these mentoring programmes fully funded. In 2009, with changing government priorities combined with the global recession, there was a reduction in funding available to the primary schools in the South Auckland area which meant a loss of the programmes to about 20 primary Schools that *Affirming Works* had been working within for the previous five years.

Afeaki-Mafile'o: "Despite the fact that we have had great success and excellent references, the cut-backs have meant that the schools that want these programmes just can't afford the mentoring programmes from their own resources. So this is our ongoing business challenge:



Emeline Afeaki-Mafile'o and Matele Misa with Tupu'anga Coffee

how to enable *Affirming Works* to achieve sustainability, and ensure that these mentoring programmes are more freely available in South Auckland schools.”

One of the projects that grew out of discussions with Afeaki-Mafile'o at the Social Entrepreneur Fellowship retreats, was the concept of creating an Alumni Association of former students that had been through the various *Affirming Works* mentoring courses. This project has now been established and is being partly funded by the Ministry of Youth Development, and the Todd Foundation.

Afeaki-Mafile'o: “We wanted to make sure that the young people were finishing university, or finishing the places that we were helping them to transition into. We have funding for 45 students, which is really a bit like having our own fellowship. This group meets every fortnight in our offices, and we are encouraging them to take more of a leadership role where they can give us feedback on our programmes, and tell us what has been useful for them.”

- While Afeaki-Mafile'o has been the main driver behind the *Affirming Works* mentoring services, she has also established and operated a separate business, called *Fofola Consultancy*, which offers social policy advice to various New Zealand and Pacific Island agencies, helping them to create social development models specifically for Pasifika people.

Afeaki-Mafile'o: “The meaning of *fofola* traditionally relates to when the older ladies in our culture would come and take the fine mats out of storage and air them. I liked the idea of unrolling the mat, and the proverb *Fofola a'e fala katau talanoa* means “to roll out the mat and invite people to come and talk with truth and transparency.”

This consultancy work has led Afeaki-Mafile'o to serve on a number of boards as a Pacific Island advocate and representative on issues of mentoring, justice and social development. She has also gained greater recognition for her work and example as a young social entrepreneur, and in 2006 was a recipient of the Sir Peter Blake Emerging Leaders Award.

- In 2010, *Affirming Works* moved *Affirming Works* premises into a former café in Otahuhu. This move was partly in order to save money because of the reduction of government funding to schools for the mentoring schemes.

Meanwhile, Afeaki-Mafile'o and her family returned home to Tonga on one of their regular trips to reconnect with their relations. While there, they thought they would buy some Tongan-grown coffee for use in their Otahuhu café. Tonga has many farms growing organic and fair trade coffee, which had been marketed under the brand of *Royal Coffee*. There was a local roasting and packaging operation (which had been set up originally with aid and development resources from France).

She got a number for the *Royal Coffee* and rang to place an order. The person on the phone asked her: "Are you interested in buying the coffee? ... or would you like to buy the coffee business?" It turned out that the firm had fallen into mismanagement and was now being auctioned off in a liquidation sale by its bank and creditors. Afeaki-Mafile'o and her family put in a bid, and quickly found themselves as the new owners of the business which involved managing growing contracts with 14 local farms, operating a roasting and packing operation, and distributing to local cafes.

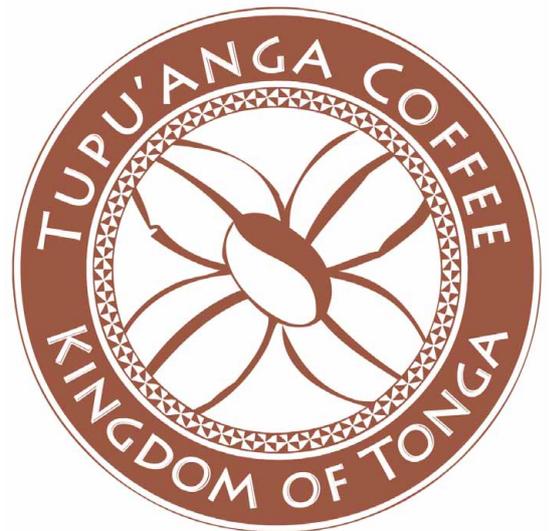
Back in New Zealand, the management of the *Affirming Works* programmes was handed over to Matele Misa (who had been part of the mentoring team from the beginning), while Afeaki-Mafile'o and her husband shifted their family home back to Tonga, so that they could concentrate on the new business.

The name of the coffee has been changed to *Tupu'anga*, and the business has been re-established as both a fair trade and social enterprise. By roasting the Arabica beans before they sell them, the business is also able to pay local farmers a fair price above the worldwide coffee commodity rate. They can also able to employ many more local Tongan workers on the coffee farms, and in the roasting and packaging of the coffee.

A substantial amount of coffee is exported monthly to *Affirming Works* in South Auckland, and is sold to assist with the cost of delivering the *Tupu'anga* youth mentoring programmes.

Afeaki-Mafile'o: "My husband grew up farming in this community. In Tonga, every man is entitled to five hectares of land when they turn 16 years - but there's still 80% of the land unused. We've always wanted to do something for Tonga, particularly in terms of developing employment and building the skills of the workforce ... but it had never really been the right time for us. Now, with this coffee business, we feel we are able to return to Tonga and give something back to our friends and neighbours."

- During the first three years of the Social Entrepreneur Fellowship, Afeaki-Mafile'o gave birth to two sons. This has meant a quick learning curve on how to juggle a very full family life with her entrepreneurial activities and her wider community responsibilities. But she has been determined to practice what she preaches ... and actively continue her own learning journey.



She would like to extend the *Affirming Works* programmes — nationally and internationally — so that more students can benefit from the innovative Pasifika approach to mentoring. She is also keen to raise the profile of social entrepreneurship within the South Pacific Region and encourage and mentor more young people to explore social enterprise as a career option.

In 2008, she travelled to Britain and Europe with her family, and attended the annual Skoll World Forum on Social Entrepreneurship at Oxford University. This conference gave her a much broader insight into the world-wide network of social entrepreneurs.

Afeaki-Mafile'o: "I felt so inspired listening to the keynote speakers — global and influential leaders such as Jimmy Carter who spoke on his work to eradicate diseases around the world, and Al Gore speaking of his movement addressing climate change. It was something which provided me with a new perspective on what "global" means. I was surprised at the level of participation by business-people at the conference, and the pragmatic focus on entrepreneurial perspectives.

"But more significantly, I was struck by just how ordinary most people were ... even though they all seemed to be achieving some extraordinary results in their work. I think that often our good intentions are undermined by the fear that we are too ordinary and insignificant in the big scheme of things, and that nothing we can do will actually help the people suffering from Aids, or affected by a natural disaster, or feel alienated from society in some way. We tend to think that great social change is the work of heroes — which is an intimidating view of reality that keeps most people on the couch. But a community or collective approach is about how we all get involved and take responsibility for the challenges. Community responsibility is about creating an inter-dependence where we all creating the future that we want to see in our nation."

(left) Dame Sukhi Turner (Chair of the Social Innovation Investment Group), Emeline Afeaki-Mafile'o and Philip Patston before leaving New Zealand for Skoll Forum at Oxford University

(right) Said Business School at Oxford University — venue of the Skoll World Forum on Social Entrepreneurship

- Afeaki-Mafile'o feels that the New Zealand Social Entrepreneur Fellowship itself has been a form of peer mentoring for her own aspirations: "As our Retreats unfolded, it seemed more to me like a support group for addicts — people who are addicted to finding ways to change the world and create social change. Often when you are on a track to wanting to



change the world you don't have time to try and see the world from your neighbour's view. This learning community has been a unique opportunity to gain a completely different and valuable perspective on my own goals and projects.

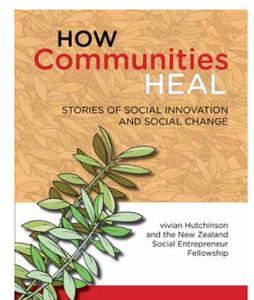
“Initially, the diversity and experiences of the fellowship members made me feel most uncomfortable. Yet, three years later, I have realised that my involvement in such diversity has very much influenced the way I now think and see the world. I have come to understand that in social entrepreneurship there are no right or wrong answers. It's about finding what you believe is correct in your own heart. And the fellowship has been motivating for me to continue pursuing what is in my heart, and know that I am not alone.”

Notes and Links

- This article by vivian Hutchinson is part of the [HOW COMMUNITIES HEAL project](#) — stories of social innovation and social change featuring members of the New Zealand Social Entrepreneur Fellowship. It is available online at tinyurl.com/hchafeaki
- *Emeline Afeaki-Mafile'o* can be contacted at emeline@affirming.org.nz, or at Affirming Works, P.O.Box 23761, Hunters Corner, Papatoetoe, New Zealand.
- The *Affirming Works* website is at www.affirming.org.nz
- *Pasifika demographics ...* Pacific people make up 7.2% of the New Zealand population as a whole increasing to 9.8% by 2026. 60% of Pacific people are now born in New Zealand. The younger age profile of Pacific people means they are making up an increasing proportion of our working age population — up to 12% of those aged 15 to 39 by 2026. The Pacific population is concentrated in urban areas with around two thirds living in Auckland and two in every five births in the Auckland area are Pacific.

Pacific peoples are the lowest qualified of all ethnic groups on average although there has been some improvement in recent years. In 2007, 44% of Pacific people have no qualifications, this compares to 25% for New Zealand as a whole. This could be related to lower levels of attainment at school and a higher percentage of Pacific school leavers with little or no formal attainment, which at 6.3% remains above the average of 4.9%. — from *Pacific Jobs Fono Background Paper February 2009* (Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs) available at tinyurl.com/3tsxhoe

- In 2007, 44% of Pasifika people had no qualifications, compared to 25% for New Zealand as a whole.
- “*Briefing to the Incoming Minister of Pacific Island Affairs*” November 2008, available on Pacific Island Affairs website at tinyurl.com/3s5espc
- “*Affirming Works — A Collective Model of Pasifika Mentoring*” by Emeline Afeaki-Mafile'o (2007) published in “*Penina Uliuli: Contemporary Challenges in Mental Health for Pacific Peoples*” edited by Philip Culbertson, Margaret Nelson Agee, and Cabrini 'Ofa Makasiale (University of Hawaii Press 2007)



- *Pacific Progress Report—report on the economic status of Pacific Peoples in New Zealand*, by Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs and Statistics New Zealand (2002)
- “Values — Emeline Afeaki-Mafile’o” chapter in book “*Pasifika Women — Our Stories in New Zealand*” by Sandra Kailahi (pub Reed 2007) ISBN: 978 0 7900 1180 6
- “*Island Girl — Emeline Afeaki-Mafile’o*” by Fiona Rotherham in *Unlimited* 27 August 2006
- *Sir Peter Blake Emerging Leaders Award* ... see tinyurl.com/yfxyjpp
- Tupu’anga Coffee website is at www.tupuanga.com. The New Zealand agent is Affirming Works c/- Matele Misa, 225 Great South Road, Otahuhu, Auckland phone 09-276-4508 or 021-278-6061.
- *Emeline Afeaki-Mafile’o* interviewed on Radio New Zealand *Ideas* programme 12 September 2010 available at www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/ideas/20100912
- *Emeline Afeaki-Mafile’o comments* taken from workshop presentations at the NZ Social Entrepreneur Fellowship Retreats at Long Bay 2007 — 2009, and at the NZSEF Social Innovation Dialogue on Youth Issues August 2008. Also interviews with vivian Hutchinson 15 August 2008, 30 June 2009, and interview for the HOW COMMUNITIES HEAL project 8 March 2010.
- More articles in this series, and further information on the HOW COMMUNITIES HEAL project can be found at www.nzsef.org.nz/howcommunitiesheal
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