



LIKE MINDS, LIKE MINE
Whakaitia te Whakawhiu i te Tangata



IMOA'S STORY

COUNTERING STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION ASSOCIATED WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

Imoa's story

Reverend Imoa Setefano is junior pastor at the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa in Papatoetoe, Auckland.

He was first diagnosed with a mental illness – bipolar disorder – in 1994. Since then, he has had many experiences and one almost prevented him from completing his theological studies.

He says, “That was hard, because I’ve been in the church my whole life and service, devotion and faith have always been a part of my life.

“We’d gone to Samoa to study when this other experience occurred. At the time I thought it was really unfair, because we had been given the all clear from the psychiatrists that I was well enough to attend the college.

“The local community gave me the label ‘vale’, which is associated with images of being an outcast and when students found out about my experience they distanced

themselves from me and spread rumours about me. They took advantage of my co-operative spells by taking things from me when I was hyper-manic and then not returning them.

“I thought being in the 21st century – and being a theological college that is supposedly serving Christ – there should have been more awareness around how to perceive my illness and how to integrate that knowledge as part of the ministry.”

Imoa’s wife Amelia said that the discrimination extended to the rest of the family too.

However, she says they did have some good friends in Samoa that supported her, and when Imoa came back, his academic achievements took some of the discrimination away.

Imoa believes that it is important to be open about an experience of mental illness. Once it is out in the open, it can change people’s

opinion about those with experience of mental illness.

They believe that discrimination in the wider population still exists because people lack information.

In Samoan culture, religious leaders have a lot of power, “so if we can inform and educate church leaders, then we can instil that understanding in the rest of the community and pass it down to other generations.”

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WHAT YOU DO MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

For those who want to support someone experiencing mental illness, Imoa advises having people around you who will listen and support you.

“My family have been the rock of my recovery. They remind me that, ‘hey, you are still loved’ ‘You are still part of our family,” he says.

“So, just be there through all the ups and downs. Don’t take things personally – look past the things that have occurred and know that recovery is always possible. Just stay with them.”



What you do matters

Kiwis pride themselves on a sense of fair play. Yet a recent Like Minds survey on discrimination showed that over 80% respondents had faced some form of discrimination as a result of disclosing their experience of a mental illness.

This is a worrying reflection of the level of unfair treatment still faced by people with experience of a mental illness today.

- For people with experience of a mental illness, fairness is as important as therapies and treatment.
- Attitudes within the wider public have improved but unfair treatment still exists.
- Fair treatment allows every person to be the best they can be.
- Every individual, family, employer and organisation can contribute to a fairer society that better includes and values people with experience of a mental illness.

What can you do to make the difference?

If someone you know has experience of mental illness, these are some of the things you can do to support them.

- Carry on as normal – just be the family member, friend or colleague you’ve always been and stay in touch.
- Offer practical support, help and understanding.
- Educate yourself about mental health and wellbeing.
- Use positive and encouraging language when talking about mental illness.
- Value and respect the person’s decisions about his or her mental wellbeing.
- Talk about the future, make plans to do things together.
- And speak up if your family member, friend or anyone you see is being treated unfairly.

“Live so that when your children think of fairness and integrity, they think of you.”

H. Jackson Brown, Jr. (author)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

This resource was produced by the Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand on behalf of the Ministry of Health’s Like Minds, Like Mine programme.

For more information on countering stigma and discrimination, or the Like Minds, Like Mine programme, visit: www.likeminds.org.nz

The Mental Health Foundation works with the media in a number of ways to promote the work of the Like Minds, Like Mine programme and raise awareness of issues relating to stigma

and discrimination. If you have a media enquiry please contact our Auckland office and ask to speak to one of our communications team:

Tel: 09 300 7010 | Email: communications@mentalhealth.org.nz

For more information about mental health and mental illness, contact the Mental Health Foundation Resource and Information Centre in Auckland:

Tel: 09 300 7030 | **Fax:** 09 300 7020
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Local Like Minds, Like Mine contact details: