

Reflections from Lululeen Santos on the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre's Regional Training Program

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'I've taken a keen interest to the domestic violence work,' explains Lululeen Santos, 'because back home, it's still something that's kept behind closed doors. Not everybody talks about it. Not everyone wants to talk about ending violence against women and children.'



*Lululeen Santos. Photo credit: Sian Rolls/Pacific Women Support Unit. With funding through the Australian Government's Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (*Pacific Women*) program, Ms Santos participated in the*

most recent four-week, Fiji-based Regional Training Program run by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre.

She participated as part of her role of seven years, as the Women's Interest Coordinator for the Department of Health and Social Services for Pohnpei State, Federated States of Micronesia.

At the end of the Regional Training Program, she has been 'inspired more' by the learning experience.

'[The course has] really cleared or opened my eyes into seeing what has been taught and what is really true in relation to my basic human rights. I really think that this training has given me a lot more than I expected. It's just given me a lot of ideas,' Ms Santos reflected.

The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre has run the Regional Training Program since 1995, supporting more than 600 women and men from around the Pacific who work to end violence against women. Violence against women prevalence rates in Pacific Island countries are among the highest rates in the world. The course uses a feminist framework, supporting participants to develop skills to recognise and be able to respond with a survivor-centred approach to those impacted by gender-based violence.

Ms Santos explained this type of work is not easy.

'Even my husband tells me he's worried about me working in this area or talking about violence against women and children because I won't be liked as much as just another person!' she said. 'So, yes, it's a great challenge. It's a big gap that really... if I don't do it, who's going to? If I don't talk about it, who will ever talk about it?'

Course participants learn lobbying and advocacy skills and develop strategies to promote gender equality in their workplaces and in the wider community.

'One of the things that I really wanted to do when I get back home,' said Ms Santos, 'I'm looking towards doing a radio spot ... just to share information on eliminating violence against women as well as gender topics, anything that deals with our domestic violence and [ending violence against women] and perhaps our gender policy. We just launched our [Federated States of Micronesia] Gender Policy in 2016 and so it would be good to share all of those in this radio spot.'



*Graduates with trainers of the October 2019 Regional Training Program.
Photo credit: FWCC/Facebook page.*

The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre is also the Secretariat of the Pacific Women's Network on Violence Against Women, providing ongoing support for 24 organisations in 13 Pacific Island countries to address the issue of violence against women and children in their diverse communities.

'What's one change that I would like to see?' pondered Ms Santos, in preparing to return home to Pohnpei. 'I guess some sort of equality. Not just with violence against women, just some equality where a woman feels safe to do whatever she wants to; is prospering, progressing because she's done the work.'