

#WeAreChurch

accept  
me for  
who I am

Supporting Pasifika young  
people with disabilities



Le Va

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**Talofa lava**

Kam na mauri

*Fakaalofa lahi atu*

**Halo olaketa**

***Malo e lelei***

Ni sa bula vinaka

**Malo ni**

***ia orana***

fakatalofa atu

*kia ora koutou*



## *Pasifika people with disabilities can live the life they want, the way they want.*

For young Pasifika disabled, churches play a positive role in connecting and supporting their wellbeing.

This booklet supports four posters designed to encourage Pasifika churches to support and cherish the disabled young people in their congregations.

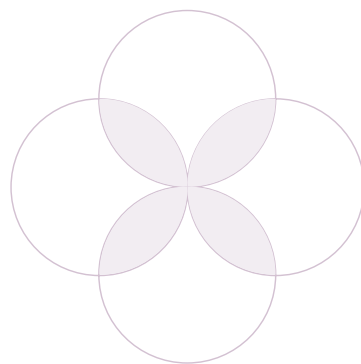
The three stories in this booklet were written by Pasifika young people, in their own words.

Their stories emphasise how churches and congregations can encourage and support people with disabilities – by helping them connect with each other, providing leadership to build confidence in themselves, and empowering them to show their love of Pasifika culture and faith in a meaningful, honest way.

Le Va's purpose is to ensure Pasifika families and communities are reaching their full potential.

Le Va would like to acknowledge and thank all those who provided advice and support into the development of this resource. In particular we acknowledge and thank:

- PHAB Pasifika, particularly Paul Lavea and Kramer Hoeflich
- Lavinia Lovo, Mavae Tongia, Delvin Godinet – their families and church communities.



Being a youth  
leader is my  
calling



**Name:** Delvin Godinet (22 years)

**Ethnicity:** Samoan (Alesa)

**Church:** Manurewa Baptist Church

Talofa lava my name is Delvin, and my family come from the beautiful village of Alesa in Samoa. My siblings and I were born here in the land of the long white cloud. Family is a big part of me. I love going to church, look forward to *To'ona'i* (Sunday lunch), being a part of our family fono (meetings) or just hanging out with cousins and friends.

In 2009 while playing rugby for school I went in for a tackle and the opposing player's knee hit me flush in my neck. I wasn't able to continue the game but I was able to walk off the field and shake it off. The next day, as I was getting ready for church and walking towards the front door, I blanked out. I woke up in hospital. The doctors said I suffered a stroke - the impact of the knee hitting into my neck caused a blockage, which stopped blood flow to my brain.

My life changed then. I had to start all over - it was like becoming a baby again. To learn how to walk, read, talk etc. After four years of dedication, and the love and support of my family, church and friends, and by the grace of God, I have been able to recover three quarters of my strength and my abilities – to me, this is a wonderful blessing.

Through this experience I knew I wanted to help others. Working alongside our youth pastor, and sharing my journey with our church youth on how to deal with adversity and challenges, I was able to make an impact. I studied and graduated with a diploma in Youth Work. I know now being a youth leader is my calling.

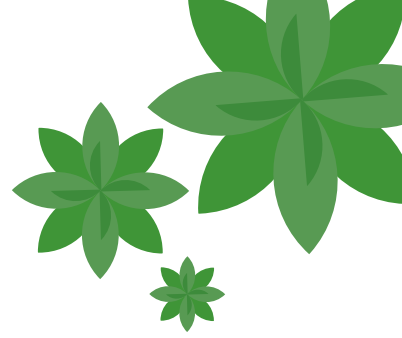
**#HisCalling**

**#WeAreChurch**



# I love sharing my favourite scripture





**Name:** Mavae Tongia (20 years old)

**Ethnicity:** Tongan (Ma'ufanga/Vava'u)

**Disability:** Dwarfism

**Church:** Free Church of Tonga Onehunga

Malo e lelei. My name is Mavae Tongia and I am 20 years old.

I was born in the Kingdom of Tonga. My family and I had to move to New Zealand when I was five years old due to medical reasons. I wasn't always confident in myself, and while I was growing up I often was shy and quiet.

My church is a place which supported me and my family. For me, church is a place where I come to learn more about my culture and the word of God while being accepted by my peers. I love sharing my favourite scripture from the Bible, which is from the book of Isaiah, and have felt and seen the support to my family from our church.

In high school I tried to join the schools Polyfest group but I was pushed away. They told me that I didn't look like the rest of the group, and I wasn't accepted for who I am and couldn't be a part of Polyfest. After I was pushed away I joined PHAB Pasifika who supported me completely, and let me be part of the dance group PHusion 2.0. I was able to dance with a group of friends that made me feel accepted. Being on the grand stage at Polyfest was amazing, but being part of the group and sharing in the practices and hard work to get there gave me the confidence and belief to trust in myself and be the best that I know I can be.

**#WeAreChurch**

**#LittleManForTheBigMan**

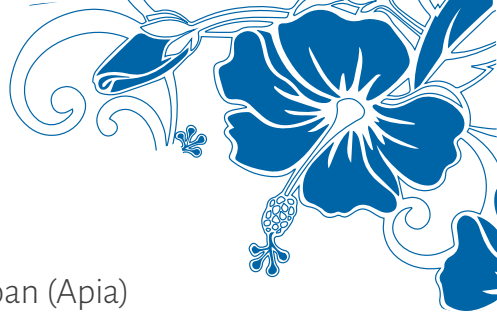
To learn more about





ut my culture &  
praise God  
helps me grow





**Name:** Lavinia Lovo (19 years old)

**Ethnicity:** Tongan (Kolofo'ou)/Samoan (Apia)

**Church:** Tamaki Community Church

One of my challenges from previous churches was acceptance of being the only one in a wheelchair. I mean they didn't know how to treat me. So they would assume I can't dance or perform in church plays.

But one of my passions is performing – especially being able to perform the *Fa'aevagelia* (Samoan Spiritual Dance). It helps me so much to grow spiritually and learn more about my culture. Exalt Otahuhu Samoan Youth has helped me with my journey, to practice what inclusion looks like in the church settings through the *Fa'aevagelia*.

PHAB Pasifika was invited to perform at Ta'imua Easter Youth rally where our theme was “we are made in the image of God”. We got to perform and did a play about what we looked like. I think that day we changed the mind set of some people.

#WeAreChurch

#WheelsInChurch

#SoulSisterForTheSoulMr



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#HisCalling

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#LittleManForTheBigMan



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