

Australia Awards Women's Leadership Initiative

Mobilising Youth to eliminate gender-based violence in the Solomon Islands: Lessons from the Side by Side Movement

Summary Paper



Photo: Neil Nuia for Oxfam

Introduction

About the Women's Leadership Initiative

The Australia Awards Women's Leadership Initiative (WLI) is an Australian Government initiative promoting women's leadership and building a future generation of women leaders from the Pacific region. WLI offers Australia Awards emerging leaders from Pacific countries skills development, networking opportunities and mentoring to build leadership capability and boost gender equality. Open to scholars studying at Australian universities and institutions, the program also aims to forge links between women leaders in the Pacific and Australia.

About this summary paper

In November 2021, WLI hosted a virtual [Learning & Networking Event](#) on *Mobilising Youth to Eliminate Gender-Based Violence in the Solomon*

Islands: Lessons from the Side by Side Movement. The online event included a presentation, break-out discussions, and a Q&A with the movement organisers. It was attended by Australia Awards scholars from the Pacific Islands, WLI mentors and alumni, DFAT representatives, and individuals working in community development and gender equality. This document summarises key insights and discussions from the event and is intended for engaging youth and campaigning to prevent gendered violence in the Australian-Pacific region.

About the Side by Side Movement

The [Side by Side Movement](#) is a first of its kind, long-term social norms campaign targeting urban youth to use arts-based activism to prevent gender-based violence in the Solomon Islands. Originally part of Oxfam International's global

[Enough Campaign](#) to end violence against women, Side by Side was co-created in 2017 by Kiri Dicker and Loretta Taika when countries around the world were invited to design off-shoot campaigns in their own contexts. Challenging the social norms that can drive gendered violence, the campaign is co-lead by young people and youth organisation, Dreamcast Theatre, overseen by Oxfam, and receives philanthropic support from individuals.

About the Co-Founders

Kiri Dicker is a WLI mentor and freelance gender and social inclusion consultant with over a decade of experience working with a range of development actors in the Indo-Pacific region. She has extensive technical expertise in the prevention of gender-based violence and worked as a Gender Justice Advisor at Oxfam Australia in Solomon Islands at the time of co-creating Side by Side.

Loretta Taika (known widely by her stage name “Eil”) is a mother, singer, artist and creative entrepreneur from Solomon Islands. She is well known for her arts-based advocacy, which she undertakes through the Patella Legacy, an organisation that she founded to honour the loss of her younger sister’s life to gender-based violence. She is a survivor of and advocate against gender-based-violence.

Who does Side by Side target?

Side by Side targets urban youth who have “dropped out of school” and represent the majority of under-15-year-olds in Solomon Islands. Preliminary campaign research identified that this target group is not engaged with educational or church institutions, and that a lack of appropriate resources and role models that promote healthy relationships leads young Solomon Islanders to turn to peers and popular culture for attitudinal and behavioural cues.

“...we identified a gap in reaching out to young people who were not receiving any positive messages in the school system. We deliberately did not engage with Churches, mostly because when we researched our target group and asked them where they got their information about relationships from, the Church did not get mentioned! They mostly got their information from musicians, influencers, peers, etcetera. We wanted to make sure the campaign was seen as ‘cool’ by young people.”
Kiri Dicker

Despite the majority of Solomon Islands’ population living rurally, the decision not to target rural youth was based on the campaign’s reliance on the virtual “spread of media”, which is often limited in rural settings where internet access is limited / out of reach.

“There are better ways to prevent violence in rural settings, and campaigning probably isn’t one of them ... there were tens of thousands of people living in urban areas, and they were increasingly using social media.”

Kiri Dicker

How is Side by Side run?

The campaign is “largely run by volunteers”, with overall direction driven and overseen by a steering committee of youth representatives. A large amount of the creative output is led by Dreamcast Theatre, a youth-led Solomon Islands theatre company.

“The plan is to eventually transition the campaign into ownership of Dreamcast Theatre, so in the future it will be truly youth-led.”

Kiri Dicker



Photo: Side by Side Facebook

Why arts-based activism?

Side by Side engages and mobilises young urban Solomon Islanders to use and celebrate art for collective activism. It uses a mix of media (modern and traditional dance, theatre, live and recorded music, songwriting, photography, moving image, street and traditional art), engaging young people to create, share and celebrate art that challenges harmful gender stereotypes and violence-supportive attitudes and behaviours. The campaign promotes gender equality and includes young people of all backgrounds and levels of ability in the creation and presentation of art and events.

“There were so many young people in the Solomon Islands with this enormous creative skillset, but it wasn’t being utilised effectively for activism. The Side by Side campaign is about giving people an outlet to use their creative skills to make change; to prevent gender-based violence.”
Kiri Dicker

How is campaign effectiveness measured?

Because social norms change slowly over decades, are often hard to track, and can be influenced by any number of factors which can’t be correlated or measured, the effectiveness of Side by Side was based on campaign message “penetration” and “approval” levels.

The campaign monitoring and evaluation strategy looked at the rate of urban youth who had heard

about the campaign and whether they could recall key messages, approved of the campaign, and would recommend it to their peers.

“We found measuring these things more useful than trying to measure changes in attitudes and behaviours. Violence prevention programs are difficult to monitor and evaluate at the best of times, because the influence on rates of violence often takes generations to become evident. It’s even harder for a campaign, because it’s difficult to know exactly who was engaged and to what extent. It’s also difficult to know whether the campaign influenced the change you observe, as there are a lot of other anti-violence initiatives happening.” Kiri Dicker

Campaign Strategies to Shift Youth Social Norms

The Side by Side campaign adopted a range of strategies to engage young Solomon Islanders, including:

Incorporating fundamentals of behaviour change

The campaign considers and is built upon three key features required in attempts to positively influence community attitudes and behaviours:

- making others’ good behaviour visible,
- picturing possible alternative behaviours, and
- showing people positively changing, collectively.

Peer-to-peer engagement

To better penetrate the youth target audience, the campaign engages popular young creative ‘influencers’ to spread and build support for campaign messages. Musicians, creatives and rappers perform at Side by Side events, share key messages on their social media pages, and act as public advocates for the campaign. Creatives and young volunteers also act as ‘youth activators’ who mobilise other young people to take messages back to their own communities and networks. The campaign also sponsored youth-led or focused groups, such as local sporting teams, to increase youth awareness.

Young people in the Pacific Islands often report encountering “cultural barriers” to being “taken seriously” by adults when discussing social issues. Being entirely youth led and targeted, the campaign avoids this potential barrier.

“For this campaign the key audience was other young people, not adults, so it was youth communicating directly with other youth. It was not like other campaigns where we are asking adults, leaders, and policymakers to change.” Kiri Dicker

Accessible community ‘roadshow’ events

Accessible, grass-roots music performance is one of the key functions and methods of advocacy for

Side by Side. This involves setting up temporary stages to deliver free music performances in urban sites all over the Solomon Islands to maximise attendance, considering the barriers to attendance that youth living away from town centres face. These barriers include a lack of finance to purchase tickets or transport to events, and social norms and low levels of perceived safety that prevent young women and girls from travelling late at night. Making concerts free of charge also drew larger crowds, incentivising talent to perform for no or little compensation in order to reach a wider audience.

“Side by Side has always been grassroots ... it’s about taking high quality music acts and advocacy that’s fun and people want to listen to into communities ... We set up stages on the side of the road, or anywhere, going to young people where they are. Young women in Solomon Islands particularly don’t have a lot of freedom of movement, so if we do something in centre of town, it’s primarily young men who turn up. Honiara can be really unsafe, particularly at night for young women, and families just won’t let their girls go to a concert. So, we wanted to know everyone had access.”

Kiri Dicker



Photo: Side by Side Facebook

Building empathy through ‘solidarity visits’

In order to “keep the campaign accountable” and promote empathy and compassion, campaigners regularly engage with women affected by men’s violence. This includes “solidarity visits”, during which campaigners would visit and support women’s groups and women taking up temporary accommodation in emergency shelters.

“Solidarity visits, developing empathy, visiting women’s shelters, cooking food for them, helping young people build empathy and create a connection with women’s organisations ... that’s how we try to keep the campaign accountable.” Kiri Dicker

Lessons Learned

Kiri and Loretta offer the advice and lessons they learned co-creating and engaging youth to deliver the Side by Side campaign, including:

Know your target audience

Understanding your target audience is vital to any effective campaigning. For Kiri and Loretta, this meant researching urban youth in the Solomon Islands to understand the types of messages and methods of communication that would best resonate with them.

Carefully select campaign role models

It's vital to choose and partner with 'influencers' and creatives who are able to role model the appropriate healthy behaviours being promoted, and to actively mentor these creatives or work with people who have positively transformed their own attitudes and behaviours.

"You only know what you see, so if the men in your life are not role modelling that good behaviour, you're not going to know. The leaders that we choose through this work need to role model that behaviour to young people. We [work with] hip hop artists and rappers, but they don't always make the best role models... and you need to choose the right people, men particularly, and to make sure they are being mentored or have gone through a process of transformation." Kiri Dicker

Inclusive collaboration is important

Actively collaborating with Solomon Islands groups and organisations that represent the full spectrum of youth, who have diverse interests and can live with disability, continues to be vital to the campaign's success.

Address the drivers of violence

Because it's easy for most people to agree with the blanket statement, 'violence against women must end' and potentially disengage with the campaign, campaign messaging needed to "go deeper" in addressing and preventing the underlying drivers of violence. This is especially the case for communication with young boys who are not yet in "serious relationships" but among whom violence-supportive attitudes can begin to take hold.

"Just turning up to a workshop or a program is not engagement. We want young men to listen, change their attitudes and beliefs, and put them into action in their own lives. One thing I've learnt is that we need to move beyond the slogan of ending violence against women, because it's lost its impact. On the surface everyone says they agree with it. We want to dig a bit deeper, especially with young men, to understand what's driving that violence. In young age, they're not yet in serious relationships, they're not necessarily perpetrating violence yet, but we know some of those attitudes and beliefs driving violence are starting to happen..." Kiri Dicker

Using art to create 'positive from negative' can be healing

In addition to promoting healthy gender-equal messaging, artist Loretta and many others involved in the campaign believe that the process of creating art and involving young people in it, can be restorative and inspire hope.

"I faced a lot of things that I didn't realise were forms of abuse... it's an abused world I'm living in. We heal ourselves through the process of doing art and involving other youth to be part of the projects we are doing. We just look for something that can give them something positive from negative." Loretta Taika

Cultural norms restrict girls' freedom of movement and engagement

Boys and young men are "more free" than girls to engage in the campaign, for example, through in-person attendance at free music events. Culturally, girls experience less freedom, are expected to take on more caring responsibilities at home, and are less likely to be given permission to travel to or attend music events at night due to safety concerns around men's violence.

"There's not a lot for young people, so when an event is on, they really turn up ... but, men are more free than girls, and I see that in a perspective of culture." Loretta Taika

"Young women are often caring for children; helping at home." Kiri Dicker

Securing philanthropic funding can create campaign flexibility

While originally funded by Oxfam, securing philanthropic funding (for A\$300,000 over a three-year period) for the campaign meant it could be executed with more flexibility, autonomy and resources.

"Securing philanthropic funding ... gave us a lot more freedom to be creative, less reporting requirements, and the ability to employ a campaign manager and full-time staff to keep things going." Kiri Dicker

Healthy relationships education is needed in the Solomon Islands

According to Loretta, there is a lack of education and awareness around healthy and respectful relationship education in Solomon Islands, which contributes to violence against women.

"I think from my own perspective, boys from Solomon Islands needs to have a kind of space that men and girls can learn what a healthy relationship is, and whatever is leading to violence; somewhere where these men and girls can educate themselves with things they need to know about; how to ask that girl out; all of that stuff ... there's a lack of that in the Solomons." Loretta Taika

Avoid putting non-violent men on a ‘pedestal’

Delivering the campaign effectively requires celebrating healthy, respectful behaviour and behavioural transformations while being cautious not to over-congratulate men for non-violence.

“We want to create a space to go through a process of transformation but not reward them for it. Not being violent is not something you deserve a reward for.”
Kiri Dicker

Acknowledge the potential danger advocacy puts women in

In the Pacific Islands and globally, women advocating for a violence-free society can be at greater risk of abuse and vitriol themselves – particularly from people known to them.

“You know your rights, but you don’t want to break up the family; the community. That’s the situation.”
Loretta Taika

“When we ask women to join us in advocacy around violence, we really are putting them at risk.” Kiri Dicker

Always take time for self-care

Loretta and Kiri share the strategies for self-care they use in their activism journeys:

- first, acknowledge that “this is really hard work”,
- take time to do something “just for you”,
- set boundaries,
- know it’s okay to take a break,
- accept that you can’t intervene in every violent situation, and
- understand ‘secondary’ or ‘vicarious’ trauma and when to practice more self-care.

Loretta and Kiri acknowledge the lack of Pasifika self-care resources available to those experiencing or at risk of vicarious trauma.

“I listen to positive music. I do crystal ball meditations. Just something ... not focused on what is depressing, but on myself. Go for a long walk and get yourself tired.”
Loretta Taika

“Sometimes you just need to step away, and for me the big challenge is setting boundaries.”
Kiri Dicker



Photo: Side by Side Facebook

Conclusion

The information in this summary paper was shared during the WLI Learning & Networking event, *Mobilising Youth to Eliminate Gender-Based Violence in the Solomon Islands: Lessons from the Side by Side Movement*. It is intended for actors engaging youth and designing campaigns to prevent gendered violence in the Australian-Pacific region.

Interested? Want to know more?

For more information on the *Women’s Leadership Initiative*, Learning & Networking events, and how you can get involved, visit <https://womensleadershipinitiative.org.au/> or email: info@australiaawardsleadership.org

Support the Side by Side Movement

Stay engaged with the Side by Side movement, Loretta, and Kiri, on social media

Side by Side	FB @sidebysidemovement	IG @sidebysidemovement
Loretta	FB @ellmusik @patella-legacy-	IG @lorettataika
Kiri	FB @councillorkiri	IG @kiridicker

Watch and share video creative from the campaign:

- [She’s a Fighter](#), Ellenor x Jammin x Bibao x Headrush x Steezy
- [Stairway to Peace](#) Patella Legacy
- [We Will Rise](#) Patella Legacy