# **CULTURAL RESILIENCE**

Alternatives to Incarceration Studying protective factors in the Cook Islands Meg Perkins 12 August 2011

# OVERREPRESENTATION 2267 PER 100,000

- When we see that Indigenous Australians have an incarceration rate 14 times higher than non-Indigenous people, we know one thing.
- People do not go to prison because they are bad!
- Overrepresentation of one community in prison clearly shows us that social factors are of prime importance unique risk factors for Indigenous people include colonisation and all that implies.

#### **PROTECTIVE FACTORS**

- Homel, Lincoln & Herd, 1999
- Indigenous people and protective factors
- Attachment bonds
- Self-confidence
- Cultural Resilience
- What exactly is cultural resilience?

# CULTURAL RESILIENCE



#### HOW DOES A CULTURE BUILD RESILIENCE?

- Resilience is not a **trait** that some children or some cultures have. Resilience **develops** through interpersonal and social mechanisms that compensate for risk.
- Put simply, relationships and social networks can change the course of a child's life and the way a community functions.
- Teachers can take a child to sports practices and keep him/her away from alcohol & other drugs.
- Indigenous communities with strong leadership and less experience of racism have less crime. McCausland and Vivian (2010)

#### THE COOK ISLANDS THEN AND NOW

• A self-governing state created by colonisation • Associated with New Zealand, citizens, aid • 2 million square kilometres of ocean, 15 islands Maori language, Christian missionaries 1825 0 • Schools on every island, high schools on some • Annexation by NZ, English compulsory 1901 • European business owners, married local people • Hotels, pay \$5 per hour, CI people go to NZ • Tourist industry creating inequality

# TE MAEVE NUI



#### CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Missionary blue laws (no holding hands)
Prisons on islands in 19<sup>th</sup> century
Compulsory road work

- Theft and burglary
- Hungry children, neglect, abuse, run away
- Steal food, money, alcohol, iPods, laptops

• Family violence, domestic violence, fights

#### THE COOK ISLANDS

- One small prison, 30 prisoners
- Rate was said to be 126 per 100,000
- Colonised country, still associated with NZ
- Population decimated by European diseases
- Missionaries attempted to destroy the culture
- Language weakened by compulsory English
- Land leased by Europeans \$1 per year
- Once for plantations, now for beachfront hotels
- Wage labour weakened primary production

# RISK, CULTURAL RESILIENCE AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE COOK ISLANDS

- Risk factors
- School failure and/or expulsion
- Parents abusive and/or neglecting child
- Child drinking, smoking marijuana
- Community protective factors
- The feeding child/relative caring for child
- School, church, sports and cultural activities
- Work, agricultural activities still possible
- After offending, probation/prison mentors

#### ALTERNATIVE PROSOCIAL GROUPS

- Family means extended family and is the first level of protection for the child. This was deliberately broken down in Australia.
- School is the second level of protection. This is where a child learns that s/he belongs to the community. No child should ever be expelled.
- Cultural activities provide an opportunity to learn identity, spirituality, arts and crafts
- Sports programs can divert young people into positive, prosocial groups
- Employment is the third level of protection and one family farm provided that feeding pigs

# PLANTING TARO



#### **COMMUNITY FACTORS**

- Racism is almost unknown in the Cook Islands
- Europeans married into the community, or left
- Also a few Chinese businessmen married ...
- Until recently, no other foreigners on the islands
- That is not to say that there is no racism!
- But, usually, Cook Islanders only experience racism when they go to Australia or Aotearoa
- One young man said that he laughed when they called him a Coconut in New Zealand
- Another was upset when he was called a Negro

#### LEARNING CULTURE AT SCHOOL



# WELCOME FOR NZ VISITORS



#### CHURCH IS IMPORTANT IN THE ISLANDS



#### COOK ISLANDERS LOVE RUGBY



# COMMUNITY AND CULTURE



#### PSYCHOLOGICAL SENSE OF BELONGING

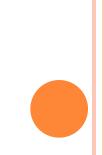


#### THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

- The justice system can act as a fourth level of protection if the staff act as mentors/counsellors instead of merely punishing behaviours
- Police who come from the same community
- Probation officers and prison officers also from the same community as prisoners
- These are our children, we don't want them to go to prison community meeting on marijuana
- Probation officers took offending young people on a camp to teach them life skills need funding

## ARORANGI PRISON FARM





#### LOCKING UP THE CHILDREN

- There are no juvenile detention centres in the Cook Islands and there is no one under the age of eighteen in prison or detention at the moment
- Building of a children's home was proposed and vetoed by the leaders of the community
- Most children are well cared for by members of the extended families or feeding parents
- Those who fall through the net are cared for by the police, probation and prison officers!

# ARORANGI PRISON



#### My Family is the prison

- The Police and the Prison Officers know the prisoners as members of the community
- They are all related/connected in some way
- For some of the young people, the prison is their family and the place that they get food and work, friendship and adult support
- It was very clear that most of the young people were well supported by their families, and by the various youth groups, church, sports and dance
- It was when the family and community groups failed that substance abuse/offending occurred

# LAUGHTER INSIDE THE FENCE



#### CROSS CULTURAL RESEARCH

- Showed that risk factors apply .....
- Families with substance abuse problems
- School difficulties are the first sign of trouble
- Exclusion from school may lead to offending
- Protective factors in this community.....
- Closely bonded family networks
- All Cook Islanders study their own language
- Children learn cultural dancing , music at school
- School reinforces community spirituality
- Church and hereditary leaders, wisdom speakers
- A psychological sense of belonging

# SUBSTANCE ABUSE



# INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS SCHOOLS CAN BUILD RESILIENCE

- Learning who you are, where you belong
- School must not be a place of foreign culture
- Primary school should be for the learning of language and culture as much as for reading, writing and arithmetic
- A S Neil proved 50 years ago that children can play all through primary school and still catch up with academic work in high school

# SCHOOLS CAN ENSURE THAT CHILDREN ARE READY FOR EMPLOYMENT

- Staying at school means learning work skills
- Children who fail at school often use drugs
- If some trauma has occurred and the child has become anxious and depressed, mental health services need to be associated with schools
- Substance abuse issues must be resolved before the young person will be ready for employment
- School is not only for healthy children, it is the place to intervene to restore health
- All of this is possible given adequate funding

#### INEQUALITY IS THE KEY

- Wilkinson & Pickett 2010, economic inequality maintains the gap between groups of people with regard to health and social outcomes
- Research based on United Nations statistics
- The more unequal people's incomes are.....
- The more unequal their life expectancy
- The more unequal their mental health
- The more unequal the incarceration rates, etc
- Sweden and Japan have created equal societies
- It is only our greed that stands in the way.....