

Thesis turns into fun new app

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Victoria's first ever Pacific Studies PhD graduate has turned her research into a free, interactive app aimed at supporting new Pasifika parents.

Esther Cowley-Malcolm – former university lecturer and researcher, current Brainwave Trust Aotearoa educator and a member of the New Zealand Order of Merit - drew on her Health Research Council-funded PhD research from 2013 that explored the perceptions and responses of

Samoan [parents](#) to [aggressive behaviour](#) in young children.

Dr Cowley-Malcolm discovered most of the Samoan parents who took part in her doctoral study lacked an in-depth understanding of childhood aggression

As part of her research, she trialled an educational CD-ROM that taught parents how to identify and manage aggressive behaviour. She found the CD-ROM was a useful educational tool, and could be easily used by parents in the home.

Last year, Dr Cowley-Malcolm approached her cousin, bro'Town animation director Ali Ekeroma Cowley, with the idea of turning the CD-ROM into an animated [app](#) called 'Play Kindly'. She also teamed up with comedian and actor Oscar Kightley who wrote the script, and elicited help from a number of people such as clinicians, app programmers, Pacific health researchers, young Pasifika parents and musician Claudia Gunn.

Dr Cowley-Malcolm says: "It's been a wonderful team effort. Many people have helped translate the research into a practical learning app."

The project also received a grant through the Quaker Peace and Service Aotearoa Loxley Award.

Esther says the project has been inspired by her life's work with vulnerable communities on health and education and her passion for "justice, equality and peace". "Producing this tool is all about serving our communities. That's what I've always been told by my parents: our purpose for being here is to serve.

"Numerous studies indicate without intervention or protective factors, children who manifest aggressive behaviour as infants and pre-schoolers

have a greater likelihood of being violent as older children and adults. Pasifika communities are extraordinarily resilient, but many Pacific people also lack resources and access to effective health services to combat childhood aggression," she says.

Although applicable to all parents, the app's Pasifika characters, humour and language, help make the scenarios relatable to Pasifika people.

Esther is looking forward to the app's official launch next week and feels "extremely blessed" to see her PhD thesis translated "from theory to a tangible application that will hopefully serve our children and young parents well".

The app will be available free to download for iPhones and Android from 5 December from the [Play Kindly App](#) Facebook page.

Provided by Victoria University

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