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# Emotion high at annual Polyfest

IN A room bursting with emotion, Reverend Mosese Taufa delivered a message that perfectly captured the feeling within Junee Correctional Centre's Cultural Centre on Friday.

"Never-the-less, if someone is suffering there is still hope," he said.

"Never-the-less despite the fences and what is happening in this place, these men remember who they are.

"Never-the-less what they did, the situation they are in or what might have happened in their past, they still remember their culture and they still have their families and friends to support them."

Mr Taufua's empowering words resonated with the large crowd of family and friends who gathered in the stunning cultural centre to support their loved ones in the annual Polyfest or Polynesian Festival. Families who made the journey to attend the event, which celebrates the different cultures of Pacific Island nations, were treated to memorable morning of cultural experiences and performances.

Under the guidance and leadership of Fijian-born inmate Jeremy, performers produced a spectacular show featuring Samoan, Tongan, Cook Island and New Zealand ceremonial war dances or haka, and a demonstration showcasing the traditional Maori technique for facial and body tattooing.

Inmates and staff also treated their enthralled audience to a number of musical performances including *Talofa Lava*, an indigenous welcoming song.

Jeremy was obviously overwhelmed by the success of the morning, his voice shaking with emotion as he spoke of the pride inmates shared in performing to their vocal and energetic crowd.

"I meant so much to all of us to have our families here with us," he said.

"It was something really special for us to be able to come together from all the different islands to showcase our heritage."

Bringing the festival to life wasn't without its hurdles, with the 34-year-old admitting he initially found it difficult to find willing participants.

"At first it was hard because a lot of the boys weren't interested in their culture and they didn't want anything to do with it," he said.

"But, they have all come a long way and I am really proud of them... and they are really proud of themselves and their culture.

"Most of the boys had never performed in front of the crowd, let alone their families, and they had never learned their haka."

He hopes the experience will be "something the boys hold onto", which will help positively influence and shape their future and eventual return into the community.

Jeremy's beloved mother, who has lived in Sydney for 30 years, played a special role in the celebration beside her son – raising a Fijian flag alongside inmates representing the participating Pacific Island nations.

"I loved having my mum here with me and I loved the whole experience," he said. Inmates had been preparing for the Polyfest event for close to two months.

The schedule of events also included a cheque presentation to FamilyLink Wagga to help the support care and respite service purchase specialised equipment for Albert Wilton, a baby boy born with a rare neurological disorder called Acardi Goutieres syndrome.

Inmates raised and donated \$850 to help FamilyLink improve the little Wagga boy's limited quality of life.



(Left, top) **LEADING BY EXAMPLE:** Respected inmate Jeremy was proud of the efforts of all involved in bringing Polyfest to life at the Junee Correctional Centre.

(Left, middle) **STRENGTH:** An inmate performs a traditional war dance during Polyfest at the Junee Correctional Centre.

(Left, below) **SOULFUL:** Inmates perform a musical number as part of Polyfest.

