

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Hala ki 'Emeasi Level 4 Counselling – Scholarship Recipient

From ICT Advocate to Counsellor: How Etiola is helping build safer, connected futures for Tonga's children

As a mother of three and Hub Coordinator at Tonga Women in ICT, Etiola Mafi saw firsthand how technology could open opportunities for women and young people in Tonga. But she also saw another side of the digital world where many children and families were struggling with stress, isolation, and online risks without the support they needed.

Determined to make a difference, Etiola through a scholarship funded by the Global Partnership for education (GPE) and Save the Children to undertake a Hala ki 'Emeasi Level 4 Counselling Program. The course is helping counsellors, educators, and PTA members across Tonga with practical counselling skills to support the wellbeing of children, young people and communities. Before joining the course, Etiola was deeply concerned about the pressures facing children and youth. From mental health challenges and limited educational opportunities to social isolation, environmental and economic hardship and online risks, she recognised the need for trusted adults in schools and communities who could respond to these issues with Empathy, understanding and professional support.



"I wanted to be someone children and families could turn to when they needed support, especially as they navigate the challenges of both everyday life and the online world," said Etiola.

Through Hala ki 'Emeasi, Etiola developed skills that have transformed her professional and personal life. She learned how to listen actively, build genuine connections, support others through challenges and maintain healthy professional boundaries. The programme also strengthened her self-awareness, helping her become a more reflective and emotionally intelligent leader, mother and community member.

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Today these skills now shape how she leads at Tonga Women in ICT. By integrating counselling approaches into ICT training and community programmes, she is helping to create safe, culturally grounded spaces where women and young people can build both digital skills but also confidence, emotional resilience and wellbeing.

This directly advances the goals of SCA and GPE-funded STG which seeks to strengthen learning environments by equipping counsellors, teachers, and PTA members with tools to support children's wellbeing Alongside their educational development.

For Etiola, the benefits are already visible. She feels better equipped to help children navigate behaviour challenges, emotional struggles, trauma, and online risks such as cyberbullying. Through her work, she encourages children and families to develop coping skills, digital citizenship, and emotional awareness while fostering safer online and offline environments.

"I have already seen positive changes in my community. Stronger relationships, more constructive communication, and improved conflict resolution have helped build greater trust among children, young people, colleagues, and community members," said Etiola.

These early outcomes have strengthened her determination to support even more schools, early childhood centres and community groups through practical counselling skills and trauma informed approaches.

As she prepares to graduate, Etiola reflects on her holistic growth that has transformed her intellectually, personally, and professionally. Supported by the scholarship supported by GPE's STG funding, she is emerging not only as a certified counsellor, but as a confident, self-aware leader helping Tongan children navigate both their everyday lives and the digital world with greater safety, resilience, and hope.