MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Impact Story: Listening First, Guiding Second

By Manase Finau – Church Steward, Youth Leader



I often saw children under 15 wandering the streets after dark, carefree, restless, and vulnerable. Some were experimenting with alcohol and drugs, others misusing mobile phones to bully or steal, and many were caught up in fights at school or in the community. Respect for elders was fading, and church activities no longer drew them in. As both a steward in the church and a youth leader, I felt the weight of these challenges deeply.

Through this counseling program, one lesson stood out above all: **listening is the key**. Too often, we rush to discipline or correct young people without hearing their voices. But when I began to truly listen to their frustrations, their broken family situations, their peer pressures. I realized that listening itself is the doorway to change.

This awareness reshaped how I lead. I've come to believe that every child deserves to be heard before they are corrected. In schools, this same principle applies: teachers and leaders must listen to students before guiding them. Listening builds trust, and trust opens the path to discipline, respect, and learning.

The program also gave me confidence to confront groups and individuals, not with anger, but with understanding. I learned that young people need to be heard before they can be taught. Once they feel listened to, they are more open to lessons about the good and bad uses of technology, about respect for elders, and about the importance of education.

For Tonga's schools, this approach can transform the way we support students:

- **Listening in classrooms**: Teachers taking time to hear students' struggles before addressing behavior.
- **Counseling in schools**: Creating safe spaces where children can speak openly.
- **Digital literacy education**: Helping students understand both the risks and opportunities of technology.
- **Parent-teacher collaboration**: Listening to families as well as children to strengthen discipline at home and school.

This is not just a local issue, it is a national challenge, and indeed a global one. But I am proud to have gained the skills to listen, counsel, and guide. Listening has become my most powerful tool, whether in the church, the prison, or the classroom.

The more counselors we train, the more listeners we create. And with more listening, we can build schools in Tonga that nurture respect, discipline, and hope for our young generations.