EVH - BONUS - Houselessness among NHPI Veterans

Sara Wong: [00:00:00] The value of ʻāina or a strong connection to the land really informs the language that we're using when thinking about being unhoused. So native Hawaiians and indigenous peoples can see their ʻāina or land and connections to their 'ohana or family as their home and do not strictly view the westernized idea of a house with four walls and a roof as a home.

Because of this, the term homeless can carry a different meaning in that Veterans and families who may not have a traditional house under a solid structure, but who have a deep connection to the land and the community that helped to raise them and their families, they may technically be unhoused, but because of this strong connection to their family and the land, they would not consider themselves to be lacking a home or homeless.

Shawn Liu: Welcome to Ending Veteran Homelessness, your firsthand look into our nation's efforts to ensure that every Veteran has a safe and stable place to call home. From the Department of Veterans Affairs, Homeless Programs Office. I'm your host, Shawn Liu.[00:01:00]

If you're a Veteran who's homeless or at risk of homelessness, reach out. Call the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 877-424-3838. Trained counselors are standing by to help 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That number again is 877-424-3838.

Hey everyone, Shawn here. We've got a bonus episode for you again today.

Throughout the life of this show, we've shined spotlights on different sub populations of Veterans who've been impacted by homelessness. We've taken closer looks at how homelessness affects women Veterans, LGBTQ plus Veterans, older Veterans, and Black Veterans.

And for good reason, too. If we're going to truly end Veteran homelessness in America, we need to do it for all Veterans. And in order to do that, we at VA have to stay vigilant to ensure that our programs and services are accessible and effective for all of those Veterans. [00:02:00] Sometimes that means deeply understanding the unique risk factors and barriers that some groups of Veterans may face, and then providing tailored solutions to address those needs.

So, for today's episode, we're going to take a closer look at Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Veterans. What barriers do they face in their journey to permanent housing? Are there ways in which we need to optimize our services to better support them? And how can we honor their culture and heritage along the way?

Those are really great questions. So, to learn more about how homelessness and houselessness impacts Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Veterans, I can think of no one better to talk to than our next two guests.

First, we have Dr. Marissa Sia, a clinical psychologist with the Intensive Virtual Outpatient Evidence Based Psychotherapy Team at the VA Pacific Islands Healthcare System. Today, she's joined by Dr. Sarah Wong, who is also a clinical psychologist, but with the Substance Treatment Clinic at VA Pacific Islands.

Let's just jump right into it. Marissa, Sarah, welcome to the show.

Sara Wong: Hi, Shawn. Thanks for having us.

Marissa Sia: Thanks so much.

Shawn Liu: [00:03:00] Yeah, this is going to be great. And I really appreciate the opportunity to dive into another subpopulation of Veterans. I feel like over the course of this show, one of the kind of sacred duties that we have is to show all of the different corners of Veteran homelessness. Of the people, the actual Veterans who may be impacted by homelessness. And most importantly, not only raising awareness to them about the programs and services that we at VA have, but I know that a lot of homeless providers, we have social workers, we have peer specialists, doctors, and psychologists, and nurses, many of them listened to the show too, and for them, my hope is that we broaden their understanding and their skill and knowledge base about the different Veterans that they may encounter, so that if they do encounter them, the services that they're going to provide are better. And this is just another really, really great opportunity.

And I just also want to acknowledge, both of you had reached out to us at the show, to raise this topic as well, so I'm really, really grateful for the opportunity.

Now both of you are clinical psychologists. We [00:04:00] seldom don't have folks who are closely aligned to VA homeless programs as subject matter

experts, but this is a really, really great opportunity for us to expand our horizons as well.

Let's get to know you a little bit better before we jump into our topic, Marissa, starting with you. Your title is probably like now the second longest title that we ever have. And it's not necessarily your title, but the program that you're with probably has one of the longest program names that we have here at VA, which is fantastic. Tell us a little bit about yourself and your role at VA.

Marissa Sia: I'm a clinical psychologist at the VA Pacific Islands based in Honolulu, Hawaii. So, yes, my title is quite long, or the team that I work for is quite long. It's the Intensive Virtual Evidence Based Psychotherapy Team Program. But, for short, we just call it IVET. So that helps a little bit. And I work with mood disorders predominantly.

A little bit about me is before this position, I completed both my pre doctoral internship and post doctoral residency with the emphasis in rural health and underserved populations here at our VA.

More on a personal note, I am fourth generation Japanese on my [00:05:00] mom's side and third generation Chinese on my dad's side. And my Japanese family immigrated to the island of Hawaii, or the Big Island, to work on the sugar cane plantation fields. And my Chinese side immigrated to Oahu to work as physicians in Chinatown.

An important side note that Sarah and I wanted to make is that we both do not identify as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders, and thus want to be really mindful that we're speaking as out group members around the information that we discussed today. At the same time, I believe Sarah and I share the same desire and passion to bring a deeper understanding of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders and clinical considerations for these populations. During our talk today, we'll aim to be thoughtful and mindful of how we discuss the data and cultural considerations with the understanding that we are translating individuals lived experiences while also wanting to help amplify underrepresented voices and not leaving the task of doing so always on individuals in traditionally marginalized groups.

Shawn Liu: Yeah, those are [00:06:00] really, really great points that you're bringing up. I want to kind of acknowledge, basically, none of us, myself included, are Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander, and there's always a little bit of a faux pas, sometimes a really big faux pas, if you're talking about a community without having representation from the community.

And so, I really, really appreciate the admonition that we are going to do our utmost best to bring respect and honor to this community. Great chance one of us, probably me, is going to screw up and say something incorrect, and I hope that you'll all give me grace and education when I do.

Also, just as an aside yes, the program you're with is IVET, way simpler than what I just mentioned before.

Sarah, let's go to you next. So, you're with the Substance Treatment Clinic at VA Pacific Islands. Tell us about yourself and your role.

Sara Wong: I'm in our Outpatient Substance Treatment Program and so we do service Veterans all across the Pacific Islands. So while we're, our team is based out in Oahu, we do serve Veterans living in Guam, Saipan and all of the Hawaiian Islands. So a lot of our work focuses on [00:07:00] reducing barriers to care for our Veterans across the Pacific Islands to really make sure they have access to quality substance use treatment. And yeah, Marissa and I actually have pretty similar backgrounds. I also completed my internship and residency with an emphasis on rural health at the VA Pacific Islands. And so we've been here for a few years and really have just fell in love with the community at our VA. Through those training experiences, we really were able to increase our worldview and understanding of the community that helped to provide so many values for us growing up.

And so we just really feel honored to be able to work for Pacific Islands and being able to give back to the community that we grew up with.

Shawn Liu: Excellent. Excellent. Glad to have you here.

All right, let's go ahead and jump on in.

Marissa, I'd like to start with you, and maybe level set a little bit. We're going to start laying some groundwork so that we can have a more nuanced discussion, but I think there's some foundational premises that we need to kind of address out of the gate.

I started thinking about, and we did some pre production for this episode, a big thing that came to mind was, "Oh, this is an episode about cultural [00:08:00] competency." That we're learning more and hopefully becoming more competent to help Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Veterans.

And before we get into that, can you tell us a little bit about just, you know, what are some of the important principles around cultural competency that we should approach this conversation with?

Marissa Sia: Yeah, absolutely.

Cultural competency is loosely defined as the ability to effectively understand, appreciate, and interact with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds or belief systems. In healthcare settings, this is going to extend to recognizing the influence of culture on health related beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. It enables providers to deliver personalized care that respects and integrates the cultural context of their patients.

However, the term competence can also imply this level of mastery or complete understanding, which is kind of challenging or even unrealistic when applied to the myriad of cultures that exist globally. And it really begs this question, can we truly know, understand, or master all cultures? Probably [00:09:00] not.

And so, recognizing this limitation, there has been this shift toward the concept of cultural humility. So, unlike cultural competence, cultural humility emphasizes an ongoing process rather than a static achievement. And so, in essence, cultural humility is more of a quote unquote how we are, rather than quote what we do. It encourages health care providers to adopt an attitude of openness and lifelong learning when engaging with diverse cultural backgrounds. And by cultivating cultural humility, providers can acknowledge limitations while actively seeking to understand and integrate The Diverse beliefs, values, and practices of the individuals they serve. So, in essence, cultural humility encourages healthcare professionals to approach cultural differences not as obstacles to overcome or master, but really as opportunities for mutual respect, learning, and collaboration in the delivery of person centered care. And this approach really fosters trust, enhances communication, and ultimately improves health outcomes by honoring the [00:10:00] unique cultural identities and perspectives of patients, which is what we want.

Shawn Liu: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. So, you know, I really appreciate the reframe to cultural humility. You know, when you were talking about cultural competency being associated with maybe like mastery, the mastery of all cultures, the really toxic competitive bits inside of me were like, "Of course, master all the cultures, challenge accepted."

But then that's not, totally like healthy. And so I really appreciate the approach of humility. Especially as providers where, you know, I'm a know it all egghead

and I definitely, need to approach things when I've met with Veterans with way, way more humility and more curiosity as well, as opposed to, "I'm the know it all who knows everything." And really learn from that Veteran, regardless of what culture they hail from. Because listening to them will help me help them better.

Sarah, I want to come over to you next.

So now that we've kind of level set about cultural humility as maybe the attitude with which we're going to have this conversation.

Tell us about Native [00:11:00] Hawaiian Pacific Islander Veterans. What, what is their culture? What challenges do they face? Who are they as a people?

Sara Wong: Yeah, yeah, this is a really important question. I think it'll be helpful for us to break this down.

So first, really understanding what this umbrella term of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders means, right? So, Native Hawaiian Pacific Islanders comprise the Indigenous people from three ethno culturally defined regions within Oceania. The first is Polynesia, which encompasses about 1,000 islands that stretch all the way from Hawaii to Easter Island. And so cultural subgroups include Native Hawaiians, Samoans, and Tahitians.

And then we also have Micronesians. And so Micronesia consists of about 2,000 islands all the way from Marshall Islands in the east to the Mariana Islands in the north. And cultural subgroups with Micronesia include Chamorros, Carolinians, and the Marshallese.

And then we also have Melanesia, which is located to the south of Micronesia and west of Polynesia, which includes the nations of Fiji and New Guinea. And so cultural subgroups [00:12:00] include Papuan and Austronesians.

There's a lot of cultural richness within that term of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders.

To help us understand a little bit more, anthropologic studies highlight a common genetic relationship between Polynesians and Micronesians with lineage traced back to East Asia. Whereas Melanesians appear more closely related to the Puapwin peoples indigenous to New Guinea. In addition, because of there are geographic locations, Micronesia and Polynesia became of particular strategic military importance to the United States. For these reasons,

when thinking of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Veterans, we're largely considering Polynesian and Micronesian populations.

Shawn Liu: Awesome. That's a really important geography lesson. Cause you know, I know we're going to get into a little bit more about where Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander Veterans reside. I want to just acknowledge my own bias. I kind of, you know, naively assumed, "Oh, well, everybody's hanging out in Hawaii. Right?" But it's way broader than that.

Sara Wong: Yeah, for sure, right? When we think of the Pacific Islands, a lot of us, [00:13:00] myself included, growing up really thought of the Hawaiian Islands. And so just being able to see a map of Micronesia, Polynesia, Melanesia yeah, Pacific Islands is a really, not only broad cultural term, but also wide geographic term.

And yeah, other considerations is really considering the different nuances and the different relationships between the U.S. military that different cultural subgroups and geographic locations have. And yeah, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Veterans have a long and complicated history with the U.S. military. Currently the military is one of the biggest employers to the Pacific Islands with bases from all branches of service sprawled across the islands. With large military presence, the federal government provides many job opportunities for civilians to offering a source of income, housing and health benefits. On the other hand, many Veterans and their family members also must balance a pride of service with the shadow of the military's dark past in these areas and concern about its current impact.

For example, Native Hawaiian Veterans may experience conflict with the American [00:14:00] government as it provides them a valuable source of economic stability while also wrestling with the generational trauma of the U.S. military being involved in the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy.

Additionally, there are some tension in all areas of the Pacific Islands as Indigenous activists and the federal government have tension across access to lands, preservation of cultural sites, and the environmental impact of having federal presence and military presence on Native land. The U.S. government can represent a really polarizing and conflicting entity as the military has had a direct contribution to generational trauma and disenfranchisement of Indigenous populations, while also providing many social and financial opportunities today.

Shawn Liu: Yeah, it's a really complex situation. And I want to, I guess that kind of really impresses about the importance of cultural humility even more,

because here you have like me, I'm just a person coming in, but I represent the government as well, as part of this complex history and this complex relationship. Coming in and say, "Hey, I'm going to help [00:15:00] you with these benefits and this thing over here, that in some way is caused by a lot of the generational in some instances, disinvestment in some communities, some of the economic situations that are made based off of policy, that, as a person from the Homeless Programs Office coming in to kind of fix a problem that in some ways we might have created, yeah, that feels... that, that, I don't know, it feels a little icky, I guess, but complex maybe might be the appropriate word, and having humility is also really critical.

Sarah, help me understand geography for a little bit, because again, my bias is that I associate them more narrowly with Hawaii, and that's obviously not the case.

Do they normally reside or, predominantly reside in the Pacific Islands, or are they in other parts of the mainland in the continental U.S. as well?

Sara Wong: Yeah. This is actually a really timely question, Shawn, as the most recent census released indicates that in 2020, 47% of Native Hawaiians live in Hawaii, while 53% reside in the continental United States. So there's now more Native [00:16:00] Hawaiians living outside of their indigenous land and are being pushed to move to more affordable places. And yeah, this is in contrast to 2010 when 55% Native Hawaiians were living in Hawaii and 45% were living in other states. So it's estimated that about 15,000 Native Hawaiians are leaving Hawaii every year. Many Native Hawaiians are moving to areas that are either more affordable or have more job opportunities including areas like California, Washington, Nevada, Texas, and Oregon. And yeah, other factors, including gentrification and urban land development, as well as influx of mainlanders moving to Hawaii increasing that income level and increasing the housing prices and their ability to buy homes, as well as growing tourism is pricing marginalized populations out of paradise.

Over the past few years, seeing a tipping point where there's actually more Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders living in the continental United States or in land that are not considered indigenous to them. Which I think it's just a really important point of [00:17:00] history just seeing where we are economically and which is contributing to the unhoused status of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Veterans.

There's also actually a migration impact happening for Chamorro and American Samoan Veterans as well. As Hawaii is often seen as the closest place where

there is more access to quality medical care and specialty care services. It's also a familiar place where many who were stationed in Hawaii at one point in the military bases they want to return for retirement. However, as the costs of continuous airfare and transportation for the off island medical treatment continues to build up, many decide to try to reside in Hawai'i permanently to maintain health care continuity. But after arriving to Hawai'i and trying to make it work many Veterans and their families then end up with a secondary migration effect and move to another city in the U.S. mainland, often in the West Coast for a more affordable cost of living and again, access to healthcare.

Shawn Liu: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. That makes a lot of sense.

Sarah, I want to stay with you for a little bit more and zoom in further now [00:18:00] to the sub population of Veterans. That I mainly focus on, which are homeless and unhoused Veterans. And so can you tell us a little bit about how homelessness and houselessness impacts Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander Veterans?

Sara Wong: This is a really well timed question. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders have been overlooked for quite some time in mainstream conversations about health care housing resources, and reducing disparities, even though Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders have the highest rates of being unhoused, with 121 out of every 10, who identify as Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander experiencing a lack of housing as of 2022. And so these numbers have increased by 19% between 2020 and 2022. So we really do see that Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders really do deserve to be in the conversation about accessing resources, about cultural humility, how can we use our roles in these federal positions, as VA staff members to reduce barriers to care, to reduce stigma associated with seeking out [00:19:00] government resources.

Shawn Liu: Sarah, before shift gears a little bit and talk to Marissa about some other components that Native Hawaiian Pacific Islanders face, I want to get your take on the use of language. Specifically the importance of using the term unhoused or houseless when working with Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander Veterans. And I want to set this up.

Many folks who know me know that number one, I hate cutesy names for programs and services. Call the program what it is, because otherwise people can't find it.

But number two, I have this kind of revulsion to changing terms in what are otherwise well intended efforts to reduce stigma, but in the process, feel like people maybe think that changing the name of the word is the work and not, say, making more affordable housing. To put it more plainly, I have a little bit of a resistance to efforts from folks in our sector, right? So, other professionals who are in the sector, lot of them who are amazing advocates for people who are homeless and houseless.

There's definitely an effort right now to shift away [00:20:00] from the label homeless, to the label unhoused. And again, like, I feel a little bit of like, ehh, about that, because I don't feel like that's the work in the mainland. Like, changing the name isn't going to increase affordable housing, it isn't going to give people livable wages.

But the one area where I am unbelievably deferential to is if a community tells me, "No, this is how I want you to refer to me."

And, you know, I first became aware of this with American Indian / Alaska Native and otherwise Native American Veterans or Native Veterans that houselessness is the term that they prefer. And in those instances, 100%, I'll call you what you want me to call you, right?

Can you help me think through this tension in my head, and in some ways the tension in the homeless service sector right now about labels? Why are terms like houseless, unhoused, more preferred by Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander Veterans?

Sara Wong: I love this question and I totally hear you with your thoughts around the importance of language. And especially with Native Hawaiian and [00:21:00] Pacific Islander Veterans.

So language is important and also their cultural values as well.

For example, the value of ʻāina or a strong connection to the land really informs the language that we're using when thinking about being unhoused. So native Hawaiians and indigenous peoples can see their ʻāina or land and connections to their 'ohana or family as their home and do not strictly view the westernized idea of a house with four walls and a roof as a home.

Because of this, the term homeless can carry a different meaning in that Veterans and families who may not have a traditional house under a solid structure, but who have a deep connection to the land and the community that

helped to raise them and their families, they may technically be unhoused, but because of this strong connection to their family and the land, they would not consider themselves to be lacking a home or homeless.

So the terms unhoused, houseless, or unsheltered are a little bit more accurate to their situations. So using these other terms can also help to lessen the stigma that can become associated with homelessness and to really highlight that those [00:22:00] lacking permanent roofs over their heads may still have communities they consider home. Using a term like unhoused also helps to emphasize that the problem is more of a structural one linked to a lack of affordable housing and not necessarily a personal or a family weakness.

Shawn Liu: I just kind of want to acknowledge, like, I try to keep an open mind. Very seldom do folks say something that immediately changes my mind on a topic that I'm actually, like, very spicy about. And I have to admit, like, you, you've kind of helped change my mind a little bit on this topic. I'm going to chew on that a little bit more.

Um, yeah, that was probably the strongest argument that I've heard to date. Uh, you, you get kudos for that. I'm a little bit stunned. Uh.

Marissa, I want to come over to you next. There is a term that I've, again, mostly seen with American Indian Alaskan Native Veterans. Sometimes it intersects with Black Veterans as well. This concept of generational trauma and how injuries that happened decades ago, maybe even centuries ago, [00:23:00] they ripple throughout time and impact people, their descendants in the here and now, in the present.

And it turns out Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander Veterans are not exempt from generational trauma.

Can you share a little bit about that history? Give us that history lesson and what's important to know about the generational trauma that impacts Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander Veterans today.

Marissa Sia: So Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Veterans may be deeply impacted by this concept of generational trauma, which can stem from historical injustices and ongoing societal challenges like colonization, displacement, and discriminatory practices. So we really want to think about Pacific Islands like Hawaii and other Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander communities where injustices have occurred and challenges like colonization, exploitation of natural resources, forced assimilation and displacement from ancestral lands can leave

these really deep scars that may have happened decades, centuries ago, but really continue to affect Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander individuals and their families.

[00:24:00] Extending that even further, we want to consider how Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander Veterans are also disproportionately represented in the U.S. military. So while military service can provide social and financial opportunities for these folks, it can also lead to exposure to stress, trauma, physical injuries, and relocation from one's home.

Thinking about that, and then pushing it even further, Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander Veterans may face varying rights depending on their birthplace. So, as a great example, those who are born in American Samoa are considered U.S. nationals, which means that even though they have one of the highest consistent rates of enlistment in the U.S. Army, they cannot vote in a U.S. Federal election, even if they are residing in a U.S. state Washington, D.C.

And so just think about how that push and pull of I served my country and yet I can't vote in this election or I can't run for this particular public office can affect them. These complexities really underscore the layered challenges that Native Hawaiian and Pacific [00:25:00] Islander Veterans encounter from historical injustices that happened long ago. And then military service related traumas, ongoing disparities in legal rights and recognition within the broader American political landscape. And so addressing these issues really requires a nuanced understanding of both historical context and contemporary policies to ensure that we're recognizing the Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander Veterans and their communities.

Shawn Liu: Yeah really good points.

This has been a really, really important discussion. I hope that, for many, myself included, this is going to be the start of a discussion and not the end of a discussion.

Marissa, and Sarah, as we start winding down this episode, I want to talk now to other folks like me, service providers who are listening in.

Are there any other practice or program design considerations that we should be knowing about to make sure that we can better serve Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander Veterans?

Marissa Sia: Yes, absolutely. I believe, and I think Sarah would agree with me too, that it's really important to push for this stance of cultural humility when working with really anybody. And for Native Hawaiian and [00:26:00] Pacific Islander Veterans, this stance is critical. Luckily, there's a few concepts that providers can consider to help better serve these Veterans.

And the first one that I want to address is connection. This idea of establishing connection with Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Veterans involves striving for awareness and appreciation of things like language, like values, and customs, and as providers we may want to allocate extra time to build rapport, potentially incorporating practices we have this local thing called Talk Story, which I think is prominent in other Pacific Islands. This is an opportunity that can highlight values, behaviors, and traditions. Also, utilizing things like self disclosure, which can enhance this authenticity as providers and foster trust. This really can signal that genuineness and welcoming to Veterans that we work with.

The second concept is harmony. And so, it can be really helpful to promote an egalitarian and person-centered approach when working with Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Veterans, because this stance [00:27:00] really demonstrates respect and care. Providers can be curious about one's perspectives on or definitions of health. And this curiosity can be really helpful because definitions of health that we can encounter may center around harmony and can emphasize balance among physical, spiritual, emotional, and environmental factors. And so, we can then understand that patients reported problems may be viewed as an imbalance or disharmony in interpersonal relationships, physical aspects of wellbeing, emotional wellbeing, spiritual wellbeing, et cetera. Even wellbeing of one's cultural lands. And that's really different than how we typically conceptualize problems in healthcare.

And then finally, we wanna talk about the concept of family. So for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander individuals, including Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander Veterans. They may view healthcare as this collective endeavor rather than an individual one. And as providers, we can therefore explore and integrate collectivistic factors like family or community involvement into things like treatment planning, [00:28:00] assessing, et cetera. And then, also, assessing the quality of familial relationships helps conceptualize presenting issues and determine the appropriateness of perhaps including family in health care or including extended family or community into health care. And then interventions that promote collective well being and address relational dynamics are particularly relevant and effective.

Shawn Liu: Marissa, that was really, really helpful. Also, yeah. A lot of times in homeless programs we strive to try to get our Veterans connected to family because so often in addition to housing affordability, wage, stagnation, all that stuff like that, family, relationship strife, or what's the word I'm looking for?

The strained relationships can be a big driver. But here, it feels like it's even more important to make sure that family is integrated into the lowercase t treatment team for the Veteran. And in some instances, what I'm hearing almost regardless of the intervention that we're trying to do, that making sure their community is involved is really, really critical.

Marissa Sia: Absolutely, it's like that wraparound care that we want to give our Veterans, especially the [00:29:00] ones that we serve in the homeless or houseless programs.

Shawn Liu: Marissa, Sarah this has been fantastic. Really, really, really helpful discussion. I know I've learned a lot and, Sarah, you may have actually got me to do the right thing where I actually changing my mind on a hot button topic in my head.

So, kudos for you there. Um, before we let you go, we're going to shift gears two more times.

First, Sarah, are there links, websites, resources people can check out if they want to learn more?

Sara Wong: We talked about this in the beginning of our podcast of not necessarily wanting the burden of explaining history always to marginalized populations, and so I think Marissa and I really encourage if you're interested, if the things that, yeah, we discussed today just pique your interest to do some independent research and finding resources.

Marissa and I did come up with a list of some research and resources that might be of interest to you and so we can include that in the podcast information for you to continue the education.

But we do just encourage you to find out some of those Independent resources to continue your [00:30:00] learning and also try to also find when it's available resources that are also voiced by Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander voices.

Shawn Liu: Outstanding. Yeah. We're going to put links to all of those into the description. Folks can check it out. Okay. This has been fantastic.

Before we let you go now, we're going to end with a tradition on our show. We're going to end with why. Folks who've been listening in know that I am a civilian, I'm not a Veteran. And whenever I rep for Veterans out in the community, it's important for me to convey that this is not just another job for me.

I'm not just collecting a paycheck. Then I'm here for them, I'm here for the mission.

So Sarah, want to start with you as we close out today's episode, what's your why for this work? You work in the Substance Treatment Program in VA Pacific Islands, but it sounds like you could be working in a lot of different professions and a lot of different areas and being just as successful.

What's your why for this work?

Sara Wong: Yeah, Marissa and I actually went to the same high school and in this high school, we I think that, yeah, really speaks to island culture and like two degrees of separation. But yeah, we went to the same high school and we actually grew up with this message and this model of, [00:31:00] "To whom much is given, much is expected."

I really recognize the privileges and honors afforded to me with my education my current profession. So I really just want to use all of the opportunities I was lucky to be afforded to advocate and give back to those who experience barriers to health care.

My grandfather was also a Veteran, and so the community of Veterans specifically in Hawaii and the Pacific Islands is a community that really means a lot to me. Just being able to combine my passion for service along with these personal values of giving back to the Veteran community, this job is just a natural and perfect fit for the work that I want to do and that gives me a sense of meaning.

Shawn Liu: Outstanding. And, Marissa, I'll give you the last word. What's your why for this work?

Marissa Sia: One of the greatest gifts in my life has been growing up in a place like Hawaii. And having exposure to different cultures and having this really indescribable connection to the place is such a huge privilege. And Sarah said, that with that privilege comes a lot of feelings of, and need to give back to my community. That's a huge reason why I [00:32:00] pursued the field of

psychology in the first place and why I returned home to work as a psychologist. And we know that there's such a huge need for mental health services throughout the Pacific Islands. And unfortunately, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Veterans are at higher risk of experiencing mental health issues as compared to other demographics. And I know I'm not resolving any of those larger issues by myself. But I do hope that I'm giving back to the community, whether it is working one on one in psychotherapy or visiting Veterans wherever they're at doing health outreach. And so that's one of the whys.

And another why is that kind of similar to Sarah, my grandfather and many of the males on my mom's side are also Veterans. And my spouse is also a Veteran. And so I do feel this huge commitment to serve the Veterans broadly and also our Veterans here locally.

Shawn Liu: Dr. Marissa Sia and Dr. Sarah Wong, are clinical psychologists with the VA Pacific Islands Healthcare System.

Marissa, Sarah, thank you so much for the gifts of your time.

Sara Wong: Thank you, Shawn.

Shawn Liu: If you want to know more about the services that VA provides to Veterans experiencing [00:33:00] homelessness and housing instability, visit us online at www.va.gov/Homeless.

And if you're a Veteran who's homeless or at risk of homelessness, reach out. Call the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 877-424-3838. Trained counselors are standing by to help 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. That number again is 877-424-3838.

If you're enjoying the show, leave us a review on Apple Podcasts.

It would really help us out.

And that's all for now. We hope that you found this time to be valuable and that you feel empowered in our collective work to ensure that every Veteran has a safe, and stable, place to call home.

Take care.