

N.Z. Pacific leaders step up for coronavirus fight



Southseas Healthcare. Photo: Supplied.

Marc Membre

Pacific leaders in New Zealand are assisting the Government by organising and mobilising communities for COVID-19 testing, after a member of a local Samoan church tested positive for the disease.

A congregation member of the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa Mangere East Puaseisei tested positive for COVID-19.

The Chairperson of the Pacific Leadership Forum, Teleiai Edwin Puni stated that the incident was a real concern and further stated that it can be seen how much the Pacific community is affected in places such as California and Melbourne which should serve as a warning for people in Auckland.

"This is where most of our Pacific people reside and our Samoan community that we should be cautious and be prepared," Teleiai said

in a phone interview with Samoa Observer.

Teleiai also stated that the community should also be prepared for the social issues and economic impact that coincides with the spread of the disease.

"What the Pacific Leadership Forum that I chair and also the A.S.A. Foundation [we were able] to help coordinate a rapid response to wrap around and support this church," he said.

"The call is not our call, the call is from the Government that this church is encouraged to go and get tested, also families of the pre-school that is run by the church."

The Pacific Leadership Forum and A.S.A. Foundation organised and mobilised the community, while clinical testing and clinical care was undertaken by Southseas Healthcare and Health Star Pacific.

According to Teleiai, they were quick to respond and had set up a pop-up testing station at the church.

"What we did was move in and try to contain and help the church. Instead of them trying to find a place to get tested, we brought the testing to their compound where they feel safe and it was quick for them to get that help," he said.

Teleiai explained that he would say half of the church had already been tested but they had brought the testing to the church so that no one would be missing out. He explained that those who were tested will be receiving their results soon.

Teleiai stated that they have been prepared since March and that this is a community coordination.

"[The] Government is doing their thing but we are also coming forward in helping the Government

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Investors decry Central Bank shutdown

Soli Wilson

Investors in Smart Finance Limited, an investment scheme shut down by the Central Bank last week, have decried the closure of the Savai'i-based investment company, which they say was helping families.

The company J & J Electronics, also operating as Smart Finance Limited, located at Nia Mall in Fugalei was shut down by the Central Bank last Friday for operating without a licence.

But its founder denied that there was anything wrong with the company's business practices which he defended as a legitimate financial management programme.

Last week investigations by the Samoa Observer uncovered the company had been promising "investors" guaranteed returns if they recruited others to join the scheme.

The man behind the scheme, Busuyi Johnson Olarewaju, defended what he said was a legitimate investment vehicle, which was managing funds of up to \$100,000 or more.

Speaking to the Observer on the condition she not be identified, an "investor" in the scheme said it was highly recommended amongst those who have put their money in.

According to the investor she had been told about the scheme by so many people before but was scared to try it out due to fears of being scammed.

A few people in her family, also a part of the scheme, attested to the "great" performance of their investments, which is why she joined, she told the Samoa Observer.

A total of 730 investors had ploughed money into the scheme, Central Bank Governor Maiava Atalina Ainuu-Enari confirmed.

It had been operating for about two months prior to its closure, which was prompted by analysis of transaction flows by private commercial banks.

An attempt by a woman to transfer \$20,000 from her person account into the investment vehicle led to the freezing of the company's bank ac-

counts, Mr. Olarewaju told the Samoa Observer.

The investor, who is from the Aiga I le tai district, said her first and only investment was \$170 tala and she was promised \$30 withdrawals each following week for six consecutive months.

And she had been collecting the withdrawals until last week.

The investors told this newspaper many who invested money into the scheme are disappointed by the shutting down of the business by the Central Bank.

"I know a few who said they had invested more than \$50,000 into the scheme, claiming their hundreds weekly and going above the money they initially put in; and they're not happy with what's happened," she said.

"Some of these people have money sent from overseas and invested in Smart Finance to guarantee a stable source of income each week. And it's really helped many families as far as I know.

"I wasn't recruited into the scheme; I was told about it genuinely because I saw that people were benefiting from it and I was attracted to the promising returns they offered. So I'm unsure about the use of the term pyramid scheme to describe Smart Finance operations."

Mr. Olarewaju denied that his business model was a classic pyramid scheme model or a classic fraudulent system of making money based on recruiting an ever-increasing pool of "investors." (The schemes eventually collapse when the supply of new investors to recruit dries up)

Mr. Olarewaju said that the business operated on a model of promising investors guaranteed returns.

On social media following the news of the investment scheme being shut down, investors are remaining hopeful that the shutdown is temporary.

"It's a good investment. The only problem here is that they should [have] wait[ed] for the approval from CBS. Hoping for a reopen pretty soon," one Facebook user said.



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