

## **I Tabagone E Aotearoa: Pacific Youths in New Zealand: Museum initiatives to reach our Youth**

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Warm Pacific Greetings, Ni sa Bula and Kia Ora!

Thank you for the opportunity given to me to present this paper at this prestigious CAM meeting in Singapore.

The topic of youth is quite dear to my heart. I enjoy working with young people. Even though it can be quite demanding in a lot of ways, I find working with them fulfilling as many of them see the world or the museum in the context of a fresh pair of eyes. I believe that their views and understanding of visiting museums, if taken into consideration, surely can make a difference in any museum's plan to reach out to its community.

### **Where is Aotearoa/New Zealand located?**

Most of you have heard of New Zealand. "Aotearoa" is New Zealand's indigenous name. The name Aotearoa has a rich oral history associated with it. "Ao" is the word for "clouds", and Aotearoa was the word used when Kupe, one of the first Maori (indigenous people of New Zealand) chiefs discovered New Zealand. The title "The Land of the Long Cloud" has remained until today and that means "Aotearoa".

New Zealand is in the Southern Hemisphere, lying between 34 and 46 degrees of latitude south in the Pacific Ocean. This puts New Zealand at about the same distance from the equator as Spain or California. Our nearest large neighbour is Australia, which is 1500 km (930 miles) to the west, and 2200 km/1350 miles to the south, across the Southern Ocean, lies the frozen desert continent of Antarctica.

Aotearoa has been my home for the last ten years. I have had the privilege of working in three amazing museums: Museum of Te Papa, Tongarewa Waikato Museum of Art and History, and Auckland Museum

### **Who are these young people?**

Young people are a diverse group with varying wants, needs and interests. I enjoy working with young people aged between 12 to 24. They are more ethnically diverse and have grown up with greater exposure to different cultures than their older cohorts.

### **Why are these young people good to work with?**

- ❖ Young people today are less likely to have two parents who live together, and a growing number of youth have step- or blended-family relationships.
- ❖ Gender roles and responsibilities are more flexible, providing young people with greater choices and opportunities.
- ❖ The decisions young people make and the timing of key transitions such as leaving home, entering the workforce and becoming a parent have all changed significantly over recent decades.
- ❖ Today's young people are more educated and much more likely than older cohorts to participate in higher education. A growing proportion of young people aged 15 to 24 combine paid work with some form of study.
- ❖ Young people are also much less likely to be married or to be parents than previous generations.

The points mentioned above highlights some of the key trends that provides characteristics of the New Zealand youth population.

### **What about out Pacific youth?**

- ❖ Census and other official statistics show that the Pacific population is young and fast-growing. That was in marked contrast to the European New Zealand population.
- ❖ In a few years young Pacific people will be a large workforce, a significant consumer market and increasingly featured in New Zealand's social, economic, cultural and political life.
- ❖ Auckland City is known as the biggest Polynesian city in the world. Museums in Auckland are taking this on board and working towards bringing new audiences into the museum and also taking the museum out into the community

### **What are some projects focused on youth that has been done to date?**

#### Case study 1: Tautai Trust

The Tautai Trust runs a youth-focused program called the The Fresh Horizon Workshops. These workshops have been run by Tautai as one-day workshops for young/emerging artists since 2001. These have now increased to three days in duration. In 2007 Tautai expanded the programs to two workshops a year and are actively seeking ways to increase that to at least three a year.

Tertiary institutions have recognised the value in hosting Tautai Fresh Horizons workshops and are regular and supportive hosts for the workshops.

Tautai engages established Pacific artists as tutors at the workshops and is now also engaging senior Pacific students from the host institution to assist them. Secondary schools in the nominated area identify and nominate students for whom Tautai then arranges all requirements for attendance including transport, catering and the provision of all necessary art materials.

Tautai Fresh Horizons Workshops are not art classes but opportunities to experiment, to try new art related ideas, or to hone special talent. By putting known artists in as tutors, backed up by senior tertiary students as assistants, Tautai is giving the secondary students visible role models – people they can relate to who are successful. The aim is to give the students a stimulating art experience under the eye of positive, enthusiastic role models, and to reinforce the value of continued education.

The workshops often conclude with an exhibition of the work produced by the students. This is extremely affirming for the students and also brings their caregivers and family into the tertiary institution, which further reinforces the exposure to continuing education possibilities, whether art-related or in other areas.

#### Case study 2: Auckland Museum

Tala Pasifika is a hands-on educational program that is very popular with Auckland schools every year. Topics ranging from Pacific customs, dances, languages and food makes this program exciting for everyone involved. Guest educators (most of whom are of Pacific heritage and are willing to share their experiences) complement the Museum Education team to deliver such a range of classes to excited children and young people.

Due to its popularity, the Tala Program has been requested to tour other museums in New Zealand. Watch this Space!

#### Case study 3: Muka youth prints

The Muka Gallery, based in Auckland is a humble gallery that has found a niche in focusing on young people. Their philosophy is that the best way to make young people acquainted with contemporary art is to get real works of art in their hands. Normally the cost of artwork is forbidding for young people. Muka gallery has found a solution. The rules:

- a number of well-known artists from all over the world are invited to produce a set of small (100 x 200 mm) original lithographs;
- the works reflect the normal style and concerns of the artists, there is no patronising or "talking down" to children;
- the lithographs will eventually be sold exclusively to young people aged 5–18;

- visitors to the show can buy a maximum of three lithographs and only for themselves, not for adults;
- all works are sold at a uniform low price, set according to specific costs in every country;
- names and signatures of the artists are covered over during the shows, Muka wants young art collectors to look at the work, not consider the fame of the artist or potential for financial gain;
- adults are not allowed in at the exhibitions.

#### Case study 4: Waikato Museum of Art & History

The Excite Science Gallery at the Waikato Museum is one of my favourites. It often brings out the child in me, when I visit this gallery. My two children aged 7 and 5, often visit the museum and the first gallery they try to visit is the Excite Gallery. Why is this Gallery so popular?

- ❖ The Excite Science Galleries aim to foster a learning experience in an exciting and engaging environment,
- ❖ Excite has fun interactive activities where kids play and have fun, as they learn about science.
- ❖ It introduces Science to young people and allowing them to actively learn whilst having fun.

#### Case study 5: Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

This museum has so many advantages, one of which is its location in downtown Wellington. It is within the local bus routes, and skateboard parks nearby allow young people to “hang out” before or after their museum visit. The technology offered in the museum suits the liking of young people today. Most exhibitions are interactive, which engages both young and the old. Te Papa, as it is commonly called, also has facilities for public performances and a theatre for serious events such as debates, conferences and workshops.

In October of 2001, I personally organised a “Memories and Images of Fiji” project with young Fijian people living in Wellington. When I started working at Te Papa, I noticed how very few Fijians visit or have never been to Te Papa. This project entails the involvement of young people and their guardians in making artwork that matches a theme. Within one day, twenty-six artworks ranging from painting to collages were assembled. These artworks were exhibited on the walls of PlaNet Pasifika for a period of twelve months. Repeat visitation from families during the course of the exhibition proved successful

### **Conclusion**

There are many other examples across New Zealand that are targeting our young people in general. I would like to acknowledge the work of Museums Aotearoa and National Services Te Paerangi for their great work in the museum sector of New Zealand. These organisations have connected metropolitan museums to regional museums and, as a result, our Pacific communities are able to access these museums and have participated in numerous programs.

With the support of local city councils, many museums are able to fulfil their duty to their communities. Artists from the contemporary and heritage worlds are always keen to share their skills with museum visitors. Museums then need to tap into these resources to bridge the gap between museums and young people.

Young people have varying needs when it comes to museum visitation. If museums are able to tap into the minds of young people and deliver aspects of art or history or even science that they like, they can win future supporters of the museum sector. For instance, bringing music bands into the museum has proven successful for the Auckland Museum lately. The LATE program has brought in a new and fresh dimension of museum visitors into the museum in the evenings.

When museums share their stories and if they communicate successfully, other museums can learn from them, hence encouraging positive scaffolding for museum staff who are developing these programs.

Story-telling is an innate quality that is in all of us, and we need to take this to another level and bring new people in, especially our young (Pacific) people as our museum audience. We can tell their story, they can tell their stories, we can all share our stories.

**YES-Our Pacific Youth, Our I Tabagone**

**They are our FUTURE, they are our TOMORROW!**

**VINAKA VAKALEVU, KIA ORA,**

**TENA KOUTOU, TENA KOUTOU, TENA KOUTOU KATO!**