



Māori and Pasifika women in trades

*Stories of wāhine toa
developing trade careers*



Introduction

These wāhine know first-hand that there's no such thing as men's work. Deciding to work in industries where there are so few women they are 'cutting trails' so that other women, daughters, and sisters, can see a trades career is both possible and rewarding. These are inspirational stories of Māori and Pasifika wāhine who decided that doing what they wanted was important for them. Making it for themselves first, they have their eyes on a future that will support them and those they most care about.

We hope these stories help inspire other young Māori and Pasifika women into a career in trades.

Nikita Grindley

Iwi Ngāi Tahu

Occupation Heavy diesel apprentice

Where Truckstops, Seaview Wellington



Nikita Grindley has liked cars ever since she was a child, and her mum encouraged her passion for them. "I like custom ones that are really shiny and go really fast!" she laughs, "My mum always took me to the car shows when I was a kid."

The opportunity to sample an automotive course at high school sowed the seeds for a career in the automotive trade as an adult. "In year 11 I got to take apart a gear box and I really liked it".

Nikita says that if you find something you're passionate about, you'll want to do it every day. "When I was at home with my child, it was everyday household stuff that I wasn't too thrilled about. That was the motivation for me. Once I decided what I was going to do, nothing was going to stop me!"

Nikita encourages other women to explore what opportunities there are for women in trades in their area.

"When I went to sign up, there was a scholarship. That was a huge help!

"If you don't have any background in the industry you're interested in, getting your foot in the door is important. The year one course gave me a really good foundation, and the work experience part really gave me the chance to put my learning into action."

After completing the first year certificate, Nikita applied for the opportunity to be included in an apprenticeship programme. "It's a very competitive scheme, over 500 people applied for the apprenticeship programme and they took 19 – one of which was me!

"I'm employed, and my employer is helping to pay for the apprenticeship programme. I'm getting paid to work and have no debt, it's ridiculously awesome!"

Larena McGregor



Iwi Waikato-Tainui

Occupation Painter/decorator

Where Ōtautahi, Christchurch

As a young woman, Larena McGregor could never have imagined retraining later in life for a new career. But her oldest child's electrician apprenticeship inspired Larena to pursue a new career. "I was so proud of him. It was something that I had never thought I could have done. But it inspired me... If he could do it, maybe I could too!"

She enrolled in a pre-trade training course in painting and decorating with He Toki ki te Rika, a free Māori and Pasifika Trades Training (MPTT) programme delivered by Ara Institute of Canterbury in partnership with local iwi and the construction industry. She resigned from her retail job and began working as a shift cleaner to support herself.

Support from her education providers enabled Larena to get work experience. "They used to put on evenings for us to meet people in the construction industry. That's how I got my first work experience job."

Larena completed her apprenticeship in June 2015. She is currently working on the Justice Precinct in Christchurch, a post-earthquakes block of buildings to house police, emergency services, and courts. Among the other 1,300 tradespeople on site is her son, Christopher (24).

Larena has found her experiences working as a Māori woman in trades to be hugely positive.

"I feel so proud of myself to see what I can achieve. It's something I didn't think I could ever do. It's motivated me – it makes me feel like I could do anything".

Leonora Ngatai-Marsh



Iwi Tainui with associations to Taranaki and Whangārei

Occupation Infrastructure and drainage

Where Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland

Raised by her grandparents in Pukekohe, Leonora says she was always playing on a tractor in the paddock. Leonora's cousin, who worked for an infrastructure company, encouraged her to take up a trade. "I told my cousin I had been looking for work but wasn't sure I could manage it [a trade] – reading wasn't one of my strengths." Leonora's cousin read her the information from a brochure about working in the trades and told her to enrol to complete a trade. "It was an opportunity, and I thought 'I'll give that a go'."

Leonora really enjoyed her course and the people she learned with are a new whānau for her. "We're all earning! We've just found out that one of us had a moko and one of the young ones had a baby, so it's a celebration! We're all nannies and koros. It's that whānau-structure, you need it and it works for our people."

Leonora is glad that she has a new support system in place with her

fellow learners, work colleagues, and employer. "You need support because you're coming off the benefit, it's like coming out of prison. It's a big change when you've always worked at being a mum and looking after your tamariki. Your life changes when you go to work. You're not at home to support your kids – it's a big shift in your whānau life."

Leonora believes that if other unemployed or struggling women are provided the right information and support, they would also take up trades. "Even people on benefits want to work as they want to provide better options and opportunities for their kids and their families," she says.

"I have a good job and the biggest thing I've gained from this is that my kids are reaping the rewards, I'm reaping the rewards, and I'm learning every single day!"

Marlane Harmer

Iwi Ngāti Kahungunu, Tuwharetoa, Ngāti Maniapoto, Te Whānau-ā-Apanui

Occupation Mechanical engineer

Where Ravensdown, Hawke's Bay



“I used to watch my step-dad welding and I’ve always been a water rat,” so after seeing a documentary about underwater welders, Marlane thought, “Actually, I wouldn’t mind doing that!”

Although she had a fabulous partner and was blessed with a baby girl, the daily routine of a stay at home mum wasn’t something Marlane wanted to do every day.

“It helped me realise that I wanted to get out there and pursue a career sooner rather than later. I went into Eastern Institute of Technology to suss out the engineering course. I told the tutor what I wanted to do and he was really encouraging and I pretty much enrolled that day.”

She completed her Certificate in Engineering Trades and while it took her a while to find her apprenticeship position she credits the “locals” with helping her to get where she is now.

She was working at a local bar and says “[they] were pretty much like my family and I was telling them how I was trying to find any engineering work, anything really - I just wanted to keep everything I’d learned on the course relevant and word of mouth and the people I knew hooked me up with the contacts to get my apprenticeship. That was cool!”

Her advice to others and people out there considering doing anything, “if you really want it, use stepping stones to get there”. Marlane also says to get a foot into the industry it’s important to try doing things that will help to build your knowledge base. “Knowing the basics will help a lot. When I did my course, I couldn’t weld at all! I didn’t have the starter knowledge that the others did, but now I’m a pretty good welder,” she says “start small, you don’t have to go straight to the point; have a good attitude and give it your all. That’s been good for me!”





Lavinia “Lovey” Johnston and her tamahine/daughter Kate Johnston

Iwi Ngai Tāmanuhiri, Ngāti Rongomaiwahine, Ruapani ki Turanga,
Rongowhakaata

Occupation Tradies Where Otautahi/Christchurch

Lavinia Johnston, originally from Tairāwhiti, has been on the periphery of trade industries since 1980. It's clear that whānau is a key driver for Lovey's motivation to upskill herself. Her oldest tamaiti Shelby, 26, is studying civil engineering at university. Miriama, 24, is a surveying apprentice, and Kate, 19, is collecting a huge amount of mātauranga (knowledge) in the road works division of a local company.

It was her daughter's decision to take up a trade that inspired Lovey to take the leap too. The sense of success and enjoyment she gained from her trade training encouraged her to look into furthering her education and, after speaking with other women employed as quantity surveyors, she enrolled at Ara Institute of Canterbury.

“Quantity surveying is about understanding everything on the worksite – from the time it will take the painter to do his job and how much that will cost, to the total build time and materials required. It's really good information to know – and if I can support women who are going through a hard time with getting their qualifications, I will,” she said.

Her daughter Kate, 19, has been witness to the benefit of employment and qualifications in the trades for her whānau and says she genuinely enjoys her mahi. Through traffic and roading, she has obtained certifications, is being paid a good wage, and gets to avoid the burden of a university loan.

Although she has had negative experiences working in a male-dominated space, Kate says the workplace support and safety for young women is great.

“I have learnt so much on roading. I have an appreciation for men and women who work on public infrastructure sites – I don't think the public understands how much is involved. And there's joking around, but if anything ever happened that would make me feel uncomfortable, I know I can report it and action will be taken. Everyone comes to my defence, it's like a family.”

She also feels racism in the workplace is dying down as “in our generation, people are being forced to accept other cultures”.

After having had experiences in a less tolerant and accepting society, Lovey was pleased to hear her daughter was working in a culturally diverse environment. There is pride in her eyes as mother and daughter sit down over a cup of tea to discuss their experiences as Māori women learning and working in the trades.

“If we were to be role models for other women, I think me and my girls would definitely want to encourage women – especially Māori women – into the trades.

“Now is the time, the time is right and the workforce is accepting that they need us.”

Katarina Blackmore

Iwi Ngāti Wai, Ngāti Kuri, Pākehā

Occupation Parenting and seeking carpentry apprenticeship

Where Tāmaki Makaurau/ Auckland



Katarina Blackmore began cooking in her parents' fish and chip shop when she was 12. "I never did any formal training or certificates or anything," says Katarina "but I got as high as second chef which is equal to sous chef." The hours were long and the work was hard. She had to balance and juggle 70-80 hour work weeks with her child.

It was a trip to a local marae that offered Katarina the opportunity to try her hand at a trade. "My kids and I regularly go to [the] Marae, and a couple of years ago I went to a Christmas event there and Kiwa education had a stall there for two courses: one was cooking and the other was carpentry," she says.

Katarina says carpentry was a natural fit for her skills and passion. "Sometimes I wish I'd done this 10-15 years ago, so I really try to encourage others, especially young mums, to get into it. They are the ones I really want to work alongside eventually.

That's why I'm keen to get my apprenticeship sorted. If I'm not walking the path, how can I be of help to them?"

Katarina says carpentry is an opportunity to play and learn with her children. "I took them on my journey and they enjoy seeing me work.

I'd take them along sometimes and they'd get to play with the hammers and nails and I'd show them photos of what I'd done. I'm encouraging and inspiring them which makes me feel awesome".



Azaria Felagai

Iwi Samoan

Occupation Carpentry apprentice,
Hawkins Construction

Where Wellington



“I definitely want to inspire more women to get into trades. Lots of people think it’s ‘men only’ but if men can be nurses, we can be builders!”

There weren’t many other girls in Azaria Felagai’s carpentry class at school. Born and raised in Porirua, she didn’t know much about trade opportunities. It was her father who suggested she used her skills to pursue a trade. “It was my Dad who encouraged me into a trade; he said to me, the only daughter, ‘do a trade’. I wasn’t even sure that girls did this stuff and now look where I am? Earning good money, no debt, and getting independent,” says Azaria.

She completed a pre-trade course at Whitireia with Weltec. “I got a Pacific scholarship after I approached Weltec and enrolled.” She enjoyed the course, but says working is better.

“The course gives you all the basics like how to use the tools and what you need to be aware of. What you

learn on site though is heaps more compared to [the] course, there’s just so much to know.”

Learning a trade has developed Azaria’s critical thinking skills. “I look at things differently now, houses, buildings, and I look at how they’re made and put together and I think, I’ll do that better.”

When asked if it’s tough to be a woman in a trade Azaria says, “I feel like I have to work twice as hard to prove myself to the guys, prove that I’m worth their time to help me, and that I deserve to be here.”

Azaria knows her line of work is physical. “I really enjoy it but I don’t want to be on the tools forever and when I’m old and my body is sore, then I’ll want to get into management.”

In the meantime, Azaria is happy to be a role model for other young Pacific women looking to a career in the trades. “I’m earning good money, I’ve bought a car, I’m getting independent, I’m debt free. It’s all good!”



Carla Tonga

Iwi Taranaki te maunga, Parihaka, Patea me Whanganui ngā kainga

Occupation Carpenter/Chippie

Where Work Monster, Auckland



Carla started her building journey in 2004 when she enrolled for a Certificate in Carpentry. Things didn't really work for her back then. "Nobody would employ me, so I couldn't get any site experience even though I was offering my labour for free."

She found people's attitudes to women in trades frustrating. The worst one was, "because you're a woman, you're going to be a distraction and you can't keep up with boys because this job is physically demanding." Dismayed, Carla pursued a career in visual arts.

Volunteering with a local homebuilding charity gave Carla the opportunity to complete her building apprenticeship. While there Carla met Peter Wolf. "He got me into a few auditions and I got on the TV shows *"Whānau Living"* and *"Our First Home"*. I'm really keen to do anything that I can in the construction industry."

Carla says building is easy; you just have to keep pushing. "You've got to try and maintain a positive attitude; it's

not other people's fault they haven't grown up with things like seeing a builder who is a woman."

She believes that other women will enjoy the opportunities of trades. "The flexibility that comes with being a tradie is amazing! I have the opportunity to negotiate with my teammates. If I have something going on with my daughter at school, we'll make it work – I don't stress about it and there's no ill feeling in the workplace."

Carla is confident that the trades sector is an area where more women can excel. "I went through a few struggles growing up, living with family violence, alcohol, struggling single mum. These are daily challenges that a lot of women face and if you can get through those challenges, then you're most likely going to make it through doing a trade," she says.

"It needs to be normal, it's nothing special. I'm not a female-tradie, I'm not a lady-tradie, I'm a tradie and I just happen to be a woman."

Tise Leota

Iwi Samoan

Occupation Self-employed

Where Taita, Lower Hutt



Tise Leota has never shied away from hard work or the opportunity to try something new. She and her husband arrived in New Zealand from Samoa in 2004. She knew that to provide the opportunities she wanted for their child, she'd need to reskill.

"I had qualifications from Samoa, but that's not recognised here so I did my diplomas in business and then [eventually] my business degree too."

A chance opportunity to cater food for a Pacific trade scholarship ceremony introduced Tise to the idea of pursuing a trade. "I was hearing about trades like plumbing and gas fitting, and painting and it [enrolment and fees] was all free!" Tise enrolled to upskill in the plumbers and gasfitters trade, and was awarded a Pacific scholarship. She was the first Samoan woman to complete the certificate with her education provider.

Tise says that opportunities to retrain and upskill give her a sense of

community belonging, and allow her to give back to New Zealand. "I love the New Zealand culture; the Māori culture – it's the same as my culture and I respect the people of the land. I am a citizen of New Zealand and I'm here to help my people here in New Zealand". This is particularly important to her, as she and her husband were both on unemployment benefits when they arrived in New Zealand, and they struggled financially.

Tise really enjoys the lifestyle she has. She is able to combine her passion for business and trades with her food cart that she operates out of a local market in Lower Hutt. And now, by having undertaken the trades courses, she can even fix her own equipment!

She believes that more Pacific women would enter into trades with support from the community. Tise suggests that churches, as cultural hubs, could provide information and support to Pacific families interested in completing trades.

Māori and Pasifika Trades Training consortiums around Aotearoa New Zealand

AUCKLAND

Auckland Māori and Pasifika Trades Initiative

Focus areas: Building, manufacturing, food and hospitality, automotive engineering

The Southern Initiative

Focus areas: Civil engineering, building

Te Wānanga O Aotearoa

Focus areas: Building, forestry

BAY OF PLENTY

Te Ara Poutama – SkillMe Māori and Pasifika Trades

Focus areas: Building, automotive engineering

CANTERBURY

Canterbury Pasifika Trades Training

Focus areas: Building, office administration

He Toki ki te Rika

Focus areas: Building

Whenua Kura

Focus area: Agriculture

GISBORNE/EAST COAST

Te Toka (Te Runanganui o Ngāti Porou)

Focus areas: Food and hospitality, automotive engineering and technology

Tairāwhiti Farm Cadetship Scheme (Turanga Ararau)

Focus area: Agriculture

HAWKE'S BAY

Te Ara o Tākitimu (Hawke's Bay Youth Futures Trust)

Focus areas: Building, agriculture

NORTHLAND

Te Matarau Education Trust

Focus area: Building

TARANAKI

Taranaki Futures Trust

Focus areas: Automotive engineering, building, agriculture, mechanical and industrial engineering and technology

WAIKATO

Waikato Māori and Pasifika Trades Training

Focus areas: Building, personal services, food and hospitality, horticulture, and viticulture

WELLINGTON

Wellington Māori and Pasifika Trades Training

Focus area: Building

WHANGANUI

Te Puna Mātauranga o Whanganui

Focus areas: Building

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