

As Pacific women, we are the makers of our homes, and communities

Shahana Kimiangatau, owner of Shahana Jewels

1 July 2020

As young women we watch our mothers, aunts, and grandmothers, create life, laughter and sustenance from their hands. We see their fingers form delicate braids, flavourful recipes, and listen to them as they tell stories from generations past and laugh from their underbellies. And it's beautiful.



When we grow older, these ways of life are passed down to us, and we discover our own talents, too. Our mothers instil in us deep values, of respect, humanity, and kindness, and somehow we learn that that one thing that we do really well (or a few things, really) are gifts for us to give to others, so we can make the world a better place. So, we can make our own lives, better, too.

As a Pacific woman I have heard countless stories of women who have been able to turn their lives around using a skill they learned as a child, or nurtured as a Pacific woman returning to her roots. I believe that it is this philosophy that will empower women to not only receive help post COVID-19, but help themselves - and others.

I truly believe we need to encourage women to use their talents, to create an income stream. Whether they have no job, or have a job that pays peanuts, chances are that they have something in their hands, right now, that they can turn into cash without the need for large capital investment. Something as simple as baking on a Friday night while the kids are asleep can provide for the next week's expenses - without the red tape that often comes with relief programs.

Putting the power back in the hands of Pacific women, will give them a sense of confidence and independence in some of the most dire times, and allow them to take charge of their own lives, and the lives of their children. When women have their own money, they have options, they have decision making power, and they have a way out. And while tackling situations of abuse is much more complicated than that, knowing that you have a means of income that isn't tied to a terrible relationship, is a start.

Of course, any growing business will start to incur higher operating costs and require investments or increased revenue. And this is where I believe The Ministry For Women can partner with Pacific women to change their lives for good.

While a Pacific woman can easily learn to offer her talent as a solution to a problem, and earn an income as a result of this, she may not find it as easy to find a larger client base, or scale her business in a way that will allow her to sustain and increase her newfound financial resources. By educating and supporting small business owners in New Zealand, and the Pacific, we can bridge the gap between women who are simply trying to survive, and support them in growing fully operational, modern businesses that attract hundreds if not thousands of well paying customers.

We can teach them how to brand themselves and take up space online, and in their communities, where they will inspire other women, to one day do the same.

At my business, Shahana Jewels, we sell pearl jewellery so that we can support Pacific women in their journey to become financially independent. We are very passionate about encouraging women that they can create their own income by doing something they love.

Our jewellery is made entirely by women in New Zealand and India. I am proud to work with these strong women who are not only able to support their families through what we do together, but also build their own confidence and be a positive voice in changing values and perceptions within their communities.

The women that wear my jewellery are strong advocates for women creating financial independence for themselves and love that every time they purchase my jewellery they are helping a woman in the Pacific with their business.