

Julia Whaipooti



Ko wai koe? A brief history on you! How you got started on your mahi, what are you working on?

Ko Hikurangi te maunga, Ko Waiapu te awa, Ko Ngāti Porou te iwi.

I te taha o tōku mama, Ko Houkamu, Ko Waithi ōku whānau.

I te taha o tōku papa, ko Whaipooti, ko Goldsmith, ko Fox, ko Walker, ko Tibble ōku whānau.

I am a new mama to Ruataupare (four months old) and she is my current boss and a very patient teacher.

In terms of mahi, I don't have career aspirations or an intentional career pathway. I have driven into working in areas really by my puku. I grew up watching my mum always push for fairness (and I used to get shamed out as a kid). I ended up at university because all my life my mum told me I had to go. No one else in our whānau had and she saw education as the way to a good life. When I was finishing college I realised I didn't know what I wanted to study and felt pressure that uni was so expensive that I couldn't afford to get what I studied wrong. I thought my option was to work fulltime and save until I knew what subject to study. I used to work at the local supermarket and fortunately one of my regular customers offered me a fulltime job as soon as I finished school at the biggest law firm in town. From there I worked two years writing out wills, being a conveyancing secretary and doing random legal support. And to be honest I had no intention of studying law for any kind of social justice kaupapa. I just wanted a job that could put a roof over my head, kai on the

table and support my whānau. Then I saw all these law grads coming through and I thought, "Man, I definitely cand o tha, I already am." So off to law school I went.

Sitting in a criminal law paper in my second or third year hearing everyone discuss the topic of why Māori offend was a real trigger for me. For the first time, I was seeing the statistics that half of our prisons are filled with Māori. Being Māori myself was an incredibly uncomfortable feeling and also made me sad, angry and confused. I was like "Hey, I'm Māori, my whānau are are and we are cool!" and I was also just so alarmed that those statistics were true. That really pushed me towards finding out why and trying to fix it (immediately which I've now learnt will take a bit more time).

I ended up being part of JustSpeak, a youth NGO driven to transform our criminal justice system (via submissions, reports, hosting public events), lawyering in community law and really pushing hard for systemic change in our justice system. And now everywhere I go or what I want to do I ask how is this working for Māori and for our long-term interests. Community lawyering made me realise how for me, my heart couldn't deal with being on the frontline day in day out. I once saw a man, his dad and his koro all in prison in the space of a few months and all for different things and I realised, no matter what I did for each of them, there was always going to be more. That moment made me realise it was at a systemic level I could be most useful and also where I needed to push for the most.

I've been to the United Nations to stop the mega-prison build in Waikeria, I have been to the Waitangi Tribunal to stop the increase of armed police in New Zealand, I have and do do everything I can with the tools I have to force change, speak up for and stop change.

He aha te whāinga matua mō tō mahi? What is the main goal for you work?

Like many people, I have a very strong sense of social justice, and probably drawing on my Ngāti Porou whakapapa I am quite righteous and unapologetic in advocating for the rights of our whānau and mokopuna to be loved, supported and to be given the space to reach our own potential. I recognise the fluffiness of this but it is really how I've ended up doing the work I've done and am doing. Driven by my puku, is the work a place where I can be most useful at service to the whānau, hapū and iwi.

Hei aha o whakaaro ai e pā ana ki te whakamahia e ngā wāhine i tō kaupapa mahi rānei? Why do you think it's important to have wāhine Māori in your particular industry/business?

Because they get sh#t done. And if you change things for wāhine you change things for generations. I think about the prison kaupapa, and our whānau trapped inside and out. In my experience seeing wāhine who are inside, no matter what they've done, if they are mamas, they are holding it together inside for their kids. They are driving (sometimes in the offending they've done) for their kids, they are the centre point that is driven for their children. Compared to my experience of tāne inside, it is the women on the outside holding

it down for them and their kids. This is a specific example - I think we have a history of wāhine Māori who drive change with generations in mind from our tīpuna to our mokopuna.

**Ka huri koe, te whakakitenga ki mua he aha ngā wawata mō te āpōpōtanga o Aotearoa?
Looking at the future, what are your hopes/aspirations for your industry and Aotearoa?**

What I want for my young whānau and all children in Aotearoa is simple: a chance to reach their potential. Not just being told about us as negative statistics. I want to see the government departments and role decrease in the live of Māori.

I want the likes of Oranga Tamariki and Corrections to stop existing. Those places cause more harm to our whānau than the harm they are meant to 'protect' our whānau from. I want to see these systems shrink to eventually nothing, I want to see Māori responses trusted. I believe we need to reallocate a lot of the resource and funding that exists in many ministries to 'improve outcomes for Māori' and that have failed at doing that for longer than I've been alive, to Māori, to whānau directly to our communities.