

★ Miriama Su'a-Hicks: A Day in the Life

Miriama Su'a-Hicks, Manager of The Learning Shop, talked to Helen Frances about working with Pasifika and Māori clients in Porirua.

“I’m a Samoan mother of three with eight grandchildren and have lived in Porirua since 1965. I bring to The Learning Shop¹ my vast management experience in the education and public sectors. My strengths are in community relationships, combined with a passion for working to make a difference with multicultural and disadvantaged groups.

“My employment experience includes: working to provide career advice and guidance; the teaching profession; Probation Services - working with people who have entered the Justice System, as well as strategic policy and planning experience in the public service and education sector.

“My team will support and give you one-on-one assistance and always with a smile. **Kia Ora** and we look forward to helping you in your pathway to the future. *He huarahi ki mua.*” [from website introduction <http://www.thelearningshop.co.nz>]



What does career development mean to you?

Career development is more of a journey image for me as opposed to a path that has a beginning and an end. It also aligns for me with the whole “age and stage” of one’s life, and it is at critical transition points that one has to reflect and review where one’s career is heading.

What changes have you seen in the delivery of career services over the years to Maori/Pasifika?

The main change is that there are more professional Māori and Pasifika practitioners delivering career services, as well as the acknowledgement that family, religion, values and beliefs are crucial to understanding the world of decision making for Māori and Pasifika cultures.

What is your main client base?

Definitely Pasifika followed by Māori in a low socio-economic situation, a youthful population, school leavers with low achievement levels and a high ratio of benefit reliant households. The majority of our clients are 18-39 year olds.

How do you work with your clients/stakeholders and what do they find most useful?

Face to face is definitely important with a lot of referrals to our services being “word of mouth”. Education is a big focus for our clients as a key to their future pathways and our close relationship with education providers has been one of TLS strengths in terms of resources. A knowledge of all our local referral agencies is also crucial for any other needs that may need to be addressed.

The big point of difference for us is our strength in ‘career guidance’ with trained professional staff.

What products and services do you promote?

Career guidance; youth services; Gateway brokerage; interviewing techniques; computer access for job searching and clients doing their own CVs.

What would be the main differences in working with Māori, Pasifika and European clients/stakeholders?

Māori and Pasifika are not very good at promoting their achievements; the key is always the face-to-face interaction, which is more personal and meaningful for them. Level of educational achievement is a challenge as we know the connection to income level is a reality.

Pasifika involvement in the Church is another difference, however Māori and Pasifika have aspirations just like any other ethnic group in the community.

It is also important to acknowledge the multicultural background of our clients e.g. half Māori/Samoan; Tokelauan/Samoan and so on.

What might characterise your approach to careers work that is a specifically Pasifika strength?

The Learning Shop staff live in the same community as our clients. We live and breathe their world and know what is happening in the community. It's like a large village – the connections that one makes with each client are quite exceptional e.g. mother went to the same college as the client or children belong to the same Rugby Club etc. We'll always have a connection in some way or other, through sports teams/ circle of friends or family etc.

Mentoring and support for this particular group is crucial. Walking with them through what an interview will be like (role modelling); taking them to the campus or course rather than letting them go on their own; guiding them through their finances and budgeting required for entering a course of study; sitting with them through Drivers Licence questions online. Lots of patience and perseverance are needed, especially with our youth.

What do you enjoy about this work?

I enjoy being in my community. It's a low socio-economic area but rich in so many ways. It depends on what lens one is using to see through. I also like working in the Education Sector at the tertiary and secondary level. We can actually see the "fruits of our labour" so to speak. TLS is here and people come and go but they know that this is a stable factor in their career journey and they can always pop in for a chat.

An ongoing challenge is to provide careers services for our community via the available funding sources. We need to be smart and nimble to accommodate new waves of priorities and policies, which the Government brings in.

Is there a particular highlight, a story about a challenge or success?

'Achievement for a Māori Learner – a Learning Shop story' is about Moana who was a single parent with a family of five children. Moana's dream was to become nurse. She was able to access resources at TLS when her 16 year-old daughter was seeking other educational options through TLS. Moana saw how we worked and with the support of TLS career advisors, Moana overcame significant barriers and received a Māori Scholarship for tuition fees for three years of the Whitireia Nursing degree (Māori). She started her first year of nursing in February 2015 and loves it.

★ [Miriam Su'a-Hicks](#). Manager, The Learning Shop, Porirua.

Note:

1. The Learning Shop was established in 2002 under Whitireia Community Polytechnic for funding purposes but operates independently.