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Article

## The Piki Toi narrative

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### Foreword

widely acknowledged,

In a 2019 report on the role of the arts in health and well-being, published by the World Health Organization, authors Daisy Fancourt and Saoirse Finn define health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity,” thus rooting health firmly within society and culture. This definition also focuses on being well, from both an individual and a social perspective. The latter can include multiple aspects such as integration within society, contribution to society, acceptance and trust within society, individual understanding of society and belief in the potential of society.” In linking the arts with health, the authors describe arts activities as those:

that can be considered as complex or multimodal interventions in that they combine multiple different components that are all known to be health promoting. Arts activities can involve aesthetic engagement, involvement of the imagination, sensory activation, evocation of emotion and cognitive stimulation. Depending on its nature, an art activity may also involve social interaction, physical activity, engagement with themes of health and interaction with health-care settings” (p. xx)

In New Zealand the media constantly presents us with role models and heroic figures from the worlds of sport and business. We are not presented with artists or poets as role models in the same measure.

Piki Toi is a project that seeks to create artist/poet role models and heroes from within a marginalised community who have experienced homelessness and incarceration, who can go on to inspire others to acknowledge their own value and in turn create a circular system of healing.

### The Piki Toi narrative

The Piki Toi project was initially a response to social problems identified in the publication *Inside the Cup*, a document co-designed and produced by community support organisation Lifewise for Auckland Council, which researched begging, or ‘hustling’ as it’s known on the street, in the central city. Lifewise was exploring the use of creativity to find alternatives to hustling, and was at the time establishing a unit for social-enterprise projects for the homeless in Auckland City.

This was led by Sophia Beatson and her team of co-designers, all of whom had lived experience of homelessness. They were employing new strategies for introducing and managing entrepreneurial activities and opportunities for people with lived experience of homelessness, and were open to trying new approaches. The everyday collective

laboratory from Auckland's Unitec Institute of Technology approached Sophia and her team with the concept of using an inexpensive product called a 'piki,' a paper object in the size and shape of a feather, and adorned with art sourced from the street community, as a product to sell. The piki could be sold by people on the street as an alternative to hustling. This idea was based on the findings of *Inside the Cup*, but was conceived with little knowledge of the reality of homelessness on the streets of Auckland; however, Sophia and her team saw enough merit in the idea to support further research and a street trial.

The Piki project was motivated by a desire to generate a creative response to the *Inside the Cup* report through an academic research project, which was supported by Unitec's Tūāpapa Rangahau Research and Enterprise, and funding was secured to seed the idea in a practical way. This response resulted in a partnership between Unitec Institute of Technology and Lifewise Trust to test the concept, as there was no comparative model in New Zealand of product design to meet a social need. Our model aimed to not only provide an alternative to hustling, but to provide a field of possibility for the development of their practice for people with lived experience of homelessness who identify as visual artists. In his 2015 book *Design, When Everyone Designs*, Ezio Manzini says, "the field of possibility within which people define their life projects is determined by the context in which they find themselves: by the characteristics of what we have called their enabling ecosystem" (p. 121). Sophia described the initial concept as "a social enterprise that harnesses the creative skills of the wider homeless community and the technology of the Unitec Design School to create piki (one-off artisanal feather-like adornments). Each piki is then sold by street vendors on the streets in the Auckland City centre."

According to *The Māori Dictionary*, the word 'piki' means, as a noun, "supporter, assistant, helper, understudy" and as verb, "to come to the rescue of, support, assist." The project was started as a co-design and maker space in mid 2017, and the team consisted of Sophia Beatson, Aggie, Rob, Shadow and Katz – all Lifewise co-designers – along with Paul Woodruffe from Unitec, and Karen Sayers and Adrian Wilson from Auckland Council. We all acknowledged the importance of our partner organisations. As

Heloise Buckland and David Murillo, in their book *Pathways to Systemic Change* (2013), explain:

favourable conditions for radical innovation are strong leadership, a complete understanding of and access to the relevant information, and good relationships with the relevant actors. From a societal perspective, it is relevant to highlight that success in social innovation practices derives to a great extent from their capacity to be transferred from organisation to organisation. (p. 12)

For this project, we are using a capability approach, defined in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* as:

a theoretical framework that entails two core normative claims: first, the claim that the freedom to achieve well-being is of primary moral importance, and second, that freedom to achieve well-being is to be understood in terms of people's capabilities, that is, their real opportunities to do and be what they have reason to value. (n.d., para.1)

The problems we wish to address are unique to each individual who engages with the project, but follow a common pattern of economic and social disenfranchisement, with the principal defining element being the dominant culture, its power structures and systems that are set in place and demand complete compliance. So far, the people we have worked with are predominantly Māori, which is unsurprising given the historical context of colonialism in Aotearoa. One of the defining characteristics of the homeless community is a fierce will for self-determination, and the ownership of one's own destiny and decision-making processes, just as it is for people who are in positions of power and privilege. This makes it essential that any project is run "by focusing on capabilities rather than functions, we do not privilege a particular account of good lives but instead aim at a range of possible ways of life from which each person can choose" (*Sandford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, n.d., 2.5).

The project fits with current government policy on reducing the long-term effects of homelessness and repeat offending, and it is established knowledge that these two issues are deeply connected. Because Māori are disproportionately represented in both these statistics, this kind of culturally based initiative is paramount for a country wanting to address inequity between Māori and Pākehā. As Keri Lawson-Te Aho, Paikea Fariu, Jenny Ombler, Clair Aspinall, Phillipa Howden-Chapman, and Neville Pierce state in their article; *A principles framework for taking action on Maori/indigenous homelessness in Aotearoa/New Zealand* (2019), “addressing Māori homelessness must be anchored in rights-based and culturally aligned practice empowered by Māori worldviews, principles and processes” (p.1). Over three years, the project has moved and developed as new findings have been uncovered, and new people and organisations have joined the project. This book traces the journey from the first street trials and co-design sessions in 2017, to 2020, when the project whānau are asking the question, “Where to now?”

### **Inside the cup and outside on the street**

There were many challenges in implementing the initial idea, which was untried, and new territory for all involved. Recruiting people who hustle as piki vendors was challenging, as during this time there was an epidemic of synthetic cannabis use on the streets, and this posed serious questions around trust and money. The systems that are needed to establish processes for stock management and payment to artists and vendors are very complex, and are surrounded with issues connected to the prospective vendors’ benefit payments. The current law does not allow a person to earn more than \$80 a week beyond their benefit payment. This effectively disincentivises any entrepreneurial activity that could result in high sales, and creates a great deal of nervousness around making extra money. But right from the start, the Piki team had set the project to work within the existing law, while not avoiding using the project to highlight the poverty trap that the current benefit system creates for even the most motivated entrepreneur.

Initially there was more emphasis put on the creative side, rather than the business development side, as energy was being put into co-designing products that would be inex-

pensive to produce but have a market appeal. Co-design sessions were undertaken weekly to explore new ideas for products to take out to the streets and test; this revealed the depth of talent that exists within the homeless community, and the level of knowledge and empathy that the Lifewise co-designers have on the life of ‘streeties.’

The first product to be tested was the original ‘piki’ – a digitally printed die-cut paper design in the shape of a feather, which could be worn on a button or in a hat, or used as a card or book mark. The artworks on the piki were sourced from artists with lived experience of homelessness, and in one case, the artist was an active hustler. However, before we could sell on the streets, permission for a street vendor licence from the council needed to be obtained: this initiative was supported by Auckland business association Heart of the City’s Business Improvement District programme for the central city area. A scoping of possible sites for the vendors was undertaken and, with the assistance of a mapping document, Auckland Council agreed to establish some key spots within the CBD for street vendors to retail piki. A code of practice was drafted to protect the vendors and the public, and to establish a social contract for the project.

Sophia reflects on the first trials to sell the piki: *The Piki project was designed to enable people who hustle an alternative way to generate income in a way that is flexible. The team itself has created several prototypes, both paper and wooden, and sold these in various ways – on the street, at markets, at events (through K Road Business Association) and just through the office here on Queen Street. So far, no one who hustles has sold piki on the street. There do seem to be many opportunities for selling creative works in lots of different contexts (markets, etc). The team are going to work through a process with Lady Di as the first vendor who hustles. The team will be looking at testing how vendors receive and pay for their piki.*

*We did a testing phase of selling the piki and our key learnings were:*

*Piki did not really sell that well, mainly because people didn’t understand the purpose of them. The piki do not appear to have any real function.*

Based on these findings we now understood that any product taken to the market needed to be highly functional, but still at a low price point. From this we developed the 'heru' (hair comb) design. This was made of very fine-gauge wooden ply that was laser cut into a shape very similar to the piki, but with a profile that enabled it to be used in the hair (Figure 2). These proved to be more popular as they had an obvious use, and the first 20 test models were sold quickly, but only within small established networks within Lifewise, and to Auckland Council staff who knew where to buy them. The issue of finding people who were hustling to sell these products was becoming more problematic, as there were issues surrounding the payment of royalties, and the tracking of stock. The handling of money was proving to be a great barrier to selling on the streets. There was also the issue of the separation of artist and vendor, and the vendors not honoring the artists' work. It looked increasingly likely that the initial concept of Piki was going to fail, and if we wanted to continue, a new direction would be needed. If we wanted to harness creativity to improve the lives of those who have experienced or are experiencing homelessness, we needed to engage with the street whānau in a deeper way, and make a connection to those who were already making artworks.

### Whānau

It was clear that, as researchers, we had to go out and connect to the homeless community, especially those who would be interested as makers in the visual arts; we had to get to know these individuals and see if they were interested in working with us, to help understand how the Piki project could become something they could use. To start, we first met Claire Caldwell who ran the City Mission's art studio. Claire's class is a one-day-a-week workshop space inside the Auckland City Mission building, and is a 2D image-making day; there is also a carving day and a ceramics day, each with a specialist volunteer supervisor. We also met Teare Turetahi, who ran the carving studio. We frequented Merge Café on Karangahape Road, Lifewise's outreach whare kai, which had hosted art exhibitions from community arts trust Toi Ora, and was a meeting point for the 'streetie' whānau. The space above the café housed Lifewise staff and so was an ideal place to meet people and discuss ideas. We also ran a couple of open workshops from the Betty Wark Room at the Ellen

Melville Centre in Lorne Street. For this we put the word out through Lifewise's connections, that these workshops would be about sharing ideas on how Unitec, Lifewise, and the City Mission Studios could work together with the street whānau in developing a creative community and network. Using tables of paper and art materials, we invited visitors to draw their ideas, and share their mahi – friendships were made and ideas were exchanged.

The people who attended loved the concept of Piki, even though the selling processes of the original piki and heru were problematic. It was here that we were introduced to Grayson Goffe and Awhina Mai Tatou Katoa, an urban Māori collective interested in social enterprise and placemaking through the use of mātauranga and tikanga. They were enthusiastic about working with us, and a new direction was discussed. This co-designed new direction would change the aim of Piki from offering an alternative to hustling, to creating a brand for the artists to sell under. What was needed was an organisation to lobby for commissioned art projects for artists who have experienced, or are experiencing, homelessness, and what was important was creating a way of giving provenance to their work. The idea for this came from the Toi Iho Māori-made brand, which provides a way of giving an authenticity to the work, and connecting the public to the artist, and the social environment the work came from.

At this time, our principal partner at Lifewise, Sophia Beatson, had left to have a baby, and two new people, Justine Mc Farlane and Margaret Lewis, were employed by Lifewise to work in developing their social-enterprise projects. Margaret was also an artist, and well connected with Auckland's public art infrastructure.

Justine Mc Farlane, Programme Lead at Lifewise Trust states their position on the project:

*A possible theory of change for the Piki project is if we foster and nurture multiple opportunities for social enterprise (our Lifewise Merge TOC) we can increase whānau exposure and interactions with technology and wider systems. This can be done by partnering with connections, business and institutions; tapping into the skills of the community; providing on-line platforms to interact with and share their talents; tutoring*

*and training around platforms and avenues to sell; creating platforms to sell and promote their work. Then this will lead to people having more money, more skills and confidence, steps towards employment, more social connections, increased capabilities and new skills with technology, creative innovations in art and design practice, increased confidence and self-esteem, more disposable money.*

To clarify our new direction, Piki was to become Piki Toi, to make it clear that the collective was visual-arts based, and so we could have a greater ownership over the name, as Piki also existed elsewhere in the media. It was formalised that Piki Toi was to be an umbrella brand under which artists with experience of homelessness or incarceration could operate, share resources, establish new partnerships and opportunities, and market their work, and Teare Turetahi designed a font to be used for a new logo. The concept was to act like a certification of authenticity, a way to give provenance to the artists' work; artists who are socially and economically marginalised specifically through homelessness and incarceration. [303 words]

### **Piki Toi**

Piki Toi became an open arts collective, with the original members consisting of a mix of people who all lived within the central city, all of whom had experienced homelessness. Membership would be open to anyone who had a similar background and wished to participate in any scheduled event or exhibition. There were to be no commitments beyond a willingness to participate, and no obligations except consideration towards the others in the group; people were free to engage or disengage as they saw fit. One of the key findings from the first Piki project was that the artists wanted control over the use of their work; they wanted their work exhibited in places that valued it, and by people who valued it, like all mainstream artists. To the researchers, it was quite obvious that the representation of the visual arts in central Auckland is socioeconomically very narrow, and almost exclusively for those who have dealer gallery representation, or the economic resources to rent space. For the artists who have had to make the streets their home, there is no communal space to make art, other than two half-days a week at the City Mission, and no space to publicly display their art other than at Merge Café in Karangahape Road.

So Piki Toi now had a clear set of goals that could be realised in many ways, and could be adapted to different circumstances and for different people. These goals are: to create a brand that can be used to obtain opportunities for public art-based engagements; to provide provenance for artworks made by artists who have experienced homelessness or incarceration; to provide a platform for workshops in creative technology and entrepreneurial skills; to help build a creative community based around arts practice; and to lobby for an arts maker-space and community exhibition space in the inner city. Addressing the problems we had faced with administering a payment system for work sold would be delayed to make way for the establishment of the Piki Toi Collective. An interim solution to the question of reimbursement was to divide a payment made to the artist, from a sale, by the number of weeks it took them to make it, and so avoid any penalties to their benefit as this was unlikely to be a large sum. [381 words]

In 2018 we received support from Barbara Holloway, at Auckland Council's Auckland Design Office. This was an important milestone, as now the possibility of giving the Piki Toi artists a voice on the streets of the city would be closer to reality. From here, opportunities started to arrive: the first of these was a pop-up exhibition at the Ellen Melville Centre in Lorne Street. For this we had assembled a wide range of works from both the City Mission studios and from other artists associated with Lifewise outreach projects. We had carved pieces, fibre works, paintings and prints. The prints were made using high-quality photographs of paintings, taken by Karen Crisp, a Technical Teaching and Learning Advisor at Unitec, and produced through Unitec's high-resolution printers. The prints were very successful, as they were wonderful images, and affordable. Photoshop was used to enhance the colours on the originals, as these were painted with cheap pigments that suffered from a lack of vibrancy; this was highly effective, as the works were all compositionally very strong. Karen also took a group photograph of the exhibiting artists (the ones who were happy to have their photographs taken) so an advertising poster could be made. These were pasted up around the city in spaces where the wider homeless community would see them.

The two-day pop-up exhibition was so well received, by both the public and the stakeholders, that a week-long exhibition was scheduled for December. This event proved to be even more successful, with the surrounding space in Freyburg Square activated by artworks displayed on stands. There was a very high number of visitors, and the artists took ownership of managing the rotation of works on display, and the many visitor interactions that occurred.

The week-long exhibition at the Ellen Melville Centre proved that the artists were highly capable of managing an exhibition in partnership with the stakeholders, and interacting with the public in an informed and articulate way. This week-long exhibition had proved the effectiveness of the capability-building and peer-to-peer learning that had occurred in the time leading up to the event. It was clear that the Piki Toi Collective was capable of contributing to the cultural life of the city in a powerful and meaningful way.

In another example of partnership, Paul Woodruffe from Unitec and the photographer Shadow, who was in the Piki Toi Collective for the Ellen Melville exhibition, collaborated on an Artweek 2019 project. Shadow's photographs of street life were used to create the content for the *Little Theatre*, a public artwork placed outside the central-city library that utilised re-purposed iPhones for an image-based diorama.

By December 2018 there was a constant group of artists engaged with Piki Toi, and a renewed passion for the project by the stakeholders and the artists.

It was at this point that Awhina Mai Tatou Katoa (AMTK) emerged more strongly as a group who could offer advice and expertise in the use of mātauranga and tikanga for Piki Toi projects. AMTK is an urban Māori collective of mana whenua, established to work with, assist and guide Māori who are engaging with Auckland City Mission, and for people wanting to participate in Māori-led place-making and events within the central city. Working with AMTK was welcomed as necessary, as a majority of the artists involved identified as Māori, and it had been noted throughout the project so far that a Māori voice was not represented in the public spaces to a degree that reflected

those who were on the streets: this was especially so for Karangahape Road.

### Co-labs and co-design

In 2019 AMTK presented us with a unique opportunity – to work together with PARS, an organisation involved with rehabilitating released prisoners. PARS wanted to have an exhibition of creative works made by artists who had been released from prison, in the kiosk building on Maungawhau Mount Eden, which would advocate for the power of creative practice to heal the trauma of incarceration and the life circumstances that placed people there. As part of this exhibition, PARS also wished to make a short film that could communicate the experience of being incarcerated; Piki Toi was approached to assist in the set-building for this – another opportunity for developing capability. The Piki Toi artists and AMTK worked together to assist PARS in gathering together a powerful exhibition of works. A space for the artists to complete work was found on the Unitec campus by PARS, who also have their offices on the Unitec campus. This workspace turned out to be the building where Lyonel Grant had carved the whare whakairo Ngākau Māhaki, which stands on Unitec's Te Noho Kotahitanga Marae, and was a very special place that seemed nurture and guide the activities that were undertaken there. To support this exhibition, PARS ran a series of talks by artists and invited the Piki Toi artists to work alongside the youth from PARS who were contributing to the exhibition. Again, the artists proved their capabilities in working alongside vulnerable people, with whom they shared experiences, contributed encouragement and offered guidance.

The PARS exhibition on Maungawhau was very successful, with a large local media and local government presence. The list of attendees, and their positive feedback, was an acknowledgement of the relevance and importance the visual arts have in healing the trauma of imprisonment. This was a great experience for the Piki Toi artists, as it demonstrated the power of collaboration in achieving a high-level event and sharing the ownership of an exhibition space. In the wake of this exhibition, the Unitec workspace, previously Lyonel Grant's carving barn, became the focus of attention for the Piki Toi artists. Knowing the heritage of the space they picked up on its wairua, and

wanted to continue to work from there. This was not possible, as the building was part of the sale of Unitec property to the Crown for future development. This was very disappointing, as it had given the artists a taste of having a maker space that was perfect in terms of size and function, and came with a very special past. There was now an urgent need to find a place like this, where the artists felt some kind of connection, and had a fit-for-purpose space to work in.

Based on the successes of the Ellen Melville Centre exhibitions, and Piki Toi's growing reputation within the community, Merge Café offered the Piki Toi artists a commission to paint a large mural on the café's garden courtyard wall. This would not only make the space more attractive, but could be used as a tool for customers to explore the meanings and symbols associated with Matariki, as the annual celebration was approaching. AMTK was consulted on finding an expert on Matariki so the artists could produce an accurate and informative work. The artists were supported in the process of undertaking a commission, and working to a deadline and to a large scale outdoors, something they had not previously done. The other new experience was in the use of spray cans and stencils, but it did not take long for the two artists involved to master these materials. In addition, they developed an innovative style based on the use of exterior-quality pigment pens to replicate some forms usually seen in carving. The Merge Café courtyard work was also a great capability and technology knowledge-building exercise, that the management were very happy with.

The mural was completed in time for a Matariki celebration at Merge Café, and it was acknowledged as much as a celebration of the mural achievement as of Matariki itself. The work was very successful in transforming the outside area of the café, and so increasing its use.

The artist Ross Liew, who had been commissioned to produce temporary artworks for the Karangahape Road transformation project, contacted Piki Toi through Margaret Lewis at Lifewise. He wanted to include the artists' ideas, and ensure a Māori voice was included in the works that were to span the overbridge on Karangahape Road. The font designed by one of the artists, Teare Turetahi,

and a motif designed by another artist, Martin Rawere, were used along with Ross's own work to great effect. This collaboration led to the artists being invited back in 2020 to repeat the bridge panel collaboration with Ross, using new designs. Another Karangahape Road opportunity was presented in the form of artworks painted onto street furniture, which was part of a funded initiative from the Karangahape Road Business Association, another organisation that has shown great support for what Piki Toi wants to achieve for the community. This project was in partnership with two artists from outside Piki Toi, and was extended to new outdoor seating in front of the Pitt Street Methodist Church.

The Karangahape Road Business Association continued to provide connections for collaboration, this time in the old Leo O'Malley menswear shop on the corner of Pitt Street, where Piki Toi artists were invited to create a window display while the building was being repurposed. This provided an opportunity to display carved work, as well as photography and painting, testing the use of a display window as a gallery space, and would lead to other developments.

### **Te Whare Ngaruru Whakatū**

In June 2019, Justine Mc Farlane from Lifewise Trust obtained a year's lease on a small, two-storey house next to the Pitt Street Methodist Church; a former caretaker's residence that had been vacant for three years. This lease also coincided with an arrangement with the church to take over the use of a garage below the house, on Poynton Terrace, that faced directly onto Myers Park. This was formerly a storage area for Housing First, a Lifewise Trust entity, but was no longer suitable for this purpose. The house was intended as a base for Piki Toi to operate from, to hold meetings, run workshops and to ensure a physical presence for the artists in the city. The garage was intended as a workshop space to accommodate making practices that were not suitable for the house, such as carving, furniture restoration, and any spray-can work. The advantage of the garage space was that it had a single roller door, and could operate as an open, public-facing maker space, where the people could engage with the artists working in there.

One of the carving artists, Te Rangimarie, who had been a driving force for a carving space for Piki Toi, was given management of the garage, and it wasn't long before he transformed this into an impressively organised work-space that welcomed visitors to either stop and talk about the work, or start projects of their own. It was stocked with donated materials and tools, and there were always chairs arranged outside so people could sit and talk, or just watch the work happen. This formerly drab and unused space was transformed into something special, and it attracted many passers-by, who would ask about and admire the work that was going on there.

The house was more problematic, as the lease from the church stipulated that it had to have a permanent resident living there, and the relatively small space meant it was difficult to physically separate the living and working activities by any useful degree. The lease was assigned to Grayson Goffe, who had experience in facilitation and knowledge of tikanga, and through his guidance, a series of workshops were planned and timetabled. These workshops were mostly based around public-engagement goals to bring people to the house and create connections. A computer with Adobe Creative Suite was installed in one of the upstairs spaces, to be used for upskilling in digital artwork, and the photographer Shadow was a regular user of Lightroom and Photoshop for post-production work on his images. Uptake for the digital workshops was very low, due to fact the space was up a narrow staircase, and right next to the resident's private areas: this indicated that there was a clash between public and private space, and that any chance of the house being an open maker-space for artists was not going to happen. But what was working was that Piki Toi was now a resident organisation of Karangahape Road, and able to connect with all the creative activities that make the area what it is known for. This did bring opportunities for collaboration, and provided the necessary logistical support for the garage space.

What the house did provide for was the reinvigoration of AMTK, of which Grayson was a founding member. They now had a space in which to conduct meetings and outreach initiatives, something that had not been available to them since Auckland City Mission had moved from their old building for the duration of the new development. The

house was now named Te Whare Ngaruru Whakatū. One of the outcomes of the house being available for AMTK was that regular meetings could be held in a place that had a kitchen and a degree of privacy, as Grayson, the tenant, was effectively the leader of this group. The regular meetings Grayson facilitated brought people together who could lead AMTK into becoming a charitable trust.

What was evident from the start was that the majority of Piki Toi participants identified as Māori, but the perception was that Lifewise 'owned' Piki Toi as an entity. AMTK was 'for Māori, by Māori,' and was therefore the organisation Piki Toi looked to for knowledge and guidance when it came to anything that involved mātauranga or tikanga.

The spectre of the 'ownership' of Piki Toi was looming over the project, and it needed to be resolved by defining exactly what it was.

The loose grouping of artists and activists who had been attracted to the events organised through Piki Toi were focused around two spaces separated by distance and run by different organisations: Auckland City Mission, in Union Street, who provided a maker space where artists could spread out and make work under supervision, which ensured the City Mission management was happy, and that protocols were followed to ensure the safety of everyone who participated; and Te Whare Ngaruru Whakatū in Pitt street, with the garage workshop below that operated as a small but well managed space, but which was limited in the number of people who could participate in its woodworking. At the end of 2019, Grayson left to assist in the Save Our Unique Landscape occupation at Ihumātao, and the lease from Lifewise on the Pitt Street house ended in July 2020. That was not the end of Te Whare Ngaruru Whakatū – Te Rangimarie became the principal tenant on Grayson's departure as he was managing the garage space. The church landlord was reluctant to evict the tenants, as they recognised the outreach work they were doing in the community, and the fact the house had previously been empty for three years. As of August 2020, the whare is still occupied by Te Rangimarie and Robyn Prior, and the meetings to set up AMTK as a Charitable Trust are still being held regularly.

The issue of not having an appropriate maker space in the inner city, that could be open at least four days a week, was becoming a big problem in keeping the momentum of Piki Toi alive. As a temporary measure to try and gather people together again, and demonstrate that Piki Toi was an entity that belonged to whoever from within the community wanted to participate, a Matariki exhibition was organised at Merge Café. This involved working closely with Claire Caldwell from the City Mission art studio to gather the works and hang them. A poster was made, and the exhibition was opened by a karakia and a short speech introducing the artists, and a short explanation of what Piki Toi is, and could be. The carving work proved to be very popular, and two of the more expensive pieces were sold at the opening. The exhibition was a critical success, and though some sales were made, selling work was always going to be challenging at Merge, as the large majority of customers do not have spare money to buy art. What the exhibition experience revealed was that the window space in the café was ideal for a small exhibition and display space, and that the carved work and jewellery was very popular. This window space is visible from the street even after hours, and could be established as a micro gallery under the Piki Toi brand, which will hopefully be the next project undertaken for Piki Toi.

The previous three years had been very exciting, but the lack of a suitable maker space in which to consolidate all the energies generated through Piki Toi was starting to show. The artists were now only centered around the City Mission studio, which opens only one half-day a week for painting and drawing, and is very much incorporated into the City Mission open space, which restricts what happens there. What was communicated to us, was that it was a shortage of supervision, rather than a lack of space that determined the level of support Auckland City Mission could supply for arts-based practice. This presents a dilemma, as without a suitable space, it is very hard to get people interested in supervising workshops or studio sessions, and their new building design does not seem to have a dedicated arts maker space. Now we can only keep exploring every avenue for a place that can be used as a community arts maker space for those artists who live on the streets or in very small spaces unsuitable for making work, or engaging in peer-to-peer learning.

### **Ideas and initiatives**

Over the three years of the Piki Toi project there have been two side projects that have attempted to use technology to support an artist community of learning and capability building. One project aims to build capability through recorded acknowledgement of applied learning and research; the other seeks to create a revenue stream independent of annual competitive funding bodies. The first project is the Piki App, an Android platform app designed to capture learning through micro-credits, and act as a CV builder. The concept requires a small database of businesses, individuals, and organisations that can provide sessions of capability building, which could include new knowledge such as te reo Māori competency, software skills and materials technology. These providers would offer practical, experience-based learning for people who, for a variety of complex reasons, are unable or unwilling to engage with traditional tertiary institutions. The principle is that if the learner cannot come to the classroom, the classroom has to come to them, on their terms, and in their safe places. The app tracks the attendance and participation of a person completing a task, or a number of tasks, attending a workshop, or producing something using unfamiliar technology within a controlled environment. The supervisor or teacher of the activity would use the app to send the participant a small file acknowledging the achievement and authenticating it. The participant would then be able to collect these micro-credits, and gradually build a CV of capabilities.

This system puts the design of the subject content into the hands of the participant, building self-esteem through the various achievements that match the participant's interests. The primary purpose is to prioritise mental health and healing rather than educational achievement, although in some cases significant educational milestones could be attained, and staircasing into mainstream tertiary education facilitated. The file-based data on the app would be downloadable as a series of print format files that could be presented as a document if desired. This app design responds to the Piki Toi artists' desire to learn new skills and technology, as well as other people encountered throughout the project expressing a desire to upskill through practical, but casual, work-based learning. No Piki Toi artist has ever expressed an interest in engaging with an insti-

tution, which is most likely due to their previous negative experiences with institutions, and the rigid structures of attendance and assessment imposed by them. The app has the power to turn students into teachers as well, for example of te reo, or the passing on of specialist skills such as carving. The app supplies a platform for formalising, verifying and collating skills and knowledge achieved in way that is completely learner driven, and at the same time, facilitates a community of learning. A proof of concept was established during a Datacom Hackathon in 2018, but the cost for Datacom to take the design to market was prohibitive at the time. The functionality has now been revised and refined, and is currently under co-design development for a final design-concept proposal. Funding will be sought to make the app go live for a small group of people over a limited trial time, and in partnership with Lifewise and their social enterprise managers.

The second initiative seeks to provide a revenue stream to help the project become financially independent. The idea is to use artwork by the Piki Toi artists to create collectable, limited-edition HOP cards, for use on Auckland public transport, much like the limited-edition credit cards made for the All Blacks, or other special events. These cards would be sold with provenance and an edition number, for a small premium, and could be loaded with ride credit in the normal way. They would be produced in limited runs, with a story or culturally based narrative to encourage a collector value to be attached to them, and would be accompanied by a social media marketing campaign run as a student project. This concept was pitched to two managers at Auckland Transport, but was rejected with the comment, "Why would we want to do that when we could get school children to do the same for free?" A disappointing answer that demonstrates some of the barriers that disadvantaged and marginalised people face when trying to improve their lives. We were advised there would be logistical problems selling cards with an extra premium, but we think these could be overcome through smart point-of-sale management, the use of specially selected retailers, and the understanding that this would be helping the city's most vulnerable citizens, and contributing to the city's culture. We intend to continue pursuing this idea, and will be approaching more senior management at Auckland Transport.

## Reflection

The project has relied heavily on continued funding from both Lifewise Trust and Unitec's Tūāpapa Rangahau, Research and Enterprise, to operate, but in the long run it has to have a source of funding that originates either from its own activities, or from a government fund allocated especially for capability building and the improvement of mental health for the homeless and vulnerable citizens of the city. The problems of obtaining sustainable long-term funding, and the need for a centrally located maker space can seem daunting, and we acknowledge we are playing a long game in wanting to achieve these things. It will most likely be a technology solution that will provide the funding to achieve sustainability and create engagement to a level that can be effective within the community. This effectiveness is best achieved through the establishment of a dedicated community arts-based maker space within Auckland central, and measuring the level of its connectivity to both informal teaching and learning systems, and to appropriate foundation courses within the New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology.

## The participants

### Margaret

*My level of engagement has been pretty deep in and intense, and revolves around trying to help us build the artists' capability to generate income from works that they are making. Some of that surrounds education and building knowledge, and skills, and some of that is around the actual talent and marketability of the works that artists are making.*

*I think that there are a whole lot of other opportunities, which I don't think we've had the chance to explore within Piki Toi, and a lot of that is around broadening people's content. By this I mean of what they could be making and what they could be doing, based on their developing a language and an awareness of works that other people are making.*

*This would be, for example, looking at excellence in photography for people who are interested in photography, digital design production and how they might use what amazing innovations are on offer. In particular what Māori artists are making around traditional narratives and traditional visual language, we do see that the project needs to go from here to this place, I think.*

One impact that Piki Toi has had is that Māori, and particularly Māori language, has become far more visible along Karangahape Road. This has been driven primarily by the exhibitions that we've run, and in the excellence of work that people have seen.

We need to expand the network of artists who are promoting this, to treat Piki Toi almost as a community college in order for the artists to learn new skills, and to be exposed to new practices and new thinking. There also needs to be a willingness to have a difficult conversation around money.

### **Teare**

I see Piki Toi as being a vehicle for an artist movement in the CBD, collectively using the art as a vehicle to engage with our community groups.

I am involved with Piki Toi because if I can help someone else, that helps me and improves the quality of my life, it builds my wairua.

I would like Piki Toi to be an entity which is developed to create a platform and a foundation to engage through the social sector, and the corrections sector, through creative processes. We need more creative spaces where people can improve their quality of life. The biggest barrier is the amount of red tape it takes to set something up. By creating our own spaces, and being in control of those, will create comfortable noises in the community, so they can develop their relationships with their communities. It's important for Piki Toi to develop an independence, there needs to be clarity around shared processes, equality within partnerships. It needs to ensure that the artists have a voice, not only on the canvases and on the walls, but in the co-designing of everything else that surrounds it. Piki Toi has set up a platform for our own kaupapa.

### **Eugene**

If Piki Toi could do anything for me, it would be providing the space – what's important to me is the environment and the space. At this stage in my life I basically use art as my therapy, for a variety of wellbeing issues, and also as a connection back to my bloodlines and my culture. Also for an understanding of where I was, and looking towards my future, I like to share my experience with art with others. Piki Toi and the Mission art studio is a support system for me, basically, it enables me to

interact with different people with different backgrounds, but also those with similar journeys to myself. Meeting the other Piki Toi artists and the coordinators has lightened up that spark again of my journey as an artist. I was involved in the organising of exhibitions with other artists in the past, but it was exhausting and I lost direction and the joy of art, but having this done through Piki Toi makes a big difference, and I can just go with the flow, and it helps with feeling comfortable with people looking at your art. Having the materials to improve your art is as much as setting up exhibitions. [204 words]

### **Richard**

Piki Toi has definitely helped me with things in my life, especially my personal journey. I have had to put a lot of good energy into my artwork, as well as my performing arts and choir. It definitely helped me to become a way better person. I would like for Piki Toi to be seen by a lot of people in the community, to maybe help them with their situations in life, I think it's a good platform for a lot of people, especially those who are with Piki Toi at the moment. There is a wide range of skills and talents – I am only six years into my artwork and carving, and I think I am going to take it on for the rest of my life. I have seen a lot of positive changes in my work, and with others as well. At the moment I think we are not reaching enough people, but it's a great way to navigate life – Piki Toi is a great community as well. Working with Claire at the City Mission art classes is about bringing out our talents – she has shown me how I can be an artist, and how I can make this my life. There are more resources becoming available to me, and I am able to produce better work, and that makes me want to do more, it makes me want to be better. And Piki Toi is just great learning, especially in the business side of things – when we talk about money it's always quite a difficult thing, but it's made it a lot easier because we can have those discussions and be really honest about it. At first, we were just learning and piloting, but now these things are in place, and our whānau are starting to see that there are other options other than what life throws at us. The people behind us believe in us, we are a good tight group in Piki Toi, people who see our collective are starting to believe they can also do things as well – that's pretty positive, and is a way to give back. It's a way to shine a light on some of the situations within our community in positive way, I am grateful for the Mission and Lifewise for what they are doing with us. Piki Toi is definitely a learning environment. I've never seen this, not even at school, I never thought I could make a life out of it.

*It's great to have these shows out in the community showing that this is what we want to do, and we love everything to do with it, and to show our other peers that are coming behind us that it's ok to fall down, it's ok to ask for help, and there are people there who want to help us. If we are all working together we can make some magic happen.*

### **Justine**

*The project's genesis was really about finding people ways to make something, and then be able to sell this to top up their benefit - the benefit is very low. You can only earn a maximum of \$80 [a week] to supplement that benefit.*

*I think it was very much about trying to create ways for people to sell on the street rather than hustle and beg. It was initially trying to be a much more enhancing way of developing a product and then sell it on the street from there. I also think it has been a way of increasing people's confidence, and there's definitely been some learnings around creative production, you actually need to generate some income to either make a product or to continue making products.*

*The project has also created a narrative on the street, and this has led to the commission of some street art, such as the Pitt Street chairs and the Karangahape Road bridge panels - it's all come through under that umbrella of Piki Toi. Artists like Martin and Richard have got small commissions that have supplemented their incomes within the boundaries of benefit laws.*

*There has been a sense of being able to bring their culture into the city. I think that's what's been quite exciting with the evolving street art, that's what's got me excited, you just see how some of the artists have evolved. Our artists here have developed products and really taken ownership, I think in some ways it's been Piki Toi taught.*

*I think its original intent was to help people create some learnings and creative outlets for the street whānau, I think definitely around that sense. You know, there's no easy answer for people that are begging to supplement their income and that some of that is for their addictions, and does art fit in with that purpose?*

*I think Piki Toi connects with Lifewise's core interests in terms of the Merge Community.*

*We are very much about working with lived experience of homelessness, we're about helping people thrive, you know, support them to thrive and develop. Our theory of change would like to see people who create their own solutions, that is a success result for us.*

*So how some of the community have taken ownership with Piki Toi is one of one of those things, and how it's diverged off to AMTK shows how we can actually do something here. For us, it's about that equity and social justice and prosperity. I've got to go back to the Lifewise values and mission, but it definitely is about that social justice, and I think part of social justice is equity, and for equity the community needs to be seen, it needs to be valued.*

*I think that perhaps one of the things we need to reflect on is that some people don't understand what Piki Toi is or could be, and I think that's been some of the challenges, people don't see what they don't understand, you know, and that's part of our motivation. We're about breaking myths and barriers of lived experience of homelessness. I think Piki Toi does contribute to showing another side of people who are rough sleeping - everyone has a negative view until they know these people have got amazing talent. It has created an opportunity to break down some of the myths and barriers around homeless people.*

*I think Piki Toi could definitely have more impact if we had a space where we can sell, and people can engage with the artists and they could see them in a work environment.*

*I definitely think from the other side we come from is a very New Zealand European lens, and we're working within a Māori worldview. You think you understand it, but you don't, you're blind, you know, so I think there's a real tension in that.*

*I think it's interesting when you talk about mana enhancing, we had a really good conversation ... the other day because I talked about Piki Toi being mana enhancing, and Mike said, "Like what's this manner enhancing? I have my mana you don't need to enhance it." But I said, so it's not about that, it's about shining a light on their mana. Yeah, it's shining a light on their creativity and who they are as people, that's right. [414 words]*

### **Kats**

A lot of these people have hidden talents, but don't want to share, they feel like they are selling themselves short as they have fears of being hurt, and being duped, how easy it is to become a target and be taken advantage of. If something bad happens, they don't want the pity, they just want to carry on, not let it happen again, they have their dignity. But we have that manaaki, that caring, to help them over that barrier, to help them manage that discomfort. Piki Toi helps out with that, and we get to share the pleasures that come with that, without feeling that something is going to happen to us. I believe that Piki Toi can help get over the barriers of mistrust, help in keeping the faith, in believing in ourselves, giving confidence that we didn't know we had. When you do something many times it becomes a pattern, and it becomes normal, rather than addictions. It shows what people are capable of, talent wise, there is more to us than drugs and alcohol. To shove the addictions aside, we need something in place of that, like what you are good at, like "What do you love? What's your favorite colour?" Acknowledgment is an important part, to be respected, to feel normal. But then again, what's normal?

The art making of Piki Toi can help to put emotions like anger into artwork, it's been a coming together, unifying, whanaungatanga. We're used to isolating ourselves when it comes to emotional states of mind, going to dark place so we can be alone, but we want to remove that practice and be in the light. It's easy for our whānau to believe in others, but it's time we believed in ourselves. Piki Toi enables the artist to share their work but remain anonymous if they want to, as their art is personal to them, everyone has their reasons, and we have to respect that. With that comes mana.

What doesn't work is pushing people, over analysing, it's good not to apply too much pressure, it's easy to forget that, communication is a big part of that.

Merge Café is a great avenue for artists, not only to show their talents, but to give back to the community – the painted pillars are always being added to, touched up, a positive addiction!

It's important that people know that they can come into Merge and not have to buy, and feel comfortable – the artwork in the courtyard shows them how marvellous it can be.

Because of Piki Toi, artists have jumped on board with other things, but it's important to ask the artists what they want, give

them space to breathe. It's all about connecting, respecting – respecting the art and those that stand behind it in support. With exhibitions, remembering it's not about the money, it's about you. Piki Toi needs to be there in support of the artists long term, not because it's the next pedestal – being there for them when they are not on that pedestal, through the hardest times. How can we make it work? Are we happy about it? Not hard questions to answer.

### **Luis**

The community of artists is an important part, you generally spend a lot of time on your own but it's been really lovely for me to meet other artists. This particular group is much more involved with indigenous art than other groups, and then you know, that it's my ideas, being me.

The artists that come here are interested in their own personal journeys, yeah. I think that actually what this this group represents is their own personal journeys, and a way forward, I see it as a way forward for people.

Yeah, even if I just use today [at the City Mission] as a place of work. I never thought of going and taking a course just to get a studio space, as I know it costs quite a lot of money to enrol in a course. But I'm open, I'm open to learning, so really availability of a workspace would be a number one priority. It's about a long journey with my art really.