

NZ YOUTH WEEK

Pacific Stars

An MSD Pacific Team special

EXCLUSIVE NEWS TODAY

An ipu kī with Okirano Tilaia

Pacific young star shares some thoughts on Covid19

It's just been Youth Week 2020 and the theme this year was "E korero ana mātou. E whakarongo ana koutou? We're speaking. Are you listening?" We sat down for a virtual ipu kī with young Pacific star Okirano Tilaia to hear his thoughts around lockdown.

Okirano (Fagaloa, Sāmoa) is in his first year of studies at the University of Canterbury, studying towards a Bachelor of Arts. The eldest of 3 boys, he has a string of accolades, like the Prime Minister's Award for Pacific Leadership for his service to the community after the March 15th shootings, he was the 2019 Head Boy of Cashmere High School, a NZ Basketball representative and is a member of the Youth Advisory Group to the Minister of Education and a member/ trustee of the Pacific Youth Leadership and Transformation Council (PYLAT), just to name a few.



Okirano receiving his 2019 Prime Ministers Pacific Award at a ceremony in Parliament, hosted by the Ministry of Pacific Peoples.

What have you been up to during lockdown?

I have been continuing with my university studies through online learning at home. I have also been involved in the SVA nationwide Covid19 response, which has been a great way to help out my community through this tough time. Because we weren't able to go out and meet friends and family, there were some online platforms which have enabled a space to connect with other Pacific people around the motu.

"Calm our community" is a Facebook group I've been a part of, whose Kaupapa is about connecting and creating a digital village where we all feel safe.

The greatest gift for me has been time with my family. Prior to lockdown, between travel, school and sports I didn't get much time with my family, so the lockdown has given me time to take a step back and live in the moment with them. It can be all too easy to focus on the future, so it has taught me to be grateful for the present and to be more self-aware.

What are some of the challenges you have seen for our Pacific communities during lockdown?

For our Pacific communities, some of the challenges I've seen has been understanding our priorities through this tough time. For Pacific young people especially, family has been the biggest priority over everything.

It has been a constant struggle to communicate this with schools and tertiary institutions to explain that most of us have to look after our families and that studying at home, is a real challenge.

On that note, I have seen and heard of the impacts that the lack of access to technology and learning support has had for many Pacific young people. What happens when a lot of Pacific young people do not have access to a computer at home, or Wi-Fi?

In the best cases, Pacific families may have one laptop that they have to share amongst each other – so how do you prioritise which kids will learn when there are three or four kids at school, who all need to learn online?

What are the opportunities you are seeing?

Where do I start?

I've seen several Pacific organisations use this time to connect with communities through online forums, support package deliveries, and check-ins through zoom and over the phone.

One of the greatest opportunities I've seen is through the online space. Many of our Pacific churches have had to adapt and deliver their services online, it's so encouraging to see many of the older Matua share the gospel and participate online.

Zoom, has enabled Pacific people to connect with family and friends and more so, organise online live discussions and forums with leaders, entrepreneurs, and key community figures to have insightful talanoa around important topics and issues in the current state.



What are you looking forward to post-lockdown?

I'm looking forward to having more face-to-face interactions with people, they have so much power in them to really connect and make change.

I also can't wait to roll my sleeves up with the organisations I'm a part of, to continue to create initiatives and platforms for our Pacific young people, especially to help understand how we can better support our communities as we look to recover.

With all of the media coverage of job losses, businesses going into liquidation and communities struggling to support each other, I look forward to seeing what changes across government, schools and local communities will be implemented to ensure a more financially stable economy and security around the future of work.

It was youth week last week, what is top of mind for you/and youth communities you belong to?

One main question is, what is next for us this year? We are already nearly at the middle of the year, some of the Year 13's are thinking about how they can finish their high school journey on a positive and strong note as well as leaving a legacy of their own. As a first-year university student, I'm thinking about how I can finish the year well too.

I definitely think wellbeing and looking after ourselves is one of the other important things top of mind for myself and other young people. The lockdown period has been a struggle with many challenges, so we have had to think holistically and understand the importance of looking after ourselves physically, spiritually, socially, and/ or culturally.

For me and my aiga, well-being looks like a range of things: time in the evenings for praise, worship and reading the word of God with the whole family is a way we look after our spiritual wellbeing. My brothers and I try to shoot some hoops at the park and go running a few days a week to get out of the house and look after ourselves physically. For cultural wellbeing, Zoom has enabled us to connect with our wider Pacific community to learn about our culture and the origins of Pacific storytelling and leadership. This is all grounded in being present and being grateful for what we have and the people around us.